

## PM WORLD TODAY – VIEWPOINT – DECEMBER 2009

## Remote Project Management: An Evolving Culture Supported by the Tools of Its Time

*By Tamara Poppler*

'Working remotely' has taken on new meaning in today's virtual world. It has come to explain a trend within the Project Management field whereby entire project teams work in concert from completely separate physical locations. This newly evolved environment has become the foundation for a new corporate culture with its own tools and efficiencies.

Some critics of managing projects remotely pose that there is no comparable alternative to in-person interactions. "In teleconferences, even video conferences, the socialization and trust building that happens face-to-face is missing" (McGraw). However, data indicates that remote participants are finding myriad technological advancements to support this new virtual environment. Remote project management teams are frequently more effective and efficient than their more conventional predecessors when they take advantage of these new tools.

On-line meeting tools like AT&T Connect® helps remote project teams meet "the unique challenge of needing live meeting time with clients who may be located around the world" (Gregory). Features like participant lists, active speaker notes, and the ability to Private Message one or more participants without disrupting the flow of the meeting result in virtual meetings with a more natural feel that closely simulates the in-person experience. On-line meeting tools provide a forum that allows listeners to focus on understanding and internalizing the data presented.

Some sources feel that the lack of face-to-face communication is a detriment and that there is no comparable alternative. "Although you can expect a significant increase in your email, instant messaging and texting traffic, I have found that talking to individuals is still more effective than texting or voice mail, and should be preferred whenever possible."

In the remote project environment, the formation of professional relationships relies more heavily on verbal rapport and speaking abilities; the ability to clearly summarize a thought and provide a break-down of support points is critical to conveying the conceptual material of project content.

Instant messaging and other instant forms of communication provide a means to be more successful when they use these tools that streamline interactions. An About.com survey says that one in four adults use instant messengers at work and,

of those, fifty percent said that instant messaging increases productivity. There is an element to IM, e-mail and social networking that allows for communication that is, in many ways, more direct than in-person interactions. IM can be used to convey a single fact, to confirm a piece of information or to give a supportive personal message, with the benefit of reducing the degree of interaction required to convey its fundamental message.

“IM is important because it is quick and efficient in allowing me to communicate” (De Hoyos, Transforming). Efficiency is fundamental to productivity and IM provides an alternative that allows an efficient exchange of information without the small-talk that is often socially required in face-to-face communications. A 2007 study finds that “workers who frequently utilized IM while on the job reported less interruption than those who did not” (De Hoyos, Study).

Ultimately, ‘working remotely’ is quickly becoming a term that says, “Successful project management team working remotely by utilizing the tools and technological advancements that the contemporary virtual world has to offer” (Ponce).

### Citations

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