

SOCIAL LOAFING IN VIRTUAL TEAMS: ANALYZING THE CHALLENGES OF REMOTE COLLABORATIONS

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines social loafing in virtual teams, focusing on its manifestation and strategies to reduce its impact in remote collaboration. Using a qualitative case study approach, the research involved six remote workers from the finance, technology, and education sectors with at least one year of experience. The findings highlight that social loafing in virtual teams is marked by disengagement, delayed communication, inconsistent work quality, and reduced accountability. These behaviors hinder team productivity, as individuals rely on others to carry the workload. The virtual environment exacerbates these issues by diffusing responsibility. To address social loafing, the study recommends clear communication, individual accountability, and fostering a supportive work culture, alongside regular check-ins and appropriate collaboration tools to ensure consistent participation and enhance team effectiveness.

Keywords : Social Loafing, Virtual Teams, Remote Collaboration.

ABSTRAK

Tesis ini meneliti kemalasan sosial dalam tim virtual, dengan fokus pada manifestasinya dan strategi untuk mengurangi dampaknya dalam kolaborasi jarak jauh. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif, penelitian ini melibatkan enam pekerja jarak jauh dari sektor keuangan, teknologi, dan pendidikan dengan setidaknya satu tahun pengalaman. Temuan penelitian menyoroti bahwa kemalasan sosial dalam tim virtual ditandai dengan keterpisahan, komunikasi yang tertunda, kualitas kerja yang tidak konsisten, dan akuntabilitas yang berkurang. Perilaku ini menghambat produktivitas tim, karena individu bergantung pada orang lain untuk memikul beban kerja. Lingkungan virtual memperburuk masalah ini dengan menyebarkan tanggung jawab. Untuk mengatasi kemalasan sosial, penelitian ini merekomendasikan komunikasi yang jelas, akuntabilitas individu, dan menumbuhkan budaya kerja yang mendukung, di samping check-in rutin dan alat kolaborasi yang tepat untuk memastikan partisipasi yang konsisten dan meningkatkan efektivitas tim.

Kata Kunci : Kemalasan Sosial, Tim Virtual, Kolaborasi Jarak Jauh.

A. RESEARCH BACKGROUND

1. INTRODUCTIONS

The rise of digital technology has transformed modern work, with remote work and virtual teams becoming increasingly common. These virtual teams offer flexibility, cost-effectiveness, and the ability to collaborate across geographical boundaries. However, they also bring unique challenges, such as maintaining productivity, ensuring team cohesion, and fostering effective communication. A critical concern within this framework is how digital interactions, rather than in-person collaboration, shape team dynamics, including the risk of diminished effort from team members.

One significant challenge within virtual teams is social loafing, where individuals contribute less effort in group settings than when working independently. This phenomenon, although well-studied in traditional, face-to-face teams, becomes more complex in remote work contexts. The shift to virtual environments, which rely heavily on digital communication tools and the lack of physical interaction, may create conditions that either foster or inhibit social loafing. In virtual settings, team members may feel detached or isolated, leading to potential disengagement and reduced accountability, thus exacerbating the occurrence of social loafing. Also, social loafing may be more prevalent due to the

absence of physical presence and face-to-face interactions, which reduces social pressure and accountability. The use of digital communication tools, while critical for collaboration, can both mitigate and contribute to loafing. For instance, video conferencing can promote a sense of presence and enhance accountability, but it can also be hindered by technical difficulties and distractions. Factors such as group size, task complexity, and perceived fairness in workload distribution may still influence social loafing, but they interact with the unique conditions of remote work differently than in traditional settings.

Despite extensive research on social loafing, there remains a gap in understanding how this phenomenon operates in the context of remote work. Most previous studies have concentrated on traditional teams, and little is known about the factors that influence social loafing in virtual teams. Key contributors to loafing in physical teams—such as group size, task complexity, and individual accountability—maybe have differently in remote environments. Moreover, the interaction between digital communication tools, like video conferencing and instant messaging, and loafing behaviors in remote teams has yet to be fully explored. This gap necessitates further investigation into the specific dynamics of virtual teams.

