EXPLORING EFFECTIVE METHODS TO BOOST VIRTUAL WORKERS’ MORALE FOR IMPROVED PROJECT PERFORMANCE

Florence Ibeh\textsuperscript{A}, David Oyekunle\textsuperscript{B}, David Boohene\textsuperscript{C},

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\textbf{ABSTRACT}

\textbf{Background:} The continuous advancement of information technology has transformed how businesses and organizations carry out their day-to-day activities. Many people are choosing to work remotely because they are handling a significant number of human interactions through various virtual communication platforms. Remote work facilitates business growth and improves customer service, yet it presents its challenges, necessitating an investigation into virtual team morale to guarantee project success.

\textbf{Method:} This study employed content analysis of readily available secondary data to examine the investigated phenomenon.

\textbf{Results:} The study determined that the key elements for enhancing project success in virtual teams are technology adoption, an environment free from distractions, effective leadership, trust, communication, a well-defined task, active team engagement, and motivation. The study also found that morale strongly influences engagement and productivity in virtual teams. Therefore, when morale is high, virtual teams achieve their optimal performance.

\textbf{Conclusion:} The research concluded that selecting the suitable technology for communication, assigning virtual team members with distinct roles and responsibilities, fostering a culture of accountability and trust within virtual teams, promoting efficient team collaboration, and motivating virtual team members are the most impactful tactics for enhancing employee engagement and performance in virtual teams.

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EXPLORAR MÉTODOS EFICACES PARA AUMENTAR O MORAL DOS TRABALHADORES VIRTUAIS PARA MELHORAR O DESEMPENHO DO PROJETO

RESUMO

\textbf{Antecedentes:} O avanço contínuo das tecnologias da informação transformou a forma como as empresas e as organizações realizam as suas actividades quotidianas. Muitas pessoas optam por trabalhar remotamente porque estão a lidar com um número significativo de interacções humanas através de várias plataformas de comunicação virtual. O trabalho remoto facilita o crescimento das empresas e melhora o serviço ao cliente, mas apresenta os seus desafios, o que exige uma investigação sobre o moral das equipas virtuais para garantir o êxito do projeto.

\textbf{Método:} Este estudo recorreu à análise de conteúdo de dados secundários facilmente disponíveis para examinar o fenómeno investigado.

\textbf{Resultados:} O estudo determinou que os elementos-chave para aumentar o sucesso do projeto em equipas virtuais são a adoção de tecnologia, um ambiente livre de distrações, uma liderança eficaz, confiança, comunicação, uma

\textsuperscript{A} Master of Science in Project Management. University of Salford. Manchester, United Kingdom.
E-mail: olachukwuibeh@gmail.com

\textsuperscript{B} Master of Science in Project Management. University of Salford. Manchester, United Kingdom.
E-mail: D.O.T.Oyekunle@edu.salford.ac.uk Orcid: https://orcid.org/0009-0007-3994-1712

\textsuperscript{C} Doctor of Development Economics from Sam Higgin Bottom University of Agriculture and Technology and Sciences. University of Energy and Natural Resources. Ghana.
E-mail: david.boohene@uenr.edu.gh Orcid: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3126-4426
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Virtual teams were originally established to enhance collaborative invention and innovation among specialists from different parts of the world or specific regions. These teams were formed to address the challenge of limited time for travel, which hindered the completion of specialized tasks required by projects (Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1998). In contemporary times, virtual collaboration has reached a level of sophistication where online cooperation has become a customary method of operation for businesses at the national, multinational, and regional levels (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020). Virtual teamwork, also known as remote teamwork,
refers to the collaborative work of a geographically dispersed group of individuals utilizing information and communication technologies (ICTs).

Before the COVID-19 pandemic required all organizations to implement remote work, virtual teams were already commonplace. However, the swift onset and widespread impact of the pandemic have significantly changed business practices (Buffer, 2022). Consequently, numerous governments in the affected countries have mandated or urged their citizens to engage in remote work, leading to an unforeseen predicament for many businesses. Geographically diverse teams are becoming more common in a wide range of businesses, from small startups to large multinational companies (Garro-Abarca et al., 2021). Consequently, businesses were compelled to expeditiously educate their employees and impart to them the necessary skills for remote work, to maintain the same level of efficiency as in an office setting.

