

Human Connection over Technology: Evidence, Pitfalls, and Promise of Collaboration Technologies in Promoting Full Spectrum Participation of the Virtual Workforce

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Abstract : The evidence for collaboration technologies (CTs) as a source of business productivity has never been stronger, and grows each day. At the same time, paradoxically, there is an increasingly greater concern about the challenge CTs present to the unity and well-being of the virtual workforce than ever before, but nowhere in the literature has an empirical understanding of these linkages been set out. This study attempted to address by using virtual distance as a measure of the efficacy of CTs to reduce the psychological distance among people. Data from 350 managers and 101 individual contributors across twelve functions in six major industries showed that business value is related to collaboration ($r=.84$, $p < .01$), which, in turn, is associated with full spectrum participation ($r=.60$, $p < .01$), a summative function of inclusion, integration, and we-intention. Further, virtual distance is negatively related to both collaboration ($r=-.54$, $p < .01$) and full spectrum participation ($r=-.26$, $p < .01$). Additionally, CIO-CDO relationship is a factor in the degree to which virtual distance is managed in the organization ($r=-.26$, $p < .01$). Overall, the results support the positive relationship between business value and collaboration. They also suggest that the extent to which collaboration can be fostered may depend on the degree of full spectrum participation or the level of inclusion, integration, and we-intention among members. Finally, the results indicate that CTs, when managed wisely to lower virtual distance, are a compelling concomitant to collaboration and full spectrum participation. A strategic outcome of this study is an instrumental blueprint of CTs and virtual distance in relation to full spectrum participation that should serve as a shared dashboard for CIOs, CHROs, and CDOs.

Keywords : business value, collaboration, inclusion, integration, we-intention, full spectrum participation, collaboration technologies, virtual distance

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