While social loafing has been studied in face-to-face settings, the virtual working environment presents unique challenges and dynamics that are not fully understood. Using a qualitative methodology to explore these dynamics offers a way to better understand how social loafing manifests in remote teams, as direct engagement and communication are less frequent in virtual environments. Additionally, the psychological factors of working alone versus in teams play a role in productivity, as some employees may be more efficient when working individually, a factor that could influence how social loafing occurs in virtual teams.

A deeper understanding of how these elements function in remote teams is essential for developing strategies to address social loafing and improve team performance in the digital age.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

a. Human Resource

Curtis & Dreachslin (2008) elaborates the strategic role of managing an organization's human capital to enhance performance and achieve organizational goals is emphasizing Human Resource. It Integrates various practices and policies that focus on recruiting, developing, and retaining employees, while also fostering a positive work environment. HRM involves systematic evaluation of employee performance and organizational effectiveness, using metrics to assess the impact of HR initiatives. HR prioritizes employee engagement and well-being by implementing policies that promote work-life balance, recognition, and support.

b. Human Resource in Virtual Work

Botsivali et al., (2024) found that the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of remote work, necessitating HR departments to develop new strategies for recruitment, training, and performance evaluation. Effective communication and collaboration are crucial, with the use of technology facilitating seamless interaction and cooperation among team members despite geographical distances. HRM implements policies and procedures that support flexibility, manage the impact on work organization, and ensure data protection and security in remote environments. HRM in remote work requires a multifaceted approach to enhance employee efficiency, productivity, and well-being, while promoting data protection and security.

c. Social Loafing

Latane et al., (1979) elaborate that Social loafing refers to decrement in individuals' efforts when working in groups in comparison to individuals' efforts when working alone.

Liden (2004) elaborate Social loafing also refers to the phenomenon where individuals exert less effort when working in a group compared to when they work alone. This behavior is often attributed to a decrease in social awareness and accountability in group settings, leading individuals to feel less responsible for the overall outcome.

d. Collaborations in Virtual Worlds

Boughzala et al. (2012) highlights the Virtual worlds (VWs) have emerged as innovative platforms for collaboration, enabling users to interact through avatars in immersive 3D environments. These spaces facilitate communication and teamwork by allowing participants to manipulate digital artifacts, share information, and engage in various collaborative activities regardless of geographical constraints. Boughzala et al. (2012) highlights the evolution of VWs from text-based environments to sophisticated social systems that enhance user engagement and collaboration. Key dimensions of collaborative work in VWs include technology, people, information, processes, and leadership, each presenting unique challenges and opportunities for effective teamwork.

e. Previous Research

Adamovic et al (2021) aimed to explore the gap between formal organizational policies on virtual work and the actual adoption of these practices by employees. It investigates the factors that predict and influence employees' decisions to work virtually, focusing on virtual work self-efficacy, the virtual work climate, and how these factors interact. The results reveal that a supportive virtual work climate can encourage employees with low self-efficacy to engage more in virtual work, demonstrating that the organizational environment plays a crucial role in promoting virtual work adoption.

Daryono & Christopher (2023) Found that active social loafing negatively and significantly influenced instructor's individual performance at a National Police School, while psychological encouragement positively and significantly influenced the instructors' individual performance. Psychological encouragement moderated the influence of social loafing on the Instructor's Department of the Central Java National Police School, representing individual performance.

Ghaleb, et al., (2023) investigates how social loafing influences the intention to leave among tourism employees, particularly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. It posits that social loafing—where individuals exert less effort in group settings—can lead to negative mental health outcomes, specifically increased stress, which mediates the relationship between social loafing and turnover intention. A survey of 700 full-time tourism employees in Egypt was conducted, analyzing data through Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The findings indicated a significant correlation between social loafing and turnover intention, with stress acting as a critical mediator; however, depression and anxiety did not show similar effects. This suggests that addressing social loafing could enhance employee mental health and reduce turnover intentions in the workplace.

B. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1. Research Approach

This research uses a Qualitative methodology with a Case Study approach to analyze Social Loafing in Virtual Teams and the challenges of remote collaboration. According to Creswell (2009), qualitative research aims to understand human problems in social contexts by providing a detailed view of sources of information in natural settings without researcher intervention. It seeks to interpret how individuals derive meaning from their environment and how those meanings influence behavior. As noted by Emerald Publishing Limited (2017), the case study approach involves an in-depth investigation of a specific phenomenon in its real-

life context, utilizing multiple data sources such as interviews and observations. This method is ideal for exploring the complexity of social loafing in virtual teams.

2. Population, Samples and Technique Sampling

The research focuses on virtual and remote employees, who provide valuable insights into the dynamics and challenges of remote work. Participants must have at least one year of experience to ensure they can accurately share their experiences related to social loafing in virtual teams. The sample consists of the workers from various industries such as Finance, Technology, and Education that are represented by six interviewees, which aligns with qualitative research practices that emphasize the quality of insights over quantity, as noted by Hitchings and Latham (2019). The criterion sampling method will be employed, selecting individuals who meet specific criteria such as: they must be remote employees with at least one year of experience and a willingness to discuss their challenges.

3. Data Collection Method

Primary data collection was used in the interview protocol guide and through in-depth structured interviews. The questions are also based on the Measurement of the Research Variables that align with the research objectives.

Documentation method records existing information in the form of documents, notes, and written reports relevant to the research objectives. In this research, documentation method is used as a source of data or relevant evidence, including information obtained from Informants and other relevant reference materials.

4. Data Analysis Method

To do Data Analysis in this research there will be several steps. The steps to analyze qualitative data involve: 1) Familiarization: Understand data diversity and context. 2) Data Reduction: Summarize and condense data that is important 3) Thematic Analysis Coding: Identify key themes and concepts through inductive and deductive coding. 4) Data Display: Present selected segments that illustrate concepts. 7) Drawing Conclusions: Make meaningful statements about the data's implications (Esubalew Aman Mezmir, 2020).

5. Validity and Reliability

Validity in qualitative research refers to the process of determining the accuracy of the findings (Rose & Johnson, 2020). For the validity, two types of measures are taken, which are Triangulation and Member Checking. Triangulation involves enhancing data validity through the use of multiple data sources, such as primary data from in-depth interviews and secondary data from academic articles and research papers. Member Checking entails presenting the findings to the participants for verification to ensure the data accurately reflects their experiences, thus ensuring accuracy and correct representation of participants' voices (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Reliability in this research means sticking to consistent methods even when dealing with the diverse richness of the data and use strategies like comparing data constantly and checking for accuracy to make sure our research is strong (Leung, 2015) that's why in order to make the data reliable the interview to collect data will be done through using an interview protocol so the questions and flow will be consistent for all interviews.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. RESULT

In this research, data saturation was achieved through a process involving 6 in-depth interviews. Each interview was meticulously conducted to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the research topic, with a focus on gathering varied and rich insights towards the objectives of the research.

To uphold the principles of confidentiality and data protection, the study employed stringent measures to anonymize participant information. All personal data has been

safeguarded through the use of pseudonyms, ensuring that individual identities remain protected. The pseudonyms used include N1, N2, N3, N4, N5, N6. By anonymizing the data in this manner, the research guarantees that participants' personal information is not disclosed, thereby respecting their privacy and maintaining the ethical standards of the study.

a. Data of Informants

Table 4.1 Research Informant Description

No	Code	Industry Background	Thick Description	Length Of Work
1	N3	Finance	Portfolio management finance - N6	2 Years
	N5			2 Years
	N6			1 Year
2	N2	Information Technology (IT) and	Technology especially web development - N2	1 Year
3	N1	Education	Consultant education Montessori - N1	2 Years
4	N4	Retail	Working at one of the E-commerce companies - N4	1 Year
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Source: Data Processed, 2025