Irrespective of the conditions of virtual work, effective management of scope, schedule, quality, and budget is crucial for the success of any project (David Strang, 2011). Studies indicate that virtual project teams offer numerous advantages, including extended working hours, reduced overhead expenses like office space, opportunities to enter new markets, access to diverse skill sets, increased productivity, and improved work-life balance (Clark et al., 2019; Garro-Abarca et al., 2021; Maynard et al., 2012; Nakayama et al., 2005).

Both individuals and businesses are leveraging the advantages of remote work due to technological progress, leading to a mutually beneficial solution for all parties concerned. Also, a virtual team in a corporation can enhance project performance by effectively mobilizing sufficient human resources, coordinating activities, maintaining clear communication, and regularly assessing performance (Martins et al., 2004). But, like any approach to management, virtual work carries certain risks, including social isolation and dependence on technology for communication, a lack of unity and team morale, control over team members, absence of visual cues in communication, and reduced knowledge sharing and potential mistrust due to cultural differences (Ludden & Ledwith, 2014).

There is evidence suggesting that flexible work arrangements enhance productivity (Beauregard & Henry, 2009; Omondi, 2016; Whittard, 2005). Regarding productivity, a prevalent misconception about remote teams is that they are inefficient. Hence, organizations are adopting a proficient remote working culture for project management (Laine, 2021), which is crucial for the prosperity of organizations and project management consultants in this novel setting. Conversely, maintaining high morale can be challenging for teams that are entirely remote or geographically scattered. However, allocating resources to morale-enhancing
initiatives yields positive results in terms of productivity. According to Gallup, companies that have high employee morale increase their productivity by 17%. Enhanced productivity can lead to enhanced collaboration and teamwork, as well as reduced employee absenteeism and attrition (Akintayo, 2012; Neely, 1999; Shaban et al., 2017).

Thus, enhancing morale and implementing workplace policies and procedures can have a positive impact on the overall cohesion of a team. For instance, Thamhain (2004) conducted a study on the efficacy of teams working on technology projects and found that a work environment that fulfills the personal and professional needs of individuals has a substantial influence on team collaboration and enhances team performance. Further, the study indicated that the overall unity of a team can be enhanced by boosting morale and implementing workplace policies and procedures.

Hence, the objective of this study is to examine the most efficient strategies for enhancing the motivation of remote employees, thereby leading to improved project outcomes.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Human resource management (HRM) is the practice of effectively managing individuals and enhancing the worth of an organization (Conner & Ulrich, 1996). Each project must conform to a prescribed set of procedures that are overseen and regulated by the HRM department. When evaluating a project, it is important to consider both the monetary and non-monetary factors that impact its viability (Chong, 2008; Irani, 2010; Moutinho & Mouta, 2011). According to Clark and Colling (2005) and Soderlund and Bredin (2006), it is crucial to incorporate human resources in project management. Human resources play a significant role in monitoring and managing projects and are considered the most vital resource for achieving success in project management, considering their job roles and personal attributes.

Imran et al. (2011) discovered a relationship between project results and the management of human resource performance. Moutinho and Lopes (2011) demonstrate the significant value that organizations attribute to project management (69.8%) and human resources (53.1%), both of which are considered crucial for project success.

Soderlund and Bredin (2006) argue that there is a significant correlation between the structure and design of project operations and the design of HRM. This refers to the HR activities carried out by managers as well as the HR activities performed by HR departments and other HR professionals. Nevertheless, they contend that the project-based approach to
human resource management contradicts widely accepted information. For example, when the work process is modified, it also impacts the dynamics of relationships among colleagues and employees. Hence, it is imperative to consider projects as the focal point of HRM analysis in the growth of businesses and industries (Joshi, 2021).

