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TEACHING & LEARNING

Workplace Challenges: Managing Project Teams and Flexible Work Programs

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Today's workplace presents a variety of challenges for managers and employees. In this issue of the *Organization Management Journal*, the Teaching & Learning section offers two articles that address important dimensions of the work environment. Through an experiential exercise, the first article explores the challenges involved in managing and working in project teams. The authors of the second article focus on issues related to work–life balance and flexible work programs through a case-study approach to student learning.

Project teams consisting of members from multiple functional areas and geographic locations are pervasive in organizations. The effective management of such teams is critical but can be difficult. Linda S. Henderson and Keith O. Hunter, authors of “The Communication Conundrum Exercise: Pedagogy for Project-Based Learning,” note the challenges in hybrid project team structures in which there is both structural flexibility and hierarchical control. The authors propose an experiential classroom approach that uses the Communication Conundrum Exercise to enable students to work through the constraints associated with hierarchical control of project scope, schedule, and resources. It specifically addresses the overemphasis of taskwork communication at the expense of teamwork communication in hybrid project team structures. Designed to enhance students' ability to communicate effectively in project team environments, the exercise also offers insight into the successful management of those teams.

Achieving work–life balance can prove challenging for all of us. It also poses challenges to business organizations and managers who attempt to create career opportunities for valu-

able employees who require flexible work schedules. Authors Russell Clayton, Micheal T. Stratton, Mark Julien, and John H. Humphreys highlight key personal and organizational issues in dealing with the complexity of flexible workplace programs through their case study, “Beverly Matthews.” The case details a female employee's return to the workforce, after spending time with her young children, to an organization noted for its flexible and family-friendly values. The case addresses specific problems that emerge when not all managers share these values. The authors explore a variety of topics including performance management, training, gender roles, power and politics, and organizational culture. The case and teaching note offer opportunities for use in both human resource management and organizational behavior courses.

Preparing our students to confront the challenges of the workplace environment is an important part of management education. Project team education that helps our students understand the communication challenges associated with teamwork can enable them to work effectively in this type of environment. It can also help build managerial capabilities, specifically related to the functioning of teams. Our future employees and managers also will face increasingly difficult work–life balance issues. Management education and pedagogy that offer insight into these challenges at both the personal level and the managerial level can better prepare students as they enter the workplace and navigate their career paths. Both articles provide our readers with useful and creative approaches to address these workplace issues.

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