b. Data Results and Categorizations

Table 4.4 Coding Categorization

No	Metric	Definition	Indicator	Informant
1	Productivity	Number of task completed	Great Work	N1, N2, N3, N4, N5, N6 (6) (100%)
		Time to task completion	Job are done	N1, N2, N3, N4, N5, N6 (6) (100%)
		Adherence to deadlines	Complete on time	N1, N3, N6 (3) (50%)
2	Communication	Number of team meetings	Regularly meet	N1, N2, N4, N6 (4) (67%)
		Utilization of communication tools	Effectively communicate	N1, N2, N3, N5 (4) (67%)
		Response time	Fast Respond	N1, N3 (2) (33%)
3	Collaboration	Number of shared tasks	Task equally shared	N1, N2, N3, N4, N5, N6 (6) (100%)
		Active participation in project discussions	Actively Participate	N1, N2, N3 (3) (50%)
		Successful completion of collaborative projects	Successfully collaborate	N1, N3, N6 (3) (50%)
4	Quality of work	Feedback	Accept feedbacks	N1, N2, N3, N5, N6 (5) (83%)
		Error rates	High Quality output	N1, N2, N3, N4, N6 (5) (83%)
		Successful delivery of high-quality outputs	Consistent	N1, N2, N3 (3) (50%)
5	Adaptability	Flexibility in response to unexpected challenges	Flexible to new changes	N1, N2, N6 (3) (50%)

2. DISCUSSION

Social loafing is a significant challenge observed in virtual teams, especially as remote work continues to dominate modern work environments. This research sought to investigate how social loafing manifests in virtual teams by examining factors such as productivity, communication, collaboration, quality of work, and adaptability. Social loafing in virtual work manifests in various ways, as illustrated by the experiences of the informants. Below are key points highlighting how social loafing presents itself across different virtual work environments:

A. The Manifestation of Social Loafing in Virtual Teams

a. Lack of Participation and Engagement

N1 mentions how when one person fails to contribute or complete their tasks, it impacts the entire team's workflow. This is an example of social loafing where certain individuals reduce their effort, affecting team dynamics. N2 and

N4 also mention situations where some team members may underperform or delay tasks, which disrupts the collaborative effort and creates tension. The absence of active participation can be attributed to the diffusion of responsibility in a virtual setting.

b. Delayed Communication and Responses

N3 notes that slow communication due to network issues or multitasking creates frustration and inefficiency. This delay in responding is linked to a lack of individual accountability in virtual teams, a hallmark of social loafing. N5 and N6 also observe that when communication is not frequent or timely, productivity suffers. Delays in responding or lack of engagement can signal social loafing, especially when team members avoid taking responsibility for maintaining communication flow.

c. Inconsistent Work Quality

N4 and N5 highlight that while the team's work is generally of good quality, occasional lapses, such as missed deadlines or unclear communication, lead to inconsistencies. The lack of collective responsibility for quality is another form of social loafing, where some team members may not exert enough effort to maintain high standards. N6 also mentions that while the team uses peer reviews to keep the quality high, the occasional dip in quality can be attributed to the uneven effort contributed by different members.

d. Adaptability Issues

N3 and N6 note that some team members struggle to adapt to unexpected changes or new tools. When members don't fully engage in the process of adapting to new work conditions or technologies, it can indicate social loafing, where individuals do not take the initiative to contribute to team flexibility and problem-solving. N5 also observes that younger team members tend to adapt more easily than older ones, pointing to a disparity in effort levels, which is often seen in social loafing dynamics.

e. Reduced Accountability in the Absence of Supervision

The results summarize that social loafing manifests in virtual teams through disengagement, delayed communication, inconsistent work quality, lack of adaptability, and reduced accountability, especially in the absence of strong oversight or collaboration structures. The virtual work environment, with its inherent flexibility and less immediate supervision, creates conditions where individuals may not fully contribute, leading to diminished team effectiveness.