3 TEAM MORALE

While it is possible to analyze both individual and group morale, in a project setting, the overall collective morale holds greater significance (Yang et al., 2010). Given that projects are accomplished by teams rather than individuals, it is crucial to assess the morale of the team rather than focusing on individual morale. Team morale refers to the general state of well-being and satisfaction within a corporate or project team (Dye, 2011). Employee perception refers to how employees view their environment and job responsibilities about the needs, goals, and objectives of the organization.

According to Saldanha (2018), morale has an impact on the engagement, behaviour, and productivity of team members. When evaluating the effectiveness of a project team, it is crucial to consider morale (Dye, 2011; Saldanha, 2018; Yang et al., 2010). Team morale can vary between being elevated or diminished. The team’s sanguine disposition and enthusiasm to make a meaningful contribution signify a strong sense of morale. Low morale signifies a state of dissatisfaction, demoralization, and aversion towards the job, leading to employee attrition (Kanimozhi and Vinothkumar, 2018).

According to Johns (1995), there are management approaches that can enhance team morale. First and foremost, it is essential to establish clear, measurable, and mutually agreed-upon objectives and risks for the project. Furthermore, it is essential to have supervision over the task, for instance, by allocating labour resources. Additionally, it is crucial to ensure that the schedule, expenditures, and flaws are verified and approved. Employee morale is influenced by factors such as compensation, incentives, job stability, and interpersonal dynamics with colleagues and supervisors (Rad & Yarmohammadian, 2006). The level of morale has a direct impact on both the productivity and turnover rate of a company. These factors have an impact on the output and profitability of a company, leading to an increase in its overall results.

Employee morale is also affected by the team dynamics within an organization (Burrows, 2020). Accordingly, Edmondson and Nembhard (2009) argue that organizations should give importance to team cohesion to foster a collective understanding of purpose among
team members. This impacts employee morale and has an instantaneous impact on team morale (Ensley & Hmieleski, 2005).

Employee morale is crucial for maintaining a healthy workplace, as stated by Fard et al. (2010). Based on his research, a high level of staff morale is linked to creativity and innovation, job satisfaction, and employee commitment to the organization, leading to enhanced organizational performance.

4 TEAM MORALE MODELS

The morale of individuals, also known as human motivation, significantly impacts the attitudes of employees toward collaborative tasks. Abraham Maslow's theory of human motivation provides an initial explanation for the functioning of morality. He formulated Maslow's hierarchy of needs to elucidate the underlying incentives that govern individuals' daily and occupational conduct (Maslow et al., 1979).

During Abraham Maslow's research on motivation, it was found that the labour market was insufficient, which contradicted Maslow's belief that physiological needs are both necessary and unimportant (Denton, 2016). Once individuals have satisfied their basic physiological needs, they endeavour to attain higher levels of happiness by addressing their safety needs (Pardee, 1990). The safety needs of individuals encompass their financial, medical, personal, and other requirements. Research conducted in Australia indicates that employees who experience financial difficulties are more prone to encountering productivity issues (Human Resources Director, 2017).

Maslow's hierarchy of needs encompasses the prerequisites for love and social connection, alongside self-esteem and self-actualization. Work environments should prioritize the promotion of inclusivity and acceptance for all employees, irrespective of their background or country of origin. Several empirical studies have demonstrated the benefits of workplace integration and a diverse, inclusive workforce (Pless & Maak, 2004; Ryan & Kossek, 2008; Shore et al., 2018). Shore et al. (2018) provides empirical evidence supporting the notion that workplaces characterized by diversity and inclusivity have a positive impact on corporate values, leading to their enhancement.
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5 FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO DIMINISHED TEAM MORALE

According to Burrows (2020), a lack of motivation and enthusiasm can have a detrimental impact on the successful completion of a project. Job dissatisfaction can cause a decline in motivation, leading to diminished productivity and an increased need for revisions. Additionally, it can pose a risk to the timely completion of projects (Shaban et al., 2017). This study aims to assess leadership, communication, work characteristics, and work-life balance, despite the presence of various factors that contribute to diminished morale within project teams.

