

The right composition matters. What stands behind successful teamwork

Abstract

Marcela Procházková has been assigned to lead a newly established team in the Training and Learning department of a well-known multinational company that develops, manufactures, and markets products for the construction, building-maintenance, energy and manufacturing industries, mainly for the professional end-user. The goal of Marcela's team is to enhance employees' sales competences and portfolio knowledge (incl. new services and complete digital systems) throughout the whole corporation in the CEE region, which includes the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, and the Baltic states. Simultaneously, the new team has to create the right, stable and professional conditions for the realization of the in-house training. Marcela had a limited influence on team composition. Two team members were part of the original on-boarding team, two members were hired from other departments, and the last member was selected by HR in the standard selection procedure. After the primordial enthusiasm from the new managerial position and assignment, Marcela discovers that things do not go as smoothly as she expected. The team does not achieve the desired results, some members lack necessary competencies and basic interpersonal misunderstandings and conflicts occur.

Students identify the wrong steps that have been taken during team creation and suggest possible solutions to the situation described in the case study

KEYWORDS: Teamwork – Virtual teams – Team development – Team cohesion – Diversity

The use of case studies offers, especially in business studies, the possibility for students to deal independently with complex, economic questions and problems, so that networked thinking and problem solving are promoted.

The present case study can be assigned to the **Case Problem Method**¹, which in this case has the following characteristics:

- The problems are roughly mentioned and the necessary information is given.
- The students identify possible causes, further partial problems and interdependencies. They independently develop varied solutions and make a decision.

¹ inspired by Kaiser 1983, p. 23

TEACHING NOTE

1. Intended audience

1.1 Student group

The case study is for students

- of Bachelor degree or
- Master's degree

in the field of business administration.

Intended courses of study for the use of the case study are Basics of Management, Intercultural Management, International Management, Leadership etc. However, the CS is designed in such a way that it can also be easily applied in other economic fields.

1.2 Required previous knowledge

Students should have a basic knowledge of business administration and be familiar with the basics of management or leadership.

2. Case background

The case study focuses on challenges that are often faced when developing and restructuring a new department (Training and Learning Department) in a multinational company. The restructuring involves not only personnel changes but also changes in geographical coverage and way of work.

The situation described in the case study shows a dilemma that all managers could face one day – how to create a functional and efficient team and, at the same time, handle limitations represented by diversity and the company's requirements and needs.

3. Didactic instructions

3.1 Learning goals

3.1.1 General learning goal

Students learn to understand difficulties connected with a team formation and the management of team diversity.

3.1.2 Specific learning goals

Content competences:

- Students indicate what mistakes have been made during the team formation.
- Students understand the importance of team cohesion.
- Students define the different stages of team development.
- Students explain how to establish cooperation between team members in a diverse and virtual team.
- Students understand the pros and cons of virtual teams.

Social competences:

Social competencies are not the special focus of learning in this case study. The learning success is therefore not explicitly identified and measured. Nevertheless, cooperation in groups implicitly enhances team competence, including conflict resolution.

Self-competences:

Self-competences are not the special focus of learning in this case study. The learning success is therefore not explicitly identified and measured. Nevertheless, it can be assumed that, for example, time management, self-learning competence or the assessment of one's own performance are also implicitly promoted.

4. Organisation

4.1 Procedure and time

The following sequence is suggested for the case study, but, of course, it can also be adapted structurally or temporally depending on your preferences.

Time schedule for the use of the case study:

<i>Time</i>	<i>Phase</i>	<i>Classroom activity</i>
0,5h	1. Confrontation: groups address the case study	The group deals with the case and the accompanying materials and develops a plan for the processing of the case
1h	2. Information: groups survey the case material provided and identify their own sources of information	The group works on the case study and researches the necessary contents
3h	3. Exploration: each group discusses alternative solutions	The group develops solutions and compares the different results so that the alternatives are discussed
0,5h	4. Resolution: each group makes its decision	The group comes up with a solution for the case study
1h	5. Disputation: each group defends its decision ²	The groups present their results with reasons and a final discussion takes place

Time schedule for final presentation and discussion:

<i>Minutes</i>	<i>Classroom activity</i>
0-45	Each group presents a summary of its approach to the solution and records this in key points on the blackboard or similar media.
45-60	The students get into a discussion about the collected solution.
60-75	If necessary, the lecturer stimulates controversy again by impulses. The following reflective questions can be used for this purpose.
75-90 and in further course	Lecturer establishes references to the specialist science and, together with the plenum, places the solutions in the theoretical context.

