

## **Distance and proximity: How can a remote team leader bridge the gap?**

### **Experiential learning through the Tacksaari Oy procurement team**

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***Distance and proximity:  
How can a remote team leader bridge the gap?***

***Experiential learning through Tacksaari Oy\*'s  
procurement team***



### **Virtual Team Simulation Learning Objectives:**

At the end of the session the student should be able to:

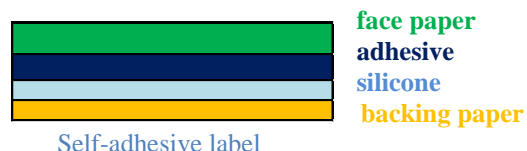
- identify key challenges inherent to virtual team work
- develop leadership and problem-solving skills essential for building effective virtual teams
- develop effective team player and problem-solving skills in a virtual context
- organize a virtual meeting

### **ISSUE**

Tacksaari Oy, an international company and part of one of the largest forest industry groups in the world, is a global leader in the market of pressure sensitive labels. Tacksaari employs 2,400 people in factories and sales offices on six continents. The headquarters are in Finland. The financial results have shown constant growth, until the 2007-2009 period, which was followed by a business slump and global restructuring. The less profitable factories shut down. New production sites with sophisticated equipment and lower operational costs emerged.

Pushed by the necessity to communicate with other sites and bring together the dispersed employees, the mother company Tacksaari Oy has developed a strong company culture embedded in virtual team work. Tacksaari Oy considers that virtual teaming is a flexible and natural way to coordinate work throughout their global organization.

Tacksaari Oy manufactures self-adhesive labels. These labels are what the consumer finds for example on a bottle of shampoo, food packaging, and pallet identification. The following raw materials are required for the production of self-adhesive labels: backing paper, face paper and different components to make silicone and adhesive (or glue) as below described. The face paper will be printed by the printer. The silicone layer enables the face paper to be taken off from the base (backing paper).



*\*Although the name of the company is fictitious, this case has been inspired by a real company case and has been tested in class numerous times and once with members of the real company.*

The following are examples of raw materials used in self-adhesive label production:



*Paper reels (back or face)*



*Containers of silicone or adhesive components*

3

Self-adhesive labels are currently used in food, beverage, chemical, pharmaceutical, retail and logistics as well as personal care, as illustrated in the examples below:



