

Chapter XV

Editor Conclusions

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The study of virtual organizations encompasses several research fields, and the variables involved in each of them are sometimes closely related. This represents a challenge for managers, since the decision taken about the technical tools to use, the organizational structure, incentives or procedures, for example, are tightly linked, and this represents a complex problem in itself. Nevertheless, the biggest challenge in virtual organization management is the lack of experience. Although the phenomenon is not new- there are plenty of successful communities of practice in the net- most of the managers and professionals have limited experience in networking, and only as users in specific areas of knowledge or business activities, and are not fully aware of networking possibilities and limitations. This lack of experience implies

a big trial when facing the problems involved in virtual organizations management.

But this lack of experience is only relative. Information technology is not new. Nowadays, every manager has an extensive experience, at least as a user, in business processes that are partially or totally done by electronic means. The inexperience lies in the virtuality of the organization in itself, not the business processes. But the management of an organization completely virtual poses a set of complex decisions completely new in respect to traditional IS management. In the new virtual organization, some powerful social mechanisms for motivation and control disappear, the human resources techniques cannot be fully applied, and some essential ways of knowledge transmission and innovation are impossible. The

advantage of a boundless space organization with workers and partners at hand no matter the place they live has disadvantages, too. Only when these disadvantages are mitigated with the right managerial decisions and it is possible to take the full advantage of virtuality, virtual organizations make sense.

In our opinion, virtual organization study must rely on some basic pillars. Perhaps, the most important is Knowledge Management. This is because the real power of networking is the access to highly qualified professionals and communities of practice. But it is not always easy to pump that knowledge out, and Knowledge Management offers a solid framework to approach the problem. Nevertheless, some specific limitations and considerations must be applied when considering the special case of Knowledge Management in virtual communities and organizations. Traditionally, networking has been considered in KM as a great advantage to add to other managerial

techniques, but in virtual organizations all goes around networking. Then, new specific studies in KM are necessary when dealing with virtual organizations. Most of the chapters of this book deal with this problem from different perspectives, and offer, as a whole, a complete vision of Knowledge Management in virtual organizations.

The second pillar is participation and motivation in virtual organization, or more generally, in communities of practice. It can be studied as a part of KM, but several studies state it is convenient to separate it from KM. The third pillar is the technical tools at hand for efficient problems like technical tools and classifications, and practical experiences. In this sense we assume it is impossible to offer a general formula to obtain the best results for a specific virtual organization. The structure of the organization, the size, objectives and activity of the organization must shape the best managerial solution for each case.

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