

## **ASCENT Teamwork Workshop**

### **Example case study: can this virtual team work?**

Sam Townsende is the head of a newly formed information technology team for a major international beverages corporation – Pino Oinos Inc. His team is composed of 20 professionals who live and work in Canada, the United States, Europe, South America, Africa and Greece. All members of the team report to Sam. The team is a virtual team connected primarily via video conference, group decision support software (e.g. SAP BusinessObjects), email, messaging services (e.g. WhatsApp) and telephone. The team has met twice in a face-to-face setting to set goals and plan. All of the team members are quite competent in their respective technical areas. Some team members have a long and valued history with the company; others recently joined the company through a corporate merger. The team members have never worked together on any projects before.

The task of the team is to develop and implement technology innovations for the corporation's global business units. The team members are excited about the importance and the innovative nature of their assignment. They respect each other and enjoy being part of this team. However, the team is having difficulty getting started and the members report being extremely overloaded. Most team members travel on business to sites for at least two weeks out of every month. The travel is important, but it causes team members to get behind with their tasks.

The team has one part-time secretary, located in New York. Her primary responsibility is to organise travel and the meetings of team members. Team members are working on several projects at once and have great difficulty finishing any of these projects. One team member has 500 unread email messages because every time an email is sent, each team member sends copies of the message to everyone on the team. Additionally, other team members have reported becoming quite frustrated with each other, and Sam has received numerous reports that certain team members do not believe that their colleagues are fulfilling their tasks well. In some cases, team members are requesting that colleagues be removed from their posts or reassigned. Sometimes these accusations are mutual – in other words, team members are accusing each other of doing the same thing. Indeed, expressing dissatisfaction with teammates and their performance seems to be a common trait currently among team members.

One of Sam's main directives is to prove that this team can work and provide a valuable function to the organisation.

### **Guiding Questions**

1. Are any of the characteristics of team excellence missing (Larson & LaFasto 1989) in this team?
2. Using the model of team leadership (Koger-Hill, 2013) should Sam monitor or intervene? If he intervenes, what action should he take?
3. Can this team's problems be attributed to any of the five dysfunctions of a team (Lencioni, 2002) and if so, what remedies could be used?
4. According to Tuckman's (1965) theory of team development, what stage does this team appear to be at?