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DAILY MEETING AS SOLUTION TO COMMUNICATION BARRIERS OF VIRTUAL TEAM OF MULTIPLE PROJECTS

Encontro diário como solução para as barreiras de comunicação da equipe virtual de múltiplos projetos

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ABSTRACT

This technical report aimed to describe how the use of daily meetings can mitigate communication barriers in virtual teams of multiple projects. Through participant observation, information about the studied organization was collected. The sources of evidence were constituted through the analysis of documents such as meeting minutes, project schedule and e-mail. The evidence showed that the studied company had to adopt the use of virtual teams due to the social distancing caused by COVID-19. The results achieved by the company by adopting the daily meetings were satisfactory where the communication barriers that were identified were resolved.

Keywords: Communication Management; Virtual Teams; Covid-19; Daily Meetings.

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ENCONTRO DIÁRIO COMO SOLUÇÃO PARA AS BARREIRAS DE COMUNICAÇÃO DA EQUIPE VIRTUAL DE COMUNICAÇÃO DE MÚLTIPLOS PROJETOS

Daily meeting as solution to communication barriers of virtual team of multiple projects

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RESUMO

Este relatório técnico teve como objetivo descrever como a utilização de reuniões diárias pode mitigar barreiras de comunicação em equipes virtuais de múltiplos projetos. Por meio da observação participante, foram coletadas informações sobre a organização estudada. As fontes de evidência foram constituídas por meio da análise de documentos como atas de reuniões, cronograma do projeto e e-mail. As evidências mostraram que a empresa estudada teve que adotar a utilização de equipes virtuais devido ao distanciamento social causado pelo COVID-19. Os resultados alcançados pela empresa com a adoção das reuniões diárias foram satisfatórios onde foram eliminadas as barreiras de comunicação identificadas.

Palavras-chave: Gestão da Comunicação; Times virtuais; Covid19; Reuniões diárias.

INTRODUCTION

A project is a temporary effort aimed at producing a product or service (PMI, 2008). It is through projects that companies manage to execute their strategies and project offices are increasingly playing a strategic role within organizations (Grander, 2019). A relevant aspect regarding project management and the search for competitiveness is that companies are adopting the use of virtual teams, as this practice has some benefits such as travel cost reduction, the possibility of using people with the best knowledge about a subject anywhere on the globe, speed in the delivery process of a product or service (Gallego *et al*., 2021; Zuofa *et al*., 2021).

A virtual project team is defined by people who are in different places, who need to carry out tasks in a coordinated way to achieve a common goal, and for that, they use technological means to carry out their communication (Casey *et al*., 2006). When we have a scenario where the project is formed by a virtual team, we have some challenges in project management, and among these challenges, we can mention: effective communication between project team members, connectivity problems (technological tools), and problems knowledge transfer (Reed *et al*., 2010).

In this scenario, the application of daily meetings promotes effective communication between project team members, as with the involvement of all team members focused on project problems and aims, it is possible for everyone to follow the tasks that are being carried out, which allows activities to be carried out in a more coordinated manner and effectively (Yilmaz & O'Connor, 2016). Therefore, to improve the effective communication, the daily meetings also bring the benefit of problem solving with more agility, as by sharing the problems they are facing, the team members make themselves available to assist each other in solving problems (Stray *et al.*, 2016).

It is worth noting that a stimulus for the use of virtual teams occurred in 2020 when companies faced a great challenge when they had to carry out their activities remotely due to COVID-19. This situation, which impacted society, due to the need to apply social distancing, led companies to rethink structures and processes. Zuofa *et al*. (2021) point out that despite the use of virtual or distributed teams already being applied by some organizations as a competitive differential; many other organizations were not structured to operate with this configuration of teams, but due to COVID-19 they had to adapt.

In this way, when there is a change in the environment and how communication is carried out, the entire process must be adequate so that it can be carried out clearly and transparently to all interested parties, ensuring that it is understood by its recipient. Based on this context, this technical report aimed to describe how the use of daily meetings can mitigate communication barriers in virtual teams of multiple projects.

1 METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

For the preparation of this technical report, participant observation was used. The observation of a phenomenon with greater proximity and its externalization in an academic document allows linking theory to practice considering all the knowledge and practice of the professionals involved in the organization that was studied (Nunes & Infante, 1996). Therefore, from the selection of the company and the phenomenon studied, it was observed how the actions and negotiations carried out during the period of March 2020 and August 2020 were observed to solve the problems of communication management in the virtual team.

Table 1 identifies the phases that were used to carry out the problem identification process, the intervention to solve it, the implementation process, and the monitoring of its effectiveness. This entire process was carried out only by the author of the technical report.

