

## OFFICE VIRTUALIZATION, VIRTUAL MEETING, OFFICE OF TODAY AND THE FUTURE

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### ABSTRACT

*The study explores the concept of office virtualization, virtual meeting, and office of today and the future. The objectives of the study were to examine the usefulness of office virtualization; examine the usefulness of virtual meetings; and examine the usefulness of offices of today and the future. A relevant theory such as the theory of affordances was adopted as the study's theoretical foundation. The established study has shown that office virtualization and virtual meeting help reduce costs, improve quality and productivity, and encourage the use of innovative and creative methods for solving problems in the modern office workplace. It was concluded that proactive organizations need to delve into virtualizing the office setting and as well conducting meetings through virtual means to enhance prompt decision-making and as well promote effective operations and performance in the workplace. Consequently, the study recommends that management of organizations should inform their employees of all information about the technological changes that they plan to bring into the office setting and the skills needed to enhance operations and performance; Management of organizations should include in its learning and development intervention plans a continuous series of training for its employees for every update or advancement that technology undergoes, as it will enable them to equip themselves in the goings of the business to enhance its operations and performance.*

**Keywords: Office Virtualization, Virtual Meeting, Office of Today and the Future.**

### INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting stay-at-home orders have led to significant changes in the way people work (Karl et al., 2022). Some of these changes involve office virtualization and virtual meetings as a means of delegating tasks and responsibilities among employees and providing premises for them to carry out these assignments at ease. Some office virtualization and virtual meeting tools such as Zoom, Google Meet, and Microsoft Teams have experienced significant increases in daily participation (Peters, 2020; Thorp-Lancaster, 2020). As regards precedents, the use of virtual offices and virtual meeting will likely continue long after the pandemic ends, as Gartner predicts that only 25% of business meetings will take place in person by 2024 (Standaert et al., 2021).

Yet, for many, the increased use of virtual offices and the virtual meeting has been challenging (Fosslien & Duffy, 2020; Strassman, 2020). This exhaustion is due to several factors, one of which is prolonged direct eye gaze (Bailenson, 2020). In a normal face-to-face meeting, participants spend very little time looking directly into the eyes of one another, whereas in office virtualization and virtual meetings individuals are typically staring more intensely at one another for the entire meeting (Strassman, 2020). Another factor is that the images of others on screen can appear too big and too close, triggering increased brain activity, biochemical changes, and physiological states that are associated with high alert and fight-or-flight (Morris, 2020). This is because the size and proximity of such images can violate our sense of personal space or cause us to subconsciously view them as threatening. Participants may also experience information overload as they attempt to focus on multiple faces at the same time, all in one-inch boxes that often jump from one position on the screen to another as different individuals speak.

The above is complicated by the fact that during virtual meetings, it is not just others' faces that draw the attention of participants, but people or things visible in others' backgrounds as well (Fosslien & Duffy, 2020). Although useful, the chat function can also add to participants' information processing load, especially if the content detracts from the meeting (Wiederhold, 2020). Furthermore, seeing one's self-image can make users hyper-aware of themselves and their appearance, leading to the feeling of self-consciousness and always being on (Fosslien & Duffy, 2020).

As matter of fact, office virtualization and virtual meetings are likely to become the preferred mode for business meetings, and working from home may become permanent for many, a greater understanding of the potential challenges caused by them is needed despite their unknown application in the workplace setting. Considering the above, this paper explores the concept of office virtualization, virtual meeting, office of today and the future, and their usefulness to business organizations.

### **Objectives**

The study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

1. To examine the usefulness of office virtualization
2. To examine the usefulness of virtual meetings.
3. To examine the usefulness of the office of today and the future.

### **Conceptual Review**

The following concepts were briefly discussed to reflect their contextual meaning in this study:

#### **Office Virtualization**

Office virtualization is the designing of an office in such a way that employees and business owners work remotely through the provision of a range of business functions accessible through the internet (Ugwu, 2020). It also enables organizations to create and maintain a presence in a desirable location without the need to pay rent for an actual space. A virtual office is part of the flexible workspace industry that provides businesses with any combination of services, space, and/or technology, without those businesses bearing the capital expenses of owning or leasing a traditional office, the office is surrounded by audiovisual technology. Audiovisual is electronic media possessing both a sound and a visual component, such as slide-tape presentations, films, television programs, corporate conferencing, church services, and live theater productions. Audiovisual service providers frequently offer web streaming, video conferencing, and live broadcast services. Computer-based audiovisual equipment is often used in education, with many schools and universities installing projection equipment and using interactive whiteboard technology.

Virtual office services started in the 1960s as serviced offices and have evolved with technology to include a wide variety of personnel, physical space, digital storage, and communication services. Customers pay a contract fee for these services which may be offered a la carte, as packages, or as membership subscriptions. The concept is popular with companies of all sizes, including self-employed entrepreneurs. One of the primary allures of the virtual office is the flexibility it offers for employees and freelancers to work from a satellite office, home office, remote location, or even on the go via a mobile device. At the same time, a company can offer its clients and employees a stable home office with access to amenities such as receptionist, conference rooms, desk space, mailboxes printing, and faxing at a permanent address, which is owned and maintained by the virtual offices' provider or a third party (Ugwu, 2020). Virtual office providers may also include digital capital such as cloud storage, web hosting, email, and other web-based applications. Virtual office influences the design of the organization at work. Among technological updates, the internet has the most significant impact on the design of office work. With the use of the internet, E-businesses were born, and these businesses focus on design as they adapt to the dynamism of

the internet environment (Ahmad, 2014). The internet also paved the way for the creation of virtual offices. Through the emergence of the virtual design of the office or workplace, technology has helped shape the lines between home and work (Ahmad, 2014). Through the internet used in personal computers, iPods, and smartphones, people can work in virtual offices right from the comforts of their homes. This means that the design of work transformed into digital such that the contents, methods, and relationships of jobs satisfied technological requirements.

In Nigeria, there is office virtualization in operations among a few technologically inclined organizations. However, it accompanies some challenges. According to Ogunmodede et al. (2022), challenges of office virtualization in Nigeria revolve around the high cost of internet data as well as poor speed and quality of internet services. This causes unpleasant disruptions that could terminate hitherto well-prepared presentations. For organizers, program planning to offer the best value to attendees is still a challenge. Some organizers have had to abolish specialized break-out (parallel) sessions sticking only to plenary sessions in their virtual conferences. Those who offered both plenary and parallel sessions had to find creative ways of coordinating people to find their virtual break-out meeting rooms after plenary sessions and to return to plenary sessions from parallel sessions. This causes a loss of valuable time.

More so, the disadvantage of not having enough social interaction and professional networking that is a cardinal component of in-person conferences is a veritable drawback of office virtualization such as video conferences. Such informal interactions held on the sidelines of major conferences usually birth research collaborations and present mentorship and training opportunities for younger professionals. Also, not everyone is comfortable with technology. Since this is required to benefit maximally from a virtual conference, it may discourage some from participating (Levite 2022; Standaert et al., 2021; Ogunmodede et al., 2022). Consistent attendance through all the sessions of a conference may also not be guaranteed because participants may simply have added the conference to their usual daily clinical and social schedules and thus move in and out of sessions in between their daily work schedules. Some loss of potential revenue also occurs with virtual conferencing. The absence of product exhibitions or their limitation to virtual exhibition rooms (if available) diminishes revenue from industry support and sponsorship. Other benefits of in-person conferences such as hands-on training and workshops may also be lost or reduced in impact by their conversion to virtual sessions devoid of the hands-on component.

### **Virtual Meeting**

Virtual meeting simply refers to the practice of holding formal meetings using online platforms and social media platforms instead of a given geographical location. It deals with a set of smart technologies that makes it possible for two more persons in different geographical locations to interact in real time using audio, visual, text, and audio-visual features in real time. In the view of Alida (2020), a virtual meeting takes place when people around the world, regardless of their location, use video, audio, and text to link up online. Virtual meetings allow people to share information and data in real time without being physically located together.

Virtual meetings use video-teleconference (VTC) software, such as Microsoft's Skype, Adobe Connect, Zoom Video Communication Application, Google Hangouts, etc. With the wave of virtualization, tertiary institutions are also joining sister organizations across the globe to hold virtual meetings by leveraging various online meeting technologies. Digitally advanced tertiary institutions invest heavily in virtual meeting technologies, making it possible for their staff to join real-time meetings from different parts of the world. In the face of the iCovid-19 Pandemic lockdown, more tertiary institutions in Nigeria were forced to adopt virtual meeting systems (Alida 2020; Kuzminykh & Rintel, 2020). Virtual meeting systems do not only support real-time audio-visual discussion they also have other advanced features that make it possible for virtual meeting attendants to share files in various formats, record meeting proceedings, and even engage in text conferencing.

The various challenges of virtual meetings can be solved easily with preparation and practice. By spending time beforehand to prepare technical contingency plans and video conferencing guidelines for your organization or team, you can overcome online meeting problems and maintain high team morale and productivity (Udoagwu, 2021). Illustratively, Zoom fatigue is one of the most significant problems with online meetings. Because virtual calls and meetings are comparatively easy to set up, some leaders and project managers may abuse their accessibility. However, employees in creative and technical roles like design, writing, and software development work well in flow states. When they're pulled into too many virtual meetings, their productivity and output start to drop. The solution to this issue with virtual meetings is simple: Schedule fewer meetings. As a project manager, you can choose to batch meetings with specific departments on specific days, limit meeting duration, and use collaborative workspaces like Wrike to handle quick questions and updates.

Technology can be managed but not controlled. With the best setup and practice sessions, you may still find yourself facing technical challenges in virtual meetings (Udoagwu, 2021). The best solution to this recurring challenge in virtual meetings is to have a tested backup plan. As a project manager, you should send out the details for the backup plan along with other relevant information and agendas for your meetings. This way, if you face technical challenges, you and other attendees can quickly switch to the backup conferencing plan without loss of time in your meeting schedule (Voitco Real Estate Services, 2022). Ensure that attendees are familiar with the virtual meeting options you use.

Virtual meetings are limited to audio and visual cues, unlike in-person meetings where body language, tone of voice, pacing, and gestures add to a speaker's words.

Here are several steps that can solve recurring virtual meeting challenges and help you communicate your key points clearly (Udoagwu, 2021). Distribute a clear, concise meeting agenda beforehand. This clarifies to attendees what they can expect from the meeting and when they'd be required to participate. Create slide decks for your presentation. This solves one of the major problems with virtual meetings: eliminating monotony and ensuring that attendees follow key meeting points.

Ask everyone to mute their microphones when they aren't speaking and sit in quiet areas during the call. Use file and screen-sharing tools to engage attendees and remember to call each person by name when you need a response or contribution from them. Stick to the meeting plan. Don't allow colleagues or teammates to ramble on and deviate from the agenda or prolong the meeting. If your teammates know you lead actionable meetings, they're likely to show up prepared and with more energy and focus.

Always end your virtual meetings with exact action items for every attendee. Before you adjourn your session, ask each person for their next steps to ensure everyone is aware of their responsibilities (Udoagwu, 2021). Sometimes, your virtual meeting attendees may include teammates, clients, or stakeholders from other continents and time zones. As the project manager, you may fall into the habit of prioritizing your and your team's time and schedules, but it's wise to factor in other attendees as well. Spend time thinking of how you can make it convenient for everyone to join in at a reasonable hour, especially if it's a recurring meeting. When you schedule the most convenient time for everyone involved, you show that they are valued and considered. This creates an atmosphere of better virtual meetings, motivated teams, and an overall increased chance of success.

### **The usefulness of Office Virtualization**

The use of virtual equipment influences the structures of work in an organization. According to Jones (2010), the skills, systems, and procedures involving technology efficiently handle environmental factors at the input stage. From input to conversion to output, virtual simultaneously

improve the quality and services, overall efficiency, and reduces cost at every level of the process (Jake in Ugwu, 2020). The introduction of new technologies in the office workplace modified the content of jobs. There had been less demand for jobs that entail manual dexterity, physical strength for materials handling, and traditional craftsmanship. The manual tasks are replaced by computer-process control, advanced material handling equipment, and other innovations. Because of these changes in the structure of work, the workers' job is just to operate and monitor the technologies being used.

The effects of technology are best reflected in the work performance of office workers or employees. The performance of workers in online platforms can be easily monitored and evaluated as compared to the efficiency of work in regular offices where evaluation is done by an immediate supervisor apart from their timely compliance with required reports (Ugwu, 2020).

Pfano (2016) emphasized that having advanced office virtualization increases the work performance of managers because technologies make work a lot more flexible. Modern technology is often used to contain and organize valuable information about the company hence it must be managed carefully. To effect increased performance, technology must be relevant and appropriate. This means that the availability of many advanced technologies alone does not equate to increased performance but the effective use, relevance, and appropriateness of the technology to the jobs in the office.

Davenport (2013) stated that information and communication technology (ICT), when used effectively, can ensure continuous interaction between managers and their subordinates. It is vital that in offices, managers and subordinates establish clear lines of communication and it is in this respect that ICT plays vital roles. Among managers, the use of modern office technology helps them make their work very flexible and easy. Another feature of technology that enables the attainment of increased productivity and profitability in businesses is mobility. Unlike the desktop computer in the past decades, the latest personal computers and mobile technologies like mobile phones, laptops, and tablets can be brought by workers anywhere they like to work at any time. The managers, for instance, can do the business task at home anytime. They can reply to send emails whenever they want to. Mobile technologies in modern offices are beneficial in the areas of networking/communication and marketing. Using mobile technologies like smartphones and tablets, managers, employees, and customers can smoothly interact and connect through social media applications like LinkedIn, Facebook, Skype, and Twitter. This very accessible mode of communication benefits offices regarding the efficient use of staff time, improved customer service, and a more excellent range of products and services delivered (Pfano, 2016).

### **The usefulness of Virtual Meeting in Organization**

Waizenegger et al. (2020) used interview data to identify the positive and negative effects of technology on team collaboration. Their results suggest that virtual meetings provided a social affordance or the opportunity to communicate with others and share ideas. However, while virtual meetings were generally welcomed by individuals living alone who craved social contact, working parents complained more of Zoom fatigue and having too many meetings or perceiving meetings as intrusive, with some noting increased role conflict due to the blurring of work-life boundaries. Similarly, Hacker et al. (2020) used an affordance theory perspective to analyze Twitter tweets regarding the use of videoconferencing systems (e.g., Microsoft Teams, Skype, Zoom) during COVID-19. The use of virtual meetings allowed users the opportunity to communicate with social groups, engage in shared social activities with family and friends, attend events, pursue hobbies, and consume non-recreational services (e.g., webinars) (Karl et al., 2022). The constraints included problems with the technology or incompetence in setting up the videoconferencing system, fear of being on camera, Zoom fatigue (being always on), exposing one's private living space, and lacking security (e.g., Zoom bombing).

To date, research has examined the capabilities supported by virtual meetings in organizations (e.g., face-to-face, audio conferencing), as well as the effectiveness of various meeting modes in

achieving certain meeting objectives. For example, in comparison to face-to-face meetings, videoconferencing does not allow for life-size presence in a shared space, the transmission of haptic (touch) or olfactory (scent) cues (Standaert et al., 2016), or the ability to observe what attendees are looking at, to see attendees' body language and gestures, to have side conversations with one or more attendees, or to examine and/or manipulate specific physical objects (e.g., prototypes or samples) (Standaert et al., 2021). Similarly, research by Kuzminykh and Rintel (2020) found that videoconferencing limited participants' ability to understand the social dynamics of the group (i.e., who is important) and view communicative signaling, such as who was looking at whom. Research has also examined participant engagement and multitasking behavior during videoconference meetings. For example, Kuzminykh and Rintel (2020) found participants reported feeling a lower motivation to engage both behaviorally and cognitively when participating in a meeting remotely versus face to face. Participants also noted that turning one's video on or off was a crucial signal of engagement, with the camera on signaling high engagement and the camera off indicating low engagement.

### **The usefulness of the Office of Today and Future**

The concept of modern office space increasingly emphasizes comfort and functionality. With total digitalization, companies want workspaces to be technological and trend sensitive as well. At the same time, the level of business concern for employees is also growing (Levite, 2022). Competing for talented specialists, companies stop looking for a comfortable office as just an element of prestige or status. The work environment becomes an effective tool for building a company's corporate culture and enhancing the employer's reputation. Offices, which only five years ago looked like the far future or a pretty picture from the Internet, are becoming the reality of today. Today, we will talk about what an actual office space looks like and how technology is making work processes more convenient and efficient (Karl et al., 2022). Everyone is looking forward to working in a place that knows the value of time, a place where you can be confident of your safety, a place where everyone has a right to choose, a place where reliable data can be operated, and a place that knows how to adapt to changing realities and a place where they know how to surprise. All of these are pivotal in the design of office virtualization and virtual meeting. More than two years ago, the COVID-19 pandemic sent nearly all employees from commercial office space to home offices. By mid-March 2020, 67% of employers shifted their operations to allow their employees to work from home. Although many individuals including employers, employees, property managers, and owners of commercial real estate initially viewed remote work as a temporary fix, a huge population continues to work from home today (Voitco Real Estate Services, 2022). Even as we've passed the two-year mark since the start of the global pandemic, many businesses and employees have found themselves continuing remote work and even preferring it in many cases. Well, the office isn't dead it's simply being reincarnated (Standaert et al., 2022). Research shows that although many Americans enjoy working from home and the flexibility it brings, they do not want to be fully remote in the future (they'd instead prefer a hybrid environment). Others are dying to get back into the office, it seems. Typically, those who work in highly collaborative work environments have suffered the most (Waizenegger et al., 2020). Additionally, Generation Z, those just entering the workforce, have been hit hard with remote work. Working in person, even on a hybrid schedule, is particularly important for this generation. At one point, there were Gen Z employees who had worked with companies for well over a year, without ever meeting any of their team members in person. A challenge of remote work is that you lose the face-to-face interaction and connectedness that you can expect from a traditional work environment.

