

# EXAMINING PROJECT MANAGERS' PRODUCTIVITY IN AN EMERGING VIRTUAL WORKPLACE POST COVID 19

Master of Science in Management

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# ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the COVID-19 pandemic's effects on project management, particularly in light of remote work. Project management has been significantly impacted by the widespread adoption of remote working practices by many organisations to ensure the continuity of business operations as a result of the pandemic. The study's goal is to investigate how productive project managers are in the post-COVID-19 virtual workplace, with a particular emphasis on Nigeria, where a lacklustre internet infrastructure may make it difficult for project managers to communicate and collaborate virtually.

The study's goals are to determine how project managers' working styles have changed since the virtual working system was implemented, to assess the effects of new systems put in place to ensure business continuity on project managers' productivity levels, to identify the advantages and difficulties that project managers face in the post-COVID-19 virtual workplace, and to suggest key metrics that would increase project managers' productivity.

Data collection and analysis for the study will be done using a case study methodology and thematic analysis. The results of this study can assist businesses in addressing productivity issues and project management in a virtual workplace. Project managers can gain knowledge from the study that will help them be more productive when working remotely.

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## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY:**

The outbreak of Covid-19 has compelled numerous organizations to adopt remote working arrangements to ensure uninterrupted business operations (Haleem et al., 2020), resulting in a significant impact on various professions, including project management (Gutierrez et al., 2021). Project management, which was traditionally regarded as a hands-on job that required physical presence, has undergone substantial changes in its work process due to the transition to remote working (Bucero, 2020). Previously assumed to necessitate physical presence in an office environment, collaboration, coordination, and communication among team members are now achievable through virtual platforms (Kim & Park, 2020).

Although the idea of a virtual workplace is not brand-new, the COVID-19 pandemic has boosted its acceptance (Bassellier & Benbasat, 2004). Employees can work remotely in a virtual setting using technology to communicate and cooperate (Alshamsi et al., 2020). Work can be managed online, and virtual teams can be formed (Zhu et al., 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic has sped up the trend of the virtual workplace, which has been on the increase recently (Bakker, 2020). Project managers face difficulties as a result of the growing virtual workplace, such as the requirement to assess productivity worldwide, in Africa, and particularly in Nigeria because of the country's weak internet infrastructure which might make virtual communication as well as collaboration difficult for project managers in Nigeria (Munene, 2022).

The COVID-19 epidemic has had a global impact, forcing many firms to implement remote work practices, making it difficult for project managers to maintain productivity. African industries have also been affected as well, with some organizations lacking the infrastructure required to monitor project manager productivity. Despite this, several Nigerian organizations have employed remote work tactics to remain competitive, although measuring productivity remains difficult owing to infrastructural constraints. Nonetheless, numerous companies have used productivity-boosting strategies to increase project manager performance. Overall, the epidemic has highlighted the importance of organizations throughout the world adopting creative techniques to manage projects in a virtual workplace and addressing productivity challenges. (Balogun et al., 2021). According to De Vries and Sohal (2021), project managers face challenges in managing remote workers because they cannot physically observe their employees and must rely on tools and software to monitor productivity. The study, therefore, recommended the use of technology-based tools for performance management information to be productive in their job. Doroudi, Beheshti, and Zadeh (2021) identified effective communication and coordination as critical success factors for remote project management. Gupta, Singh, and Singh (2021) discovered that virtual team collaboration was essential for project success and recommended the use of collaborative tools and platforms to promote communication.

Additionally, the research was motivated by the author's experience as a project manager. Before the pandemic, remote working was only permitted under exceptional circumstances and project management was viewed as a physically demanding position. (Kim & Park, 2020).

This research aims to look into project managers' productivity in the post-Covid-19 virtual workplace. Productivity is the first idea that applies to this research. Productivity is a gauge of a project manager's effectiveness in completing tasks on schedule and within price. Productivity in a virtual workplace can be impacted by things like dialogue, coordination, and technology accessibility. Regardless of the sector, productivity is the main focus of every company because it is used to calculate an organization's return on investment. Project managers' productivity is determined by the performance levels of the team members that they oversee, the calibre of the project outcomes, and the degree of employee involvement within those teams. (Kalliamvakou et al., 2019). In their study of US workers' productivity fell as a result of companies adopting remote working as a permanent system and, in some instances, requiring employees to work longer hours.

The case study in this study is on Project Managers in Nigeria who operate remotely for companies both within and outside of Nigeria. Saunders et al. (2019) posit that the case study approach aids the researcher in gaining a thorough grasp of the research context while also allowing for a flexible collection of data methods that may include interviews, surveys, and observation. The research will look at how project managers' work habits have changed as a

result of virtual work, as well as the new systems put in place to ensure work continuity and how these systems have impacted their productivity levels. 2020 (Bucero).

The data will be analyzed using thematic analysis, which is a qualitative data analysis method that includes searching through data collection to discover, study, and analyze common themes and identify patterns. (Braun and Clarke 2006). The data will be concerning the study goals to provide insights into the Project manager. Finally, the research will make necessary recommendations to improve remote project managers' productivity and effectiveness in the organization.

## **1.2** AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

This study aims to examine project managers' productivity in the emerging virtual workplace post-Covid-19.

The objectives of the study include the following:

- To assess the degree to which project managers' working habits have changed since the virtual working system was implemented.
- To assess how the new systems implemented to guarantee business continuity have impacted project managers' productivity levels.
- To determine the benefits and challenges encountered by project managers in the emerging virtual workplace post-Covid-19.
- To suggest key metrics that would help improve project managers' productivity levels and operational efficiency working remotely.

## **1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS:**

This research seeks to answer the following questions:

- What are the changes in working habits among project managers since the implementation of virtual working systems, and how have these changes affected their productivity levels?
- How have the new systems implemented to ensure business continuity impacted the productivity levels of project managers, and what are the key challenges encountered?

- What are the benefits and challenges faced by project managers in the emerging virtual workplace post-COVID-19, and how can these challenges be addressed to enhance productivity levels?
- What key metrics can be suggested to improve project managers' productivity levels and operational efficiency in a remote work setting, and how effective are these metrics in enhancing project management?

## **1.4 RESEARCH PROBLEM:**

The Covid-19 epidemic has changed how businesses function, which has had an impact on project management. The project management sector has had to adapt due to the remote work process, which was previously thought to be impractical given the nature of the position. It was once believed that since the role of project manager requires team member coordination, it necessitated physical presence in an office environment. Because of the abrupt shift to virtual work, organizations and project managers now face new challenges in ensuring operational efficiency. Therefore, this research aims to explore the productivity levels of project managers in the emerging virtual workplace post-Covid-19.

## **1.5 OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF TERMS:**

**Remote work:** Work that is completed remotely—typically from a home office or another location—instead of in a workplace setting.

**Project management:** Planning, organizing, and managing resources to accomplish specified objectives within a predetermined timeframe.

## Virtual workplace

This describes a work environment where employees can perform their duties offline via technological tools like computers, the Internet, and telecommunications systems.

## Productivity

Productivity is the ratio of output to input by a company or an individual over a predetermined time frame.

## Remote working

This refers to the practice of using a work-from-home arrangement approved by the organization for the sole purpose of work and free from any other obligations.

ons, such as illness.

## **Project managers**

This is a term used to describe people who are in charge of organizing, carrying out, and wrapping up projects within an organization. This includes leading project teams and stakeholders and completing projects on schedule, on budget, and by the project's objectives.

# 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly changed how individuals do their jobs. Many organizations have been forced to embrace virtual work environments as governments all over the world-imposed lockdowns and travel restrictions. Organizations are now faced with the challenge of measuring the productivity of their project managers in this emerging virtual workplace, which has required project managers to adapt to these new working circumstances.

This chapter focused on a thorough analysis of the literature on measuring project managers' output in the post-COVID-19 virtual workplace. The study was conducted in three different ways: conceptually; theoretically; and empirically. After the reviews, there was a summary and a conceptual model that illustrated the different gaps in the study.

## 2.1 Productivity in the Virtual Workplace

In every workplace, productivity is a crucial indicator of performance; in a virtual workplace, it is much more crucial (Siziba & Chimboza, 2021). The timely and cost-effective completion of projects is the responsibility of project managers, and the success of the project is significantly influenced by their productivity. Since project managers can no longer be observed in person, the virtual workplace has introduced new difficulties for measuring their productivity. However, a variety of methods and technologies can be utilized to evaluate productivity in a virtual office setting. (Kerzner, 2017).

Project management software is one of the most important instruments used to measure productivity in a virtual workplace, therefore Project managers can track a project's progress and keep an eye on team members' performance. Project managers can take corrective action by using this software to find any problems or errors in the project workflow. Project management software, according to research by Liu et al. (2018), is a crucial tool for measuring productivity in a virtual workplace since it gives project managers access to up-to-date information on the status of their teams' work in real-time.

Software for tracking time is another resource that can be utilized for measuring productivity in a virtual workplace. Raziq et al. (2017) Project managers can track the amount of time spent on particular tasks and pinpoint any time-consuming activities by using time monitoring software. The project workflow can be optimized using this data, and team members' productivity can be ensured. Time tracking software helped assess productivity in the virtual office, according to studies conducted by Raziq et al. (2017) since it gave precise data on the time spent on particular tasks.

