

VIRTUAL CHAOS



WORLDWIDE Rx is a global pharmaceutical company. They develop, manufacture, and distribute over-the-counter medications and nutritional products across the Americas, Europe, and Asia. The company has been on a steady growth trajectory for the last decade, with the greatest growth occurring in Asia.

Kate McDonald is the IT Director at WORLDWIDE Rx. She's been with the company for twelve years and really enjoys the organization's global footprint. She was recently appointed as the project lead for TABLE—a new logistics software that will integrate WORLDWIDE's global distribution system.

Previously, each WORLDWIDE regional office developed and used its own IT infrastructure based upon the unique needs and logistics of that region. But headquarters has decided that an integrated, aligned system is necessary to enhance efficiency for distributing its products globally.

Kate's project team consists of co-workers from around the world who have a similar function to hers. She was excited when she was asked to take the lead on this project because she was looking for a new challenge, she loves problem solving, and she enjoys working with international colleagues. There haven't been any promises made to Kate, but her manager told her that if this project goes well, she will be the lead candidate for the open vice-president position in IT.

But this assignment comes with challenges. Kate doesn't have any formal authority over the individuals on her team, so she has to work primarily through influence and consensus to get things done. The geographically dispersed nature of the team combined with the vast cultural differences result in a variety of different perspectives based upon what is important to each region.

It's been a long day, but Kate goes to bed feeling pretty good about herself and her situation. Tonight's conference call lasted longer than usual, but everybody reached agreement that TechKnow in London is the best vendor to use for integrating all the existing systems to TABLE. Others at headquarters had warned Kate how challenging it would be to get everyone on board but she did it. And this happened just in time for her meeting tomorrow morning with senior management when she will update them on the project.

The next morning, Kate scans her email before walking into the meeting with senior management. She decides she had better read the "urgent" email from Chang Su, her colleague in Seoul. Chang Su copies everyone on the project team as well as his entire team in Korea. He writes:

Dear Kate,

I've spoken with others and we're concerned about using TechKnow. I think it's better that we use TechKnow's competitor Jung & Co. to handle the integration. They've served us very well here. And I don't need to remind you that we're WORLDWIDE's largest region. What do you think?

*Regards,
Chang Su*

"What do I think?!" Kate mutters to herself. "I think this is so typical of Chang Su, and I think he should have brought this up last night!"

This just ticks her off. But why should it surprise her? If she says "A", Chang Su says "Z". But it's never to her face. He was extremely supportive when he was at headquarters last month and he sounded agreeable last night on the call. At least, he never raised any concerns. She defers to him when she can so that she can make the tough calls when she has to. But this isn't only undermining her leadership. The entire project team agreed last night and her very last statement was that she would be updating senior management tomorrow and signing the contract with TechKnow. Why didn't Chang Su speak up then? And how does she tell Chang Su that the European and South American teams have confided in her that they are very opposed to using Jung & Co?

What should Kate do?



DISCUSS

1 What issues are involved?

2 What should be done?
