ABSTRACT

This chapter examines virtual collaboration tools from the perspective of project managers of EU-funded projects. The chapter overviews virtual collaboration tool types, users types, and their motivation to use the chosen tool alongside the human factors. The authors have observed 40 EU project managers, who have managed 244 EU projects. Despite of the abundance of modern, web-based, and mobile tools, project managers are still not familiar with the advantages of cloud-based document systems and communication tools. Factors such as un-friendliness, security concerns, and lack of IT skills prevent more wide usage of virtual collaboration tools. Live meetings are still perceived as the most efficient channel for distributing and receiving project tasks, but they are closely followed by virtual meetings using the communication software. The authors propose a standardized process of including virtual collaboration tools to distributed project teams. Their experiences show that strong leadership and defined process increase the usage of IT tools and consequently the success of EU-funded projects.
Virtual Collaboration Tools for Project Managers

INTRODUCTION

Imagine you are a project manager of an EU project, coordinating an international team. You are aware of the fact, that the single most significant factor affecting the success of a project is the communication ability of the project manager (Zulch, 2014).

How can you live up to such expectations when project participants come from various cultures (Dafoulas & Macaulay, 2002; Gibbs, Sivunen, & Boyraz, 2017) and organizations, they speak different languages (Lockwood, 2015) and they are used to different ways of knowledge sharing (Almeida & Soares, 2014)? They have various beliefs and statuses within their organizations. Project partners use their own documentation and communication information systems and processes used within their organizations. For shared project purposes, yet another documentation and communication system is usually selected. Project partners’ knowledge and motivation to use such systems may vary significantly.

The question is: Is it possible to achieve smooth and effective collaboration of a virtual team and timely finalization of tasks, and eventually reach project objectives in such a complex environment?

The authors of this paper are involved in the management of virtual project teams on a daily basis and struggle with similar issues as described in the literature. They are especially interested in the IT aspect of virtual teams’ management: shared documentation and IT-supported communication. Cloud-based document management tools (such as Google Drive, Dropbox, SharePoint, Office 365 and similar) have been used for a decade and are quite mature in technological and usability terms. Nevertheless, their adoption and usage are still limited, which is surprising, because improving document management increases the project management efficiency (Eloranta, Hameri, & Lahti, 2001). Similarly, in the age of modern communication tools (email, sound & video conferences, chats, social media platforms), the selection of appropriate communication channels for different project management tasks is still an issue.

Firstly, we will present existing literature on the following topics: virtual teams, distributed teams, document management and similar. Then, we will present a typical EU project environment. Next, we will present the problem which is in the focus of our research: collaboration between project team members using online tools. We will summarize the types of project document management in 9 patterns. Next, we will present the results of the research (survey). These results include answers from various project participants and their attitude towards various communication tools and techniques. The results (descriptive statistics) were analyzed using pivot tables.

In the end, the results are discussed and guidelines for project managers are presented.

The results were used to create guidelines for project managers and reference processes for document and communication management, which are presented in the last chapter.

RELATED WORK

Virtual, Distributed Teams and Project Networks

Managing virtual teams is tightly integrated with the effective usage of information technology (Olariu & Aldea, 2014). Electronic communication is ranked the highest among effective communication methods in some researches (Zulch, 2014) that were done among construction, occupational health, environment,