#### 2.2 The Virtual Workplace Post-COVID-19

Due to the COVID-19 epidemic, firms have been forced to move to a virtual workplace, which has created additional difficulties in measuring the project manager's productivity. Following COVID-19, there has been a rise in the use of remote working and online communications services like video conferencing. Although some of the technology described was already in use before the recent pandemic, their use has expanded dramatically due to changes to remote work. These tools have produced fresh obstacles, which include issues related to communication, collaboration, and examining project manager productivity in a virtual environment. According to Gao et al. (2020), remote work during the pandemic has resulted in reduced productivity due to challenges with communication, coordination, and technical infrastructure. Similarly, a study by Buffer (2020) stated that 20% of remote employees rated collaboration and communication as the most difficult aspect of remote work.

The absence of face-to-face interaction makes it difficult to examine project manager productivity in the post-COVID-19 virtual workplace because it is impossible to monitor an individual's nonverbal communication and body language in a virtual context, which may give significant insight into their productivity, virtual surveillance is more difficult. According to research by Lin et al. (2020), project managers in the post-COVID-19 virtual workplace had considerable challenges since it was difficult to establish communication with team members and keep track of their performance when there was no face-to-face connection. Before the COVID-19 epidemic, project managers' performance and progress were primarily tracked by inperson observations and face-to-face interactions. However, as the workplace has gotten increasingly virtual, measuring performance has become more complex. The performance of project managers is now measured through digital communication methods such as video conferencing, screen sharing, and project management software. These techniques enable remote task monitoring, but it can be difficult to assess performance without the nonverbal evidence and interpersonal interactions that occur with in-person observation.

The requirement for new communication skills makes assessing project manager productivity in the virtual workplace post-COVID-19 a problem, (Lee 2020). Project managers must rely on online communication tools like video conferencing and instant messaging to communicate with their team members in a virtual office. Project managers must adjust to these new communication techniques to be effective because these tools require different communication skills than face-to-face interaction. Communication in virtual settings differs from communication in face-to-face encounters, according to research (Kock, 2015). Nonverbal clues such as body language and facial emotions, for example, are lacking in virtual communication, making it harder to discern the intended meaning of a message (Kock, 2015). Furthermore, the lack of social context in virtual environments might lead to communication mistakes and misinterpretations (Kock, 2015). As a result, to be effective in the post-COVID-19 virtual workplace, project managers must adapt to these new communication approaches.

Project managers in the post-COVID-19 virtual workplace have to learn new communication skills to be successful, including active listening and good written communication, according to research by van der Meijden et al. (2020). Before COVID-19, project managers depended mostly on face-to-face communication and cooperation, which allowed for a more direct and quick exchange of ideas and feedback. However, in the post-COVID-19 virtual workplace, project managers must now adjust to the use of remote communication and collaboration tools, which necessitate different communication skills such as active listening, clear and concise written communication, and the ability to communicate effectively through technology.

## 2.3 COVID-19 AND THE MOVE TO REMOTE WORKING

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a major effect on the world, changing how work is done in various industries as well as on health, business, and economic disruptions. The pandemic situation has made remote working a common option, but it has its own set of difficulties. According to Nickson and Siddons (2012), remote working is the act of using a legitimate work-from-home system for business purposes only, free from any other responsibilities like a sickness. They emphasized that the primary difficulties faced by remote workers are monitoring, adaptation, and institutional infrastructure and that productivity can be maintained in a virtual workplace by enforcing set standards that regulate employee behaviour and output.

However, Thorstensson (2021) claimed that because the majority of employees lacked previous remote working experience before the pandemic, the abrupt shift to virtual working has negatively impacted employee productivity and well-being. Therefore, it's crucial to ascertain whether and how much remote work affects employee output.

## 2.4 CONCEPT OF PRODUCTIVITY IN PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Project administration is also a concept pertinent to this study. To accomplish particular goals and objectives, projects must be planned, carried out, and controlled. Project management can be difficult in a virtual workplace because it necessitates efficient coordination and communication when there isn't any face-to-face contact.

Although work process change is not a new occurrence, the pandemic forced an unusual and mandatory change in organizations all over the world. The transition was difficult for project managers because they had to manage teams, create strategies, establish and meet project goals, and assign tasks in addition to other duties that required close supervision.

Another concept that is pertinent to this research is the virtual workspace. An online work setting known as a virtual workplace allows employees to collaborate and speak with one another while working remotely. Project managers working in a virtual environment must be able to handle projects and interact with team members who are spread out across the globe.

Digital technology, effective communication lines, ongoing training, and effective management techniques can help virtual work succeed as a long-term system. (Vafin, 2021). Additionally, according to Borissova et al. (2020), remote working is advantageous and sustainable when enabled by information technology. They advised businesses to take advantage of the digital transformation to foster real-time collaboration among teams that are dispersed across various geographic locations.

## 2.5 THEORETICAL REVIEW

The goal-setting theory proposed by Locke and Latham in 2006 is one of the theories that will be used in this research. The goal-setting theory, which was created in their 1990 book "A Theory of Goal Setting & Task Performance," explains how setting specific, difficult objectives boosts performance. The theory contends that objectives have an impact on performance by focusing attention, energizing effort, boosting persistence, and encouraging the creation of strategies and action plans. The degree of performance rises with the goal's difficulty and specificity. The relationship between remote working arrangements and an increase or decrease in project managers' output levels can be better understood using the goal-setting theory.

An additional theoretical foundation that can be used for this research is the expectancy theory. According to this theory, which was put forth by Victor Vroom in 1964, people are motivated to act in a certain manner because they believe that doing so will result in desired outcomes. (Vroom, 1964). In the context of this research, project managers might be encouraged to work harder if they think their efforts will pay off with rewards like recognition, bonuses, or promotions. Project managers might be less driven to be effective, on the other hand, if they think their efforts won't produce fruitful results.

The expectancy theory has been used in several studies to analyze the connection between output and motivation. For instance, expectancy, instrumentality, and valence were found to be significant predictors of employee motivation and work satisfaction in a study by Hechanova, Alampay, and Franco (2013) of call centre agents in the Philippines. In the same way, Vidal-Salazar, Ros-Morente, and Céspedes-Lorente (2018) investigated the link between productivity and motivation in the hospitality sector and discovered that valence and expectancy were important indicators of employee motivation and performance.

The expectancy theory can be applied to this study's context to better understand how project managers' expectations for the results of their efforts can affect their drive to be effective while working remotely.

The Resource-Based View (RBV) theory is a different theoretical paradigm that is pertinent to this research. According to the RBV theory, (Barney, 1991). a firm's resources and capabilities play a crucial role in gaining a competitive edge. This theory stresses the value of a project manager's abilities and knowledge in achieving project success in the context of project management. The RBV theory contends that to increase project managers' productivity in a virtual workplace, companies must invest in their skill and knowledge development. This research additionally makes use of the Transaction Cost Economics Theory. According to TCE theory, people's and groups' transaction costs may affect how they behave. This theory, when applied to project management, contends that the expense of collaboration and communication may have an impact on project managers' output in a virtual setting. The TCE theory emphasizes the need for businesses to spend money on technology that can help project team members communicate and coordinate.

The Social Exchange Theory is the final theoretical framework that is pertinent to this research. (SET). According to SET, social interactions play a significant role in determining an individual's conduct. According to SET, project managers' interactions with team members and stakeholders can affect their productivity in the framework of project management. This theory places a strong emphasis on the value of creating and sustaining social bonds among project team members, even in a remote work environment.

#### 2.5.1 Relevance of Theoretical

The theories reviewed above are not meant to be examined as individual lenses through which to analyse the results of the study. Rather, they inform the study design and approach by providing a theoretical foundation for understanding the relationships between variables and informing the research questions. For instance, the goal-setting theory informs the research question of whether setting specific, difficult objectives for remote project managers leads to increased performance. The expectancy theory informs the research question of whether project managers' expectations for the results of their efforts affect their drive to be effective while working remotely. The RBV theory informs the research question of whether investing in remote project managers' skill and knowledge development leads to increased productivity. The TCE theory informs the research question of how the cost of collaboration and communication affects remote project managers' output. Finally, the SET theory informs the research question of how social interactions among remote project team members and stakeholders affect project managers' productivity.

#### 2.6 EMPIRICAL REVIEW

In the empirical review, studies assessing project managers' productivity in a virtual workplace following COVID-19 will be analyzed. The empirical review analysis starts with Vignesh and

Uma's research, which suggests that virtual project management enhances project performance if project managers coordinate and manage team member communication. However, the study ignores team members' perspectives, which might limit the study's findings. Other studies, such as Ghosal et al. (2021), Kumar and Rautela (2021), Rajabi and Khodabandehloo (2021), Azizi and Piryaei (2021), and Khoury and Eid (2021), discuss the factors influencing project managers' productivity in virtual settings, such as efficient communication, technology tools, leadership, virtual team-building activities, and emotional intelligence. Additionally, research by Hussain et al. (2021) and Shafique et al. (2021) examine how project managers' work-life balance and cultural diversity affect their productivity in a virtual workplace. Lin et al. (2020) highlight the difficulties that project managers face when assessing the effectiveness of their remote team members and the need for new communication techniques. Finally, Zhang et al. (2021) found that project management software is a useful tool for project managers to efficiently manage their teams in the virtual workplace. The studies also point out the difficulties in assessing project manager performance in the post-COVID-19 virtual workplace. The absence of face-to-face communication is a serious problem because it is challenging to appropriately assess each team member's performance. Additionally, project managers must become accustomed to new forms of communication like video conferencing and instant messaging, which call for different communication abilities than face-to-face interactions.

