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Managing Project Teams: Case Study Report Critical and Comparative Analysis

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Abstract

The shift from traditional to virtual project teams has transformed the landscape of project management, driven by advancements in technology and globalization. This study critically examines the dynamics of managing traditional and virtual project teams through the lens of two case studies: the Burj Khalifa Tower project, managed by a traditional project team, and DigiCo's FLEC project, led by a virtual team. The findings highlight the distinct challenges of each management approach, including communication barriers, resource allocation complexities, and trust-building issues. For virtual teams, technological proficiency, cultural intelligence, and adaptability emerged as critical competencies, while traditional teams benefitted from physical proximity and structured resource coordination. The report underscores the necessity for project managers to adapt their skillets to meet the demands of virtual project management, emphasizing the importance of trust, team cohesion, and effective use of digital tools. By drawing comparisons between these operational contexts, this study offers practical insights for enhancing leadership strategies in diverse project environments.

1. Introduction

Due to improved technology in the workplace, the dynamics of the workplace have been changed, and this has called for change in managing project teams form traditional project teams to virtual project teams and managing virtual project teams as we saw it presents its own set of challenges (Binder, 2016). There is the conventional project team which comprises people who are grouped together in the physical space of an organization or in the same company and who consequently, have a similar understanding of the nature of a project, responsibilities, objectives and deliverables (Webster & Wong, 2008). On the other hand, virtual project team can be defined as the ones that are located in different geographical locations, and are working in different time zones and differenocalypse cultures and mostly use electronic communication (Morrison-Smith and Ruiz, 2020). These are teams that are characterized by the technological dependence, and/or problems of coordinating work among people who are geographically apart (Webster and Wong, 2008).

This report assumes two case studies one being the Burj Khalifa Tower project for conventional project team and the other one being the DigiCo's FLEC project for virtual project team. As for the Burj Khalifa Tower project, a conventional project team, mainly consisting of various professionals and workers, was employed, which physically collaborated at the project site and directly communicated there to implement the project (Abraham, 2019). Let's look at the example of how virtual teams work at the DigiCo with their FLEC project. It again has a cross-geographically distributed group, who communicate and work predominantly in the online space; thus, this project best

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illustrates the dynamics of and problems related to the management of virtual teams (Panteli, 2017).

This paper looks at the various difficulties that project managers experience specifically when managing the two kinds of teams to offer a snapshot of the key comparative assessment of these two styles of teams and examines the competencies involved in virtual project teams as opposed to traditional project teams.

2. A Critical and Comparative Analysis of the Project Cases

Handling a normal project team or a virtual project team is always accompanied by its own usual difficulties that it brings out less efficiency of the team and in extension impacts the output of the project(Binder, 2016).With these discussed project cases, now it is high time to pay the attention on the given challenges that Project Managers encounter while leading these teams.

Effective communication

As a way of supporting these challenges, real-life examples will be illustrated using DigiCo'S case FLEC project and Burj Khalifa Tower project. The FLEC project at DigiCo also experienced communication challenges because of time zones differences in the employees' culture, and language barriers. One of the main challenges for the FLEC project was that there were no timely communication protocols in place. Employees were missing work files and not receiving them on time, emails also were not being replied to thus affecting both work productivity and working interpersonal relationships. In the project especially technology means where used to enhance the means of communication (Bosch-Sijtsemaand Sivunen, 2013). While on the Burj Khalifa project, the activities were more unified hence provided a common ground for interaction of the team members, the stakeholders and contractors (Abraham, 2019). That is, the organization faced challenges of working with employees whose first language was not English since the project involved cross-border employees.

It is definitely surprising that despite the fact that communication is an essential component of project management, project managers mention communication as the most serious difficulty they encounter when managing a project, whether it implies leading a technical or an operational team (Daim et al., 2012). Whereas in a traditional project environment, particular details may get omitted or even change due to language, communication, or other form of misunderstanding. For virtual teams, the challenges are more severe since the members are hailing from different geographical locations and they have to rely on technology to communicate, might often end up misunderstandings and delays (Hoch and Kozlowski 2014).