*Food labels*



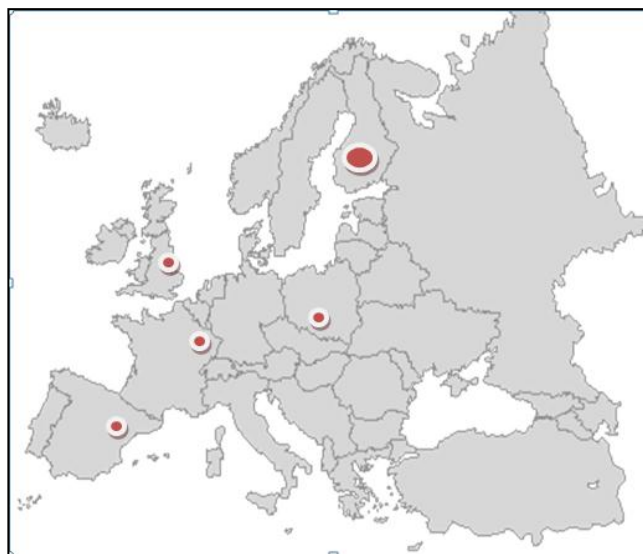
*Packaging labels*

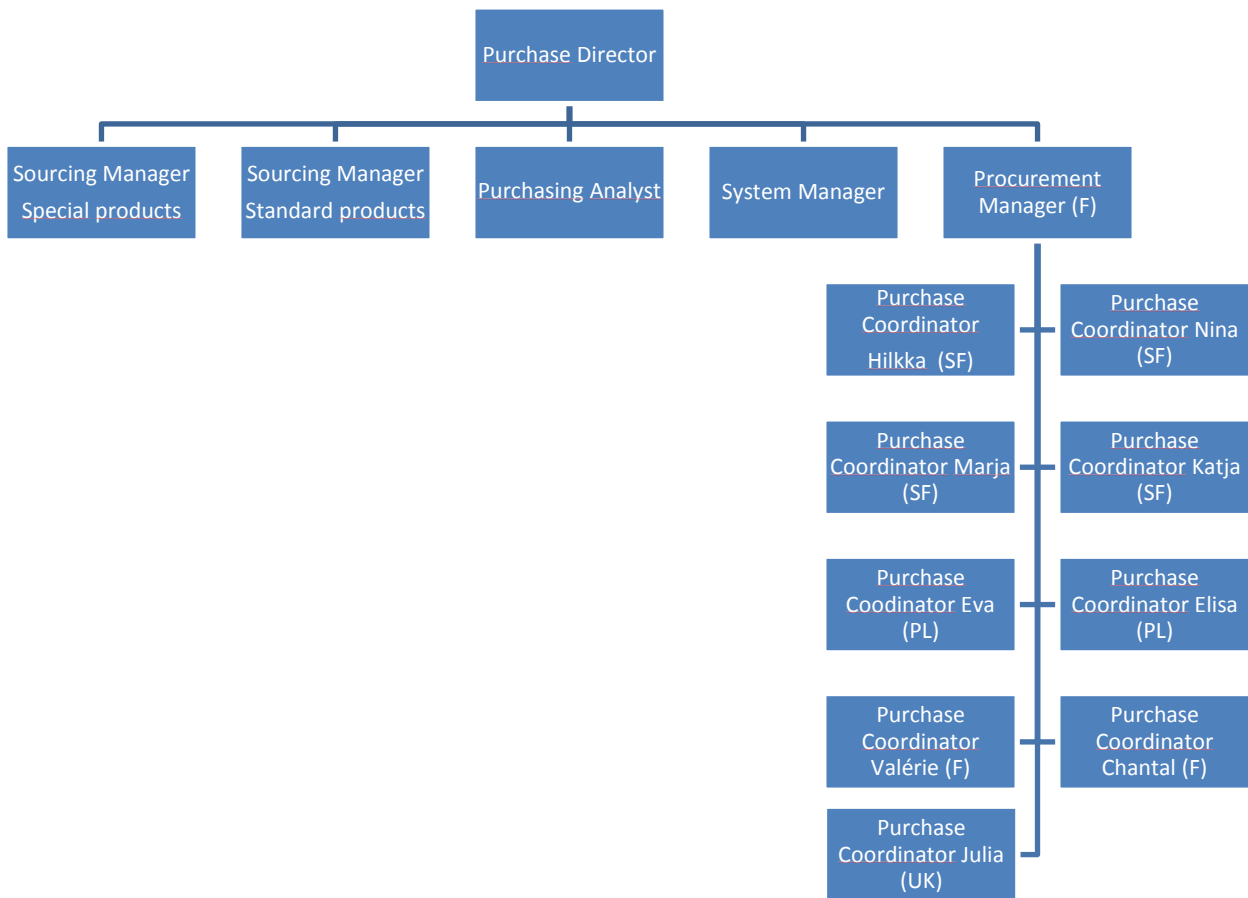


*Cosmetic labels*

The purchasing division of Tacksaari Oy is composed of the purchasing direction, sourcing managers, a purchasing analyst, a system manager and a procurement manager. The procurement manager leads the procurement team. She manages a team of nine purchase coordinators located in five production sites in different European countries. The map below plots the different production sites.

**Figure 1: Tacksaari Production Sites in Europe**





The nine purchase coordinators have similar functions and jobs. Their main role is to insure on-time delivery, as well as the quality and quantity of raw materials requested by the production sites. In addition to this role the purchase coordinators:

- control the stock level and the raw material stock rotation
- monitor needs between the factory and suppliers, and anticipate production planning issues
- control the procurement system by placing orders in the system and controlling whether the deliveries match the quantities and prices invoiced
- report quality issues to the suppliers and solve any problem that arise
- monitor the suppliers' commitment (ex. respect of delivery, service reliability, product quality)

The purchase coordinators must anticipate possible changes and hick-up in the supply chain. In case of problems, they have to find suitable solutions. For example, if a production line has to be stopped, major costs arise immediately and solutions must be sought.

Regular interactions occur between the members of the procurement team. They may informally contact each other for pleasure and exchange the latest news. They may interact to solve quality issues that

regularly arise with a common supplier. Or they may try to improve the raw material stock turnover between sites. For example, one coordinator may organize the shipment of some chemical containers to her colleague's site because her colleague's production is running out of chemicals. Even though slightly different, the production equipment on all of the sites is considered to be the same. Therefore the procurement coordinators can help each other if they are short of some raw materials or if they have too high a stock of certain paper grades or chemical components.

The procurement manager and the nine purchase coordinators have to be considered as one team, even though not all members of the team know each other or have ever met face-to-face. All the team members share common targets and the team must report to the procurement manager once a month through an on-line meeting.

The team's global performance contributes to the global cost reduction strategy of the company deployed through all departments and divisions. Each team member is rewarded individually a bonus for contribution to team performance. The bonus is calculated on the base of metrics resulting from actions to reduce procurement costs (see Table 1). The purpose of this bonus is to stimulate team productivity.

Measurable targets are set for the procurement team on a yearly basis. The targets consist of a set of actions to effectively handle the claims sent to suppliers due to faulty material or service, reduce the raw material stock level, and shorten the stock rotation (see Table 1). Those actions should contribute to reach the targets at the end of the year. Each team member participates in the global team performance by way of his/her individual contribution to the actions set to reach the objectives. Hence, the results of team performance will have an impact on the retribution of team members.

For the team members, reaching the monthly target goals requires additional work alongside carrying out their daily tasks as a purchase coordinator. Each member has to contribute to her local site productivity but also to the global team result. This appears sometimes challenging for the purchase coordinators. Conflicts of interest arise as illustrated by the following examples:

- A purchase coordinator may succeed to obtain a sufficient level of raw material but the procurement team manager, may ask her to send this material to another site facing an unexpected production pike. She would then need to re-order the material for her own site. This would not be serving her local and individual targets but the group targets. Such requests make the task difficult for the purchase coordinator even though the procurement manager gives her support to the group.
- The sourcing manager (see Figure 2) may request that the purchase coordinators buy extra raw material even though the stock level is already high. Why would the sourcing manager behave in such a way? Because he/she wants to anticipate a price increase, despite the stock level indicators being very high.
- Some internal and unofficial "alliances" may emerge inside the team, especially when cooperation is running smoothly between certain team members. Other team members may intentionally avoid engaging in such informal alliances. Such interaction avoidance results at times in laborious communication between team members. Some purchase coordinators may group their orders together to get better prices from suppliers.

The monthly on-line meeting enables the whole team to share knowledge and information at the same time. It is important for the procurement team manager to ensure that the team members understand team

goals, share individual knowledge to enlarge team knowledge, and learn from the various experiences inside the team.

For the first time in its history, Tacksaari Oy is leading a restructuring policy through the whole European organization. The global economic crisis requires higher rationalization. Tacksaari Oy sees an opportunity to streamline its own organization with the purpose of remaining competitive on the market. The Finnish company has to shut down some sites while completing the start-up of a state-of-the-art technology factory in Poland.

The global restructuring has an impact on the procurement team. A new distribution of work inevitably calls for downsizing the team. There is little top-down communication. The team is aware that France is directly affected. The team members know that they have to integrate the Polish team. The global procurement planning might be revised due to possible production transfer, production start-ups and trials. Each team member has to contribute to the common effort to achieve company success. The procurement manager needs to maintain her team members' motivation and commitment to the common objectives.

**Table 1: Detailed individual bonus calculation**

Target description	Objective : % of the bonus calculation	Objectives	
		Bonus level : 0 %	Bonus level : 100 %
<b>Claim process</b>	<b>10%</b>		
Internal handling time	2%	< 10 days	10 days
External handling time	3%	50 days	30 days
Compensation rate	5%	75%	90%
<b>Raw material stock level</b>	<b>20%</b>		
Standard papers	10%	> 44 million m <sup>2</sup>	40 million m <sup>2</sup>
Special papers	10%	> 8 million m <sup>2</sup>	10 million m <sup>2</sup>
<b>Paper stock rotation</b>	<b>20%</b>		
Standard papers	10%	> 21 days	10 days
Special papers	10%	> 35 days	20 days

*The bonus is calculated according to the following logic: 50% of the bonus is based on individual site results and 50% on Tacksaari Oy results. The company results are based on the progress of the EBITDA (Earnings Before Interests, Taxes Depreciation, and Amortization), and the global results of the stock of all the products.*

## *Distance and proximity: How can a remote team leader bridge the gap?*

### *The case of Tacksaari Oy's procurement team*



#### **Teaching Notes**

##### **1. Case description**

Tacksaari Oy is a Finnish international company employing 2,400 people in 6 continents. The company is one of the paper industry world leaders, specializing in the production of self-adhesive paper for the self-adhesive label market.

