**Cases for Small Group Discussions**

**Case 3-1. Communicating with Technology on Friday Afternoon**

Coleen cheered as she completed the last of her attachments for the report, a last-minute request before the weekend; a fair-weather Friday, one that she was eager to begin, since she had made plans for a date with her new romance of the last three weeks. She saved the interactive pdf file, which linked to eighteen ancillary files, all nineteen files attached to her e-mail to her boss.

Coleen pressed "SEND" and her e-mail was off to her boss. Coleen rushed from her office to catch the 5:15 uptown bus. If she missed it, she would have to wait about a half hour for the next one. As she jumped on the bus before the doors closed and grabbed a seat in the back, she opened her purse. She quickly turned off her phone, which had only a small charge left, to preserve the battery. She brushed her hair, powdered her face, and put on some lip gloss in preparation for dinner at a nice uptown bistro. Brian, her date, had made reservations for outdoor dining, on the bistro's balcony overlooking the hustle and bustle below.

At the same moment, Coleen's boss was opening Coleen's e-mail. As he downloaded the files, error messages began popping up. Six of the files had been corrupted in electronic transit. He called Coleen's extension; it went immediately to voice mail. He called her cell phone; the receiving message said that the recipient was not receiving calls. He e-mailed her, hoping that she would somehow still be available, to no avail. Panic quickly set in—the report had to be delivered in a meeting in one hour, and the four functional area managers would be present.

**Questions for Case 3-1**

1. *Do you perceive any possible repercussions from the failure of the electronic transfer of the six files?*

Students should understand that when subordinates are unable to accomplish a directive, it makes their supervisor look incompetent. While a last-minute assignment always comes with risk, the boss should not have expected Coleen to follow through smoothly under these conditions. Blaming Coleen when he delivers his incomplete report at the meeting will be a mistake. A wise boss plans for disasters and always has a backup plan.

1. *What would you suggest as a one-hour plan for Coleen's boss?*

The boss should deliver a partial report based on the information that he has. The following week he should send the missing portions to the meeting attendees, with apologies.

*3. How could problems like the one in this scenario be avoided a) by Coleen, b) by Coleen's boss, or c) by company policies?*

Students should recognize the dangers of last-minute deadlines, the risks of making themselves unavailable to their bosses who are in a crunch, and that disappointing their bosses can threaten job security.

Coleen should have checked that the pdf files were properly attached to her e-mail. She should not have attached all 19 to a single e-mail but sent them in several e-mails. She should not have turned off her cell phone and made herself unavailable in case there were any complications.

The boss should not have asked Coleen to rush through the preparation of a major report and demanded that she do the work so late on a Friday afternoon.

**Case 3–2. Reply to All?!**

Jamal Wright arrived at the office a bit late on Monday morning, around 9:45. He had been invited to speak at the Miami Chamber of Commerce breakfast as the chief operating officer for InterWorld Traders, an international shipping service. His topic, ironically, was communication efficiency. His speech was well received, and he was in a good mood as he logged in for the day. As he opened his e-mail, he was instantly struck by the incredible number of internal e-mails he had waiting in his inbox. Normally about 20 messages, today the tally was 21,291! The e-mail messages were from all over the world, and were short messages in reply to others’ messages. Thousands of them!

Jamal scrolled down the list until he got to the last ones he had read on Friday afternoon. The culprit soon surfaced. It was a message from Sue Knowles, a manager in charge of distribution analysis. Her job focused on the efficiency of logistical matters concerning the shipping of parcels and the organization of the firm’s headquarters warehouse. Sue had sent out a call asking for input concerning efficiency issues that had been noticed in any of the areas within the firm. Unfortunately, the question was open-ended, and her delivery method had created a monster. She had sent the message to all of the 546 supervisory level managers or higher within the company. She had not used a mail merge process to send the messages; instead, she had listed a group with all of the e-mail addresses included in the recipients line of her message. The result was disastrous. As several well-meaning recipients responded with their observations and suggestions, they had unfortunately selected Reply All. Apparently, the recipients were under the impression that only two or three people had received the initial e-mail. Unfortunately, as others also hit Reply All in their responses to the responses, millions of e-mail messages flooded the firm’s servers.

Jamal returned to the more recent messages. They were noticeably aggressive messages, like “Remove me from this e-mail list” and “I wish you people would learn to use e-mail properly!” and “You idiots stop e-mailing me!” There were even some who obviously realized what was going on—they had replied to all saying, “Everyone stop pressing Reply All!”

The tumult of messages was growing greater minute by minute. The company was bogged down in its inability to function by e-mail, and there seemed to be no end in sight.