In fact, according to research, 55% of people say working remotely puts a strain on collaborative efforts, making it more challenging. Company leadership recognizes the benefits of side-by-side collaboration, and how it adds to their company culture and gives new employees a sense of belonging. The bottom line is that people want to return to the office, but with the proper health

and safety precautions in place. Drawing from the above, regardless of COVID cases, which change every day, for many, remote work will continue to be the new normal (Voitco Real Estate Services, 2022).

### **Theoretical Foundation**

The theoretical foundation of this study is mainly anchored on the theory of Affordances. It was first observed by psychologist James J. Gibson and written about in his 1977 article *The Theory of Affordances*. It was there that he established the idea that affordances were the properties of an object that allows it to function (Wesolko, 2016).

The theory reveals three assumptions:

1. Whether affordances are identified as intended prior use or emerging in action.
2. Whether affordances are functional or non-functional.
3. Whether affordances are potential or actual.

Implications of the theory to the present study have it that the affordance concept has penetrated the Information Systems (IS) scholarship as a lens for theorizing the relationship between technology (office virtualization, virtual meeting, today's office, and future office) and its users (Wesolko, 2016; Standaert et al., 2021). Not all organizations can afford modern office setting such as office virtualization and virtual meeting. Thus, the management of the organization needs to weigh the affordability of such design and the cost-and-balance effect of such affordability on the business before its purchase. More so, if virtualizing the office would not promote the ideals of the organization, there is no need for management to adopt such. The functionality of the business concerning technology matters a lot. Thus, it is important to note that when the functionality is in tandem with the business ideals, affording it is vital to enhance the organization's operations and performance.

To contribute to this research strand, this essay explores the various ways in which Information Systems researchers have addressed the issues while using the notion of affordances. For this purpose, we have gone through the "basket" journals within the Information Systems field. This small-scale literature screening is done to base our arguments on the issues in the Information System context. Thus, our review does not attempt to identify gaps, or synthesize evidence, in the style previous affordance reviews have done [23]. Our essay reveals the assumptions of the status quo and considers alternative paths. To contribute to this research strand, this essay explores the various ways in which Information Systems researchers have addressed the issues while using the notion of affordances. For this purpose, we have gone through the "basket" journals within the Information Systems field. This small-scale literature screening is done to base our arguments on the issues in the Information System context. Thus, our review does not attempt to identify gaps, or synthesize evidence, in the style previous affordance reviews have done [23]. Our essay reveals the assumptions of the status quo and considers alternative paths.

### **SUMMARY**

The study has shown that office virtualization and virtual meeting help reduce costs, improve quality and productivity, and encourage the use of innovative and creative methods for solving problems in the modern office workplace. Virtuals are of great help in making the work more efficient, but this would never eliminate employees for being the leading central prayer in any organization (Ugwu, 2020). The human workforce remains highly crucial in offices. They can never be replaced with virtual techniques. The success in the use of technology in the modern office work environment depends on the sufficiency of money, time, and technology expertise. Technology has rapidly advanced to the point of having most of the jobs done digitally and it threatens the employment of people who are not literate on technological advancements. The adoption of technology such as office virtualization tools may be costly, but if used effectively,

increased work performance and productivity will reduce all the rest of the production and service costs in offices in the long run.

Conclusively, proactive organizations need to delve into virtualizing the office setting and as well conducting meetings through virtual means to enhance prompt decision-making and as well promote effective operations and performance in the workplace.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the summary of the study, the following suggestions are advanced:

1. Management of organizations should inform their employees of all information about the technological changes that they plan to bring into the office setting and the skills needed to enhance operations and performance.
2. Management of organizations should include in its learning and development intervention plans a continuous series of training for its employees for every update or advancement that technology undergoes, as it will enable them to equip themselves in the goings of the business to enhance its operations and performance.

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