Tacksaari Oy's financial results have demonstrated constant growth, until the 2007-2009 period, which was followed by a business slump and global restructuring, mainly due to the global economic crisis and decrease in buying.

Today, restructuring is the opportunity for the company to improve its organization in terms of production and logistics but also in terms of human resources. Some production sites are shut down. Others are built up from green field with state-of-the-art technology. New people are hired, others are made redundant.

The company is very active in project development and therefore has always encouraged team work and collaboration across its divisions around the world. Virtual teaming is a part of the company culture. It is a common way of working, as illustrated by the procurement team's monthly meetings. The procurement team in this case, based on a real situation, is composed of ten members located in different sites in Europe.

**Key words:** virtual teams, team work, intercultural communication, learning by doing

Globalization supported by innovation in various areas, more specifically in technologies and communication, lead to wider synergies across countries. Phenomena such as mergers and acquisitions, emerging markets, outsourcing and off-shoring with inter-organizational alliances towards higher competitive advantage, together push corporations to adapt their organizational structure and processes. Virtual teams are one of the answers to higher flexibility. New proficiencies, knowledge and adequate behaviors are necessary to support innovative practices and widely distributed and collaborative work. Virtual team managers and team members need to be engaged, on a daily basis in virtual work, intercultural diversity and all related issues. Learning by doing is a key factor of success as "virtuality" is characterized by new technology and computer mediated communication, which are continuously updated and subject to electrical and internet breakdowns. In addition virtual teams are composed of people of different cultures, languages and professional backgrounds who, to get their job done, share common goals. They must permanently adapt to and address concerns of individual members of the team to reach team goals. Learning by doing often replaces formal training in building effective virtual teams. The meeting preparation is a key factor of success for virtual meetings. The agenda must be communicated ahead of the meeting allowing the team members sufficient time to collect information for the on-line discussion.



## 2. General Purpose

This case can be used to illustrate how to effectively face the challenges of virtual team work.

## 3. Teaching Purpose and Objectives

This case can be used to analyze critical challenges inherent to virtual team work. Thus the case has multiple possible teaching objectives, depending on the course in which the case is taught. Major teaching objectives include developing skills in:

- effective leadership and problem-solving behavior essential to building effective virtual teams
- effective team player and problem-solving behavior in a virtual context
- preparation, implementation and follow-up of virtual meetings

### Learning-by-doing theory

The approach to teaching by way of simulations encourages experiential learning or learning-by-doing. The approach places emphasis on personal development. It is an approach to experiential learning which has been associated with many universities and where it has supported business development programs for many years. Originally, the approach consisted in involving participants in group projects set in real organizations. This experience has been carried out in different programs ranging from Master level to MBA, DBA and executive education. The approach promotes personal learning from practice (learning through doing = doing things and reflecting on the ways things have been done).

### Suggested references:

Weimer, M. (2002), *Learner-Centred Teaching*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Anzai, Y. & Simon, H. (1979), "The Theory of Learning by Doing", *Psychological Review*, 86 (2): 124-140.

### Leadership and team player theory

It is widely agreed that team effectiveness depends on team composition, team process and the context. In addition to knowledge and skills of individuals, it is also important to pay attention to individuals' abilities to respond effectively to the challenges of working within a diversified team. Rickards and Moger (1999) identified seven factors that shape team performance. These factors are: platform of understanding, shared vision, team climate, ownership of ideas, resilience to setbacks, network activators and reflective learning. These factors are strongly interactive. It is also agreed that team performance could be improved through deliberate interventions by a team leader. The role of leadership has an influence on the team's performance. The ability of the leader to influence team working strategies, structure, and decisions will have a positive or negative impact on the team's productivity and results.

The notion of a team player and the importance of being a team player are accepted ideas in the organizational world. Traditional perceptions of the team player as a "good soldier" have been challenged by more recent complex approaches such as that of Parker (2008) to understanding the different types of team players. Specific strengths and weaknesses are characteristic of the contributor, collaborator, communicator and challenger team player profiles.

### Suggested references:

Parker, G. M. (2008), *Team Players and Teamwork*, San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Rickards, T., & Moger, S. (1999), *Handbook for creative team leaders*. UK: Gower.



## Intercultural Communication

The effects of culture on human behavior have been a subject of interest to management researchers whose works have stimulated classroom discussions at undergraduate and graduate levels. Intercultural communication occurs when people from two or more cultures interact. More than ever businesspeople cite intercultural skills as the single most important factor in international success. Students in multicultural workgroups or engaging in foreign studies or internships also face daily challenges to effectively communicate. Dramatic changes in communication technology have made international communication commonplace. The technological revolution means that organizations such as enterprises and higher education institutes need to invest in the development of intercultural communication skills. Cultural priorities can be understood through observing and analyzing learned and shared behaviors. It can also be understood through the expressed values, attitudes and norms of behavior of members of a community.

### Suggested references:

Hall, E. T. (1976), *Beyond Culture*. New York, NY: Anchor Press/Doubleday.  
 Hofstede, G. (1991), *Cultures and Organizations/ Software of the Mind*, London: McGraw-Hill.  
 Varner, I. & Beamer, L. (2011), *Intercultural Communication in the Global Workplace*. McGraw-Hill Irwin.

## Virtual Teams

Virtual teams are one of the answers to new business environments shaped by globalization. Organisations look for means to remain competitive through new alliances, new skills, enlarged knowledge, expertise and global talent despite physical distance separating the different business units. Virtual teams are work teams dispersed across the world, mutually accountable, operating despite different time zones, space, cultural and social boundaries. As a consequence, virtual teaming requires technology adoption to communicate and collaborate, and innovative practices to reach common purpose. Transforming virtual distance into proximity assumes appropriate behaviors, a shared mindset and coordination. On-line meetings are one of the challenges of virtual teaming.

### Suggested references:

Dixon, K.R. & Pantelin, N. (2010), From virtual teams to virtuality in teams. *Human Relations*, 63 (8): 1177-1197.