The team's morale diminishes because of ineffective leadership. Ngambi (2011) states that leadership traits such as effective communication, trust-building, and teamwork have an impact on morale. Effective project team management relies heavily on strong leadership. According to Soderlund and Bredin (2006), project leadership plays a crucial role in effectively managing human resources and fostering high morale. Yang et al. (2010) state that leaders must possess both process- and people-based management skills to enhance the effectiveness of project teams.

Poor communication is a primary factor contributing to low team morale (Haddock, 2010). One of the most demoralizing behaviours related to poor communication is the lack of clarity regarding management's expectations of team members (Rico & Cohen, 2005). Team members desire clarity regarding their responsibilities and the criteria by which their performance will be evaluated.

Inadequate personnel development and training are additional factors contributing to low team morale. Kupperschmidt (1998) asserts that employees need opportunities to acquire experience and enhance their skills to progress in their careers. This implies that employees may experience dissatisfaction if they are not given the chance to advance. Thus, as per Chanana (2021), prioritizing the provision of professional development is a prudent investment for companies.

Insufficient tools and techniques for accomplishing tasks also contribute to diminished morale. Certain employees experience a deficiency in the provision of tools, equipment, and a designated area for work (Bowles & Cooper, 2009). Communication challenges arise for remote teams due to the presence of ineffective platforms and time-consuming procedures (Burrows, 2020). Consequently, teams allocate a greater amount of time to soliciting feedback and resolving issues, resulting in the oversight of certain tasks and a sense of discontentment.
Bowles and Cooper (2009) propose that the utilization of communication tools and platforms facilitates the simplification and enhancement of collaborative work.

The nature of a job also serves as a determinant of morale. According to Hoda and Murugesan (2016), when a team is given a task that does not satisfy them or is made to work in a role for which they are not adequately prepared, their morale decreases. Excessive workload leads to confusion and hinders the achievement of goals. Hence, companies must identify and regulate the factors that impact workforce morale. The additional hours worked by employees do not necessarily indicate their level of engagement. It could indicate that they are burdened with excessive work and are unable to cope (Pattnaik & Jena, 2020).

6 THE CONSEQUENCES OF DIMINISHED TEAM MORALE

Diminished morale has adverse consequences on a company's revenue, output, financial competitiveness, and organizational goals. Emphasizing the significance of enhancing employee morale to enhance performance and construct superior organizations is underscored by Shirom (2011). To effectively adapt to environmental changes, organizations must be highly innovative.

Shaban et al. (2017) suggest that worker turnover is indicative of diminished morale. Staff turnover occurs when employees depart because of dissatisfaction and a lack of incentives to stay. O'Connell and Kung (2007) argue that employee turnover has a detrimental impact on both financial performance and productivity. To achieve a higher level of financial success, the organization must increase its ability to attract individuals by raising salaries or implementing recruitment fees. Individuals who depart from the production process possess valuable knowledge, skills, and talents that have positively influenced the company's growth, financial success, and overall performance.

According to McHugh's (2001) research, low morale has a direct correlation with increased rates of absenteeism, sick absence, and employee turnover. Diminished morale hampers workers' ability to commute to their workplace. The focus of his research was on the factors of low morale, motivation, staff productivity, and competition. Low morale and motivation are widely attributed by academics as the main factors behind low production and declining competitiveness (Shaban et al., 2017). It has the potential to result in increased rates of employee absence and intentional damage to property or operations.
In their study, Montoya-Weiss et al. (2001) discovered that individuals with low morale are more susceptible to experiencing conflict. They might complain about trivial issues, pass judgment on others, or decline to collaborate. According to Furumo (2009), experiencing stress, frustration, and other negative emotions can change how individuals behave in their jobs, leading to conflicts. Workplace aggression is a consequence of low morale. Workplace conflicts can lead to stress, anger, and ineffective communication (Sepehri et al., 2014). Inadequate job performance frequently leads to financial setbacks.