² inspired and translated from Kaiser 1983, p. 26

5. Teaching tips

5.1 Use in the university context

- Recommended group size: Up to 4 students.
- Resources: Lecture or seminar room, in the best case with group tables and information or research facilities such as access to the internet.
- Accompanying material: As a lecturer, you decide which material you want to give, when you want to add it or to what extent you want to differentiate internally.
- Adaptation to learning group: This case study is designed for Europe-wide use. However, you can of course adapt or modify it to your learning group and their environment or professional orientation, previous knowledge and competences.

5.2 Role of the lecturer

As a lecturer, you merely take on the role of a learning advisor and moderator when working with the case study. The students should work on the case independently in groups, acquire the necessary knowledge, identify problems and find solutions by themselves. You do not give tasks, instructions or directions. Only if a group of students does not progress and the learning process is prevented, you can act as a learning guide and help through impulses or clarify difficulties in understanding.

5.3 Questions for reflection

A case study is for students to discover problems themselves, control the learning process and develop their own solutions. Tasks or questions within the case study therefore are unnecessary. These reflective questions should only be asked if the discussion stops or remains too superficial. They only serve to give new impetus in the final discussion at the end or to open up other perspectives. Ideally, students should consider and discuss these questions and interdependencies/considerations themselves.

- What mistakes have been made during the team formation? What could be done differently?
- How could Marcela lead the virtual team more effectively? What are the strengths and weaknesses of a virtual team? What do managers have to be careful about when leading a virtual team
- What techniques or managerial tools would you suggest to Marcela to improve the atmosphere and effectivity of her team?

Further case studies of this kind, a Manual for your own development of didactically high-quality case studies as well as an Online-Planning-Guide for the digital, cross-location use of case studies in cooperation with other universities and a partner-tool for contacting interested institutions can be found at: <https://www.e3cases.uni-koeln.de/en/>.



CASE

The right composition matters. What stands behind successful teamwork

Marcela Procházková started working at the HI company eight years ago right after her graduation from a prestigious Master's degree programme focused on International management. During her studies, she managed to get many attractive internships mainly in the field of marketing and spent almost one year abroad on studies in France and Singapore. Marcela could be described as an ambitious, purposeful and communication wise relatively direct woman. She started her career in the sales department, as did almost everyone in the company. The company politics say that everyone who plans to pursue their career at the company has to get to know all products, services and especially customers personally. This helps every one to get to know the company's culture and gain their own hands-on experience with the functioning of the company. Marcela was lucky, her mentor was Petr who was considered to be a very competent and successful salesman with many years of experience in the field of sales. After one year, Marcela continued to the marketing department where she successfully led a team of 9 people. Marcela thinks back to this time quite frequently. It was her first managerial experience and, one must say a very successful one. This position completely satisfied her ambitions and her results met the expectations of management. Her career continued according to her plans. The team Marcela led was just perfect (and very homogenous). The relationships within the team were excellent - all the team-members spent a lot of free time together, the content of the job was for all of them motivating, there were almost no conflicts. All team members were of a similar age (under 30) and had a related education. Some of them knew each other already from their studies. All of them had only minimum working experience from other companies. After a few years, Marcela left on maternity leave and management had to find her replacement. The new team leader took over the whole agenda very quickly and Marcela was able to enjoy her baby for almost two years. During this time, she stayed in touch with the company and occasionally helped with some projects.

Marcela liked the company she worked for a lot. HI is a multinational company which is currently present in more than 120 countries around the world. It is one of the leading global companies in providing products, systems, and services to construction professionals. It develops, manufactures, and markets products for the construction, building maintenance, energy and manufacturing industries, mainly for the professional end-user. It concentrates mainly on anchoring systems, fire protection systems, installation systems, measuring and detection tools (such as laser levels, range meters and line lasers), power tools (such as hammer drills, demolition hammers, diamond drills, cordless electric drills, heavy angle drills, power saws) and related software and services. Even though the company focus does not seem to be too attractive for women, Marcela fell in love especially with the company's quite strong

corporate culture which could be described as caring and performance oriented.