When evaluating the generalizability and applicability of the study's findings, it is important to take into consideration their limitations, which include small sample sizes and a narrow emphasis on particular factors. To fully understand the complex dynamics of virtual project management and the variables that affect productivity, more study is required. This study intends to fill that gap by examining the experiences of project managers in Nigeria who have been working remotely since the outbreak. The qualitative methodology of in-depth interviews with a limited number of participants provides for a more thorough and nuanced understanding of the difficulties and possibilities faced by project managers in this situation.

Furthermore, while there may be certain similarities across different settings, it is critical to remember that each virtual workplace is unique and can encounter distinctive problems that

are not represented in wider research. As a result, the study's emphasis on a specific set of project managers in Nigeria will give useful insights into the factors that impact productivity in that environment.

Finally, this study intends to add to the literature on virtual project management by providing project managers with practical advice for improving productivity and overall organizational performance in a post-COVID-19 virtual workplace.

#### 2.7 SUMMARY

With the advent of the virtual workplace following COVID-19, this article has offered a critical analysis of the literature on measuring project managers' productivity. The theoretical study emphasized how crucial it is to spend money on project managers' technology, social networks, and knowledgebase. Project management, productivity, and virtual workplace were all emphasized in the conceptual assessment. The empirical review highlighted the crucial elements, such as efficient coordination and communication, technology, time and priority management, competent leadership, and training, that have an influence on project managers' productivity in a virtual workplace post-COVID-19. To increase project team members' productivity in a virtual workplace, organizations must engage in project managers' skill and knowledge development, as well as in the technology and training they need. They also need to foster social relationships within project teams. Based on the literature review, the below literature gaps were identified.

#### 2.8 LITERATURE GAP

While the study on the effects of COVID-19 on the virtual workplace and remote work is expanding, there is little information on how to examine project managers' productivity in the post-COVID-19 virtual workplace. More research is required to examine the difficulties and possibilities for assessing the productivity of project managers in this setting. To address this gap, this study aims to apply a qualitative data analysis approach and will collect data from project managers in Nigeria who operate remotely in firms both within and outside of Nigeria using semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis will be utilized to discover patterns, trends, and linkages in the data and give insights on how to examine the project manager's productivity. The study's findings may help to define best practices and techniques for monitoring and examining project managers' productivity in a virtual workplace, resulting in better project outcomes and overall organizational performance. This study could contribute to the establishment of essential measures that would assist increase project managers' productivity levels and operational efficiency while working remotely by evaluating the experiences of project managers in the virtual workplace.

There is little empirical research on how the productivity of project managers relates to remote work: There are some empirical studies on the productivity of workers in the virtual workplace, but more empirical research is needed on the productivity of project supervisors in particular. These studies can aid businesses in their efforts to comprehend the effects of remote work on project managers' productivity and in the creation of plans for boosting it in the virtual workplace.

## 2.9 JUSTIFICATION OF METHODOLOGY

The next section will cover how a qualitative data analysis (QDA) methodology will be used to accomplish the study objectives. QDA is a process that includes organizing, analyzing, and interpreting qualitative data, which is non-numerical data. (Bazeley, 2018). The methodology mentioned in this statement is adequate for attaining the study objectives because it entails employing qualitative data analysis to analyze the experiences and views of project managers who operate remotely in Nigeria. Qualitative research is well-suited to studying complex social phenomena as well as how individuals perceive and make sense of their facts, which is critical for reaching the study objectives.

This study's research tool will be a semi-structured interview guide comprised of open-ended questions intended to generate comprehensive answers from Project Managers in Nigeria who work remotely in organizations both within and outside of Nigeria. The use of semi-structured interviews as a research technique is acceptable since it allows the researchers to collect extensive and detailed information on project managers' experiences. Open-ended questions allow interviewers to express their views and opinions, ensuring that all important information is collected. Furthermore, conducting interviews with project managers from both Nigerian and non-Nigerian firms offers a thorough knowledge of the virtual workplace's impact on project managers' productivity levels.

In this research, thematic analysis will be used as the appropriate technique for data analysis. Thematic analysis is a qualitative data analysis method that identifies patterns, trends, and connections in data, which can then be used to provide insights and suggestions. (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The thematic analysis aims to find significant or interesting themes or patterns in data and use these themes to answer research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2013). It entails more than just summarizing the data; it also entails analyzing and making meaning of it. Thematic analysis is appropriate for data analysis because it helps researchers identify patterns and themes within data that are important for the research objectives. The goal of thematic analysis is to find significance and discover patterns that would be difficult to identify using conventional data analysis methods. Researchers can give important insights and ideas for improving project managers' productivity and operational efficiency when working remotely by finding patterns and trends in the data.

# 3.0 METHODOLOGY

This research Methodology will be structured like the research onion proposed by famous author Saunders et al. (2019), as seen in the figure below.

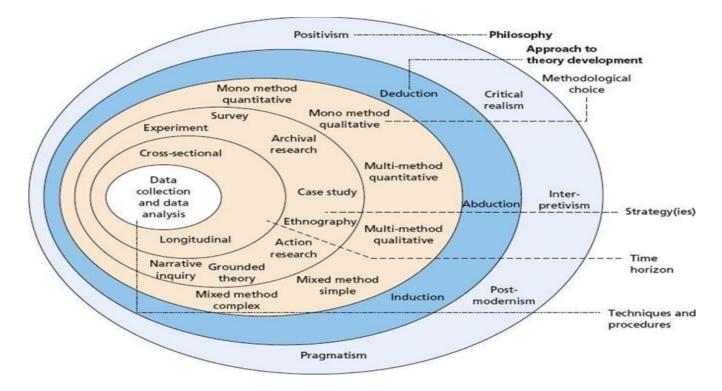


FIG 1.1: Proposal Research Onion Source: Adapted from (Saunders *et al.*, 2019)

## 3.1 RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY

Philosophy is an individual's point of view and method of thinking about the genesis and development of knowledge. (Saunders, Thornhill and Lewis, 2003). According to Saunders et al. (2009), research philosophy is influenced by how a researcher feels about knowledge development and will influence how the researcher conducts the study. We can alternatively use philosophy for paradigm in this chapter because the paradigm is a vague term with no clear definition. (Ellis and Crookes, 2006).

According to Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, and Jackson, philosophical views are important in a study because they help determine the research design, the type of data required, how it will be gathered and evaluated, and how this will provide answers to the research questions. (2008). It assists the researcher in identifying the best research design for a particular project. Finally, if

necessary, they assist the researcher in producing designs that are not directly related to the researcher's speciality.

The collection of ideas and assumptions that support the research strategy and technique is referred to as research philosophy. The three major research philosophies are positivism, interpretivism, and critical realism. (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019). The interpretive research philosophy is used in this study. An interpretive research perspective emphasizes the subjective interpretation of social phenomena and attempts to understand how individuals interpret their experiences. This study is ideal for the interpretive research theory because it allows the researcher to investigate the viewpoints and experiences of remote Project Managers in Nigeria.

#### **3.2 RESEARCH STRATEGY**

A research strategy, according to Al-Ababneh (2020), is a plan outlining how the researcher wants to answer the research questions, achieve the objectives, and decide on the sources and methods of data collection. Qualitative data analysis (QDA) look at will be employed in this study to achieve the study goals. QDA is a process that involves organizing, analyzing, and interpreting qualitative (non-numerical) data. (Bazeley, 2018). The research technique for this research would be a semi-structured interview guide comprising open-ended questions designed to elicit complete responses from Project Managers working remotely in firms both inside and outside of Nigeria.

#### **3.3 RESEARCH APPROACH**

According to research theories, there are two basic approaches to doing research: inductive methods and deductive methods.

#### 3.3.1 The Inductive Research Approach

According to Bryman (2016), it comprises building concepts and theories through data analysis and observation, which is widely used in qualitative research, which acquires data through interviewing respondents and collecting observations. The data is then examined for themes and patterns that could be utilized to build ideas and hypotheses regarding the research. According to Crowther and Lancaster, one of the key advantages of inductive research is its adaptability. (2008). In terms of sample size and data type, inductive research provides flexibility and does not need the formation of prior notions or assumptions.

## 3.3.2 The Deductive Method of Research

Deductive research begins with a broad theory and then tests it against relevant evidence. (Bryman, 2016). The researcher does establish a hypothesis in line with a theory, collects data to test the hypothesis, and then analyzes the hypothesis to determine if it confirms or refutes the theory in this manner. Deductive research does not apply to this study. The deductive research method provides a distinct benefit. It may evaluate the viability of theories, which can help researchers better understand occurrences. However, one possible drawback of this strategy is that it may be difficult to identify data relevant to the research.

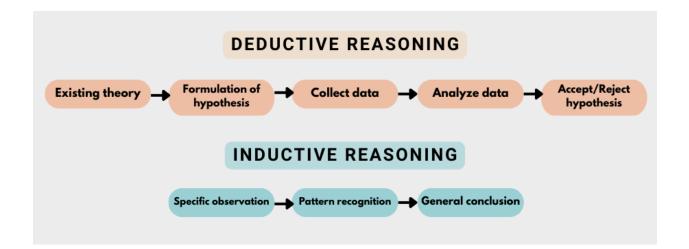


Figure 2. Deductive and inductive research approach

This study utilizes an inductive research technique. The inductive technique includes studying the data to uncover patterns and themes, which are then utilized to build ideas and explanations. This method is excellent for delving into difficult topics in a real-world setting.