7 THE CORRELATION BETWEEN VIRTUAL TEAMS AND PROJECT PERFORMANCE

According to Levi (2007), a virtual team refers to a team where members communicate and collaborate through technology, despite being separated by time and distance. Levi cites Driskell et al. to support this definition. According to Brown et al. (2007), a virtual team is a collection of individuals who collaborate towards shared objectives primarily using computer technology and are usually physically distant from each other. Levi further asserts that the concept of "virtuality" can be measured on a spectrum and emphasizes that the key factor is not the technology itself, but rather the collaboration of a team that is physically separated. It is worth noting that most virtual teams do engage in some form of in-person interaction.

Jahagirdar and Bankar (2021) discovered that virtual teams provide access to experts and highly skilled individuals from diverse market sectors. Research indicates that team performance is enhanced by temporal and geographical variation (Brewer, 2015; Garro-Abarca et al., 2021; Martins et al., 2004; Nakayama et al., 2005; Pullan & Prokopi, 2016). Clark et al. (2019) demonstrate that knowledge bases, electronic resources, and information provide greater support to virtual initiatives compared to traditional ones.

Sivunen (2008) posits that the project manager’s communication skills augment the performance of team members. The performance of a virtual project team can be evaluated at three distinct levels: individual, team, and project. The coding framework is established based on these levels, which are then examined to determine the performance criteria of virtual project teams.
8 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR BOOSTING MORALE OF VIRTUAL TEAM

The reviewed conceptual frameworks identify several recurring factors that enhance the morale of virtual teams and improve project performance. These factors include the adaptation of technology, a distraction-free environment, effective leadership, trust, communication, well-defined tasks, team collaboration, and motivation. The researcher constructs an innovative framework that integrates technology adaptation and a focused environment, drawing upon this concept. Distracting situations can pose challenges for virtual teams, as they diminish the efficiency of typically high-performing virtual teams. Technology adaptation refers to the process of incorporating, utilizing, and assessing the compatibility of technology in human interaction (Majchrzak et al., 2000). Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework for boosting virtual team workers’ morale.

The following connections can be postulated considering the above conceptual framework.

a) Proposition 1: Distract-free environment positively influences virtual team morale;
b) Proposition 2: Technology adaptation positively influences virtual team morale;
c) Proposition 3: Leadership positively influences virtual team morale;
d) Proposition 4: Communication positively influences virtual team morale;
e) Proposition 5: Trust positively influences virtual team morale;
f) Proposition 6: Well-defined task positively influences virtual team morale;
g) Proposition 7: Motivation positively influences virtual team morale;
h) Proposition 8: Team collaboration positively influences virtual team morale.
9 METHODOLOGY

This study employed content analysis of existing literature to examine the investigated phenomenon. The keywords that were searched for include "morale," "team," "team morale," "employee morale", "virtual team", "virtual organization", and project performance". The Boolean query for this search is: (team OR morale OR teamwork) AND (employee morale). The search strategy performed multiple searches as search terms were depleted or documents were identified. The generated search terms, including Science Direct, ResearchGate, Academia.edu, and the Salford Digital Library, were used to query Google Scholar, a meta-search engine that searches multiple paper archives. Figure 2 shows the inclusion and exclusion criteria used for sourcing research materials.

Figure 2
Inclusion and Exclusion criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inclusion</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Paper is concerned with Team Morale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Paper is concerned with Virtual Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Paper contains empirical evidence</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Paper is concerned with Project Performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Findings are generalizable</td>
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</table>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exclusion</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Paper is not written in English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Paper is not peer-reviewed (e.g., master’s thesis)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Paper is not related to at least one of the research questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Duplicate paper</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

10 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study are discussed concerning the research questions and prior content analysis of the literature reviewed on the subject matter. The review identified the Various forms of morale present among team members, the impact of morale on project performance, and best practices for enhancing morale among virtual team workers.

10.1 VARIOUS FORMS OF MORALE PRESENT AMONG TEAM MEMBERS

10.1.1 Leadership

Efficient leadership is crucial for surmounting the obstacles faced by virtual teams. Competent team leaders excel at fostering relationships among their employees. The leadership position of the virtual team leader is one of the factors that affect performance. Ferrazzi (2014) identifies several key leadership actions that effectively motivate virtual team members, including trust-building, promoting feedback and improved team communication, delivering work-related instructions, and enhancing team members’ technological skills. The absence of direct interpersonal communication and the practice of remote work poses challenges for leaders of virtual teams, potentially leading to diminished performance and productivity in the establishment, maintenance, and financial sustainability of such teams. (Gibson & Gibbs, 2006).