Gibson, C.B. & Gibbs, J.L. (2006), Unpacking the concept of virtuality: The effects of geographic dispersion, electronic dependence, dynamic structure, and national diversity on team innovation. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 51: 451-495.

Hinds, P.J. & Mortensen, M. (2005), Understanding conflict in geographically distributed teams: The moderating effects of shared identity, shared context, and spontaneous communication. *Organization Science*, 16 (3): 290-307.

Kirkman, B.L. & Mathieu J.E. (2005), The dimensions and the antecedent of team virtuality. *Journal of Management*, 31 (5): 700-718.

Kraut, R., Steinfield, C., Chan, A., Butler, B. & Hoag, A. (1999), Coordination and virtualization: the role of electronic networks and personal relationships. *Organization Science*, 10: 722-740.

Martins, L.L., Gilson, L.L. & Maynard, M.T. (2004), Virtual teams: What do we know and where do we go from there. *Journal of Management*, 30 (6): 805-835.

O'Leary, M., & Cummings, J. (2007), The spatial, temporal and configurational characteristics of geographic dispersion in teams. *Management Information System Quarterly*, 31 (3): 433-4.

#### 4. Course Positioning and Fit

As a case that focuses on Virtual Team Management, the case has multiple applications. It can be used in a variety of courses, including International Master Management courses, more particularly IHRM, Communication, Organizational Behavior, Operations Management, Logistics, and Supply Chain Management. It addresses the current challenges facing managers in international contexts, for which traditional management training has not prepared them. It presents fairly leading-edge management concepts which will be tested in the classroom. It is more appropriate in second-year Master in Management, MBA and executive courses. The case encourages undergraduate students to question the efficiency of skype meetings conducted for school assignments. For MBA and Executive education students it encourages the identification of “best practices” for conventional management tools (ex. agenda, appropriate language, minutes of meeting). It also raises awareness about the challenges of virtual work worlds and intercultural management and encourages to students to make their own recommendations for improving remote team work.

##### **Advised prerequisites:**

Intercultural Management

Leadership

Drama or experience in role-playing would enhance the class experience.

##### **Size of class:**

Ideal: 8-10 people per team.

How to adapt for smaller group: leave out characters less important with respect to instructor's key learning objectives. These characters will remain in the script but be absent for viable reasons such as illness, etc.

How to adapt for larger group: Make several teams of 8-10 members.

##### **Room:**

Ideally several rooms should be reserved to successfully simulate geographical distance.

##### **Teaching Plan**

6-7 hr. teaching day

##### **Pre-course**

At least one week prior to class send message to students requesting them to:

- send individual video-conference (eg. skype) addresses to instructor
- bring laptops for the all-day session
- read the case and be prepared for a quiz on company and team management problem

##### **Activity A (90 minutes) Introduction**

5 minutes - catchy opening

85 minutes - powerpoint slide presentation, activities and discussion

Slide with links

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n1NyIBiYuFQ> : presents the key points of VT

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y1YokiumAkQ> : about program teaching on VT

**Activity B (30 minutes) Quiz on Case Study**

Hand out the 10 question quiz and allow about 15 minutes for completion. Discuss answers together to introduce the case. The purpose of the quiz is to encourage reading and note-taking on the case study prior to class. Case study questions can be adapted according to targeted learning objectives.

**Activity C (45 minutes) Getting prepared for the VT meeting**

Hand out the Activity C sheet “Getting prepared for the VT meeting”. Divide class into teams, allocate roles and hand out “Role descriptions” to individual team members. Only the procurement manager has information on all of the team members’ roles and receives the “Monthly Meeting Simulation Instructions for Procurement Manager”. Members from the same country have information on their home country colleagues’ roles. Address potential technical issues (audio video conference connections between team members), role-play facilitate and encourage group dynamics. Distribute “Language functions for meetings”. Make sure that all members have received the agenda by email.

**Activity D (60 minutes) VT meeting simulation**

Distribute “Template for minutes of meeting”. Supervise and facilitate group work. Observe each group and take notes on effective and ineffective team management, virtual challenges, etc. These notes will serve for debriefing.

**Activity E (60 minutes) Drafting minutes of meeting**

At the end of the 60 minutes have students hand in minutes.

**Activity F (60 minutes) Debriefing**

Ask each group to reflect on their teamwork and record their findings (flipchart, ppt, post-its, etc.). Each group will report to class on findings. Share observation notes with class. Write students’ learned lessons and recommendations on white board. Take a photo of the results for comparison with future class experiences.

**Assessment suggestions**

Individual 500 word reflections on key lessons learned about effective virtual teamwork. Credit will be given to linking theory and practice.

## **APPENDIX**

**Activity B - VT Quiz to review case study situation (student copy)**

**Activity B - VT Quiz to review case study situation (instructor's copy)**

**Activity C - Getting prepared for the meeting**

**Activity C - Language functions for meetings**

**Activity C - Role descriptions**

**Activity C - Monthly Meeting Simulation Instructions**

**Activity D - Distance and proximity: How can a remote team leader bridge the gap? Simulation of Tacksaari Oy's procurement team**

## **Activity B - VT Quiz to review case study situation**

**Q1: How many employees does Tacksaari have?**

**Q2: What is the worldwide presence of Tacksaari?**

**Q3: What years marked a negative turning point in terms of financial results?**

**Q4: How does the company feel that virtual teaming can contribute positively to company culture?**

**Q5: What products does Tacksaari manufacture?**

**Q6: What principle raw materials are required to make the products?**

**Q7: Which industries does Tacksaari serve as clients?**

**Q8: What division does the procurement manager belong to?**

**Q9: How many members of the procurement team are there and what are their nationalities?**

**Q10: What is the main role of a purchase coordinator?**

## **Activity B - VT Quiz to review case study situation**

**Q1: How many employees does Tacksaari have?**

**Q2: What is the worldwide presence of Tacksaari?**

Tacksaari employs 2,400 people in factories and sales offices on six continents.

**Q3: What years marked a negative turning point in terms of financial results?**

The financial results have shown constant growth, until the 2007-2009 period, which was followed by a business slump and global restructuring. The global economic crisis tightened the paper industry and faced a drastic decrease in consumption (directly linked with product and information labelling).