## 3.4 INSTRUMENT OF DATA COLLECTION

A semi-structured interview guide will be utilized to collect data for this project. The interview guide will include open-ended questions aimed at eliciting detailed responses from participants. The researcher will have the ability able to collect rich and comprehensive data from the

participants by using a semi-structured interview guide. The guide to interviews will be pretested to verify that it produces the required data.

## 3.5 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

In every research project, validity and reliability are critical concerns. (Gallagher et al., 2019). The extent to which a research study evaluates what it requires to measure is referred to as its validity. (Trochim, 2021). The consistency of the study findings is referred to as reliability. (Mokkink et al., 2010). Various procedures will be taken by the researcher to ensure the credibility and dependability of the data obtained. First, the interview guide will be pretested to confirm its effectiveness in extracting the necessary information. (Babbie & Mouton, 2021). Second, the researcher will do member checks to verify that the participants' perspectives are appropriately reflected. (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Finally, the researcher will employ triangulation to validate the findings by comparing them to other data sources. (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

## 3.6 ACCESS AND ETHICAL ISSUES

The concept that drives the pursuit of scientific knowledge is characterized as research ethics. The researcher recognizes the need to assess the study's ethical acceptability because it will entail sensitive personal and business information that might influence the lives and financial status of many organizations.

- To get access to the subjects, the researcher will seek ethical permission from the appropriate institution.
- Before the interview, the researcher will provide consent papers to the participants, and they will be able to select whether or not they want the session recorded, taking into account the sensitive material that will be disclosed.
- The participants would be made to understand the goal of the research, which is to offer remote-working PMs information on the service levels anticipated by employers, as well as the required input needed to accomplish the desired productive output of a remote-working PM.
- The researcher will also guarantee that the participant's data is protected by EU GDPR rules. (Gdpr-info.eu, 2016).

• The researcher will also guarantee proper citation of all academic and non-academic materials utilized to avoid plagiarism.

## 3.7 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHOD

The exploratory and interpretative technique of qualitative research entails understanding and characterizing events using narrative information, research, and experiences. (Creswell, 2014). This method seeks to investigate the complexities and depth of human feelings and behaviour. Qualitative research is usually performed in natural settings and using non-statistical data analysis techniques such as content analysis and discourse analysis. (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative research enables the discovery of fresh ideas by providing a deep and comprehensive comprehension of the study issue. One of the major drawbacks of qualitative research is that the results may not be generalizable to broader groups. Furthermore, qualitative research is frequently criticized for lacking rigour and impartiality, because data interpretation is impacted by the researcher's subjectivity and prejudice. (Creswell, 2014).

As a result, the philosophical assumption of the qualitative research approach states that truth is located in dynamic interactions between the two, rather than in an objective outside world or a subjective knower's mind. (Creswell and Poth 2018). Truth, according to social constructionists, is a nebulous concept that cannot be defined objectively. Furthermore, it appears that reality is not a solid entity. Individuals and groups will instead build their perceptions of reality based on their distinct financial, political, and cultural backgrounds and experiences. As a result, rather than determining which version is closer to the truth, the researcher should carefully document and characterize all of them. (Clarke and Dawson, 1999).

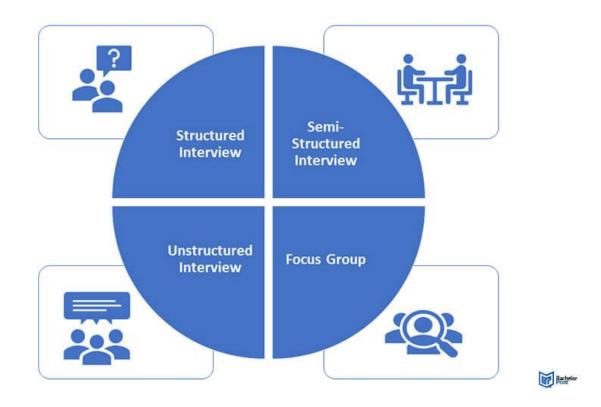
It is worth noting that proponents of the qualitative research technique base their methodological position on the notion that social and natural phenomena are fundamentally separate. As a result, the method employed to research natural phenomena may not be suitable for studying social phenomena. As a result, qualitative research takes an inductive approach to study, in which information is gathered to draw broad generalizations from observable facts rather than testing hypotheses. (Creswell, 2007, 2009).

Therefore, the qualitative research method was used for this study. As a result, the purpose of this study is to investigate project managers' productivity levels in the evolving virtual workplace post-Covid-19.

## 3.8 METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION

## 3.8.1 INTERVIEW

Interviews are methods of gathering information from people by asking questions and listening to their responses. It is a question-and-answer session in which an interviewer asks questions, and the interviewee responds. It might be a two-way interview, a one-on-one interview, or an interview with more than one participant. (Bhat, 2023).



## 3.8.2 Types of Interviews in Research

## Figure 3, Types of Research Interview

A researcher must conduct interviews with a group of participants at a point in the research when information can only be obtained by meeting and personally connecting with a portion of a target audience. Researchers can direct their subjects during interviews to obtain the desired level of feedback.

- Structured interviews,
- Semi-Structured Interviews,
- Unstructured Interviews, and
- Focus group interviews.

## 3.8.3 Structured Interview

Structured interviews are the most common type of interview. They are defined as research instruments that work in a very rigorous manner and provide very little space for interview prompting to collect and assess data. Pre-set Standardized questions are presented, and the process is primarily quantitative. The interview questions are pre-planned depending on the precise information required. (Bhat, 2023)

## 3.8.4 Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews provide the researcher with a lot of latitudes to extract information from the respondents while still following the basic interview framework. Even though it is a guided session, the interviewees allow the researchers a lot of leeway. The presence of structure in this form of research interview assures the researcher that more interview rounds are not required. (Bhat, 2023).

## 3.8.5 Unstructured Interviews

It stands in stark contrast to organized talks. It is an unorganized discussion. This type of conversation is also known as an informal interview. In this situation, the interviewer has already decided on the questions they will ask. Typically, questions are presented and answered throughout the interview. These questions may change depending on the candidate's replies. Unstructured interviews lack any specific norms or techniques. (Bhat, 2023).

According to Bazeley, P. (2018), field studies with thorough interviews should be employed for doing exploratory research, which is what this study accomplishes. When people were able to explain a topic in-depth and in detail, interviews were allowed depending on practitioners' experience without injecting prejudice.

## 3.8.6 Focus Group Interviews

A focus group interview, according to Krueger and Casey (2014), is a strategy used in qualitative research to gain in-depth thoughts and opinions about a certain topic or issue from a small group of people. A moderator guides a conversation among the participants during the interview, using open-ended questions to encourage them to express their ideas, opinions, and experiences about the issue at hand.

Focus group interviews can be held in a variety of contexts, such as in person, over the phone, or online. (Krueger & Casey, 2014). Participants are often chosen based on certain characteristics such as age, gender, career, or lifestyle to ensure that the group reflects a diverse range of viewpoints and experiences on the issue.

According to Krueger and Casey (2014), focus group interviews may be a beneficial technique for market research, product development, and customer satisfaction evaluation since they give significant insights into the requirements, desires, and preferences of a specific target population. They may also be used in educational research, social science, and public policy to acquire input and ideas from a varied set of stakeholders.

During interviews, respondents provided in-depth and different definitions of phenomena. In this study, semi-structured interviews will be employed.

## **3.9 SOURCES OF DATA**

The major source of data for this study will be approximately six (6) remote Project Managers in Nigeria who work for firms both inside and outside of the nation.

## 3.9.1 Instrument of Data Collection

A semi-structured interview guide will be the tool utilized to collect data for this project. The interview guide will include open-ended questions meant to elicit detailed responses from the six (6) participants. The researcher will be able to collect rich and thorough information from the participants by using a semi-structured interview guide. The interview guide will be pretested to verify that it extracts the necessary information.

#### 3.10 DATA ANALYSIS

To respond to the research questions and support the study's basic claim, the gathered data must be interpreted and given meaning. Because raw data is difficult to understand, the need for analysis and interpretation develops. To do this and respond to the study objectives, the data must first be categorized, organized, revised, and summarized into understandable and interpretable formats. (Kerlinger and Lee, 2000).

Because this research gathered qualitative information through interviews, a qualitative analysis is required. In the next parts, we discuss this type of data analysis and how it was carried out in this study.

#### 3.11 ANALYZING QUALITATIVE INFORMATION

In essence, qualitative data analysis is the dissection of data to discover its basic elements and how they interact. (Charmaz, 2014). According to Saldana, J. (2016), the essence of qualitative data analysis is to examine a collection of field notes that have been either transcribed or synthesized and meaningfully deconstruct them while keeping the links between the components. Because this study obtained qualitative data through interviews and documentary analysis, a qualitative analysis is required. This type of data analysis and how it was done in this study are detailed in the following sections.

## 3.12 QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF DATA AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

Essentially, qualitative data analysis means dismantling the data to understand its pieces and their relationships. (Charmaz, 2014). According to Saldana, J., the content of analysis is to examine a collection of field notes that have been transcribed or synthesized and properly deconstruct them while keeping the links between the pieces. (2016). According to Creswell (2009), regardless of the qualitative approach utilized, four phases are always followed when interpreting qualitative data, even though the processes are not necessarily linear. These are mentioned below:

- Data preparation and organization for analysis (including interview data transcription, field notes transcription, scanning documents and other visual images)
- Reading the data repeatedly to gain a general understanding of the data.