10.1.2 Technology Adaptation

According to Baughman (2019), virtual team members need to possess a high level of technological proficiency. Communication technology has a significant influence on performance, as stated by Saafean and Shaykhian (2014). Frequent communication between managers and employees enhances morale and fosters trust. Leaders should establish a structured daily check-in to effectively support remote workers by setting goals, recognizing
achievements, and seeking feedback, which mimics the natural support that occurs in an office environment.

10.1.3 Team Collaboration

Prior studies (Liao, 2017; Saafein & Shaykhian, 2014) have demonstrated that trust is the paramount factor in all facets of collaboration. Trust has a significant impact on team effectiveness as it affects interpersonal communication, exchange of feedback, and discussions about issues and concerns (Liao, 2017). The performance of virtual teams is significantly influenced by team collaboration. Letaifa and Goglio-Primard (2016) define it as "a process in which two or more parties engage closely with each other to generate outcomes that are mutually advantageous." Multiple studies have indicated that it enhances the productivity of team members (Jarrahi & Sawyer, 2013).

10.1.4 Team Trust

Team trust, as described by Callow et al. (2009), acts as a cohesive force in partnerships and has a notable impact on team performance (Jarrahi & Sawyer, 2013). The inability to quickly establish trust significantly affects teamwork. Trust facilitates the establishment of a highly effective virtual team and improves the process of making decisions (Clark et al., 2010). The successful completion of project tasks relies on a strong basis of trust and social connections among the members of the virtual team, facilitating collaboration and information exchange. Individuals exhibit constructive behaviour when they possess self-confidence and establish a sense of ease with each other, which is beneficial for the establishment of virtual teams. Furthermore, the level of trust within virtual teams is influenced by factors such as communication style, prompt responses, transparent communication, and feedback (Henttonen and Blomqvist, 2005). A recent study suggests that establishing early communication and maintaining a positive tone can expedite the development of trust, leading to improved performance through increased member confidence and trust (Crisp and Jarvenpaa, 2013).

10.1.5 Well-defined Task

Virtual teams can function efficiently when their responsibilities and procedures are clearly defined and transparent. It is necessary to mandate that team members provide feedback
on a daily, weekly, and/or monthly basis, adhering to a specific deadline. Team members can establish a consensus on the desired goals and results and designate a specific individual who will be responsible for receiving regular feedback on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis (Johns, 1995). Regarding this matter, team members can reach a consensus on the desired goals and results, and delegate responsibilities to a designated individual. Work complexity significantly impacts the structure and functioning of virtual teams (Bell & Kozlowski, 2002).

10.1.6 Technology Adaptability

For virtual teams to effectively carry out tasks, they must have access to the necessary technologies required for remote work. The adoption of the technology will have a significant influence on its "user experience," which forms the basis of the concept (Yu et al., 2011). Implementing technology that is responsive, reliable, and user-friendly is achievable. While Zoom and Google Meet are typically the most widely used video conferencing platforms, a business must choose a platform that aligns with its specific requirements.

10.1.7 Motivation

Techniques for invigorating and inspiring virtual team members exemplify instances of motivating remote employees. Methods to motivate virtual teams include opportunities for travel, electronic gift cards, uplifting quotes, regular communication, and virtual recognition. Employing astute strategies to motivate remote workers is crucial in fostering enthusiasm for collaborative work, as telecommuters are prone to disconnection. The purpose of motivating employees is to enhance productivity and foster engagement among remote workers.

