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"Ideal Virtual Collaboration Model- The Key to remote team challenges"

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Abstract
COVID-19 pandemic has brought along with it various new work-related challenges which if not tackled efficiently can create lots of problem throwing the entire organization worldwide into a pool of uncertainty. These challenges should be addressed efficiently through practical solutions which can help the organizations worldwide to fight the economic uncertainty in a much better way. The most obvious challenge faced by every organization worldwide is remote work environment. Considering the present COVID-19 situation worldwide it is but necessary willingly or unwillingly to work remotely. Remote work environment concept is not new. Many companies who had branches in several countries in different time zones used to follow the remote work so that employees were able to deliver. Due to the surge in COVID-19 and social distancing being the new norm, most organizations worldwide are allowing their employees to work remotely. Remote work has its own sets of challenges. The most obvious challenge is virtual collaboration. Many jobs cannot be done solo it needs to involve team. Team involvement virtually is in itself a big challenge due to no physical presence. This paper talks about the various challenges faced by the organizations due to remote work and team collaboration. In this paper the readers would also have a glimpse of a unique model which will provide practical solution in the form of Virtual collaboration and would practically prove that "Virtual collaboration- The key to remote team challenges".

Introduction
COVID-19 pandemic has shattered the entire world for almost 2 years now. The entire world is passing through such a phase where survival has become very tough. Human being has been badly affected from all corners right from health till economy.
Economy of any country is majorly dependent on its organizations. In this tough

situation smooth running of organizations has become a mammoth task. Any organization can sustain if its employees are able to optimally contribute to the performance of the organization. Due to pandemic normal functioning of the organization like physical presence of the employee in the workspace has become a dream. In order to save its employees from the infection most of the organizations worldwide have decided for remote work.

Organizations worldwide have vouched for and have accepted remote work as the new norm. Previously organizations were sceptical regarding the remote work idea. The COVID-19 pandemic didn't leave any choice for anyone but to accept remote work. Now a days organizations and employees are so used to the concept that they are now enjoying remote work as it is not hindering the work but is also contributing towards financial gain of the organizations.

Remote work is better for everyone as it is also safeguarding the employees from getting infected and also working from the comfort of the home contributes towards employee engagement, motivation, innovation, better work life balance, increased performance and mental wellbeing.

Remote work is not free from challenges. The problem starts when employees are working on group projects or having colleagues who are in different time zones. Coordination, communication, explaining, division of responsibilities and completing the project in the required time frame with team members virtually is a mammoth task which if not tackled wisely can create a problem for the entire organization. For team work virtual collaboration is the best option.

Meaning of Virtual Collaboration

Virtual collaboration means collaborating from any part of the world with team members for day-to-day work, meeting or projects in order to complete it through online mode. It could be through Zoom platform, video conferencing, Google meet or slack messages.

Virtual collaboration has made life easier for anyone who is remote working. In the initial stages of remote work employees and organizations suffered a lot. Due to remote work communication between team members took a back seat. Management was not able to keep a track regarding the work done. Slowly employees started losing interest and started feeling isolated and were getting office sick. All these problems combined together affected the mental health and the performance of the organization. These problems were due to the fact that employees were not used to remote work and were not able to cope up with the sudden change in the work style. Employees used to work solo and were not used to technology hence coping up with the work was becoming a problem.

Now organizations have understood that remote work is inseparable and would continue. In order to motivate employees for work completion virtual collaboration is the best option where people start working as a team, complete the work, management can keep a track and above all communication becomes better between the organization hierarchy and people are not lonely. Virtual collaboration inculcates a sense of belonginess and also gives a feeling that there is someone to look up to. This sense creates a sense of motivation to complete the job at the dedicated time.

Advantages of Virtual collaboration

1. ***Productivity-*** Through virtual collaboration the team can increase its productivity through collaborating with the best talents in the world. Through virtual collaboration the team becomes more charged up and try to help each other to complete the project within the deadline. The result is much better as the best of the people come together for the project. Virtual collaboration helps in motivating each other to complete the project as they can collaborate from anywhere and no time is wasted and this in return helps in increased productivity.

2. ***Increased efficiency-*** Virtual collaboration helps in increased employee efficiency. Employees in normal situation spend a lot of time in going through mails and answering them these hampers work as well. Through dedicated virtual collaboration tool team members can keep track of the proceedings and also need not spend time in searching the trailing mails for the team updates. This saves a lot of time and each member is in the loop so work front efficiency level increases and time is saved which can be utilised for the betterment of the work.