- Contextualizing and creating connections between the themes to identify how they relate to one another in the narrative.
- Interpretation, which explains the information at hand. Thematic analysis and qualitative content analysis are two qualitative data analysis procedures often employed by researchers using various qualitative research methodologies.

## 3.12.1 Thematic Analysis

According to Bryman (2008), the thematic analysis includes "searching out the underlying themes in the materials being analyzed." This data analysis approach differs from quantitative content analysis, which stresses word frequency count. (Stemler, 2001).

According to Hsieh and Shannon, thematic analysis is "a research method for interpreting the subjective nature of the subject matter of textual information via the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns." (2005). The thematic analysis focuses on detecting, evaluating, and documenting patterns in data. Themes are patterns discovered in various data sets that are relevant to the description of an event and may be tied to a specific research topic.

The method of content analysis is used to analyze written, spoken, or visual communication messages. (Neuendorf, K. A. 2016). It is also known as a document analysis technique and a research approach for generating reliable inferences from data about their context to convey knowledge, new perspectives, a representation of the facts, and a meaningful action plan.

Semi-structured interviews will be utilized in the study to gather data from the six (6) Remote PMs in Nigeria who work for organizations both inside and outside of Nigeria, and Thematic Analysis will be used to investigate the trend and pattern after the interviews have been transcribed.

In all parts of research, including the interview process, ethical issues are critical. As a result, research interviews entail a direct connection with people. Ethical issues are critical to ensuring participants' safety, privacy, and dignity. (Barrow et al 2022). He went on to say that ethical considerations are required to limit harm and preserve the rights of participants during the study interview process.

Informed consent is a major ethical concern during the study interview procedure. Before deciding to engage in a research project, participants are given all relevant information about it. This is known as informed consent. This technique assures that participants understand the study's aims, procedures, and any potential dangers. According to Robson (2016), obtaining informed consent is critical to ensuring that participants can choose whether or not to engage in the study on their own.

Another critical ethical consideration throughout the interview process is maintaining confidentiality and privacy. Researchers must ensure that only the study team has access to participant responses and personal data. (Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013). This is critical to protect participants from harm or privacy breaches if their information is shared without their authorization.

Furthermore, ethical concerns include conducting interviews with participants who are treated with dignity and respect. Researchers must use caution to avoid asking unpleasant or inappropriate questions or responding in a way that might make participants feel uncomfortable. (Creswell, 2014). According to Coughlan et al., researchers must be conscious of participants' emotional and cultural needs and ensure that they are not harmed or exploited when engaging in research interviews. (2013).

#### 3.13 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The methodology that will be employed in this study has been thoroughly addressed in this chapter. It has highlighted the research strategy, research philosophy, data sources, data collecting instruments, validity and reliability, access and ethical problems, data analysis, research design, and research technique. Thematic analysis will be employed as a suitable approach for data analysis. The case study method is used in this study to investigate the experiences of 6 remote Project Managers in Nigeria who work for firms both inside and outside the nation. The next chapter will present the study's results and findings.

# 4.0 PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF THE RESULT

This chapter presents and analyses the result of the semi-structured interview. The data was collected by conducting five semi-structured interviews with five respondents with the profile below. To ensure that the inclusion criteria were adhered to both male and female respondents were selected. These respondents have had experience working in a virtual team and a physical team.

The interview was conducted using a video conference tool called Google Meet. After every interview, the recorded audio was downloaded and transcribed into a text format using Fireflies AI. The Fireflies AI is software with inbuilt speech recognition technology that helps convert spoken words into written text. The transcript was properly read, and patterns and themes were identified to know the exact response from the respondent in other to make an informed decision. The respondent helped identify key issues associated with working in a virtual team, the advantage of virtual teams and how they feel productivity can be measured in a virtual team. Below is the profile of the respondent.

NAME	AGE	SEX	COMPANY	POSITION
Р	32	male	eCore Services Limited	Project Manager
С	30	Female	eCore Services Limited	Project Manager
s	35	Male	eCore Services Limited	Project Manager
v	45	Male	Crowdbotics	Technical Project Manager
т	30	Female	Crowdbotics	Team Lead/Project Manager

## 4.1 Background of Respondent and their company

It is necessary to explain the background of the respondent company to get an insight into their activities and to determine if the company is suitable for the context of the study. Five

Respondents from two companies were interviewed. Three were staff of eCore Service Limited and two were staff of Crowdbotics. Below is a brief description of both companies.

#### 4.1.1 Crowdbotics

In 2017, Kulkarni established Crowdbotics after the launch of Lead Genius, a sales lead discovery tool that utilised artificial intelligence to power its web crawling capabilities. Crowdbotics offers business-to-business software-as-a-service solutions. The objective of Crowdbotics was to establish a repository of code modules that could be reused to optimise the process of software planning and deployment. They enable the conversion of conceptualised ideas into operational code for diverse professional domains. The company analyses a vast collection of production-grade software applications to ascertain the optimal components and procedures for each project.

Crowdbotics is responsible for overseeing the project's infrastructure, implementation, upkeep, operation, monitoring, and security. The platform offered by Crowdbotics facilitates the expeditious development of applications by users with varying levels of technical proficiency. It facilitates the integration of numerous pre-existing code packages into mobile or web applications without requiring scripting, thereby providing clients with a streamlined approach to the process. These items are widely utilised and easily accessible. The ability of Crowdbotics to transform the design files of their clients into operational products is remarkable, in addition to their punctuality (Crowdbotics, 2020). In 2023, a Series B funding round amounting to \$40 million was spearheaded by NEA, with the participation of Homebrew, JSV, Harrison Metal, and Cooley, as reported by Wiggers.

#### 4.1.2 eCore Service Limited

ECore is a company that provides outreach services in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA, where its headquarters are located (Signal Hire, 2020), with a staff strength of about 50 in numbers. ECore is a specialised firm offering dedicated remote teams for outsourced and non-outsourced projects, effectively managing project details over short or long-term durations. In 2020, eCore was founded to aid businesses in adapting their workforce strategies to tackle economic, competitive, and societal obstacles, such as those arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. The company's capacity to recruit a proficient remote workforce that can effectively contribute to achieving organisational objectives and expansion is a fundamental strength of advantage.

The organisation was established by a group of proficient managers, each with a wealth of experience exceeding three decades, facilitating the recruitment of highly skilled remote employees. The company is known especially in Remote Teams, Consulting, Data Management, Professional Services, Remote BDR Teams, Managed teams, Call Centres, Lead Generation, Data Enrichment, Data Validation, Outbound Calls, Telemarketing, Project Management, Hard to find data, Personalized Data, B2B data, Remote SDRs, Customer Service, Inbound Calls, App Development, Design, Mobile Applications, Web Applications, App Design, Scrum Team, Agile Project Management, Waterfall Project Management (Signal Hire, 2020). Various clients have attested to their proficiency over the years.

#### 4.1.3 The Productivity of the Project Manager

Project managers use their experience in project management to initiate, execute, and accomplish projects in a variety of businesses. They are the creators of some of the most brilliant modern goods, services, and procedures, from smartphone apps to the lavish structures of foreign cities.

Project managers possess a varied range of competencies that enable them to tackle each task with a distinct and tactical perspective. Primarily, they understand using their project management expertise to facilitate an entity's capacity to acquire knowledge, prosper, and develop alongside a project.

Project managers are equipped with various tools to evaluate project performance, such as timelines, deliverables, budgets, and quality standards. What methods can be employed to assess the performance of project managers? Which specific tool provides sufficient detail to offer meaningful feedback to both project managers and those who hire, assign, and promote them? Generally, the assessment of project management is based on the criteria of timely completion, adherence to budgetary constraints, and alignment with the intended objectives (Cochran, 2000). The proficiency with which a project manager executes a project is of paramount significance. The conventional approach to measuring success is inadequate as a result of the significant impact that each of the diverse project management skills can have on the quality of a project.

Incorporating measurement data from diverse stakeholders, beyond the immediate supervisor, offers a more comprehensive evaluation of the efficacy of a project manager. Indeed, this feedback holds greater significance for a project manager who oversees team members that are not under his direct supervision. The manager's authority is not derived from a hierarchical position, but rather from the refinement of their communication and leadership abilities (Cochran, 2000). The meaningful assessment of competencies provides insight into the actual worth of labour.

Judith Olney emphasized the significance of evaluating the proficiency of project managers in effectively implementing project management skills and capabilities in her article published in the October 1999 edition of PM Network. The exclusive means of acquiring such data are limited to either 360-degree assessments or behaviour event interviewing.

The term "360 feedback" pertains to obtaining a comprehensive and all-encompassing (360degree) perspective of a given situation. Data is collected from diverse individuals in the vicinity of the project manager, whose competencies are being evaluated. The most valuable feedback is obtained from individuals who closely collaborate with the project manager, including the supervisor, colleagues, subordinates, stakeholders, and other personnel in project support roles. The productivity of a project manager can be evaluated based on the overall success of their teams and the feedback provided by team members.

#### 4.2 Presentation of Result

The result will be presented under four themes that were identified in the recorded transcript they include Remote working experience and adjustments, Management of virtual teams, Productivity and engagement in a virtual workplace and the Future of project management in a virtual workplace.