10.1.8 Distract-free Environment

Working virtually becomes arduous in the presence of distractions, as employees experience a diminished sense of job control amidst increased disturbances (Keller et al., 2020). For instance, noise pollution can have a considerably greater negative impact. A virtual team member may not be concerned if they live alone, but if they are in close quarters with others, the situation may often deteriorate into chaotic noise and confusion.
10.2 THE IMPACT OF MORALE ON PROJECT PERFORMANCE

Engaging in virtual work can pose challenges for individuals accustomed to the presence of teammates daily, as their absence may hinder motivation. Prolonged workdays in a home environment can result in sensations of solitude and estrangement, which can promptly result in a decline in employee morale. Morale is a key factor that influences both engagement and productivity. Virtual teams will achieve optimal performance when morale is elevated. Pattnaik and Jena (2020) argue that organizations need to acknowledge that loneliness, anxiety, and depression are significant obstacles when working remotely. Moreover, the presence of uncertainty leads to workers experiencing excessive concern, stress, and significant anxiety, which can impede their ability to effectively engage in their routine tasks and consequently affect their overall productivity (Pattnaik & Jena, 2020). Remote employees often encounter reduced levels of engagement, diminished concentration, and a sense of isolation from their work and the organization due to their absence from the office and separation from colleagues (Laine, 2021; Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020).

While the idea of remote work may initially seem appealing, over time, employees may become disengaged, leading to decreased motivation and, consequently, reduced productivity. The decline in employee morale can have a significant negative impact on project performance. Productivity and efficiency are built upon a strong foundation of morale. Establishing a framework for remote employees to communicate effectively will enhance the enthusiasm and motivation of individuals who contribute to the growth of your organization. Positive morale significantly influences remote workers: as morale increases, the potential for higher-quality remote work also increases.

Due to these factors and other conditions, remote workers must possess a strong motivation to enhance their productivity. Virtual team-building activities such as online meetings, group discussions, casual get-togethers, and brainstorming sessions serve as sources of inspiration for fostering collaboration among team members. When a team member experiences a sense of worth and psychological security, their performance improves, and these actions strengthen the entire team by providing positive encouragement.
10.3 BEST PRACTICES FOR ENHANCING VIRTUAL TEAM MORALE

The morale of employees directly affects their ability to stay with the company, their level of performance, and the overall productivity of the organization. Virtual teams are an asset for businesses, but it is crucial to prioritize maintaining high worker morale to ensure long-term corporate success. This necessitates the adoption of best practices to boost morale in virtual teams, leading to improved performance. The researcher found the most effective methods for boosting morale in virtual teams, which are summarised in Table 2 based on the literature reviewed.

Figure 3
Best practices for enhancing virtual team morale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Best practices</th>
<th>Sub-inputs for best practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identify the right technology for communication</td>
<td>• Know the competencies of team members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Select the technology that best suits the competencies of virtual team members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Avoid imbalance in communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide clear roles and responsibilities</td>
<td>• Provide a clear agenda, objectives, goals, and key message.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Team tasks should be well-defined.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Ensure regular follow-up to track performance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Develop a culture of accountability and trust</td>
<td>• Build trust among distant workers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Having virtual team members meet high-quality and targeted outcomes fosters trust.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Communication behaviour, timely responses, open communication, and feedback all influence trust within virtual teams.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensure effective team collaboration</td>
<td>• Knowledge sharing enhances collaboration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Create high performance expectations.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Train virtual teams</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Manage distractions before and during virtual meetings.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Provide structured support</td>
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<tr>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>• Stimulate and inspire virtual team members by providing travel opportunities, e-gifts, certificates, e-postcards, inspirational quotes, online awards, etc.</td>
</tr>
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</table>

11 CONCLUSION

The study determined that the key factors for enhancing project performance in virtual teams are the adoption of technology, a focused environment, effective leadership, trust, communication, well-defined tasks, collaborative teamwork, and motivation. This study additionally discovered that to enhance the diminished morale prevalent in remote teams, it is possible to modify the optimal strategies employed by in-office teams to sustain a high level of team morale for virtual teams.
Currently, there is limited information regarding strategies that address challenges arising from external factors in virtual teams, such as ambient noise, disruptions caused by family members, inconvenient timing for project discussions, and so on. The study additionally demonstrated that the level of engagement and productivity in virtual teams is influenced by morale. Consequently, when morale is elevated, virtual teams exhibit optimal performance.

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