Table 1 Analysis Phases

Phases	Procedures
1ª Phase: Survey of internal documentation	a) E-mails, meeting minutes, and project schedules were analyzed. The objective here was to identify evidence of the problems that were occurring with the new configuration of the service team.
2ª Phase: Critical Analysis	a) The information that was available in the documents (e-mails, meeting minutes, project schedule and messages) related to the process of mapping solutions to solve the problems was analyzed. b) Information from the weekly meetings that project managers held was analyzed. c) Here the following problems were identified: • Schedule Conflict. • Problem of calling those responsible for the activities. • Lack of knowledge in the internal communication tool.
3ª Intervention Phase	a) The experience of the author of the technical report in the process of mapping possible solutions, defining the solution to be adopted, validating the solution, and making official the use of the solution was explored.
4ª Phase - Validation and Implementation	a) For the process of validation and implementation of the chosen solution, the experience of the author of the technical report was used. This process was divided into two stages, the first being the approval of the solution in a predetermined period and the second stage in the process of officializing the adopted solution.
5ª Phase - Monitoring	a) The monitoring process of the implemented solution was based on the analysis of the minutes of the meetings held between the service manager and the project managers.

The author of the technical report had direct participation in the process from the identification of the problem to the implementation of the solution. It should also be noted that all the necessary information was available and was used to define the intervention adopted to solve the problems.

2 DIAGNOSIS OF THE PROBLEM-SITUATION AND/OR OPPORTUNITY

The company used in the study is an information technology infrastructure solutions integrator and service provider, operating in the Brazilian market for 40 years, and has ten different suppliers in its portfolio. With a staff of approximately 100 people, which are distributed in two offices, with the head office in the city of São Paulo and a branch in Rio de Janeiro.

This study only includes people from the head office's professional services department, which is composed of sixteen people, including a service manager, two project managers, and thirteen technical analysts. This team is responsible for performing two types of activities: (i) tasks related to projects; and (ii) activities related to maintenance and technical support for the solutions sold.

The service team is small, 11 people considering the service and project manager are located within the same office. The communication between the team was with a low level of formalization.

Because the project team is small, 11 people between team members and project managers, and all are located within the same office, project communication throughout its life cycle was carried out verbally and with a low level of formalization. Formalizations were more frequent when they involved some type of demand from external customers, but communications between people in the company itself were predominantly informal.

Due to the pandemic and the social distancing process necessary to fight COVID-19 that was introduced in March 2020, the company was forced to change its way of operating, making everyone perform their activities virtually. At this time, all people had to work from their homes, using their home internet and the equipment that the company made available.

At the time this movement took place, the company was in the process of implementing an internal communication tool (MS Teams). The tool was implemented in December 2019 and was being adopted by the people of the company. It should be noted that when there was a need to have the entire team working virtually, most people did not have adequate knowledge to operate the communication tool and did not have adequate

computers to perform their activities virtually. Thus, the communication that was done face-to-face, verbally, and informally, started to be done through a messaging tool, which was not very familiar.

Another relevant point was that at this time the company, due to the context of great uncertainties that was established with the new scenario that had been established due to COVID-19, decided to reduce the team. Thus, the team that was composed by 16 people, including the service manager, now has 11 people. In this case, all project tasks that were being performed by people had to be relocated to other people, that is, it was necessary to replan the allocation of people within each project.

A relevant aspect in the studied company is that it makes full use of the traditional (predictive) project management approach, so it monitored the project's evolution, the problems, and risks of the project portfolio through weekly meetings. These meetings were aimed at monitoring the status of projects, identifying problems, identifying risks, and aligning the allocation of people to their tasks.

Based on this scenario, it was observed how the actions and negotiations were carried out during the period of March 2020 and August 2020 to solve the problems of managing the virtual team. When the company decreed that all people had to carry out their activities virtually (home office), due to the social distancing necessary because of COVID-19, that was when some problems related to the allocation of people in project tasks began to appear, Due to schedule conflict for executing project tasks, there was a problem with delivery of equipment to our customers causing delays in the project schedule.

Problems were identified in the weekly project follow-up meetings when project managers reported problems with schedule conflicts of the analysts responsible for performing the project tasks, the problem of communicating with the analysts that were happening frequently in the meetings that took place in the period of March 2020. Each issue affected the projects in some way as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Impacts of problems

Problems	Impacts
Schedule Conflict	• Has a direct impact on the project schedule, as an analyst responsible for performing a task had two tasks to be performed at the same time. • We had 20% more projects finishing after the scheduled date. • Impacts on customer satisfaction, as one of the tasks that were scheduled to be performed, had to be rescheduled.
Access the people on the team	• Impacts on the delay for the allocation of people in their tasks, on the start time of the task, to be performed, consequently, on the delay of the project schedule. • Impacts on the delay to be able to carry out some technical understanding about a project activity that was going to execute or that had already been executed.
Lack of knowledge in the tool	• Directly impacts the involvement of people to perform project tasks, such as a technical meeting with the end customer or some internal alignment to clarify some point of the project. • Directly impacts the alignment of project status, the evolution of activities (e.g, delivery of equipment).