B. Reducing Social Loafing in Virtual Teams

a. Clear Communication and Role Definition

Clear communication and well-defined roles are fundamental in minimizing social loafing. Informants like N1, N4, and N6 highlight the importance of setting clear goals and defining individual responsibilities from the outset. Tools like Asana and Trello allow teams to track tasks, ensuring visibility and reducing ambiguity. By ensuring everyone understands their role and what is expected of them, these teams foster accountability and prevent any individual from coasting.

b. Regular Check-ins and Accountability

Regular check-ins are another essential strategy to combat social loafing. As seen in N2, N5, and N6, holding routine meetings, whether weekly or project-specific, helps maintain engagement and monitor progress. These meetings provide a space for team members to update each other, discuss challenges, and stay aligned. Video calls are particularly effective as they minimize delays

and enhance real-time communication, ensuring that no one slips through the cracks.

c. Fostering a Supportive Team Culture

A supportive team culture plays a crucial role in reducing social loafing. N1 and N4 demonstrate how collaboration and mutual support help maintain productivity. When one member struggles or falls behind, others are quick to offer assistance, which ensures the team stays on track. This creates a culture where everyone feels responsible for each other's success, thereby fostering a higher level of commitment and reducing the temptation to loaf.

d. Transparency and Task Monitoring

Transparency is key to maintaining accountability in virtual teams. Teams like N6 and N5 use task tracking tools to monitor progress, which helps to identify any performance gaps early. These tools, such as Trello and Asana, allow members to see who is completing their tasks and who may need support. This visibility discourages loafing, as individuals know their work is being monitored, and the group remains aware of any potential delays or issues.

e. Adaptability and Flexibility

Flexibility is essential in remote work, but it must be balanced with accountability. Teams like N1 and N4 emphasize adaptability, recognizing that personal challenges and unexpected disruptions can arise. However, they also stress the importance of ensuring that these challenges don't derail the team's overall productivity. A flexible approach, combined with clear expectations, ensures that individuals remain responsible while managing personal commitments.

f. Incentives and Consequences

Incentives and consequences are effective tools to motivate team members and reduce social loafing. N5's approach, which involves reminders, warnings, and consequences for missed deadlines, helps maintain high standards of performance. This system reinforces the importance of individual contributions and creates a structure where members understand the impact of their actions on the team. When consequences for underperformance are clear and incentives for good work are in place, team members are more likely to stay engaged and contribute consistently.

D. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

1. CONCLUSION

The main focus of this research was to explore how social loafing manifests in virtual teams and to identify strategies for reducing its impact in remote collaborations. Through examining the behaviors and challenges faced by virtual teams, several key findings emerged regarding the factors that contribute to social loafing, including a lack of participation, delayed communication, inconsistent work quality, and reduced accountability.

- a. **Social loafing in virtual teams** is characterized by disengagement, lack of participation, delayed communication, inconsistent work quality, and reduced accountability. These behaviors hinder team productivity and efficiency, as team members reduce their individual efforts, relying on others to carry the workload. This is exacerbated by the virtual setting, where the absence of face-to-face interaction and supervision leads to a diffusion of responsibility and a decrease in personal accountability.

- b. **To reduce social loafing and improve virtual team effectiveness**, it is essential to implement clear communication channels, promote individual accountability, and foster a supportive and flexible work culture. Regular check-ins, performance evaluations, and setting clear expectations for team members can help ensure consistent participation and collaboration. Utilizing appropriate collaboration tools and encouraging a sense of collective responsibility can help combat the effects of social loafing in remote environments.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

To reduce social loafing and enhance virtual team effectiveness, it is crucial to establish **clear communication channels**, such as regular check-ins and utilizing collaboration tools like Microsoft Teams, to ensure consistent participation and engagement. **Promoting individual accountability** through clear roles, responsibilities, and deadlines will help maintain productivity, while **fostering a supportive and flexible work culture** encourages team members to feel valued and motivated.

Regular virtual meetings should be held to discuss progress, set goals, and address any challenges, ensuring everyone is actively involved. Encouraging active participation, recognizing contributions, and setting clear expectations will minimize disengagement, while promoting adaptability and flexibility will help team members adjust to new tools or unexpected changes.

By implementing these strategies, teams can combat social loafing, improve collaboration, and enhance overall team performance.

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