The corporate culture at HI is not just a theoretical definition, but a practical activation of expected behaviour. The company itself defines it as a unique combination of caring and performance. It's about balance and sustainability. This culture was built over decades and was strongly influenced by the nature of HI as a family-owned company. Today, HI is privately owned, and the company has managed to blend the entrepreneurial spirit of a small agile start-up with the great processes and structures of a large corporation.

The culture is an integral part of the of the HI business model and strategy. The business model starts with Purpose and values, followed by People and then comes Business Strategy. The strategy has its foundations in caring and performance-oriented culture.

For the company, its values are fundamental. The way that HI runs its business is based on living the HI core values:

- HI acts with integrity in all it does
- HI demonstrates courage to go beyond the circle of habits
- HI outperforms through teamwork
- HI has commitment to personal and company growth
- HI believes that the culture is critical for the creation of a good atmosphere in the company and that significantly influences employee engagement

One day the management offered Marcela a new challenging position as head of the Training and Learning department. She decided to accept this offer and return to the working process. This department has been through a significant restructuring in recent months. Newly, its focus is not just on the Czech Republic and Slovakia, but the new team is going to have a responsibility for the whole CEE region, which in this case covers not only the Czech Republic and Slovakia but also Hungary and the Baltic states, in total six countries. The primary goal of the department is to increase sales and other competencies throughout the whole organization and create professional conditions for employees to reach this goal. The strategy of the department falls into four main pillars: 1) newcomer onboarding 2) leaders development 3) e-learning and 4) training center (creation of a new training center for the whole region which will be located in Bratislava). The six countries cooperated within the concern on the marketing level but never on the level of education and training. Therefore, it was necessary to start with a personnel description of this new international team.

When Marcela took over the team, it had been formed by two trainers who had been responsible for the onboarding of new employees in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. One of those men was not unknown to Marcela; it was Petr her trainer from her beginnings at the company. The second man was Jan, Petr's colleague. Both men were used to each other; they had been cooperating within one department for more

than ten years. Before the restructuring of the department and the change of the strategy, they had a team leader who was of the same age as they were (over 40). He did not want them to be creative or to change anything, but he appreciated their technical skills, experience and deep knowledge of all products. The team leader himself had great knowledge of products and was considered as a professional specialist. However, he had no managerial aspirations. Therefore, he decided to continue his career as a specialist. Currently, he does not lead any team. Petr and Jan were quite disappointed by his decision since they liked his undemanding leadership style. On the top of that, the three were good friends.

Marcela's position was not therefore too comfortable. Firstly, she has not been accepted by her team members since she was not perceived by her new subordinates as the competent one in terms of technical knowledge. Secondly, her task was to establish a new team and implement a lot of changes that comprise not just the new functioning of the department, its geographic extension but also the change of content of all training that should newly involve information and knowledge of more complex solutions, incl. modern software and connected services. The salesmen should be able not just to sell the product, but also to offer the whole individual solution which would be based on a deep and concrete analysis of the customer's situation and actual needs.

For the first nine months, the new team consisted of three members- team leader Marcela, Petr and Jan. Petr and Jan were in charge of the onboarding in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, as they had been used to doing it beforehand. Marcela's task was to work on the other three pillars (leaders development, e-learning, and training center in Bratislava) and on the main goal to centralize all these pillars from across the region (CZ, SK, HU, the Baltics) to the Prague office. The cooperation with Petr and Jan started being for Marcela more and more complicated. The reason for that was not just the disrespect towards Marcela from their side. Also, other aspects like troubles in the personal life of Petr started playing an important role. Petr had always been perceived as a real professional, even though he was missing any formal education. After his first job as a car mechanic, he found a great opportunity at HI where he had stayed until now. He has been working hard on his development and after a few years, he even won a prize for the best sales consultant. Petr loves his job and the company as a whole. He realizes that the company enabled him to make a great career and when he faced some troubles, the company always supported him. The HI became his second family and now, after the divorce from his wife, maybe even the first one. Petr is an expert for the HI solutions. Unfortunately, he has an only a passive knowledge of English. His colleague Jan has English knowledge at the same level as Petr's. Jan has been working for HI for almost 25 years, he's 57 years old. He has occupied several positions in the company during his career. Currently, he's the trainer of sales skills and he's really competent in this field. Even though he knows a lot about the products, he as well as Petr do not see any reason for making some changes. Jan sometimes says to Marcela, that he does what she wants in the end, but doesn't want to come up with any new ideas. He is already looking forward to retirement. Petr, on the contrary, usually negates all the

ideas Marcela comes up with.