**Q4: How does the company feel that virtual teaming can contribute positively to company culture?**

Pushed by the necessity to communicate with other sites and federate the dispersed employees, the mother company Tacksaari Oy has developed a strong company culture embedded in virtuality. Tacksaari consider that virtual teaming is a flexible and natural way to coordinate work throughout their global organization.

**Q5: What products does Tacksaari manufacture?**

**Q6: What principle raw materials are required for the products?**

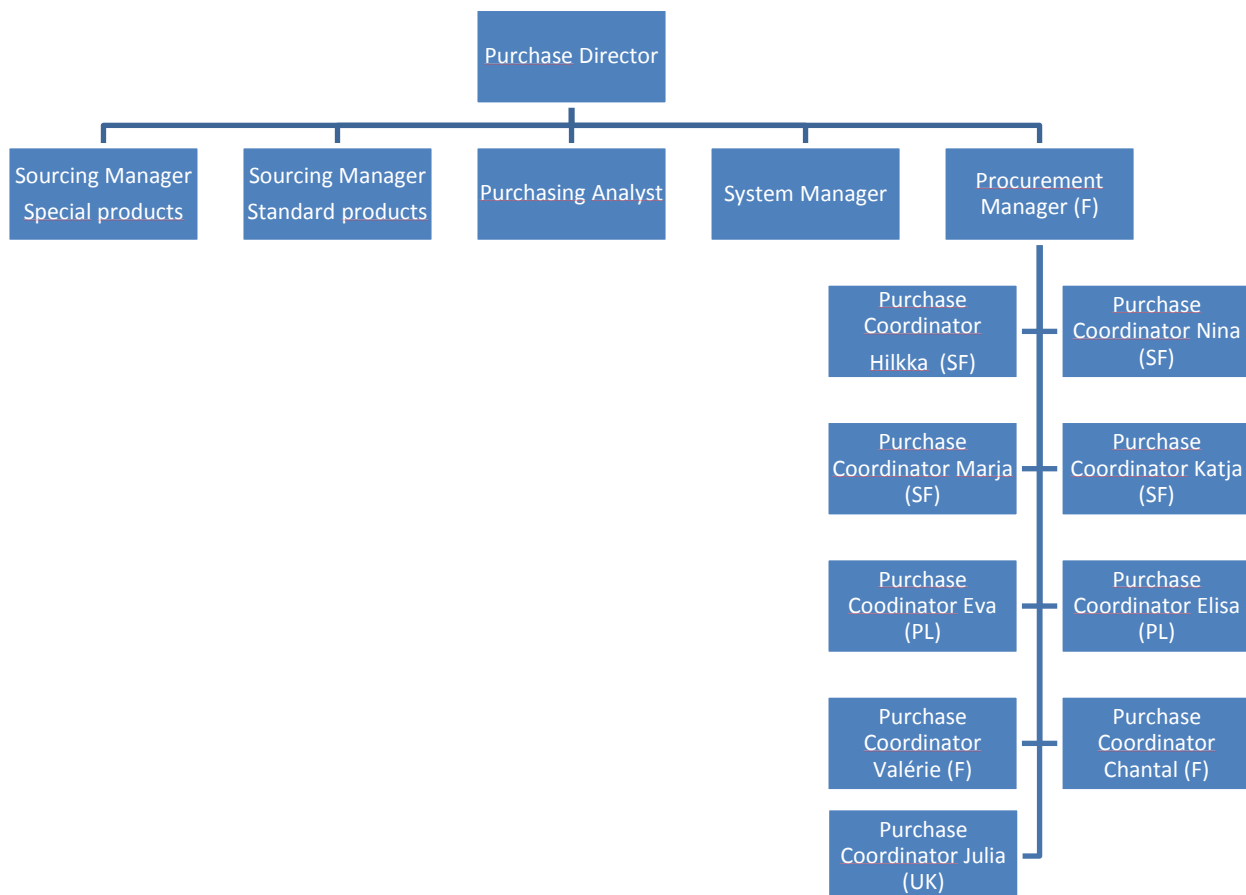
Tacksaari Oy manufactures self-adhesive paper rolls. Tacksaari Oy's customers make and print self-adhesive labels. These labels are what the consumer finds for example on a bottle of shampoo, food packaging, and pallet identification. The following raw materials are required for the production of self-adhesive paper: backing paper, face paper and different components to make silicone and adhesive (or glue) as below described. The face paper will be printed by the printer (Tacksaari Oy's customer). The silicone layer enables the face paper to be taken off from the base (backing paper).

**Q7: Which industries does Tacksaari serve as clients?**

Self-adhesive labels are currently used in food, beverage, chemical, pharmaceutical, retail and logistics as well as personal care.- food label, packaging label, cosmetic label

**Q8: What division does the procurement manager belong to?**

The purchasing division of Tacksaari is composed of the purchasing direction, sourcing managers, a purchasing analyst, a system manager and a procurement manager. (Draw on board and explain command and report relationships).



**Q9: How many members of the procurement team are there and what are their nationalities?**

The purchasing division of Tacksaari Oy is composed of the purchasing direction, sourcing managers, a purchasing analyst, a system manager and a procurement manager. The procurement manager leads a European team composed of nine women located in five production sites in different European countries.

**Q10: What is the main role of a purchase coordinator?**

*The purchase coordinator's main responsibility is to:*

- *control the stock level and the raw material stock rotation.*
- *procure raw materials on time with the requested quantity and quality level.*



- *monitor needs between the factory and suppliers, and to anticipate production planning issues.*
- *control the procurement system: placing orders in the system, controlling whether the deliveries match the quantities and prices invoiced.*
- *report any quality issue that may arise to the suppliers and to get the problem solved.*
- *evaluate the suppliers' performance (ex. respect of delivery, service reliability, product quality), and measure any possible deviation from the initial service level, which is a key tool used in decision-making regarding supplier management.*
- *insure that the agreed quality changes and requested services from the suppliers are applied*

## Activity C - Getting prepared for the meeting

(45 minutes)

Build a team of 8-10 people, distribute roles. This activity includes writing the agenda with manager sending email to members of final agenda. It also includes solving technical setup issues (Skype connections between team members). Individual team members should use this time to ask for role-playing tips from session facilitators as to how their character should behave. Read over the team meeting language vocabulary.