## 4.2.1 The Remote Working Experience and Adjustment.

From the interview, it was discovered that every single one of the respondents had to adjust accordingly when working became virtual. Since most of them were managers, they had to first invest in technology to be able to meet up the current demand of managing a virtual team. In the words of Mr P "*The remote working thing after COVID-19 forced me to function in two roles* 

both as a leader and also as a manager. Because basically if we are working in an office setup, you would just be a manager because you see everything physically, you can direct everything physically. You can go to somebody's desk and be like, okay, this is what you need to work on, this is all you need to get done physically and you can see results physically. Right now, you really cannot do that as a remote manager because everybody is probably spread within different time zones". The manager further noted that his social life was affected, he had to get used to not sleepless nights and staying indoors most of the time. Lastly, he had to continuously communicate with his team to be on the same page as them.

A second respondent, Mr S, is disappointed at the fact that people see remote working as being lazy. Although she learnt so much as a manager, she has to deal with jobs coming in late which forced her to learn the tactics of not giving out the correct schedule of a job and rescheduling as fast as she can. Mrs C had to become intentional about scheduling in her words "I've been a lot more intentional with regards to scheduling. I have my schedule caught out for me. Time for exercise, time for family things, time for spouse, children and work time" while Mrs T sees remote working as an opportunity to pinpoint team members that aren't working because they won't often have the deliverables to submit and won't be close to colleagues to help them out. "It's really hard to work remotely for the people who are, I want to explain this very correctly, people who are used to working in offices and spend their time like two, 3 hours working and the rest 5 hours just drinking coffee and chitchatting with the other co-workers". So, while three out of the respondents think managing teams virtually is a whole lot of work that needs so much adjusting the other two see it as a good opportunity to checkmate their team members and are willing to adjust for this actual reason.

#### **Themes Highlight**

- Working in a virtual team requires investing in technology.
- It would affect scheduling a great deal.
- It makes working more flexible.
- It helps track the progress of work and team members.
- It requires so much communication.
- Certain barriers to productivity should be expected.

#### 4.2.2 Management of Virtual Teams

Managing a physical team and a virtual team is quite different. In a virtual team, team members need to be proficient at what they do else they won't meet up with deadlines. Unlike a physical team where it's easy for one team member to easily learn from another. Because the productivity of a manager depends on the team's success, managers must live up to their expectations because in the end the same checklist will be applied to measure their success. From this interview, managers gave insight into how they manage their teams and the challenges they often encounter while managing teams virtually. The first challenge identified by Mr P is managing cross-cultural teams. However, he has found a way around this and in his words, *"I make sure my team members are from the same geopolitical location, they have a similar cultural background. This helps them produce, the outcome at the same speed as having to work with somebody that I know they have a different outcome. So that's what I do. Because yes, you have the same cultural background, you are from the same region." Mrs T identified the problem of trust and not being able to know if team members are working. She said technology has helped her overcome this as she can use so much software for project management. Software like Click Up, Asana, Jira and Trail to monitor teams' work in real-time.* 

Management skills aren't static, they are continuously evolving. Traditional management skills would not yield the best result in a virtual team. When the respondents were asked if they got some sort of training for their role. Most of them emphasize that the difference was getting conversant with technology. Technology is the basic working tool in a virtual team and to be successful, a manager should know how to navigate the available technology. A respondent has this to say, "Every training we have as a project manager is inclined towards managing people either physically or remotely. I just did my first commerce training, and I completed the certification also. So, it's been certified. While most of 80% of whatever we taught, or the seminar was about managing deliverables and managing people". The training helps the managers understand how to manage cross-cultural teams, among other things.

Another important point raised by the respondent is making the team members personalize the project by appealing to their conscience. In managing a virtual team Mrs. S said that "she Has to make them feel ownership of whatever they are building or whatever they are working on. That

is to make them feel whatever they are working on is worthwhile. What they are working on is not just a project, but it's a product that they would also enjoy using."

Managing a virtual team requires motivation and incentives because they are not physically present. The respondents all said they motivate their teams as much as they can to get the desired result. Mrs C has these to say, "Motivation, incentives. What's the word to use for that now? Appreciation. Appreciating the team member, seeing what they are doing, noticing the team members that they're doing a good job when they're doing a good job, and of course, calling out what is not done, what is not being done". Rewarding hard workers can indirectly inspire others.

Overall, they all think managing virtual teams is easy if you are good with technology, a good communicator, know how to schedule and assign tasks, and know how to explore not just the professional skills of team members but their interpersonal skills. Furthermore, managing a virtual team requires training because u would be dealing with people from different cultures and a manager can only motivate and appeal to a team, he/ she understands.

#### 4.2.3 Productivity and Engagement in a virtual workplace

To be productive in a virtual team, the manager and team members must leverage modern technology because it will serve as the channel of communication and work tools required to generate deliverables. According to Mr p "Communication applications, project management applications, documents, even companies' proprietary software that we need to open up at one point in time just to be able to deliver." He further stated how he measures productivity weekly. "If by the end of the week, we set out to deliver item A and we deliver item E. if Item A is not fully competitive, and I know that something is wrong. That is just an instinctive measurement that I used to do". Besides this, he noted that productivity happens when there is adequate feedback. Team members that give feedback are those who are likely to deliver on their tasks. On his part as a manager, he stated that he needs to continuously upskill and monitor his team members in other to be productive.

Mrs s emphasize work-life balance. In her opinion turning in deliverables is not only what makes a manager productive, but also the balance he/she can give to her work and life because, in the long run, it is what matters. It is easy to be carried away by a particular project

while others suffer. To avoid this, she said "I might have four projects I want to tackle today, and I might decide to spend 20 minutes on each project. If I'm done or not, I move to the next project", and when a team is been productive say so, analyse what was done right and share lessons learnt.

According to Mrs T, the last respondent, all tasks must be rid of any ambiguity. Managers should always ask team members if they are clear and emphasize with them only then will a team the manager be productive. Mr v shared how he has been productive in his virtual team. "Okay I look at how many milestones are available as against the scope that was given because most times, I find out that supplies along the line you change the scope and things begin to look Warf. Most times I look at how long aspects of projects are and what's happening to achieve extended scope". I reach out to developers to ask them oh, I hope I have not been slow, or I've not been on track back in this project."

At Crowdbotics speed is a metric for measuring productivity, so it doesn't matter about the quality of the job done when it isn't submitted at the appropriate time the management team may view the manager has been unproductive.

#### 4.2.4 Future of project management in a virtual workplace

At first, everyone thought remote working would be temporary, especially for organizations that never practised it before. However, from the interview, it is clear that the style of work has come to stay. Despite the challenges associated with virtual teams which include the cost of technology, social isolation and conflict companies are willing to have both virtual and physical staff or just the former.

Mr P from Crowdbotics says "The virtual work environment is much more stressful than the physical environment because, for one, you'd always be locked up in one space for hours". However, it is flexible, and u can be able to access the workflow from any location. On the future of management, the respondent thinks management is the most important aspect of any project. in the words of Mr P, "As I said, project management is needed in every department because we are much keener and more focused on delivering, meeting our scope of work, meeting our budgets, meeting the resources, cutting down excesses that are always specializing cutting down excesses and probably automating the workflow of whatever we need to get

done." On the other hand, Mrs C is of the option that the role of managers in virtual teams cannot be replaced with machines. "I mean, every day we hear that the machines or the robots will be here to take our jobs, but the management of human beings would never be I don't want to use the word possible but may never be properly done using machines. Human beings must always manage human beings" MRs T thinks managing teams virtually isn't the best for any organization. "Whether I like it or not, for me project management, it's not only project management, it's also people's management within the project, but in the COVID-19 period. Right now, as well, what is happening is that the companies are trying to cut off the expenses. Project management is not having this part of people management no more."

One of the respondents suggested if a manager would continue to be productive while his teams aren't physical companies has to adopt the agile methodology of work and put aside the waterfall that requires both necessary and unnecessary documentation which leads to delay most times. In his opinion, the waterfall is more suitable for a workflow involving a physical team, not a virtual team.

#### 4.3 Chapter Summary

The chapter presented the result of the interview in four themes identified from the transcript. The managers shared their experiences working with remote teams. The challenges they faced and how they managed each situation at a time. The skills required to manage a virtual team were shared by the different managers. One of which is upskilling in terms of using technology because that is the basic working tool for teams that can function remotely. The metric for measuring their productivity was identified and what is expected in the future as it regards managing virtual teams was stated.

## 5.0 DISCUSSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

#### 5.1 Discussions

The result from the semi-interview showed that project managers could be productive in a virtual workplace. However, there was no comparison between the result from working physically in the office and working remotely. According to the respondents, managing virtual teams is more difficult than managing teams in a physical office. Three out of the Five respondent thinks productivity will be more if a hybrid system is practised, while the other respondent maintained that working remotely is best in that it saves time and money and gives a better work-life balance.

According to Ford et al. (2020), the pandemic has left a hybrid work culture behind, and all managers must learn to adapt; work will only partially return to the office. A hybrid working system is suitable for almost all jobs; however, remote working is suitable for only some roles. Occupations such as medicine, nursing, and engineering must be physically present at work. However, an aspect of their job can be handled remotely. According to the respondent, there are basic things to implement to make a manager succeed while managing a virtual team. One such is adequate investment in technology because technology is the major work tool and channel for remote working.

Measuring managers' productivity in a virtual workplace is easier because, at a glance, deliverables and timelines are seen from the workflow. The 360-feedback mechanism is also useful in that the productivity of a manager isn't only dependent on the number of submitted deliverables but how well he can manage the team members.

