Preface

When we had the chance to discuss matters with virtual team members or virtual team managers, very often we noticed that they miss some information on virtual team processes or underestimate its importance. Consequently, a feeling of frustration emerged rapidly when they have to work virtually. The idea of this book came from that observation and the wish to consolidate the theoretical knowledge on virtual team management along with practical recommendations to virtual team managers.

Our book differentiates from the prior books written on the topic by its methodology and the exhaustive bibliography dealing with virtual teams. Additionally, we complete each chapter with guidelines for managerial practice, easily usable by practitioners for a comprehensive understanding and affording concrete applications. We thus provide researchers, practitioners and any individual linked to virtual teaming with a comprehensive and updated global knowledge on virtual team management. We started writing the book a decade after Martins et al.'s, 2004: 'inputs/process/outputs model'.

Based on that model, we augmented and improved the matrix by identifying the attributes of virtual teams (input), the essential factors to keep virtual teams functioning (processes) and the outcomes of those teams (outputs). The book suggests different ways to transform those factors into performing processes, which is longer and more complex to reach with virtual teams than with co-located teams. We went through two phases to gather our data. First, we scanned the research publications on the topic. Second, we considered prior books on virtual teams written by academics and practitioners. Only articles reviewed through double-blind-peer-review, and therefore recognized by the research community, were selected in the review of findings; thus considered as reliable. We used science mapping associated with the co-word analysis method to go through a series of conceptual or semantic maps called clusters. These clusters are generated by various statistical classification methods to analyse a set of selected words. These semantic maps are formed from classes or groups of words that have strong links to each other, and that may account for the cognitive structure of the field by indicating areas and subareas of research.

Research findings converge to the same conclusion: practising and working within a virtual team or within a virtual team network becomes more commonplace but it is not a spontaneous way of working. Virtual teams concern nearly all individuals working today, in a business context or not, with higher or lower levels of complexity and degrees of virtuality.

About two decades ago, virtual teams became an attractive domain for academic researchers who identified this new way of working as different from conventional team management mainly because of the distance dimension and new technologies. Technologies have been a key element in the research approach which has since moved to more complex inputs and mechanisms due to dispersion and distance.

Thanks to academic research, empirical studies and expanding practices, the different stakeholders increased their understanding and application of virtual team processes. As demonstrated in the book, virtual team leaders and their organizations need to analyse virtual team inputs and assess the virtuality of the team. Guidelines at the end of each chapter can be a helpful framework for virtual team analysis. This investigation helps the virtual team manager to determine the appropriate processes and the leadership style/s to be used, and more specifically the requested preparation and learning structures to achieve optimal, efficient virtual teaming. It involves various relevant factors, some perhaps less technical and more oriented to socio-emotional or managerial processes as well as performance management within a virtual context.

We note that virtual teaming as such continuously evolves which is one of virtuality's characteristics, thus requesting regular adaptation to the environments where it operates in order to fit in those environments, as well as to the concerned organization's strategy. Essential levers need to be identified to foster team and individual satisfaction recognized as key triggers to performance, especially difficult to set up and manage at distance. Thus, seen as efficient conveyors of performance, virtual teams have become the support of strategic orientations, and competitive advantages through cost reductions, work mobility or work distribution towards various international local opportunities, staffing and talent resources. Virtual teams and the global context enables the organization to find the right person with the requested critical knowledge and able to share it within a virtual environment, as long as the virtuality challenges are mastered within the organization.

However, generalization about virtual teaming is not possible due to the broad spectrum of diversities. For example, dealing with the younger generation and, therefore, with new characteristics and different expectations, differs from those conveyed by the conventional workforce. This possible gap may be stressed or caused by multicultural diversity, new opportunities

and necessities. Research should consider changes in economies and see the influence of emerging countries, and the constraints on virtual team management. Would they bring new ways of working and thinking, together with unexpected new methods of management, opening the era of 'post-globalization'? How can emerging practices and already established methods match together in a constructive, productive and sustainable evolution? Technology development might partially answer this question. On a micro level, we can already see the evolution of contacts that become more and more distant or virtual. This is the case of service providers and customers, where companies try though to give a sense of 'reality' to virtual relationships. E-learning and massive open online courses (MOOC) enable students to join prestigious courses without being penalized by the requested high costs or travel distance. It gives access to a wider spectrum of students as long as they have adequate Internet connection capability and equipment. Virtual teaming seems likely to develop even more in the future and, therefore, the awareness of its processes and challenges can contribute to higher efficiency and satisfaction.

To present the theory and the key points (complete with guidelines for managerial practices) and render the book easily usable by practitioners requiring a comprehensive understanding and concrete applications, we have organized the book in to 11 core chapters, illustrative case studies and a comprehensive references section.

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