### Keep in mind for the VT team meeting simulation:

1. **For the online meeting chairperson:** you need to present **a clear agenda**, appoint a presenter, a time keeper, and use a virtual white board where questions can be posted for review at the end. Once the presentation has been given, a round table discussion should ideally take place with one person speaking at a time to avoid a messy and confused situation. You have to foster and obtain global participation and collaboration by building mutual trust, respect and group synergy.
2. **For the online meeting participant:** you must avoid speaking at the same time as another participant. Use the muted function during information sharing. You must be explicit and clear, and behave in a way that fosters collaborative relationships with other team members.

Note that technology does not solve all VT problems such as the organisational / political context, individuals and stages in their careers, individuals' perceptions of their future in the enterprise, individuals' loyalty towards the firm, etc.

Refer to the example of an international company which displays on its intranet some rules about communication which would be helpful in a virtual context:

*"1 direct contact is 10 times better than a phone call. 1 phone call is 10 times better than an e-mail. 1 e-mail to 1 person is 10 times better than 1 e-mail to 20 persons".*

## Activity C - Language functions for meetings

### Chairing a meeting

#### Connecting

Hello, hello ..

Does everyone hear me..?

*Elisa? Katja? Chantal? Valérie?*

Can you hear me clearly?

#### Opening the meeting

Good morning *Julie*. Good afternoon *Julia*. Good evening *Lee* ...

If we are all connected, let's ...

... get started.

... start the meeting.

... start.

#### Welcoming and introducing new participants

We're pleased to welcome ...

It's a pleasure to welcome ...

I'd like to introduce ...

I don't think you've met ...

#### Giving apologies for absences

I'm afraid ... can't be with us today. She/he is ...

I have received apologies from ....

#### Stating the purpose/objective/aim

We're here today to ...

Our aim is to ...

I've called this meeting in order to...

By the end of this meeting, we need to make (a) clear recommendation(s);

#### Introducing the agenda

Have you all received a copy of the agenda?

There are ... items on the agenda. First, ..., second, ... and third,...

Any further points to address?

#### Allocating the role of the secretary of the meeting

...has agreed to take the minutes.

..., could you please take the minutes for this meeting?

#### Agreeing the ground rules for the meeting (contributions, timing, decision-making, etc.)

We will hear a short report on each point first, followed by a discussion round the table.

I suggest we go round the table first.

We'll have to keep each item to ... minutes. Otherwise we'll never get through.

Remember we have to stick to the agenda.

The meeting is due to finish at...

**Introducing the first item**

So let's start with ...

So the first item on the agenda is ...

**Closing an item**

I think that this covers the first item.

Can we leave that item?

Now we come to the question of ...

**Next item**

... let's move onto the next item

The next item on the agenda is ...

Now we come to the question of ...

**Asking for contributions**

We haven't heard from you yet, *Elisa*. What do you think about this proposal?

Would you like to add anything, *Marja*?

Anything to add, *Chantal*?

**Handing over to another person**

I'd like to hand over to *Elisa*, who is going to lead the next point.

Right, *Julia*, over to you.

**Keeping the meeting on target (time, relevance, decisions)**

We're running short of time

Please be brief.

I'm afraid we're running out of time.

I'm afraid that's outside of the scope of this meeting.

We're beginning to lose sight of the main point.

Keep to the point, please.

I think we'd better leave that for another meeting.

Are we ready to make a decision?

**Clarifying**

Let me spell out...

Is that clear?

Do you all see what I'm getting at?

To clarify...

To explain...

Let me rephrase ...

To recap / wrap up/ sum up

**Summarising**

Before we close, let me summarize the main points.

To sum up ...

In brief, ...

A summary.

A report

A write-up

**Agenda completed**

Right, it looks as though we covered the main items.

**Agreeing time, date and place for next meeting**

Can we fix the next meeting, please?

I suggest that the next meeting be on ... (day) ... (the date) ... of (month) at ... (time). Is that OK for everyone?

What about the same time, same day next week?

So, see you all then.

**Thanking participants for attending**

I'd like to thank *Elisa* and *Cecilia* for coming over from *London*.

Thank-you all for attending.

Thanks for your participation.

**Closing meeting**

The meeting is closed.

I declare the meeting closed.

**Language for Participating in a Meeting****Getting the chairperson's attention**

Mister/Madam chairman/*Hilka/Nina\** *depends on relationship between members of the meeting*

Excuse me for interrupting.

May I come in here?

**Giving and seeking opinions**

I'm sure/convinced/positive that ...

I really feel that ...

In my opinion ...

I tend to think that ...

Are you sure/convinced/positive that ...

Do you really think that ...?

Am I right in thinking that ...

**Commenting**

That's interesting ...

Good point!

I see what you mean.

**Agreeing and disagreeing**

I totally agree with you.

Yes and ...

Up to a point I agree with you, but ...

(I'm afraid) I can't agree.

**Advising and suggesting**

Let's ...

We should ...

Why don't you ...

How about ...

I suggest/recommend that ...

**Requesting information and action**

Please, could you ...

I'd like you to ...

I wonder if you could ...

**Dealing with Communication Problems****Asking for repetition**

I can't hear you. Could you repeat that please?

Did everyone hear that?

Sorry but the signal is slowing down/cutting off.

Could you speak more slowly please?

Sorry, I missed that. Could you say it again, please?

**Asking for clarification**

I didn't quite follow you. What exactly do you mean?

I don't see what you mean. Could we have some more details, please?

**Asking for verification**

You *did* say March, didn't you?

Is it true that we'll be moving in March?

**Asking for spelling**

Could you spell that, please?

**Correcting information**

Sorry, I think that you misunderstood what I said. The move will be in March.

Sorry, that's not quite right. We'll be here until March.

**Language for recording the meeting****Listing the names of the participants**

Present: (*names or initials*)

Apologies for absence received from: ... (*names or initials*)

**Describing the topics discussed**

... (*name*) reported on/presented/considered/discussed/evaluated/proposed..

**Giving details of arguments for and against**

... (*name*) pointed out/observed/stated that...

... (*name*) disagreed with/voiced reservations about/opposed/objected to...

### **Describing the decisions made**

We agreed to...

It was (unanimously) agreed that we would...

... (*item*) was postponed until the next meeting on..