According to the research of Esra (2021), a factor that seem like a benefit to a particular IT manager was viewed as a challenge by another. In the research, 50 per cent of the respondent opined that productivity is affected while working from home because of home chores. At the same time, others stated that house chores have no impact on productivity.

According to the study by Ford et al. (2020) on software developers working remotely, some factors were listed as both the benefit and challenges of working from home. Some of the physical benefits listed are more time for work, a conducive environment, less distraction, and

more breaks. On the other hand, Ford et al. (2020) listed some fewer physical activities as the challenges often faced by managers who work from home. These challenges include fewer breaks, less time for work, and poor work-life balance. From the points above, it is evident that managers' productivity depends on several factors, such as if the manager is willing to manage his team remotely, has kids in his workspace, and is provided with the required technology and agile team.

The different themes discussed were identified from the transcript. The first theme is the remote working experience. Respondents noted that, at first, it was difficult, but they had to adjust. Mr P stated that he started functioning as a manager and a leader. He was sometimes unsure if a team member was working, but in the long run, he had no option but to trust the process, workflow, and technology. According to Oliveira et al. (2020), to have a good experience working from home, a manager must be disciplined, maintain a good daily routine, exercise regularly, and be committed. In addition, Birimoglu and Begen (2021) recommended that one dress up, have breakfast and act like one is going to the office. Also, the working space should be neat and arranged.

From the interview, it was discovered that a manager must be knowledgeable and emphatic to manage a team working remotely. The team must be constantly motivated and provide incentives when necessary. Constant communication is key to staying on course. The metrics for measuring productivity in the office are the same for those working remotely. Tasks must be completed, deadlines must be met, and the necessary deliverables must be sent out as when due. Therefore, a manager's productivity will be seen in how his team can accomplish the above-highlighted points.

The study clarified that remote working has come to stay, and everyone must adjust. The respondent noted that even though some managers don't quite agree with the method of managing people, it is a management methodology that will be around for a while. As a result, people should find their way around it.

#### 5.2 Key Findings and Their Relevance

The study seeks to examine a manager's productivity in a virtual workspace. Productivity refers to how quickly someone completes a task. It may be described as the pace at which an organization or nation creates products and services, often assessed about the quantities of inputs (capital, labour, energy, and other resources) utilized to generate those goods and services (Simplilearn, 2023). More productive people may accomplish tasks faster, work more effectively, and have more leisure time. Productivity may support a good work/life balance. For some individuals, it even makes work more enjoyable and reduces stress to answer the question of whether working remotely impacts productivity negatively or positively. Interviewing top officials managing their teams remotely led to major findings.

First, managers' productivity in emerging virtual workplaces can be influenced by many factors, including the availability of technology, the kind of profession involved, and the tasks involved. Also, a manager's productivity depends on the team's general success. Workplace team productivity is assessed using formulas, graphs, and charts based on several quantity indices. To determine a team's level of production and efficiency, weekly or monthly reports, statistical data, and balance figures are obtained, processed, contrasted, and examined. Charts and reports show the time distribution across jobs and projects. To analyze different elements of productivity trends, time estimations are compared with actual working time, overtime, and leave time. The managers recommended investing in technology, up-skilling, and relating with team members on a personal level as ways to improve productivity.

This study is relevant because it acknowledges that remote working is here to stay. In addition, it seeks to determine how productivity can be measured with such a work style. The outcome shows that productivity can be measured when the task and target in the workflow are met, and the deliverable is submitted as due. Lastly, staff feedback can also be used to assess a manager's productivity, which can be achieved through 360 feedbacks.

#### 5.2 Recommendations for Future Work

The study didn't explore several professions. Rather it was limited to Crowdbotics and ecore services, which are IT firms. Companies comprising other professionals should be selected as case studies to get a well-represented view. Also, in the future close-end questionnaire should be sent to more people in other to get their specific views on how they are managed remotely. Further study should not concentrate on project managers alone because their team members' success determines a project manager's productivity.

#### 5.3 Conclusions

The COVID-19 epidemic has affected and altered the way we operate. There was a lot of discussion about productivity after the abrupt switch to working from home (WFH) and telework. Many businesses claim that improved flexibility, shorter commute times, and greater connection make remote work more productive. More businesses are using hybrid or permanent WFH modules to boost productivity as we reach the third year of WFH. The effectiveness with which products and services are produced may be called production process productivity. The most common method for determining productivity is to compare an aggregate output with a single input or an aggregate input with an aggregate output over time. As a result, measuring productivity for remote work became necessary. This study investigated productivity and the measurement metric in the emerging virtual workplace. Primary data was obtained by interviewing top management players in the IT field. The transcript was analysed thematically, and themes were identified for discussion. It was discovered that achieving the target in the workflow and general team success is the best way to measure a manager's productivity in a virtual

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## **Appendix 1**

20 SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS RELEVANT TO THE TOPIC:

- How has the remote working forced by COVID-19 changed your experience as a project manager?
- What changes have you made to your working style and approach to adjust to the virtual workplace environment?
- Which platforms and communication tools do you find work best for leading remote teams?
- What techniques have you used to maintain project goals and guarantee work continuity in a virtual working environment?
- Have you experienced any challenges in managing remote teams, and how have you addressed these challenges?
- Have you faced any difficulties in managing remote teams, and how have you addressed these challenges??
- What metrics do you use to measure your productivity as a project manager in a virtual environment?
- In a virtual workplace, how do you guarantee employee engagement and motivation?
- What changes have you made to your project management procedures to allow for virtual work?
- In managing tasks remotely, have you come across any fresh challenges? If so, how have you handled them?
- As a remote project manager, how have you prioritized and handled competing demands on your time?
- How have you handled the change to remote employment in terms of maintaining a healthy work-life balance?
- How have you kept a feeling of culture and teamwork in a virtual workplace?
- Have you ever had problems with virtual team members failing to complete projects on time? If so, how did you resolve the situation?
- How have you managed project risks in a virtual working setting, and what strategies have you found most effective?

- What part, in your opinion, have technological advancements made in enhancing project manager efficiency in a virtual working environment?
- Have you ever undergone any training to help you manage remote teams effectively, and if so, how has this helped?
- How have you handled disputes and arguments among team members in a virtual workplace?
- What advice would you offer to other project managers who are new to online work?
- How do you envision project management evolving in the post-COVID virtual workplace?

# Appendix 2

Thematic analysis of the transcript

Themes					
memes	MR P	MR S	MRS C	MR V	MRS T
Remote working experience and adjustments	1- So, for example, I know Saturdays and Sundays I trust as much as possible not to jump on my PC, not to work in any way	1 - Most people thought working remotely was kind of lazy and not very effective	1 - I have a different kind of working experience being that I used to work with a physical team and also a remote team even before COVID-19 as a project manager, brick and mortar- wise, I used to work with this team that I have to meet every week or monthly basis, depending on the project that I'm managing. Of course, daily toolbox meetings, not necessarily stand up but moving to the virtual environment where I do not get to see this person. It's different I would not want to use the word difficult thing when I'm working with freelancers, I guess working with people who are more of a core team from where I'm coming from. In summary for that, it's been a different experience from a physical team to a virtual team.	1 - most times they are always on-site to see what's going on and you oversee the activities of the site. So now it's a different ballgame. We depend on reports and to be able to walk, we assume that the developers and the report get are exactly the way they should be	1 - For me it was kind of different because I was PMing in the research field. COVID- 19 was a chance for me to enter a new market, which is its field. For me that was like opening the doors and in a normal situation, those stores would be closed without the circumstances of COVID-19

2 - flexible in the context that because we are not all situated in the same office, situated in the same time zone, we all have different calendars	2 - I have had to schedule more. I've had to plan my day or plan my week more at the time saying, this is what I want to do this week. There are the calls, there are meetings	2 - What have I done to adjust? I've created a room for myself where I'm able to just sit down and be able to reach out or react to messages or information as a compromising	2 - For virtual you're online and you're working too. Most times you tend to work for longer hours. Now you adapt to that at like 04:00 05:00 you're home now. It's like a long stretch once you're running tired and shut down. How will I put it now does this ability or does this adjustment to be able to work for longer hours, unlike people?	2 - I think the most challenging is the feeling when you just get used to any kind of structure and you think that is a structure that you have to follow and if you do not follow the structure, then you are having anxiety
3 - Communication has been the major thing and yes, in as much as we are remote working there are some tags that it is almost very difficult to explain just on a video call, just on the type of messages	3 - Yes, some of the challenges in managing remote teams are lack of productivity from other members and lack of communication. You can also have people not being responsive to issues, people not bringing deliverables on time, and how to solve them is really through communication	3 - I've been a lot more intentional about scheduling. About scheduling. Has my schedule caught up for me? Time for exercise, time for family things, time for spouse, children and work time	3 - Yes, because it's not been like that before. We're trying to adjust the reason it's becoming a way of life. Initially, it wasn't easy because of course we're not, but now it's becoming.	3 - Because every time you go to the office, you know that, oh, you go to the office, you work, you finish the day at seven or 06:00 and you leave the office. The first challenge was that I struggled to balance starting and finishing time for my work because I was like 24/7 there

<ul> <li>4- my advice to people that are coming to online work or a virtual environment, remote work is to be prepared for so many sleepless nights</li> <li>4 - Most of my experience has been learned the hard way, which is through just experience from different platforms and different teams. I haven't undergone any specific project management training, but I have probably about five years of experience in project management from being in project management experiences.</li> </ul>	4 - Having some technical experience myself helps me to understand some of the	4 - I will tell them they don't need to go the extra mile, that there's no closing time, because most times, anytime you can just some clients are online way goods	4 - It's really hard to work remotely for the people who are, I want to explain this very correctly, people who are used to working in offices and spend their time like two, 3 hours working and the rest 5 hours just drinking coffee and chitchatting with the other coworkers
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Management of virtual teams	<ul> <li>1 - If I have a good</li> <li>relationship with those</li> <li>team members, I have a</li> <li>good relationship with</li> <li>extreme relationships. I</li> <li>also try to get their</li> <li>WhatsApp number</li> <li>because I feel it's more</li> <li>personal. They can have</li> <li>a conversation and then</li> <li>translate that to work.</li> <li>That's like</li> <li>communication strategy,</li> <li>basically, or suicide for</li> <li>communication</li> </ul>	1 - Have to make them feel ownership of whatever they are building or whatever they are working on. How to make them feel whatever they are working on is worthwhile. What they are working on is not just a project, but it's a product that they would also enjoy using	1 - Being that the physical team is easier to reach, or they are easier to reach, easier to stay with the goal as against a freelancing virtual team.	1 - Well, use Slack as we do, and I think it's been an awesome competition because of the different features it has. You can send pictures, you can screenshot, you could send voice messages and share files.	1 - Even though I have not worked with this prior from the experience that I have right now, there are a lot of ERP systems. ODU O-D-U is one of the best in my understanding because it has all the project management tools in it
	2 - So, first of all, is the team spirit. Secondly is to make the team understand that is their project. I'm just here to motivate them.	2 – Is it an issue with what they're working on? Is it an issue with the product itself? Where is the blocker? Is it from their issue? Sometimes it might be the developer has something in the family of Christ in the family, a developer might be sick, or the developer might have a technical block that they can get through	2 - Scrum Master. Working with the remote team, empathy and teamwork is always very important to a Scrum Master	2 - I have been able to explore the area of accountability on the side of my developers and speaking, it's not been so easy because you have people come from different walks of different beliefs and pictures and I've always told them I like to keep time on accountability.	2 - Especially if they're freelancers, it's really hard to make sure that you don't know where they are, you don't know if they're working. It's really hard to maintain this working relationship

timeli impor resou impor what avoid project that. where option force and th can fo work and g	roject manager, my line is very ortant to me. My urces are very ortant to me. So, t do I do? I have to d him from the ect is as simple as Yes, in some cases re that is not an on. Well, we have to e him to do the work there's no way we orce him to do the than to avoid him get somebody else can do it. That's just did.	3 - It's basically about organizing and communicating as well with your team, those two skills	3 - Motivation, incentives. What's the word to use for that now? Appreciation. Appreciating the team member, seeing what they are doing, noticing the team members that they're doing a good job when they're doing a good job, and of course, calling out what is not done, what is not being done	3 - I've had that, and I have to reach out to my team lead to jumping into the situation because clients are waiting and also my CSM, so he understands where we stand on such a situation	3 - The only thing is if you can get the word acknowledgement within the group to acknowledge the fact that oh, somebody is doing a good job and you are announcing that so others can see this can also be financial support, like bonuses because that's the easiest way to do that. It depends on the company.
provid so mu many mana tools	echnology has ided so many tools, uch software, so y project agement technology that we can use the of Click Up, Jira, , Trail	4 - You can have a 1-hour call and definitely, you might breeze through it, but if you have something that helps you transcribe record your call, and give you transcription later, it makes you more efficient when you need to check important notes from that call.	4 - That per time I'm able to always, at the end of every sprint or end of every milestone, get something that's working perfectly as against what I was doing before, which I had to wait and do from the beginning to the end before I get what I was looking for.	4 - Yes, I have. It has helped because there are people from different walks of life, from different countries, and there are things you see that may not overwhelm them, but because you've been trained, you've been asked to appeal to their conscience and the k first. Now, if they go a step further to open up. All is well and good	4- Still, Ftrillik it's important to take into account not only the professional but also the interpersonal skills of your team members and to know them to make sure that you distribute the tasks in a way that they do those tasks with a light heart and with motivation.

Productivity and Engagement in a virtual workplace		1 - Also try to make sure that doesn't affect your life balance. Try to make sure you're working from home, not living from work, because you can just end up working the whole 24 hours	1 - These are some of the things that I always bring to the table to make sure that my team is very productive. They know that the project manager is a team player, makes sure that everybody has what they have to do, has what they need when they need	1 - Okay I look at how many milestones are available as against the scope that was given because most times find out that supplies along the line you change the scope and things begin to look wrong. Most times I look at how long aspects of projects and what's happening to achieve extended scope. I reach out to developers to ask them oh, I hope I have not been slow, or I've not been on track back in this project.	1 - I think that's the hardest part and at this point, it's what can be used here because it's way easier to motivate people when you work in the offices because it can be like oh, let's go to lunch together, let's do this together, let's play this game, blah, blah. It's way easier to do that when you work in the office
	2 - the end of the week if by the end of the week, we set out to deliver item A and we deliver item E, if, by the end of the week we set out to deliver item A. Item A is not fully competitive and I know that something is wrong. That is just an instinctive measurement that I used to do	2 - I might have four projects I want to tackle today, and I might decide to spend 20 minutes on each project. If I'm done or not, I move to the next project	2 - It takes it back to what I said previously, empathy and teamwork. Unless the team member understands that it's important to be a member of the team, it's important to prioritize the tasks, important to prioritize the team itself.	2 - developers I asked about the interview how's the family? How did we go through just give them to experience themselves to be free with you	2 - Well, basically it starts with the task that I have for myself. It would be how I divide the tasks, how I distribute the tasks and how specific I am in terms of giving the task to people

	3 - Continuous upscaling every single minute you're upscaling yourself every single means you are learning a new skill.	3 - The team knows that these goals have to be hit, these goals are really important, and you want to make sure that they hit those deliverability milestones	3 - I could use charts, and run down charts to be able to see that what is happening is where I am on the project, is where I should be	3 - they have become quite helpful, as physical meetings where you need to drive down the venue have changed and orders it's not like they used to be before, and now you could just open your system and have.	3 - Well that's like cutting up the extra time so it's like you have everything handy. It's easier. You don't have to go through dozens of emails like going to ten people to understand what's happening
	4 - So how do we work? Asynchronous when I clock in, I tell him to list out all the things he needs to do and give me feedback on the previous task and when he comes on board, he says all of that, does that and gives me back feedback	4 - I have tried to stand up with the same team, trying to say what have we accomplished already? Also making the team realize what they have accomplished in a month or three months helps the morale.	4 - Not a very standard practice bill, but it always works to be able to give that buffer for the team to be able to meet up the client's expectations and the project timeline.	4 - You don't have to go to a particular place. You just have to have your system get a quiet place and have your meeting	4 - As long as you keep the tasks very clear, you just don't have to stand on somebody's neck
Future of project management in a virtual workplace	1 - the virtual work environment is much more stressful than the physical environment because, for one, you'd always be locked up in one space for hours	1 - Once you can get good organizational skills, once you can say, yes, this project	1 - I think those technological advancements have helped continuously help a team with communication	1 - People get into a meeting late, trying to settle down, and they're missing out on some points. For example, another point is having a note taker, like I use fireflies. I'm sure you do that here, which is an AI note taker	1 - The job market was full, not people applying, like full of the opportunities we can say

2 - Being flexible to be able to adjust on the fly is very important	2 - It's going to get tougher because the productivity demands would be tougher, but it's going to get better in terms of the platforms, the functionality, the things that you can do would be there will be more things that you can do going forward remotely and how you can work	2 - Changing from the waterfall, starting from the beginning to the end, before getting the major thing that we need to get out of it, change it to be able to work, to be able to use the agile methodology	2 - Now, it gives you a faster and better idea of if you want to continue with those guys or if you want to get another developer.	2 - If I were like back then, I would try to do something like that.
3 - project managers are one of the most important aspects of every workforce, every industry	3 - I feel people will have to keep up with that. It's here to stay and it's just going to get more interesting	3 - That's one of the major reasons I try to mitigate against that as early as possible by always giving the buffer	3 - because so far so good. We've been having some should I use the word progressive approach because of the continuous evolution of methods, ideas and all that? Things will only get better when you present better ideas, you bring them to the table. Project managers and project management will always evolve because new ideas and knowledge are added to the field	3 - whether I like it or not, for me project management, it's not only project management, it's also people's management within the project, but in the COVID-19 period. Right now, as well, what is happening is that the companies are trying to cut off the expenses. Project management is not having this part of people management any more

manag in eve becau keene on de our sc meeti meeti cuttin that a specia excess autom	of the to we'll be pretty n project then I fe to go cr are always alizing cutting down sses and probably mating the workflow atever we need to	's what I feel in terms pols and the things able to do remotely. nuch when you can yourself into a room, eel that we're just going azy working remotely	4 - I mean, every day we hear that machines or robots will be here to take our jobs, but the management of human beings would never be I don't want to use the word possible but may never be properly done using machines. Human beings must always manage human beings		4 - We don't need to have people's management in need. I think that part will be more or less excluded. It's going to be more of how to say correctly, let me just think it's going to be more action based in terms it's going to be more mechanic than people involved, and emotions involved in that
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