**Questions for Case 3-2**

1. *How could blunders like the one described above be prevented?*

The most obvious answer is employee training. The information technology department can readily provide training programs on e-mail etiquette as well as the features of the e-mail program used in the company. IT can send links to the training programs to employees so they can be viewed electronically, on the workers’ computers. Mandatory training will prevent future disasters.

1. *Since it was not prevented, what should Jamal do now?*

Again, consulting with the IT department is the best approach. Responding with more e-mails to the people involved in these exchanges will only worsen the situation. The entire system will likely crash, and business functions will be harmed.

**Case 3-3. The Potential for Technology**

Bill Emory is the operations vice president of a large banking firm in California that has 48 branch operations. These operations vary from drive-in facilities with 10 employees to larger facilities employing as many as 150 people. Employee turnover has always been a major problem in these branches, and no employment strategy has been effective in reducing this problem. The high turnover has made employee training a special problem.

The human resources department is responsible for employee training, but HR charges branch operations for the expenses incurred. The recent expansion in training due to ever-changing services offered by the bank has become extremely costly. Emory has decided it is time to attempt to reduce these costs by implementing some new training strategies. He believes that many of the new communication technologies could be used to save training expenses. In particular savings could be realized for the branches that are more than 400 miles from the corporate office. (In the past, the training representatives would travel to the branch site, stay overnight, present a one- or two-day training session, and then return. Emory would like to reduce these travel and lodging expenses.)

Emory has casually asked the HR manager, Joan Tyson, to investigate communication technology possibilities in training, but no action has been taken; consequently Emory has decided to write a persuasive letter to Tyson encouraging Tyson’s staff to investigate this subject.

**Question for Case 3-3**

*Write a memo to the HR director, Joan Tyson, that could be used for this purpose. Include one or two specific technologies that might be appropriate, their advantages, and the communication impact that could be expected. Special attention should be given to training for the tellers. For instance, the procedures for recording the various transactions and customer communications should be part of the training.*

Students’ answers will vary and any modern method of communication would be acceptable as long as the students demonstrate that the method is cost efficient and will achieve the goals necessary.

**Case 3-4. Improvements at ServeNow**

ServeNow is a grocery store chain that has seven stores in the southeastern United States. ServeNow’s strategy is to target smaller towns (under 50,000 population) so it can become the dominant store in the area. The chain is headquartered in the largest town, population 75,000, in which it has a store. Each store is at least 50 miles from another store within the network.

The owner of the stores, Edward Bushley, has found that it is extremely difficult to monitor store activities because of travel logistics. As a result, the manager of each store has traditionally had a lot of latitude. Many of the pricing and inventory decisions are made at the individual locations. However, most purchasing is made through a central purchasing office in the headquarters city.

But during the past two weeks, three managers left ServeNow to start a major grocery brokerage firm. This took Bushley by surprise, but being an entrepreneur himself, he understands their desire to start their own business. In addition, another manager is nearing retirement. Bushley has found that it is extremely difficult to find qualified replacements for these energetic, creative managers.

Bushley had hoped that potential managers would be available among his present employees, but he discovered the company had been weak in its human resources planning. Current staff members do not seem to have the capabilities or desire to become store managers. It became obvious that managers would have to be found outside of the present staff.

Bushley has retained a small-business consultant, Solange DePeres, who specializes in personnel problems. DePeres agreed that no potential managers were on the present staff. The assistant store managers would be able to manage during the transition, but ultimately new personnel would have to be hired. She stated that Bushley would have to hire managers who were not familiar with the stores’ operations and simply spend more time with them than he had with the previous managers. In particular, Bushley would have to spend time training them and answering operational questions.

Bushley asks DePeres, “How can I possibly spend more time at the individual stores? It seems that I am already too busy to maintain a balanced lifestyle.”

**Project for Case 3-4**

*Assume you are the small-business consultant, Solange DePeres, and make several recommendations to help Bushley stay in touch with his stores and develop his managerial force. Consider especially the technological communication tools on the market. Explain your recommendations.*

Students’ answers will vary greatly here; however, most should contain many of the essential requirements. These include:

1. Training all of the four new managers at one site while the assistant managers continue to run the stores temporarily. This will save Bushley time and travel expenses.
2. Have the new managers, once trained, train the assistant managers so that they will be prepared to take over the running of the store in the event of the retirement or termination of another store manager.
3. Possibly the business being started by the previous managers could be used for the purpose of central warehousing of the products that Bushley’s stores sell. If this possibility exists, then a central computer system could also be installed between the warehouse and the stores. This system could keep track of all products sold and the prices at which they are sold. This would enable all of the stores to sell their products at the same price in every branch, simplifying or eliminating many of the problems the chain is currently experiencing.
4. A central computer system or intranet linking all of the stores will also allow for constant and inexpensive communication and will allow the stores to use the same procedures in all areas including pricing and inventory.