

The Big Switch: Taking Remote Work Anywhere

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15/09/2020 When – seemingly overnight – a pandemic changed the way the world worked, Porsche's consultants had to come up with clever ways to complete projects without letting clients down.

Although the Covid-19 pandemic shut down travel around the world, it didn't shut down business—or clients in the midst of implementing projects with the help of Porsche Consulting. That meant the management consultancy's preferred collaboration style—hands-on and in person, with intensive workshop sessions—had to be adjusted in the face of social distancing and travel bans.

From Canada to Chile, three projects show how consultants and their clients coped with the change and succeeded in delivering results despite a sudden shift to remote work. Their experiences show that digital collaboration tools and creativity will reduce the need for on-site work in the future, but the personal touch will never go out of style.

Changing Mindsets: Codelco

Codelco, the world's largest copper producer, runs seven mines and eight processing plants in Chile. Until 2019, each one had its own logistics and purchasing operations.

In order to create synergies for the company as a whole, Codelco decided to move purchasing operations to an off-site model and introduce remote work to the state-owned Chilean company. Codelco's supply chain corporate manager Ricardo Reyes says it was hard to convince managers and staff that moving part of their operation off-site would work. "Mining is a very traditional industry where face-to-face relations are a high priority," Reyes says. "There was a lot of pressure from plant managers to maintain personnel close by."

Porsche Consulting was brought on to help create and implement new processes of remote collaboration. "When the Covid crisis hit, it helped change the mindset of the people there," says Porsche Consulting manager Francisco Fuentealba. Remote work was suddenly the safest option and proved to work out on a large scale—for the consultants as well. Instead of traveling back and forth to distant mine locations in Chile for face-to-face meetings, they implemented regular video meetings with scattered employees.

Almost overnight, digital collaboration tools and Microsoft Teams meetings replaced smaller in-person meetings and conferences of up to eighty participants. Suddenly, Codelco's efforts—over a period of more than three years—to efficiently implement remote work along the supply chain sector were especially valued. In a first pilot area, the shift to a centralized system reduced the approval time for purchase orders by 50 percent and optimized the team's workload.

Porsche Consulting completed its part of the project in June, but its influence is still being felt beyond the key performance indicators like improved turnaround time, reduced costs, and reduced staff needs. Every Thursday at 3 pm, Reyes and his team still meet online. "It's a ritual now," he says with a laugh. "That's one consequence of the discipline Porsche Consulting brought—people are continuing to make improvements even after the project is over."

Codelco ...

... is the world's largest copper producer. The Chilean state-owned company mines and processes almost two million tons of copper each year. It operates seven mines and eight ore-processing facilities in Chile, generating more than $16 billion in annual revenue.

Watching from Afar: Sto Panel

The Sto company, a major manufacturer of building prefab panels, is all about making building construction more efficient. Sto Panel is a program to enable a network of contractors and fabricators to create branded prefabricated high-quality wall panels. In 2019, Porsche Consulting was commissioned to help Skyrise, a Sto Panel affiliate in Pickering, Ontario, drive their own efficiency in their production process. Skyrise's thirty-person factory had reached its limits and was looking for ways to turn out more panels within its existing infrastructure.

After starting the project with an analysis of the factory in late 2019, the Porsche Consulting team returned to Canada in early March 2020 to help implement the identified solutions on the shop floor. But after just two weeks, travel restrictions made it impossible to finish the project in person. The team had to rapidly integrate new skills to keep the project on track. Online collaboration tools replaced Post-its and flip charts, and Porsche consultants brought remote work to the shop floor by facilitating team meetings at the Skyrise factory with employees via conferencing and messaging apps. “Carrying out the implementation together with our client is a crucial part of our work. So we tried to be there, without actually being there,” says Porsche Consulting manager Jean Collard.

Patrick Kehrer, Sto's manufacturing and on-site solutions manager, was particularly impressed by the team's problem-solving creativity in the midst of a crisis. One unusual “hack” stood out: unable to evaluate the newly implemented processes and ways of working in person, Porsche consultants leveraged video cameras on the factory floor—and fast-forwarded the footage to better understand production flow and where it could still be optimized. “Evaluating the videos that way was a major plus,” Kehrer says. “That really saved us a lot of time.” The creativity paid off: production more than doubled.

That doesn't mean on-site visits are over, particularly when part of the project is to win over employees. “Physical presence leaves something with workers that tele-presence doesn't,” Kehrer says. “But when you get to know people in person first, you can easily transition to digital collaboration.”

Sto ...

... is a construction materials company based in Stühlingen, Germany, with €1.4 billion in revenue and more than 5,000 employees around the world. Its dozens of affiliates located in North America, as well as several affiliates in South America, produce prefab exterior wall systems under the brand of Sto Panel for the construction industry. The panels, manufactured offsite, are used to quickly assemble energy-efficient, long-lasting exterior walls. Porsche Consulting worked with one of its Canadian affiliates, Skyrise, to maximize production line efficiency.

Step by Step: Edenred

The Brazilian corporate voucher company Ticket Log works hard to keep its customers moving. Over 30,000 clients rely on the company to manage fueling and maintenance for their corporate fleets—a total of around one million vehicles. That means tracking 2.5 billion liters of fuel and seven million spare parts each year.

Keeping track of all those vehicles is a huge job, one Ticket Log—a subsidiary of the French multinational Edenred—wanted to streamline. Using AI and software robots to make decisions, Ticket Log hoped to get better prices for its clients and better results from the 18,000 auto repair shops in its network. The ultimate goal was to reduce the number of people involved in decision-making, and enable clients to pinpoint problems in their car fleets.

Edenred brought in Porsche Consulting to help them review the automation process from start to finish. Meetings and workshops followed a traditional format, with consultants flying in to Ticket Log's headquarters in Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, each week for all-day, in-person workshops. In March, Covid shutdowns across Brazil made that impossible. The collaboration had to shift online—with success, says Eduardo Fleck, head of fleet maintenance & mobility solutions at Edenred Brazil. "We understood that it was possible to work together in a very dynamic way even remotely and the gains were significant for the project."

For that, the consultants had to rethink their approach. It was clear that the all-day sessions Edenred had come to expect from Porsche Consulting's team didn't translate well to an online format: spending three or four hours at a stretch in online meetings wasn't viable. "When an online workshop goes on more than two hours, people start dispersing," says William Kang, Senior Expert at Porsche Consulting. Therefore, instead of holding day-long sessions, the consultants broke down the steps into smaller chunks and prepared differently, aiming to make meetings shorter. The Porsche Consulting's team met separately each day for "pre-work" sessions, refining their proposals and going over possible discussion points in advance. By mapping out solutions, they were able to speed up discussions with their Edenred partners later on. They quickly saw results, including simplifying the ordering system to make automatic approvals more efficient. "It was impressive to see how we were able to incorporate these improvements into the project in a remote context," says Eduardo Fleck. "We would not have considered that possible before the pandemic."

The approach was bolstered by a virtual project environment set up to show all the steps necessary to achieve Ticket Log's goals. By zooming in to the step that was up for discussion, participants could easily orient themselves and track what they had achieved so far and what lay ahead. "This helped us to focus," Kang says, "because everyone knew that other questions had not been forgotten but would be discussed in an upcoming session."

Edenred ...

... is a French company specializing in pre-paid card services and vouchers. Their business covers everything from meal vouchers to vehicle fleet management. Based in Malakoff, France, they have operations in forty-six countries and managed 2.5 billion transactions last year for over 850,000 corporate clients. Ticket Log is one of their Brazilian subsidiaries.

Info

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