Leading Virtual Project Teams in the Post Pandemic Era: Trust and Conflict Management Strategies

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Abstract : The coronavirus pandemic has sent an important message that future project teams need to be trained to work under virtual conditions, which has already become the new norm in organizations across the world. As organizations increasingly rely on virtual teams to achieve project objectives, it is essential to comprehend how leadership functions in virtual project teams. The purpose of this research is to analyze the leadership behaviors exhibited by project managers for building trust and managing conflicts effectively in virtual project teams. This convergent parallel mixed method research was conducted by surveying 185 virtual leaders and conducting a semi-structured interview with 13 senior virtual leaders involved in managing projects across the industry sectors. The research findings indicate that establishing trust and managing conflicts were ranked as significant challenges in leading virtual project teams in the post-pandemic era. In contrast to earlier findings, our research findings suggest that productivity was not ranked as a significant challenge in leading virtual project teams. This indeed is a positive finding for organizations to consider adopting virtual project teams in the long run. Additionally, the research findings recommend that virtual leaders need to strive to build a high-trust environment and develop effective conflict resolution skills to improve the effectiveness of virtual project teams. As the project management profession struggles with low project success rates, mixed-method research aims to contribute to the knowledge in the growing research area of virtual project leadership. This research contributes to the knowledge by offering first-person accounts from senior virtual leaders on the innovative strategies they had implemented for building trust and resolving conflicts effectively in the virtual project when there were limited opportunities for face-to-face interaction on account of the pandemic. In addition, the leadership framework created as a part of this research for trust development and conflict management in virtual project teams will guide project managers to improve virtual project team effectiveness.
Keywords : conflict management, trust building, virtual leadership, virtual teams
Conference Title : ICLM 2022 : International Conference on Leadership and Management
Conference Location : Singapore, Singapore
Conference Dates : November 18-19, 2022