



## **Chapter VIII**

# **Remote Management of a Province-Wide Youth Employment Program Using Internet Technologies**

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

*A province-wide network of Community Access Internet sites was supported during the summers of 1996 and 1997 by Wire Nova Scotia (WiNS), a government funded program to provide staffing, training and technical support for these centers. The program was managed remotely from an office in Sydney, Nova Scotia (Canada) using a variety of Internet-based technologies, including e-mail, a Web site, conference boards, real-time chat, and mailing lists. Remote management enabled the efficient and low-cost operation of a program involving 67 sites with field placements, plus six regional coordinators and the technical and administrative staff at the hub in Sydney. Effectiveness of remote management was enhanced when employees participated in an initial face-to-face regional training workshop. This training not only familiarized the employees with the communications technologies, but, perhaps more importantly, put a human face and personality to the messages that later came electronically over the Intranet. [Note: For the benefit of those readers who may not be familiar with Internet technical terms, a brief glossary (Appendix A) is provided at the end of this case].*

## BACKGROUND

Remote management as a key strategy for enabling new kinds of enterprise and other cooperative endeavors has emerged from the necessity of creating networked organizations to deal with the complexity and fluidity of the Information Age society. In the business world, the companies who are able to create effective virtual teams, particularly if they are able to collaborate with other companies that have complementary resources, are the ones who are thriving. For example, in 1995, three “arch-competitors” in the magazine business, *Men’s Health*, *Esquire*, and *Rolling Stone* discovered an opportunity to collaborate on a bid for a significant advertising contract, and in three short weeks managed, via rapid and effective use of electronic communication and virtual team building, to put together a bid that beat out the media giant, Time, Inc. for the contract. In Denmark, government policy encouraged small enterprises to create collaborative networks, and this has resulted in a significant increase in the success of these businesses (Lipnack & Stamps, 1997).

Note that it was not just that electronic media created more efficiency or enabled existing projects to be done more effectively. It created the possibility for an entirely different way of doing business. As Marshall McLuhan (1964) has told us, “The medium is the message.” Even if our initial motivation in using electronic media is to simplify or speed up existing routines, the nature of the medium inevitably generates secondary effects (Grundy & Metes, 1997), changing the way we work, the way we think, and the way we relate to other people and organizations. One impact of working virtually is that the old hierarchical models of the Industrial Age become transformed into a more interdependent networking model, where access to information and participation in decision making is not limited to the upper echelons.

*Instead of asking, “What is the information that matters and how do we most effectively manage it?” companies must start asking, “What are the relationships that matter and how can the technology most effectively support them?”* - Michael Schrage, *The Wall Street Journal*, March 19, 1990 (cited in Johnson-Lenz & Johnson-Lenz, 1995)

This creates a need to develop new management and leadership styles, new ways of training workers to collaborate effectively, and a readiness to work across organizational boundaries, whether in commerce (e.g., Sieber & Griesse, 1998) or in not-for-profit organizations (e.g., James & Rykert, 1997). Moreover, the network that is built must be constructed in anticipation of rapid change, able to respond immediately to new realities and new opportunities (Metes, Grundy, & Bradish, 1998).

In the case described below, the initial motivation for using remote management via use of an intranet was to create a cost-effective way of coordinating a province-wide program, delivering technical support, and receiving reports. However, once the network was created, it became clear that it also had potential to enable types of collaboration that would not have been practical with conventional organizational structures. Despite the fact that there was a nominal hierarchical structure in place, with both central and regional levels of coordination, the universal access to information and to communications tools enabled both fieldworkers and regional coordinators to operate with a high degree of independence, and were able to use the intranet communications to brainstorm, plan and implement collaborative activities involving multiple sites. The existence of the commu-

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