3. ***Cost effective-*** Virtual collaboration is cost effective than traditional method. The team can work from the comfort of their home and can collaborate with different members throughout the world. The organization saves money as it is not spending on physical workspace.

4. ***Wider audience-*** Virtual collaboration helps in reaching wider audience. Since the medium is virtual it is very easy to be associated with best professional worldwide along with the organization's stakeholders. These best people would help in completion of project in the best and efficient way.

5. ***Better Project Management-*** Virtual collaboration helps in better project management than traditional way. In the traditional way most of the team members are clueless regarding the proceedings of the project. This creates a lot of chaos and in turn delays the project. In virtual collaboration tool each and every detail is available and each team member knows about the proceedings and even management also can keep a track. No need to generate a separate report for the same. This process helps in increased coordination, exchange of ideas and motivation which helps everyone to finish the project within the dead line.

Disadvantages of Virtual collaboration
1. ***Reduced Role clarity-*** Since members are not meeting the team members face to face sometimes members are not clear about their role. Clarification may take sometime as people hesitate to call up and discuss as many employees think that they might be disturbing the family. This kind of clarification becomes easy in physical workspace. Sometimes online virtual mode may be facing some technical glitch hence clarity becomes a problem and this might lead to delay in project completion.

2. ***Reduced efficiency-*** Virtual collaboration may lead to cluttering of the email boxes as all the team members would be receiving so many mails. Finding the correct content from the huge pile becomes a huge task and since each bit of information

is essential so emails cannot be deleted this leads to slowing of efficiency of the mail. These kinds of problems may lead to less efficiency of the team members.

3. *Increased cost-* Virtual collaboration platform may be costly if not researched properly. Since virtual platform is now used by everyone so many platforms are quite expensive. Due to this reason the organizations restrict the use of the virtual platforms and this also results in less communication, problem solving and getting on with the project properly.

4. *Diffusion of focus-* Virtual collaboration tempts organizations to involve the best fit worldwide to collaborate. This creates a lot of problem as there may be need for so many people to be involved in a particular project. Too many people too many views, this leads to difference in opinions, frustration and diffusion of focus. This kind of situation is also instrumental in project delay.

5. *Security issue-* In Virtual collaboration safeguarding of data is sometimes difficult. There is always a fear of data being hacked by someone. Even sometimes due to virus many data can also be lost. These kinds of problem can create a lot of problem for the organization and hamper the work progress.

Challenges of Virtual collaboration and Solutions

1. *Different communication style-* Every team member has a different communication style. Some might be comfortable through email, some through videoconferencing or through some other online platform. When the communication style is different it creates a lot of confusion among the team as to which platform to use. This confusion can create a lot of misunderstanding and work delay.

   Solution- The team leader can pull the team together and this is the beauty of virtual collaboration. Through virtual collaboration we can involve a strong team leader who knows the work. The leader can fix the virtual mode and time for the team members to meet virtually so that work can be done faster and without any confusion.

2. *Lack of right tools-* When employees work in office physically due to lack of proper technology availability employees cannot perform properly and this used to create a gap in the work. These types of problems may also happen in remote work as well.

   Solution- Through Virtual collaboration the company can take technical help and invest in the best virtual platform which is apt for the requirement. The technician can help in maintenance and also in protecting the data as well. This will safeguard the business and also help the team to perform better.

3. *Lack of trust-* In remote work an element of distrust among the team members can easily develop. No one meets each other so due to jealously team starts distrusting each other and starts complaining. This leads to lots of chaos among the team members as no one listens to anyone.

Solution- Virtual collaboration helps in easing this problem. The team can decide regarding the role and responsibilities each one is supposed to share through proper communication. The team leader can keep everything transparent so that no members are distrusting the other one. Through common virtual platform each member can keep a track of the team's progress. This will definitely remove distrust and would make the team bonding much stronger.

4. *Delayed response-* Delayed response is one of the biggest challenges in remote work. Employees do not respond to any job-related issues early. This delays the job process and the job completion gets delayed.

   Solution- Virtual collaboration helps in speeding the employee response. Through virtual collaboration team members starts coordinating and discussing the job plan with each other. Team members along with the leader fixes a time frame when every member has to respond to the job-related procedure. This leads to job completion within the specified time.