### **Describing follow-up actions to be carried out (who, what, and when)**

... (*name*) will prepare a report by... (*date*)

... (*name*) agreed to evaluate the new software by...(date)

It was agreed that ... (*name*) would present the findings to the next meeting on... (*date*)

It was agreed that... (*name*) would present the findings to the next meeting on ... (*date*)

### **Showing the date, time and place of the next meeting**

The next meeting will be on ... (*date*), at... (*time*) in ... (*place*)

Next meeting:... (*time*) on... (*date*) in... (*place*)

Adapted from J. Comfort and N. Brieger (1998), *Business English Meetings Instant Agendas*, Penguin Books, for virtual and international team contexts and based on authors' previous experience.



## Activity C - Monthly Meeting Simulation Instructions

**You are: Team leader (Procurement Manager)** You lead the procurement team. You are French, based in France but can work from any place. You are involved in the global strategy of the company. You are a woman. Your mission is to develop and manage the procurement team through effective management of workload, resources and processes at the factory environment. You are acting as a lead buyer as well.

You are requested to lead the procurement team to achieve performance levels clearly linked to the global cost reduction targets. Your job is to create a collaborative team mind set and develop standardized practices. Among your tasks, you are asked to integrate the new Polish team. You are made aware by the top management team that you must be prepared to face a severe period of restructuring which will effect operations all over Europe. You are leading the monthly procurement online meeting.

**General skills required:** managerial skills in international and virtual environment, communication and leadership competences. Your qualities: openness, trust, initiative, accountability.

**Composition of your procurement team:** 9 women: 4 Finnish, 1 English, 2 Polish, 2 French. See details in tables.

**Objective:** The procurement manager organizes a monthly meeting to present the consolidation of the team outcomes. It is the opportunity for her to remind the team of the global strategy, the important events that concern the team, to stimulate the group synergy and to foster an interaction between the team members.

The following meeting agenda has been sent to the team members beforehand:

- the latest company news
- team news
- specific issues
- conclusion and next meeting date

### The content of your meeting

- latest company news : restructuring on-going process
- team news : Nina will be on maternity leave for one year and Sami (a trainee) will replace her
- target result review :
  - claim process
  - raw material stock level
  - paper stock rotation
- specific issues:
  - Poland, a new factory, is postponing their “hot melt production” (new production system using hot adhesive) due to machine adjustment
  - Poland is running out of backing paper grade A due to supplier’s machine break and quality problems
  - hot melt production in France is increasing due to unexpected high volume of customer orders

## **Activity C - Role descriptions**

**1) The procurement manager**

**2) The nine procurement team members from**

- **Finland**
- **Poland**
- **United Kingdom**
- **France**

**(France)**

**You are:**

**Team leader (Procurement Manager):** you are leading the procurement team. You are French, based in France but can work from any place.

You are involved in the global strategy of the company. You are a woman. Your mission is to develop and manage the procurement team through effective management of workload, resources and processes at the factory environment. You are acting as a lead buyer as well.

You are requested to lead the procurement team to achieve performance levels clearly linked to the global cost reduction targets. Your job is to create a collaborative team mind set and develop standardized practices. Among your tasks, you are asked to integrate the new Polish team. You are made aware by the top management team that you must be prepared to face a severe period of restructuring which will effect operations all over Europe. You are leading the monthly procurement on-line meeting.

**General skills required:**

- inter-cultural skills
- understanding of international economic environment
- capacity for communication
- leadership skills
- accountability

**Composition of your procurement team:** 9 female purchase coordinators: 4 Finnish, 1 English, 2 Polish, 2 French. See details in tables.

**Activity:**

The procurement manager organizes a monthly meeting to present the consolidation of the team outcomes. It is the opportunity for her to remind the team of the global strategy, important events that concern the team, to stimulate team synergy and to foster interaction between the team members.

The following meeting agenda has been sent to the team members beforehand:

- the latest company news
- team news
- specific issues
- conclusion and next meeting date

The content of your meeting

- latest company news : restructuring on-going process
- team news : Nina will be on maternity leave for one year and Sami (a trainee) will replace her
- target result review :
  - claim process
  - raw material stock level
  - paper stock rotation

- specific issues:
  - Poland, a new factory, is postponing their “hot melt production” (new production system using hot adhesive) due to machine adjustment
  - Poland is running out of backing paper grade A due to supplier’s machine break and quality problems
  - hot melt production in France is increasing due to unexpected high volume of customer orders

Team members	Country	Some key information	Behaviour about targets	Attitude toward outcomes	Who knows who	Concerned by the restructuring
Hilkka	FIN		proactive	focused on results	Finnish team	maybe
Nina	FIN	Nina is training a trainee who will replace her during her maternity leave for 1 yr. Production is increasing unexpectedly due to new customer orders.	proactive	focused on results	Finnish team	maybe
Katja	FIN	Katja is the most experienced in the Finnish team. She worked in production planning then join procurement. She hopes to move to a sourcing manager position	active	focused on results and eager to always get the best service from your suppliers		
Marja	FIN		a bit less active	focused on results	Finnish team	maybe
Julia	UK	under the pressure of the local production manager, Julia ordered too many reels of paper grade A. The stock level is much too high, reducing thus the team performance at this point. Julia has not yet updated the claim system and therefore the information report is not reliable. Hilkka is well aware that Julia does not master the claim system.	late, basic information	tries to catch up	French team	no
Eva	PL	Eva succeeded in getting the first delivery of hotmelt H after a long logistics issue with the supplier. The production at the Polish site is slightly delayed as the machine still needs to pass the final tests.	on time, detailed info	focused on results	no one	no
Elisa	PL	Elisa needs some paper grade A as the supplier failed in delivering on time.	on time, detailed info	focused on results	no one	no
Valérie	F	Valérie is facing a sudden increase in production. She urgently needs some hot melt H. She leaves on a 2 wk holiday in 3 days.	late	lack of motivation	Julia	yes (one of them will be made redundant)
Chantal	F	Chantal has to train Eva and Elisa to the procurement way of working. She keeps in mind that a large part of their local production will be transferred to PL.	late	lack of motivation	Julia	yes (one of them will be made redundant)

**Hillka, Nina, Katja, Marja**

**You are:**

Purchase coordinators and members of the **Procurement team**.

You are four Finnish women among a team of ten.

