



Chapter 6

Virtual Collaboration in Remote Project Management: Challenges and Recommendations


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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents virtual collaboration in remote project management as a way to develop sustainable business practices. As temporary organizations, virtual projects have grown substantially, mainly because of the confinement conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic. A study was conducted to identify the main issues that employees working in virtual projects in the state of Tamaulipas in Mexico have faced. A survey based on the remote work and its effects scale was used. The most relevant tools and techniques that have been applied in virtual collaboration in remote project management are briefly described. The objective is to shed light on the importance of technology, time and task management, team collaboration and integration, communication, and trust to develop successful projects.

INTRODUCTION

Individuals, organizations, societies, and countries are experiencing times of unprecedented change. These accelerated transformations are linked to technological development and increased consumer demands,

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which have modified the ways of working that now, require higher levels of productivity, lower production costs, and consequently greater efficiency (Laihonen, Jääskeläinen, Lönnqvist & Ruostela, 2012).

Another adjustment that businesses have had to make is that of sustainability. As the idea of Corporate Social Responsibility has grown wider and its implementation becomes indispensable, many companies search for new and better ways to achieve their goals, make a profit, and be aware of their impact on society and the environment at the same time. In this regard, the United Nations established that 14 out of 17 Sustainable Development Goals can be solved or advanced through virtual work and that living and working in a sustainable way is not only good for business but for the world as it has a positive effect on everything from a sustainable economy to a sustainable environment (Afshar, 2020).

In this complex and evolving context, organizational theories have started to incorporate ideas, concepts, and terms related to the future of work, new ways of working, and the new world of work, as an attempt to explain the changes in organizational designs, the logistics of workspaces, and even the different types of leadership that appear in these particular situations. Digitization has been an essential component of this transformation process, and many of the new and emerging approaches to work and employment revolve around the use of technologies.

The new conceptions surrounding work tend to increase the flexibility of organizations and include different types of employment and employees, such as the knowledge worker, the invisible worker, and the anywhere worker. According to the International Labor Organization (2017), these trends help maximize people's autonomy in the way they work and dilute relationships between employers and employees, creating new dynamics.

New technologies have allowed these changes, facilitating processes, promoting ways of storing and sharing information, and advancing the possibility of remote mobility and connectivity. In practice, the new modalities of work integrate material and immaterial aspects, such as the opening of workspaces or the set of skills that workers must possess according to the type of activities they carry out. Under these conditions, a conventional office is no longer required, and is neither a college nor a graduate degree.

The idea of work and what working implies has changed substantially in recent years. Traditionally, work has been associated with commuting to a physical location such as an office, a building, a factory, an industrial park, or other types of facilities. Going to work and working had become synonyms. Nowadays, the workplace is not restricted by physical limits nor specific periods. People often have jobs with flexible contracts and without a specific location. There are various arrangements for schedules, and employees can work anytime, anywhere, and in any way to meet the job demands.

Work has been redirected to the domain of shared physical spaces, such as coworking, or to virtual spaces where people can work from home or any other place with an internet connection. Remote work constitutes an essential aspect of the future of work that also merges with other variants such as work by projects and the creation of temporary organizations. Gartner (2018) estimated that by 2020, 62% of employees would be working virtually, and this was before the pandemic, which has paved the way for remote work in sectors that were not initially contemplated for this dynamic.

Teleworking and the diverse degrees of flexibility over time and work location have come together, supported by Information and Communication Technologies that provide the ability to work remotely and non-traditional conceptions of work practices and settings. This has allowed employees from multiple industries to work individually, virtually, together in a physical space, or collectively in a remote manner, transforming work into something digital, fluid, informal, flexible, and mobile.

Project management (PM) is at the center of these transformations, and virtual project management (VPM), although it has its specific characteristics in terms of the elements that constitute a project, con-

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