After a thorough analysis, it was clear that the team should be expanded also by the nature of the objectives. In addition, Marcela desperately needed someone who would not be in the opposition all the time. And she found Vendula. Vendula used to be Marcela's colleague in the Marketing department but now, she is becoming dissatisfied with her current job and starting to think about changing it. When Marcela found out that Vendula was planning to change employer, she acted very quickly and offered the position in Marcela's team to her. Vendula agreed and became E-learning specialist. Vendula was a perfect choice. She studied in Canada several years ago, and after her studies, she managed to find a job in HR in the UK. After that, she moved back to the Czech Republic where she worked at HI in the Marketing department. Experiences with marketing and HR were a perfect match for the position of an e-learning specialist. Vendula is very communicative, and she became a part of the team very quickly. She is very popular even with Petr and Jan since their competences complemented each other perfectly.

After Vendula joined the team, the Prague office was more or less complete. However, there was still a need to find someone who would be in charge of the construction of the training centre in Bratislava, some facility manager. The requirements for someone who would satisfy this position were wide ranging. It should have been someone who could speak fluent Czech, Slovak, Hungarian and English. The facility manager should be also a person who would be able to arrange purchases for the training center and also to deal with the participants, arrange accommodation, transport, and catering for them and, at the same time, it must be someone who is practical and understands construction. For the HR department, it was not an easy task especially in times of economic growth. It took more than 6 months but then HR found Václav who met all the requirements and joined Marcela's team. Václav is very hardworking and communicative, but unfortunately, he's a facility manager without any facility because the training centre is still not built. Václav is therefore located in the headquarters in Bratislava where he helps different staff. He successfully went through intensive training on HI products and currently, he prepares and organizes the initial sales training intended for sales consultants coming from the whole region (approx. 300 participants).

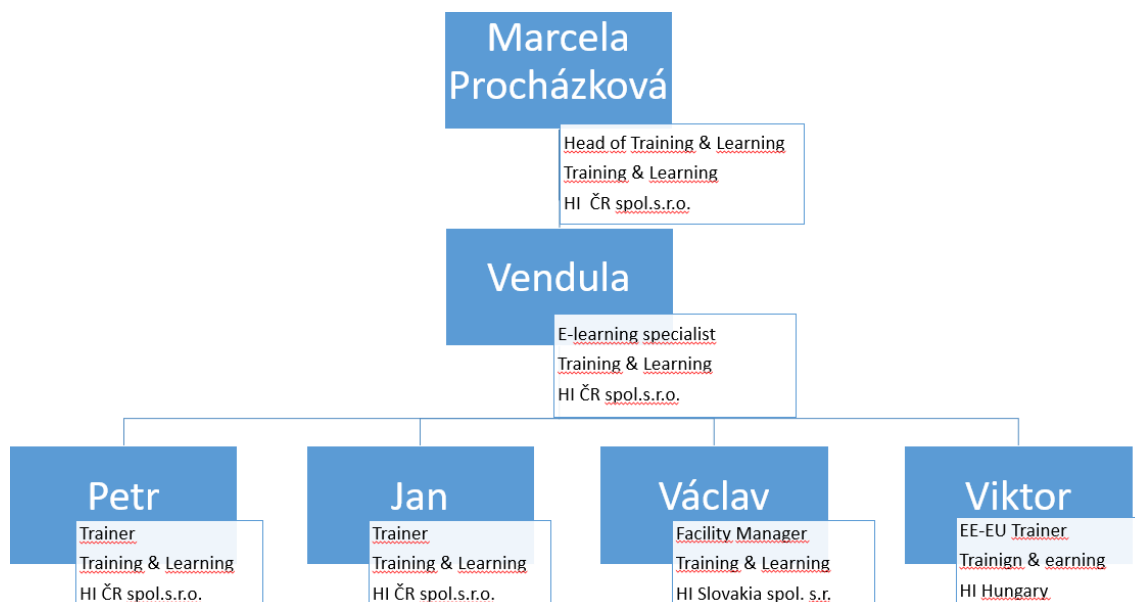
The last person who joined Marcela's team is Viktor, who is in charge of sales and training for Hungary and the Baltic states and leadership training for the whole region. Also, his task is to run the e-learning for Hungary. Viktor is located in Budapest, but his training will take place in Bratislava where he will commute when necessary. Victor has been working for HI for more than 15 years; he had held a managerial position before he went through burnout.