3 Solutions and Results

At the beginning of April 2020, in one of the meetings to monitor the status of the portfolio of ongoing projects, the service manager asked the project managers to raise suggestions for possible solutions to the problems that were occurring. At the status meeting for subsequent projects, the service manager scheduled a session, on a different date from the date of the status meeting, where we made presentations on the solutions, we had come up with to solve the problems we were facing.

At this meeting, where possible solutions were presented, there was a discussion between the participants, the service manager, and the two project managers, to identify the strengths and weaknesses of each solution. As a result of this meeting, the most favorable option for solving the problem was the adoption of daily meetings. The benefit that was most relevant for this option to be adopted was that it would be possible to give visibility to all the tasks that were in progress for the entire team and with this, it would be possible to act quickly on any problem. The downside of this action would be that we would have the entire team allocated in an internal

meeting, and this would represent a 25% increase in the allocation of people in an activity that is not directly linked to a project.

The daily meeting was structured to carrying out the daily meetings, consisting of the following blocks: list of new projects, list of ongoing projects, and related activities support and maintenance. Each of these steps is subdivided by the customer and for each customer, it was necessary to identify the project, which actions were performed, and which actions would be performed that day. The objectives of each step are listed in Table 3.

Table 3 - Stages of daily meetings

Stages	objetives
List of New Projects	• Make the entire team aware of the new projects that would start in the coming weeks; • Signaling to the team, responsible for carrying out the tasks of the new project, that they should prepare for the execution of the new project.
List of projects ongoing	• Present to the entire team all clients and projects in each client that was in progress; • Verify that those responsible for executing the project tasks were aware of the schedule and that there was no scheduling conflict; • Identify risks, issues, and situations within the project that need to be addressed by the project manager and/or service manager.
Tasks of support	• Check the allocation of those responsible for the tasks, verifying that there was no scheduling conflict; • Monitor the evolution of dealings with incidents in the customer's environment.

With the structure for conducting the meetings defined, we set a period for validating the effectiveness of the daily meetings. During this period, it was observed whether the problems, which were identified in Table 1, were also identified in these meetings and the solution was applied more quickly. It was possible to identify problems related to scheduling conflicts and problems with triggering the people responsible for carrying out project tasks.

As a result, at the end of May 2020, it was concluded that this ritual would be inserted, and all people on the team should participate in it, only in extreme cases (such as urgent appointments with clients and execution of critical tasks) could justify the absence of people from these meetings. It was not difficult to sensitize people on the team about the importance of the new ritual that was introduced, as everyone was being impacted by the problems. Thus, two adjustments were made to the process, the first being the definition that all meetings would be recorded in the Wiki tool, which is available to the entire team involved, with the objective that if someone cannot attend the meeting, that person can consult the records. And the second would be the provision of tutorials for the best use of the tool, which would open space so that it would be possible to ask questions about the tool, sharing knowledge among team members.

The daily meetings brought many benefits to all team. It is possible to emphasize that after the insertion of this new ritual, all problems were resolved, all problems could be identified and treated more quickly than before. What is a previous scenario, without the implementation of the daily meetings, could take a week or more to

check the status and effectiveness of the solution, with this new scenario, all the people on the team were monitoring daily the actions that were being performed and even contributing new ideas for solving new problems.

The fact that we have increased by 25% the allocation of people from the service team in an activity, which is not directly related to the execution of a specific project, proved irrelevant when we looked at the projects that were again completed on time again, again having a delay rate of 5% of projects.

CONCLUSION

At the end of this report, it is possible to say that the implementation of the daily meetings managed to address the problems we were facing, which we can summarize in communication problems, as with this new ritual, communication between teams became more effective. By carrying out a daily alignment, this made the objectives of each project, the planning of activities for each person, transmitted more clearly. In addition, at the end of the implementation process, it was evidenced that the problems of using the communication tool were solved as well. Actually, there is na increasing interest in studying and applying geographically distributed agile development (GDAD), and hence the need to review and synthesize the literature on communication challenges (Alzoubi, Y. I., Gill, A. Q., & Al-Ani, 2016); and moreover, to consider the fact that communication is an essential tool for Project Management and Leadership (Zulk, B. G. 2014).,

A relevant aspect in this process of adopting virtual communication tools for team management is knowledge management. Although this aspect has not been studied, opportunities for the application of knowledge management practices were highlighted. Sharing and transferring knowledge are activities facilitated in daily meetings. In this same sense, although the adopted solution does not use a Kanban board, and a ScrumBan was not structured, where the two most used project management approaches in software development are made, we were able to identify similar results. These can be points to be explored in another study, where it is possible to improve communication.

In this way, this technical report contributes in a way that reinforces that the use of daily meetings helps to improve the performance of the team's communication and even to increase the sense of team among the members who know each other.

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