5. *Reduced Office culture-* In absence of physical office, office culture is missing in employees. Culture interaction with colleagues and coordination takes a back seat and colleagues don't interact with each other for weeks together this creates detachment between employees.
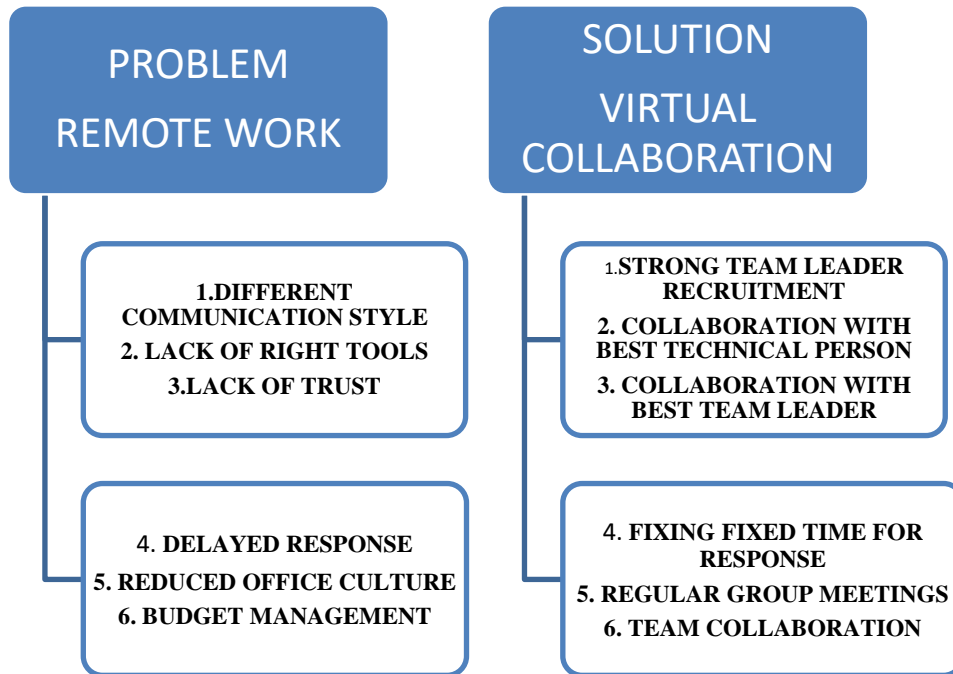   *Solution-* Virtual collaboration helps in increased office culture. The team can work on joint projects where interaction is a must. Group meetings can be also introduced weekly once or twice so that everyone starts sharing the problem related to jobs or can also discuss regarding nee plans. This process increases the employee bonding and everyone starts knowing each other and coordination becomes much stronger.

6. *Budget management*- Working solo in remote work may lead to less focus on work leading to not keeping a track on the project deadline. This leads to overbudget. The organization also suffers because of the same.

   Solution- Virtual collaboration brings the entire team together. The team starts working in tandem with each other. This leads to more focus and keeping a track of the deadline and the budget is also controlled.

   From the above discussion it is clear that working solo in remote work can lead to so many challenges for the employees and the organizations both. Virtual collaboration is the best solution which can help both the organization and the employees to overcome the challenges with flying colours.

   Ideal Virtual Collaboration Model

PROBLEM REMOTE WORK

1. DIFFERENT COMMUNICATION STYLE
2. LACK OF RIGHT TOOLS
3. LACK OF TRUST

4. DELAYED RESPONSE
5. REDUCED OFFICE CULTURE
6. BUDGET MANAGEMENT

SOLUTION VIRTUAL COLLABORATION

1. STRONG TEAM LEADER RECRUITMENT
2. COLLABORATION WITH BEST TECHNICAL PERSON
3. COLLABORATION WITH BEST TEAM LEADER

4. FIXING FIXED TIME FOR RESPONSE
5. REGULAR GROUP MEETINGS
6. TEAM COLLABORATION

Organizations using Ideal Virtual Collaboration Model
Case 1- SAP

SAP is the largest globally recognised inter-enterprise Software company. It has its headquarters in Germany and R&D in India, China, Israel and United States. Total employees working are 30,000 in 60 countries. With such a huge set up Virtual collaboration is a must.

