Virtual team work and virtual project teams have become increasingly common in organizations for a number of factors. Technology allows for synchronous as well as asynchronous communications, bandwidth increases have allowed high levels of audio and visual communications, and virtual work support systems provision online meetings and uplift task functions. Most information technology project managers expect to work in virtual teams on the majority of their projects and most organizations utilize some degree of virtuality in all team interactions.

Project leaders in all contexts often struggle to successfully manage virtual teams, part of this struggle lies in the fact that managing a virtual project team requires skills and understanding of both the technology challenges and the human communication challenges. Even those project leaders who have become accomplished at deploying virtual collaboration technologies may find the human communication challenges more difficult to overcome. The lack of communication richness in many virtual projects makes it difficult to communicate effectively and work towards solving complex problems. In spite of this, an increasing number of information technology project teams are working in virtual environments and need to find methods of managing the technical and communication challenges.

This special issue of IJITPM includes four papers covering issues with managing virtual project teams. One of the papers examines technology-related risks in virtual projects and considers whether technology-related risks pose a greater risk to virtual projects than to traditional projects. A second paper investigates levels of trustworthiness in virtual project team members and makes recommendations on personal identity profiles in virtual environments, a dimension often overlooked by teams in technology projects. Another paper looks at training as a method for increasing levels of cohesion, improving perceptions of team processes, increasing satisfaction with working in virtual teams, and enhancing communication patterns. The final paper considers the emotional intelligence of the project leaders as it varies by degree of virtuality.

Virtual project teams rely more heavily on technology for communications than do face-to-face teams, and they need to leverage technology to facilitate or enhance communication among virtual team members. The first
“Technology Related Risks on Virtual Software Development Projects” examines whether technology-related risks pose a greater risk to virtual project teams than to traditional teams. The authors identify seven technology-related project risk factors and determine that two of those factors exhibit a significantly greater risk for virtual project teams. The authors consider the impact of those risks on project success and put forward recommendations for risk management.

Collaboration in virtual project teams relies heavily on interpersonal trust, for which perceived trustworthiness is an important determinant. In the second paper, “Can I Trust You? Profile Elements that Inform First Impressions of Trustworthiness in Virtual Project Teams” the authors identify information elements that are commonly perceived as important to inform initial trustworthiness assessments of colleagues on virtual project teams. The authors then use these results to develop guidelines in the design of personal identity profiles in virtual team environments. Further, the authors formulate recommendations for the design of personal identity profiles in groupware environments.

In the third paper, “The Impact of Training on Virtual Teams: A TIP Investigation,” the authors investigate the effects of training on relational link levels and communication modes as analyzed using McGrath’s TIP framework. One set of virtual teams were given training, another set of virtual teams received no training. Factors of team success and functionality were higher for those teams receiving training. An investigation of the communication patterns for both sets of teams indicates that the teams receiving training spent more time in the member support mode and also more time in the problem inception mode but less time in the conflict resolution mode.

In “Patterns of Social Intelligence and Leadership Style for Effective Virtual Project Management,” the author recognizes that teams vary in the extent of virtualization. Leadership behavior also varies according to task and people orientations with leaders exhibiting varying degrees of social intelligence. The greater degree of virtuality requires a greater extent of social intelligence. Organizations with an increasing number of virtual projects should train leaders how to interact with more empathy, maintain a task orientation, and be prepared for a wide diversity of team members.

Peggy M. Beranek
Gary Klein
Guest Editors
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