Best practices collection for successful virtual teams

1. Virtual Team agreements

- Use of a team agreement including conflict and escalation handling in alignment with the organisation's code of conduct.
- Be aware, that conflict is a normal part of the team's life cycle and take care to focus with conflict discussions on tasks and not on another person. Use the telephone and speak directly to the person. Go to the person first, not to the team leader or to another team member.
- Talk openly at the beginning, making agreements e.g. it is okay to say out loud: 'I have the feeling not everyone is fully engaged in this call', 'name anything disturbing to reach the team goal'.

2. Sharing expectations at the start of a project and best practices from regular virtual sessions

- In the beginning of the project invest time to share why each participant joins the project what you want to get out of it, what you think you can contribute and to clarify the roles and responsibilities. This supports to get everybody on the same page and helps avoiding conflicts.
- Nominate a moderator and set out an agenda in advance.
- Start each session with questions about: What happened during the last week? What went well? What needs to be improved? What activities are planned for the coming week? Where are we on the way to our goal and way forward?
  Or alternatively with the following 3 questions: What have you done yesterday? What are you going to do today? What barriers might you face? It is a quick communication exercise and each person has 1 minute speaking time.

- Take the pulse of the virtual team frequently e.g. asking 'What is the weather like?' at the beginning of regular sessions helps to forget about the fact that people are not in the same room.
- Give acknowledgement and feedback to the one who is speaking.
- Make sure everybody is being heard, ask everybody about their opinion input. Take care of speaking slow in case of non native English speaking persons are part of the team.

3. Virtual common coffee breaks

- Call your key contacts on Monday morning or on Friday afternoon to exchange private stories about hobbies, weekend activities…
- Place an informal once-a-week 10-minute chat, while relaxing with a cup of water, tea or coffee via a conference call or web session without an agenda with the only rule: whoever wants to join is welcome.
- Use your intuition, your capability of yourself, to name what you feel in virtual discussion.

4. Virtual team building exercises:

- Collect the photographs of the various team members, put them together on one page and distribute them to the team members, as a visual reminder, who the people are on the call. This is very simple and effective.
- Use a virtual map with a small story and a photograph how the world looks from their perspective.
- Call your key contacts in between the regular conferences to speak about the main goals, how to support each other and about best practices.
- Whenever thinking "should I call?" or "should I not call?" make the choice to call!
- Use virtual team-building exercises e.g. create a common story, speak openly about cultural, gender and generation differences inside you team.
- Use a virtual circle. Distribute the circle including the names to the whole team. This helps during call conferences to hand out e.g. to the person to the left and supports people knowing and visualizing when they are next to speak   .

'A group becomes a team when each member is sure enough of himself and his contribution to praise the skills of the others.' - Norman Shidle

'Giving everyone a turn increases the intelligence of groups. Knowing they won't be interrupted frees people to think faster and say less.' – Nancy Kline

'Treat people as if they were what they ought to be and you may help them to become what they are capable of being' – John Adair

I wish you great team successes.