The Organizations success lies in the fact that SAP motivates each centre having different expertise to share the knowledge with the entire company. This process helps in knowledge exchange which makes the employees mush more work efficient.

The managers in order to increase coordination and efficiency select different members from different centres virtually to work on a particular project this increases the efficiency and also exchange of knowledge takes place.

In order to increase team performance SAP has also started with an Ongoing team-building initiative. This initiative was developed by teams as a project to improve employee performance.

Case 2- IBM

IBM has 200,000 employees worldwide. The greatest challenge is connecting with these employees as they are in different time zones. Ideal Virtual collaboration model is the only solution for the same.

Employees working during productive time can give maximum results. In order to follow the concept IBM has established Result Oriented Work Environment (ROWE) which helps the employees and the team members to select the productive time and work during that time. This helps in increased efficiency and coordination between the team members. Through use of collaborative software IBM holds its team together and also helps in improved coordination, communication and efficiency within the team members.

Case 3- General Electric (GE)

General Electric has 90,000 employees worldwide. It is a mammoth task to coordinate and manage the team. In order to make the team well versed in virtual collaboration General Electric arranged for training programs for all its employees regarding effective virtual collaboration through e-learning.

Feedbacks were collected from employees so that the training program can be made much better. This process helped in improvement of virtual collaboration, communication, coordination and efficiency level of employees.

From the above cases it is clear that remote work is the need of the hour. Remote work is not free from challenges. These challenges if not addressed on time can create lot of problems for the organization leading to disturbed communication, delayed work, increased frustration, less efficiency and performance and also it takes a toll on the budget. The only solution to all these problems is ideal virtual collaboration model which the above real organization examples have proved to be successful in.

Findings

Figure 1. "Ideal Virtual Collaboration Model- The key to remote work challenges"

IDEAL VIRTUAL COLLABORATION MODEL- THE KEY TO REMOTE WORK CHALLENGES
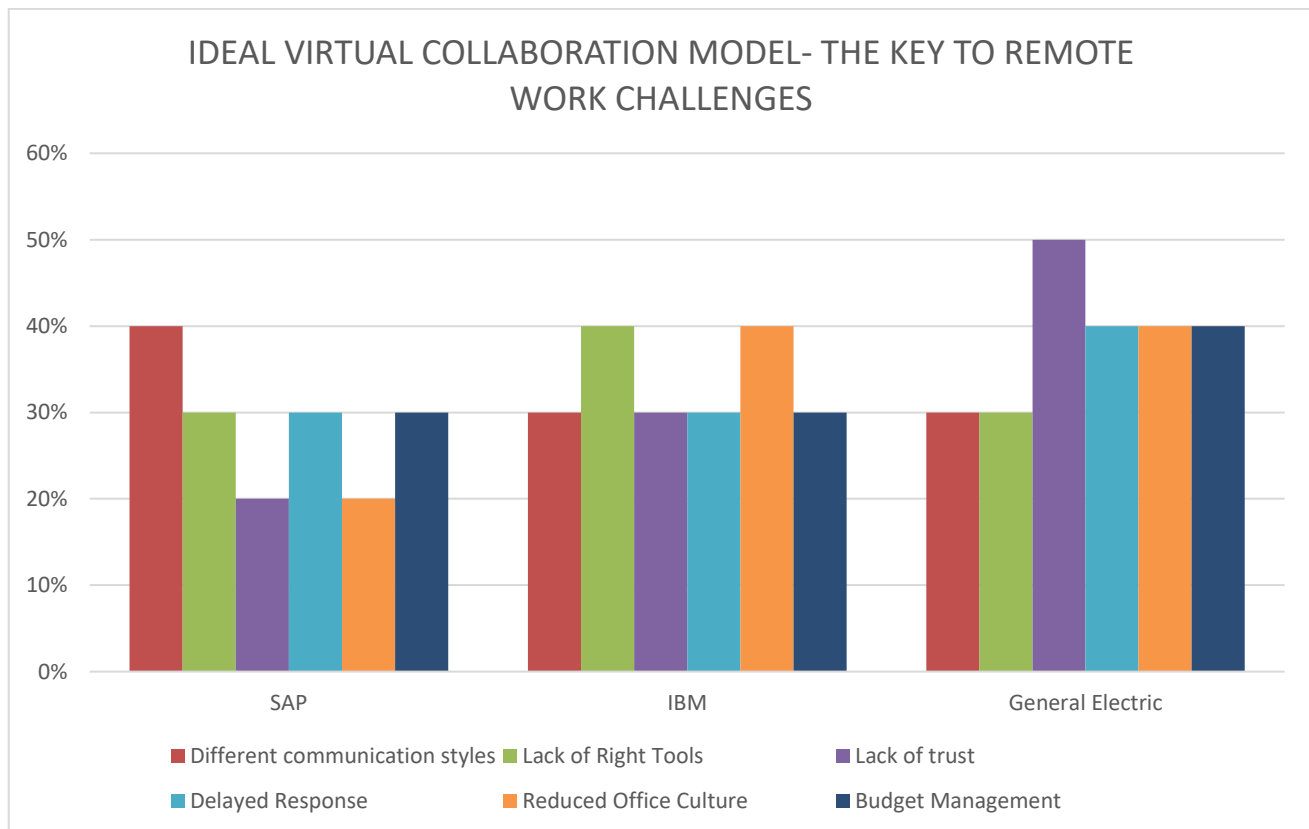
- Figure 1 shows "Ideal Virtual collaboration model-The key to remote work challenges"
- Sample, N= 100, N= 3 organizations, N= 6 parameters
- Figure 1 shows: 40% of respondents prove that ideal Virtual collaboration model has helped SAP in different communication styles, 30% of respondents prove that ideal Virtual collaboration model has helped SAP in lack of right tools, 20% of respondents prove that ideal Virtual collaboration model has SAP helped in lack of trust, 30% of respondents prove

