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LESSONS LEARNED IN RUNNING VIRTUAL ORGANIZATIONS AND PROJECTS

Abstract

The advent of new technologies in recent years has revolutionized many aspects of our lives. One of these has been our relationship with our workplace. The internet and new computing devices have enabled us to plan and execute many aspects of projects remotely, without the need for team members to necessarily work in the same office. Geographic separation between team members not only introduces new challenges (such as the need for time zone management), but it also changes communication within the team, with team members relying largely on text based communication. Despite these challenges, “virtual” projects enable further international collaboration by removing the need for geographical closeness.

Clearly, “virtual” projects are here to stay, and are starting to become the norm. As such, it is important to identify the best way that these “virtual” organizations and projects could be successfully managed, with specific focus on the challenges that the use of new technologies introduces.

In this paper, the author will present some of the lessons learned running such virtual activities in the past five years. Experiences will draw from managing both projects and organizational activities at the Space Generation Advisory Council, along with working on a European project (ITN-WALL) with partners in various European countries. This paper will highlight some of the lessons learned in communicating within the team in a “virtual” environment, tools and techniques used to improve organizational knowledge transfer and capacity building, conflict resolution in a “virtual” project, and guidelines for in person meetings that can complement these virtual projects.