**General skills required:**

- fluency in English (spoken and written)
- excellent communication skills
- a flexible and an initiative-taking approach
- general stock management capacities
- customer-oriented and sales business understanding
- understanding of time pressures in a fast-paced production environment
- ability to prioritize and organize her/his own work
- capacity of assimilating information from a range of sources while maintaining focus on a broad range of detailed information
- good working knowledge of PC applications (especially SAP) is a benefit

You are young graduates, with a university degree or equivalent professional qualification in international business, enthusiastic about working at the headquarters of the locally well-known multinational enterprise.

***Behaviour with respect to common targets:*** You are proactive when reporting actions and results each month as you send in your reports. Your monthly report always arrives a few days in advance of the deadline which helps the team manager to analyse information. The actions are documented, precise and reliable.

***Attitudes toward outcomes:*** You are very concerned about complying with the top management's expected targets.

Team members	Country	Some key information	Behaviour about targets	Attitude toward outcomes	Who knows who	Concerned by the restructuring
Hilkka	FIN		proactive	focused on results	Finnish team	maybe
Nina	FIN	Nina is training a trainee who will replace her during her maternity leave for 1 yr. Production is increasing unexpectedly due to new customer orders.	proactive	focused on results	Finnish team	maybe
Katja	FIN	Katja is the most experienced in the Finnish team. She worked in production planning then join procurement. She hopes to move to a sourcing manager position	active	focused on results and eager to always get the best service from your suppliers		
Marja	FIN		a bit less active	focused on results	Finnish team	maybe



**Eva and Elisa (Poland)****You are:**

Purchase coordinators and members of the **Procurement team**.

You are two Polish women among a team of ten.

**General skills required:**

- fluency in English (spoken and written)
- excellent communication skills
- a flexible and an initiative-taking approach to solving problems
- general stock management capacities
- a customer-oriented and sales business understanding
- understanding of time pressures in a fast-paced production environment
- ability to prioritize and organize her/his own work
- capacity of assimilating information from a range of sources while maintaining focus on a broad range of detailed information
- good working knowledge of PC applications (especially SAP) is a benefit

You are newcomers as the Polish factory was recently built and equipped with state-of-the-art technology, including new pilot process systems like the one for procurement. You are young graduates and are enthusiastic about working for a non-local multinational company.

***Behaviour with respect to common targets:*** When preparing your monthly report, you ask many questions to the team leader and team members. Your monthly reports arrive on the requested date with detailed and reliable information.

***Attitudes toward Outcomes:*** You are very concerned about complying to top management's expected targets.

Team members	Country	Some key information	Behaviour about targets	Attitude toward outcomes	Who knows who	Concerned by the restructuring
Eva	PL	Eva succeeded in getting the first delivery of hotmelt H after a long logistics issue with the supplier. The production at the Polish site is slightly delayed as the machine still needs to pass the final tests.	on time, detailed info	focused on results	no one	no
Elisa	PL	Elisa needs some paper grade A as the supplier failed in delivering on time.	on time, detailed info	focused on results	no one	no

## **Julia (UK)**

### **You are:**

A purchase coordinator and member of the **Procurement team**.

You are the only English member among a team of ten.

### **General skills required:**

- fluency in English (spoken and written)
- excellent communication skills including a flexible and an initiative-taking approach
- general stock management capacities
- customer-oriented and sales business understanding
- understanding of time pressures in a fast paced production environment
- ability to prioritize and organize her/his own work
- capacity to assimilate information from a range of sources while maintaining focus on a broad range of detailed information
- good working knowledge of PC applications (especially SAP) is a benefit

You have been working for many years in the company as a production planner, and are eager now to have more time for your grandchildren. You are an expert user in the production process system. Procurement tasks have been added to your position after the restructuring.

***Behaviour with respect to common targets:*** You are always late for the monthly reporting deadline. Your reports provide rather basic information.

***Attitudes toward outcomes:*** You hope that the target will be reached.

Team members	Country	Some key information	Behaviour about targets	Attitude toward outcomes	Who knows who	Concerned by the restructuring
Julia	UK	under the pressure of the local production manager, Julia ordered too many reels of paper grade A. The stock level is much too high, reducing thus the team performance at this point. Julia has not yet updated the claim system and therefore the information report is not reliable. Hilka is well aware that Julia does not master the claim system.	late, basic information	tries to catch up	French team	no

## Valérie and Chantal (France)

### You are:

Purchase coordinators and members of the **Procurement team**.

You are two French members among a team of ten.

### General skills required:

- fluency in English (spoken and written)
- excellent communication skills
- flexible and initiative-taking approach to solving problems
- general stock management capacities
- customer-oriented and sales business understanding
- understanding of time pressures in a fast paced production environment
- ability to prioritize and organize her/his own work
- capacity to assimilate information from a range of sources while maintaining focus on a broad range of detailed information
- good working knowledge of PC applications (especially SAP) is a benefit

You have been doing the same job for many years with less and less enthusiasm. You are aware that the company is restructuring which may drastically impact your site and your positions.

***Behaviour with respect to common targets:*** You have been required to train the new Polish colleagues. You provide your monthly report shortly before the monthly procurement meeting during which information is shared and results discussed.

***Attitudes toward outcomes:*** You are very critical of the procurement process system which has been newly implemented, because it requires time consuming adjustments and it changes the authorisation level process. However you hope that the expected target will be reached.

Team members	Country	Some key information	Behaviour about targets	Attitude toward outcomes	Who knows who	Concerned by the restructuring
Valérie	F	Valérie is facing a sudden increase in production. She urgently needs some hot melt H. She leaves on a 2 wk holiday in 3 days.	late	lack of motivation	Julia	yes (one of them will be made redundant)
Chantal	F	Chantal has to train Eva and Elisa to the procurement way of working. She keeps in mind that a large part of their local production will be transferred to PL.	late	lack of motivation	Julia	yes (one of them will be made redundant)

## Activity D

### Distance and proximity: How can a remote team leader bridge the gap? Simulation of Tacksaari Oy's procurement team



#### Writing minutes of a meeting      *Time: 60 minutes*

**Keep in mind:** A person not having attended the meeting should be able to follow: what has been discussed; what decisions or actions have been decided within which time frame and who is coordinating or responsible for those actions or decisions.

#### Template for Minutes of meeting

Topic of the meeting:

Date:

Meeting leader:

Participants:

Agenda:

Topic 1: subject

Coordinator

Actions: what, when and who

Decisions: what, when and who

Topic 2: subject

Coordinator

Actions: what, when and who

Decisions: what, when and who

Topic 3: ...

Other topics:

Conclusion

Next meeting date: