Foreword

For over a decade, people have been talking enthusiastically about the potential for telecommuting and other forms of electronically enabled remote work. But most people I know today would say it hasn't happened. They still have offices; they still drive in to work; they still have face-to-face meetings.

What they don't seem to realize (even though it's all around them) is that virtual work is everywhere today. Most professionals I know read and send work-related e-mail from home. Many travel with laptops, cell phones, and other devices that let them stay in touch electronically on business trips and even vacations. More and more meetings include people who are present by speakerphone or are held entirely as conference calls. A growing minority of people now work primarily from a home office—sometimes thousands of miles away from their company office.

When I spent a sabbatical year in Barcelona, Spain, two years ago, for instance, I was surprised at how easily I was able to continue participating in several MIT research projects. We had regular weekly meetings that several participants and I usually attended by phone. We had frequent e-mail exchanges and phone calls. Even though there were a few times when I really wished I had been in a meeting in person, overall I felt like my remote participation in the projects was at least 80% as effective as if I had been there in person.

But all these new possibilities have only become economically feasible in the last decade or so. Taken together, they lead to some profound changes in how teams can work together. But very few people realize just how profound these changes really are.

Now—finally—someone has written a book about what's really happening and what it means. In this remarkable book, Robert Jones, Robert Oyung, and Lise Pace describe what it's really like to live and work in a company that is leading the way in the daily use of virtual teams. They shatter some of the myths that keep many organizations from ever seriously trying to take advantage of virtual teams. They give detailed advice about what works and what doesn't work in virtual teams. They describe the advantages and disadvantages of different kinds of virtual teams and tell a person how to recognize when virtual teams are appropriate and when they are not.

Filled with eminently practical suggestions you can use today, this book also conveys a compelling vision of where we are headed. It's hard to imagine an organization today that could not benefit from reading—and taking to heart—the practical wisdom in this book.

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