Resource Allocation and Task Coordination

The challenges that the DigiCo FLEC has faced while integrating a system, which requires multi-task coordination across time zones, dealing with local holidays and working time differences (Panteli, 2018). Subsequently the Burj Khalifa project had well defined resource distribution and task integration since most of the teams were located physically together and relied on traditional project management tools and techniques (Abraham, 2019).One of the main challenges of virtual project management was resource management (Niaziet al., 2016). It is always advisable that within any activity planning and distribution of activities and other requirements is properly done (Gido & Clements, 2014). Still, it gets a bit challenging, especially when clustered into a

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group, working on assembling different skills, or organizing work across different time zones for virtual teams (as cited in Daim et al., 2012).

Another application in team dynamics and particularly in building trust.
In our DigiCo FLEC project, we were starting to notice that the distributed team was struggling to gel and form the sort of camaraderie needed to propel the team forward and keep it together for the sake of the project. Which can all be attributed to low levels of trust within the project team (Panteli, 2018). The Burj Khalifa project which was established in a conventional environment also experienced some problems in the management of team dynamics as a result of its large size and use of foreign workers. There are some strategies such as the followings – Strong leadership, the implementation of the on-site team-building activities, and proper communication were priority due to the reasons of building up trusts and collaboration (Abraham, 2019).

Another challenge of project management also include handling of teams and establishing trust within the team and between the members of the actual virtual and conventional project groups (Larsonand Gray, 2014). It is true that the traditional teams offer opportunities for building rapport and trust since the neighbours can meet each other face to face, as pointed out by Gera (2013). However, personalities differ and teams create contests of interest; this makes the performance of the team poor. The construction of trust in virtual teams is quite difficult because there is no opportunity to meet and recognize each other as team members and many people may have difficulties experiencing the feeling of connectedness (Gilson et al., 2015). In a study for Alsharo, Gregg and Ramirez (2017), the authors revealed that there is significant correlation between knowledge sharing and collaboration and trust in virtual teams.

Monitoring and Control
Both project teams needed project monitoring and control. DigiCo FLEC project utilized online tools in the project management to ensure on the site tracking of the work progress and responsibility assignment (Panteli, 2018) whereas Burj Khalifa project enlisted on-site team for regular follow up and detailed control efforts based on construction work progress (Abraham, 2019).

Of all the task-related areas of managing a project team, monitoring and control are considered to be the most problematic. As previously described, monitoring and control is another important aspect of team working that has to be defined and maintained by project managers no matter what type of teams they are dealing with. Even though these processes are relatively easier in the context of real teams because of the physical interaction only the fruition of such processes is relatively difficult in the context of virtual teams because of the dispersion of team members and the asynchronous nature of their works (Hoch & Kozlowski, 2014).

3. Virtual team management, needed people management skills and competencies
In the increasing digital economy project managers have to develop the competencies in order to manage virtual teams. Relative to the nature of virtual project teams and the difficulties inherent in leading such teams in contrast to conventional teams, specific skills and competencies have been defined as essential for achieving satisfactory virtual team performance.

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Effective communication Skills

A project manager needs to be a good communicator Project managers need strong communication skills. They need to be able to convey ideas without ambiguity by giving instructions or relaying information that must be understood and acted upon by all members of the team As such there should be a free and open communication (Hoch and Kozlowski, 2014). Similar to the FLEC project, virtual project teams are always formed of members from different time zones whereby the project manager has to be articulate in the virtual environment to prevent misunderstanding the intended messages (Panteli, 2018). This involves sharing of information without ambiguity, at appropriate intervals and in a form understood by everyone.

Cultural Intelligence

Culture is defined as Cultural Intelligence which is a theory that seeks to explain the ability of a person to perform well where culture differences exist(Earley and Mosakowski, 2004). It is a form of intelligence that is more than the cultural understanding or even culture knowledge, but more so the ability to learn and function in the right manner among diverse culture people. Similar to the DigiCoFLEC project team, most virtual project teams create work from different cultural context that is why; there is need for the project manager to have cultural sensitivity in order to recognize, value and deal with cultural diversity within the virtual workspace. This is with a view to avoiding conflict and misunderstandings within the team and when working with clients or stakeholders (Kimani and Scott, 2023).

Trust Building

Since virtual contact is not available, virtual project managers need to build trust from the other team members (Morrison-Smith, & Ruiz, 2020). This can be done through fostering communication transparency, offering feedback, reward and appreciation of the team members' effort and understanding and fairness in dealing with the members (Gilson et al. 2015). Proprietary communication can ensure that people living in different geographical locations, and from different cultural backgrounds, do not feel isolated but are rather connected to the rest of the team. Crisp and Jarvenpaa (2013) state that frequent communication, positive feedback and feedback with timely feedbacks are some of the components of openness. Kirkman et al (2002) postulated that when providing feedback it must be constructive and timely.