2683

that ideal collaboration model has helped SAP in delayed response, 20% of respondents prove that ideal virtual collaboration model has helped SAP in reduced office culture and 30% of respondents prove that virtual collaboration has helped SAP in budget management.

- Figure 1 shows: 30% of respondents prove that ideal Virtual collaboration model has helped IBM in different communication styles, 40% of respondents prove that ideal Virtual collaboration model has helped IBM in lack of right tools, 30% of respondents prove that ideal Virtual collaboration model has IBM helped in lack of trust, 30% of respondents prove that ideal Virtual collaboration model has helped IBM in delayed response, 40% of respondents prove that ideal virtual collaboration model has helped IBM in reduced office culture and 30% of respondents prove that ideal virtual collaboration model has helped IBM in budget management.

- Figure 1 shows: 30% of respondents prove that ideal Virtual collaboration model has helped General Electric in different communication styles, 30% of respondents prove that ideal Virtual collaboration model has helped General Electric in lack of right tools, 50% of respondents prove that ideal Virtual collaboration model has General Electric helped in lack of trust, 40% of respondents prove that ideal Virtual collaboration model has helped General Electric in delayed response, 40% of respondents prove that ideal virtual collaboration model has helped General Electric in reduced office culture and 40% of respondents prove that ideal virtual collaboration model has helped General Electric in budget management.

From the above findings it is proved that the Best well known Organizations have got good result and has been successful after implementing the ideal Virtual collaboration model to overcome the remote work challenges.

Conclusion

COVID-19 pandemic has forced every organization worldwide for remote work. Remote work is full of challenges. Since people are slowly getting used to remote work, they are facing many work-related problems. The problems are in form of less employee engagement, different communication styles, lack of right tools, lack of trust, delayed response, reduced office culture and budget management.

The problems stated above is faced not only by smaller organizations but also by larger organizations as well. Larger organizations like SAP, IBM and General electric are also facing the same problem. The only solution to these problems is following the ideal Virtual collaboration model which when used by these companies as discussed above have yielded maximum benefits.

From the above discussion it can be safely concluded that "Ideal Virtual collaboration model- The key to remote work challenges".

Recommendations

The present situation worldwide is such that remote work would be the new normal. Organizations are not ready to suffer more. The organizations have the added responsibility of taking care of employee safety as well as continue with the operation.

This situation calls for a best solution which will no only keep the employees safe as well will help in operation process of the organizations.

The best solution is virtual collaboration which not only promotes team work but also helps the team to take help of experts worldwide leading to knowledge gain, work completion, motivation, employee engagement and overcome mental stress and job security. Accepting ideal virtual collaboration model is the need of the hour which big organizations have also accepted and got results.

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