The team is complete now. However, it is facing many troubles. Marcela does not know what should be done in order to start working as a real team and not as separate individuals. The cooperation between the Prague members does not work, Petr does not listen to Marcela and rejects every idea she suggests. Jan does not like changes and refuses to adapt to the new situation and new requirements. Other team

members work well, but they do not have any impact on Petr's or Jan's approach. In the team, there are many roles and positions that must cooperate and work together. The communication goes through Tel-Co, Marcela travels to Bratislava once or twice a month where she meets Viktor and Václav. Václav and Victor meet relatively often because of the training organization. All the other communication among other team members is done via chats, emails or Skype. The team members do not know each other well personally. Marcela knows that she has to change it, but she does not know how...

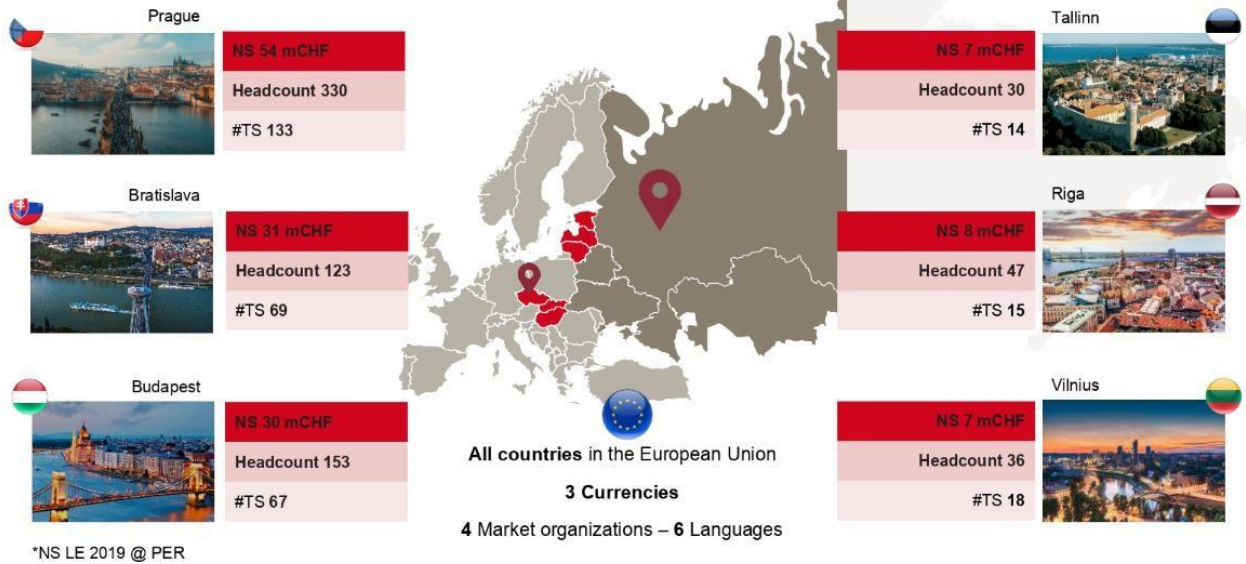
MATERIAL

Attachment 1: Organizational chart of Training & Learning department







Attachment 2: EE Sub-region of HI

EE-EU IS A DIVERSE SUB-REGION



Attachment 3: HI strategic goals

1	2	3	4	5	6
					
Sustainable value creation	Refocus on leadership	Strengthen differentiation	Strong global growth	Focus on engagement	Increase entrepreneurial spirit and diversity