

THE WORLD OF VIRTUAL WORK DEFINED

Defining the World of Virtual Work

- This is most simply defined as work done outside of the traditional physical office or work space. This may mean that individual workers or teams are based physically away from the organization's office, either at home or in different departments or countries, or in a virtual (3D simulated) environment. Alternatively, employees and /or the organization's office or workspace could be virtual, for example in 3D virtual environments such as Second Life (SL).

Virtual Workers

- Individual virtual workers can be people in permanent, semi-permanent and flexible types of work scenarios, for example working from home or simply using modern technology such as virtual private networks, videoconferencing and Voice over IP. Recently, these technologies have been extended by new Internet platforms such as blogs, wikis or social networks, where virtual teams can collaboratively create content. Probably the most sophisticated version of social networks are 3D virtual worlds which allow virtual team members to work in an immersive environment emulating face-to-face communication with colleagues.
 - Telecommuting, e-commuting, e-work, telework, working at home (WAH), or working from home (WFH) is a work arrangement in which employees enjoy some flexibility in working location and hours. This flexibility increases the employability of marginalized groups, such as mothers and fathers with small children, the handicapped and people living in remote areas.
 - Some workers, such as management consultants who tend to work at their client's side most of the time, do not have a designated desk or office space because they spend most of their time out of the office.
- A virtual team is a group of individuals who work across time, space, and organizational boundaries with links strengthened by webs of communication technology. In today's organizations, these teams consist of employees both working at home or in the office, but in different physical or geographic locations.
- Virtual teams are used to gain flexibility in the respective workloads of virtual workers, so that work can be handed off to one another seamlessly. For example, a network of freelancers may meet in a coffee shop, at one of their homes or at a client location when face-to-face communication is required, but everything else can be done virtually.
- There are a number of different types of virtual teams:
 - *Company Virtual Teams* are made up of people who all work for the same company but within different departments and, most likely, different locations.
 - *Organization Virtual Teams* are made up of members who work for different organizations. For example, a marketing team may work in partnership with an external agency responsible for carrying out creative work on their behalf. The team members will work under different management and in different working conditions, may have conflicting ideas about what their objectives should be and often have little awareness of their colleagues' other responsibilities or projects. (Source: www.trainingreference.co.uk)

- *Multiple Virtual Teams* are made up of a mixture of virtual teams. For example a cross department team, all based in different locations, that also works with an external supplier based in another country. In addition to the issues highlighted above there will be more complex communication issues that will make it a challenge for members of this team to coordinate their thoughts and ideas collectively. (Source: www.trainingreference.co.uk)
- Virtual offices allow employers to keep valuable employees, allow employers to hire employees otherwise not available, and have facilitated productive re-engineering of order-management and customer service processes.

Virtual World Workers

- Individuals (represented as avatars) are increasingly finding employment in 3D virtual worlds, such as SL. These may be jobs that only exist in the 3D environment, although the boundaries between virtual and real are blurred because a real income can be generated from these virtual jobs.
- Workers can be employed in positions in 3D virtual worlds that also exist in the real world. In other words, their roles can be split between the real and virtual worlds. For example, a recruitment consultant can interview candidates for jobs in the real world as well as in the virtual world (e.g. SL).
- There are as many opportunities for innovation and profit in SL as in the real world. For example, jobs in SL include: party and wedding planner, pet manufacturer, casino operator, tattooist, nightclub owner, automotive manufacturer, fashion designer, aerospace engineer, custom avatar designer, jewelry maker, architect, XML coder, freelance scripter, game developer, fine artist, machinima set designer, tour guide and dancer.

Outsourcing

- Outsourcing is an area in which virtual work has become commonplace. For example, an HR department may choose to outsource recruitment to an employment services provider, but will still handle interviewing, onboarding/orientation and other functions of the hiring process internally. This requires a level of virtual teamwork, as software enables the fast and accurate transfer of data from the client company to its outsourcing partner and back. The two companies do not need to be in the same city or even the same country in order to facilitate the smooth delivery of this continuum of services. However, outsourcing can occur virtually between two companies located in the same country, the same city or even the same building complex.
 - Offshoring is a type of outsourcing and is defined as the movement of a business process done at a company in one country to the same or another company in another, different country. This includes any business process such as production, manufacturing, or services.
 - Offshoring virtual working can include the permanent outsourcing of business functions to another geographical location or permanent virtual teams working together from different geographical locations.
- In the case of an outsourced project, key members of the team work for an entirely different organization, under an entirely separate management team, and are not even governed by the same overriding corporate objectives.

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