Chapter XV

Virtual Organization:
Duality of Human Identities in Consciousness and Entity

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ABSTRACT

This chapter discloses the social aspects of a virtual organization and identifies the role of human actors in a virtual organization (consciousness). This consciousness exists in the perceptual world that we create beyond the limits of time and space. However, its counterparts exist in various forms (entities) in the real world. To bridge the gaps between the consciousneses and the entities, there exist dual identities of human interveners in both virtual and real worlds. This research provides the meaning of virtual organization, and proceeds to explain the relationship between the consciousneses (virtual organizations) and entities (real organizations) with human intervention (human players) using structuration theory. This study uses a theory-building process to understand human activities in virtual organizations. The theory proposed in this study reflects the epistemological positions of virtual organization research.
INTRODUCTION

As with net-enabled organizations, the concept of virtual organizations has gained prominence among researchers and practitioners. As shown by the recent work of Schultze and Orlikowski (2001), virtuality can be understood through the perception of time and space. This research extends the scope of the virtual organization in terms of “virtual space,” a metaphor used in time and space (beyond the constraints of the actual location we belong to) dimensions (Allcorn, 1997). As opposed to the virtual organization, time and space dimensions are constrained in traditional or “real” organizations. Time constraints occur in real organizations due to the operational time dimension of such organizations, while space dimension occurs due to constraints of location.

It is true that a virtual organization inherits the attributes of virtual dimensions—a newly defined concept of time and space. In other words, a virtual organization does not exist in our time and space, but rather exists only in virtual space (perceptual world), which is only a metaphor of our consciousness and not reality. A virtual organization, in this sense, is the metaphor of our designed and structured consciousnesses that exists in virtual space to perform the intended actions of interest. However, the most important thing in a virtual organization is to identify the role of human actors who get involved in both the physical and the perceptual world. We attempt to explain the relationships between the human actors, the real and virtual organizations, and our perceptions of these concepts.

MOTIVATIONS

Given that e-business is imperative in the modern business world, the definition or the dimension of virtual organization is necessary to set up competitive strategies in e-business. However, this is a very challenging task for many companies due to the ever-emerging, nebulous interpretations currently in existence. Many new business models have been created, experimented upon, and abandoned in the e-business area. E-business is still a fledgling field in terms of organizational strategies, structure, and behavior, which is indicative of the fact that virtual organization is not yet firmly defined within the dimensions of time and space (Ahuja and Carley, 1999).

Metaphors play a very powerful role in structuring virtual organizations because terms like “virtual space” and “virtual organization” originate from symbolic languages (Faucheux, 1997). These metaphors provide the meaning of existence, thus we can treat the organization like a real organization in virtual space. Continuous analogical processes between virtual and real organizations explain the
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