Chapter XXII

The Virtual Organization

While this book has highlighted the successful (and some of the less than successful) techniques and applications of virtual teams, the future evolution of virtual teams is yet to be seen within the marketplace. Clearly, many external forces within the marketplace could potentially either drive further utilization of virtual teams within organizations, while other factors might point toward a diminished use of such models. In this chapter, we’ll discuss three potential paths that the use of virtual teams within the enterprise might take, and discuss in more detail the scenario that we feel is most likely.

Possibility Number One: Virtual Teams Fade in Prominence

In this scenario, the use of virtual teams would eventually fade within corporations. Their use would essentially go the way of other management and business fads, with the pendulum swinging back to utilization of more co-located teams and organizations. The remote worker becomes the exception to the rule and must try to fit in as best they can. Factors that might influence this evolution might include a desire of the return to more face-to-face communications and team methodologies, based on feedback from team members that might begin to feel
too isolated. Corporations may also determine that the business benefits from the use of virtual teams do not outweigh the challenges.

### Possibility Number Two: Virtual Teams Remain in Use, But in More of a “Niche” Role

In this situation, virtual teams would continue to be used within large corporations where they made business sense; however, they would not necessarily become a pervasive way for corporations to conduct all business. The majority of business interactions would be conducted within face-to-face, collocated teams. This situation may arise because technology advances stall, making more broad-scale implementation of virtual teams unfeasible, or because corporations discover that in some cases virtual teams just don’t make sense. Basically, organizations would be asked to make virtual teams work, where necessary, while putting a primary focus on face-to-face teams.

### Possibility Number Three: The Virtual Organization Emerges

This possibility describes the evolution that we believe is in the future for virtual teams within corporations. In this scenario, virtual teams are taken to the next level, and the operations of the entire corporation embrace the virtual working environment. Employees are geographically distributed in many locations, and the ability to work in this environment is an expected skill set for all workers, including knowledge workers, sales associates, support staff, factory personnel, middle management, development engineers, and even the executives. Much like the Web links disparate computing systems together, corporations would become a web of employees, all linked through technology, that work together to solve business problems and bring products and services to market, regardless of their geographic location or team affiliation. Teams are more fluid, engaging to solve business problems and disbanding when no longer necessary,
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