Adaptability and Flexibility

Virtual project managers should possess the nature of how to manage situations as it changes regarding the requirement of the team. I, 2024). This consist of working at any time of choice in order to manage the different time zones, the willingness to adopt new mode of working and technological tools (Ebrahim et al., 2009). This competence is unique convenient as virtual project management is a fluid process. For instance, availability of team members may vary due to different time zones, or there are always changes in the project specifications, or alterations in tool and technology used in the working environment. As such, virtual project management calls for effective steering of the project through changes of a project life cycle to meet the intended goals (Panteli, 2018).

The next dimension of flexibility is accepting change and new approaches and/or technologies in a virtual mode. With increased technological development new innovations are being created whose particularity is to improve communication and coordination of virtual team members.

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Besides, being an effective virtual project manager, he or she should also update himself or herself with these technologies and capable to implement those technologies to enhance his or her team productivity (Ebrahim et al., 2009). This entails readiness to work through the 'bumps' that accompany aspects of novelty such as new technologies, in addition to facilitating other team members through the bouncing phase.

Shared Leadership

To compensate for some of the gaps resulting from insufficient face-to-face meetings, the shared leadership approach can be adopted. Shared leadership is a collaborative leadership approach that increases the efficiency of the team's planning and organizing processes (Choi, Kim and Kang, 2017).Shared team leadership is thought to improve relationships between team members, foster commitment and cohesion, and lessen the drawbacks of virtual teams(Hoch and Kozlowski, 2014).To increase overall team effectiveness, managers are advised to work together with team members more closely and to pay extra attention to the manner in which the leader's actions and the team's final results line up (Oluwasanmi S.A. 2024).

Team Building

Members of virtual teams could feel alone or alienated from the group. The motivation and engagement of team members should be encouraged by project managers through praise, online team-building exercises, and the development of a supportive environment(Dyer Jr and Dyer,2013).

Emotional Intelligence

The emotional intelligence of a project manager is key to the successful operation of an online team (Mersino,2013).Project managers can encourage team members and foster a more compassionate workplace by being aware of their feelings and opinions, especially under trying circumstances (Gift O. D; Babatunde W. D. 2024)

Competence in Technology

Given the reliance of virtual teams on technology for communication and collaboration, a project manager leading a virtual team should be skilled in using technology and competent to troubleshoot technical issues (Kirkman *et al.*, 2004). This will help to track progress, manage tasks, and ensure that deadlines are met (Panteli, 2018).Technology is vital for promoting collaboration and coordination in virtual teams (Goh and Sandars2018).

4. Conclusion

The report shows that while the core people management skills required to lead both traditional and virtual project teams overlap in many areas, the context in which they are applied differs. Both types of project teams require effective communication, task coordination, team dynamics management, shared leadership, team building, emotional intelligenceand project monitoring and control. However, the virtual environment significantly exacerbates these challenges and requires additional competencies such as technological proficiency and cultural intelligence. Comparing the Burj Khalifa Tower project and DigiCo's FLEC project, it was revealed that the unique challenges each team faced was due to their operational context. The DigiCo team, operating virtually, had to grapple with differences in time zones, language barriers, and trust building issues due to lack of physical interaction, while the Burj Khalifa project had to manage language barriers, team dynamics, and logistical challenges despite the benefit of physical proximity.

The findings suggest that leading a virtual project team requires a shift from traditional project management techniques. Project managers need to demonstrate technological savvy, an ability to build trust without

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physical presence, an understanding of and respect for diverse cultural norms and practices, and an ability to manage and coordinate tasks across different time zones and local work routines. For traditional teams, project managers must place a greater emphasis on controlling the physical environment, scheduling in-person meetings, and navigating the challenges associated with physical absence of team members.

While these findings do not diminish the importance of core project management skills, they underline the fact that effective leadership in a virtual environment requires project managers to embrace additional skills to complement traditional competencies. As the shift towards remote and virtual work continues, organizations need to invest in training and development to equip their project managers with these necessary skills, not only to survive but to thrive in the changing landscape of project management. In essence, the shift towards virtual project teams necessitates a broader understanding of the concept of people management in project settings. In such environments, traditional management skills need to be adapted, and new competencies need to be acquired for effective leadership.

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