

Makovoz Oksana

Dr.sc. (Econ.), associate professor,
professor of department of management
National technical university «Kharkiv polytechnic institute»

Oksana.Makovoz@khp.edu.ua

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8728-1500>

Korobov Kyrilo

PhD student of department of management,
National technical university «Kharkiv polytechnic institute»

Kirill.k.korobov@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9867-3128>

Sushkova Kateryna

Senior Engineering Manager,
EPAM Systems,

kateryna.sushkova@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6336-2322>

**ONLINE FACILITATION OF DISTRIBUTED PROJECT TEAMS
AS A MUST DURING COVID-19 CONSTRAINTS**

The global pandemic COVID-19 around the globe resulted in strict constraints introduced by most of the governments in the world. COVID-19 has acted as a reason for radical changes in the working and served everyone to shift their practices into online environments. The major constraints introduced were social distancing, isolation and strict prohibition to meet in larger groups (more than 5-10 people), especially in closed buildings to control the virus spread, minimize numbers of diseases and lethal cases. There were more constrains and challenges COVID-19 brought to us, however this one, probably, was the most impactful for many businesses, their operations and project management

As more groups spread online in the modern era or are pushed online during the COVID-19 pandemic, facilitation methods are being adapted to an online context. However, online spaces such as Zoom and Google Hangouts are not designed with the unique needs and knowledge of facilitators in mind, and are not designed to hold the range of tools, methods, practices, and crafts they require [1]. Facilitation in business is the process of group decision-making and plays crucial role in its operations and new services delivery as those are very

handy to resolve complex problems one expert cannot resolve. Most of facilitation methods were designed with an idea of face-to-face meetings of larger group of experts. It is much better to keep group dynamic, establish personal eye to eye contact and observe humans' behaviour in a more efficient way with offline events rather than online, even with web camera switched on.

The global initiative to create purposeful cooperation between states, organizations and businesses is extremely relevant. The Global Coalition for Digital Safety is working with key stakeholders to advance a range of principles, technologies and tools and policy frameworks that provide a holistic approach to improving safety online [2]. The Safety by Design assessment tools emphasise the need to address online harms, alongside user safety and rights, in the product development lifecycle, so that safety is systematically embedded into the culture and operations of organisations [3].

However, with the new reality of COVID-19, business had to adapt to sustain. Most of the companies' budgets moved them investing into IT projects to find a solution to operate online with the minimal physical contact of people. Marketing moved online, commerce moved to e-commerce, restaurants shifted to food delivery services, banking - to online banking and fintech to keep everybody at home. And facilitation is not an exception here. Understanding the benefits of face-to-face meetings, business had to move to online to save our ability to operate in efficient way as we did before.

While various aspects such as collective belief in the value of diverse voices or the very careful and thoughtful online communication style of members of the collective do indeed facilitate the expression of e-voice, barriers such as less formalised procedures or power and knowledge asymmetries coexist and can limit people's ability and willingness to voice their concerns via digital tools [4, p. 12].

Against this background managers tries to answer the following questions:

- How to organize the online space to utilize existing facilitation methods?

– What kind of tools and how many do you need to proceed with successful facilitation?

– What are the must haves for successful online facilitation event?

Challenges that COVID-19 pandemic introduced are still needed to be addressed by government and businesses in order to develop sustainable economics and human well-being. The topic of online facilitation is very interesting to investigate especially considering the current circumstances. That COVID-19 led to multiple crisis event types that we all must deal with economic, physical safety and emotional well-being. The activities of employees can be constantly monitored and as team members progress on their goals, managers should be sure to check in on tasks and deadlines to ensure nothing falls through the cracks. Tactical decisions were made by many organizations around the world to utilize online facilitation technics, ensuring the group decision making process can work even with the fact, everybody is sitting at home and cannot meet together because of COVID-19 constraints. The research objective is to show how facilitation methods could be moved to online space and keep its productiveness there.

References

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