

# Investigation of client influence on collaborative and distributed project success \*

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## Abstract

Project teams today often work in collaborative and distributed settings, especially when multinational companies or international projects are involved. Various studies on collaborative and distributed projects have attempted to identify and measure the factors that influence project success. Many models have been proposed, reflecting the rising importance of this research area. However, very few authors have explored the client's contribution to project success. This article presents a theoretical overview of (a) distributedness and collaboration specificities in industrial practices and (b) client involvement in project management. The empirical results of a study in Canadian companies are then presented. The results support the positive role of certain dimensions of team–client collaboration in organizational support and in clarifying and monitoring objectives. A more surprising result suggests that client proximity has little impact on the various dimensions of collaboration and involvement. The results highlight interesting aspects of the contribution of collaboration between client and project team to project success.

*Key words:* Distributed project, Collaboration, Client, Project management

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## 1 Introduction

As distributed projects are becoming the norm and not the exception in many industries, several studies have examined distributed projects as a separate research topic. Research in this area has flourished, particularly in the management and organizational fields, from the seminal work of Kipnack and Stamps [1] to the simultaneous publication of four literature reviews in 2004–2005 [2, 3, 4, 5]. Earlier studies focused mainly on the impact of team ‘distributedness’<sup>1</sup> on various measures of performance. Results were often inconsistent, however, probably due to the large number of dimensions considered and the methods used (e.g., experiments in controlled environments). Nevertheless, it was shown that team distributedness tended to create difficulties (inefficiency and ineffectiveness) for teams engaged in collaborative work. Several contextual dimensions were shown to impact the relationship between distributedness and performance, such as project size, task type, the experience of team members, etc. Many other studies focused on the success factors that contributed to high performance in distributed teams. For example, work processes, team competencies, and organizational support

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<sup>1</sup> Evaristo and his colleagues were among the first to use this term in their research [6].