Imagine that you live Chicago, and your best friends live in Texas, Florida, California, and Paris. Overall, do you think this is a good thing or a bad thing? Some people might think, “It’s a bad thing because I can’t see my friends whenever I want, and we can’t get together and do things as often as I’d like. We can only talk on the phone and write to each other.” Other people might think, “Well, I don’t get to see them all the time, but now when I want to go on vacation, I have people in four different places I can visit and maybe even stay with.” This is an example of the level of comfort—of preference—that an individual has in a particular situation. For virtual teams, we characterize the level of comfort and readiness to operate in a virtual environment on the “virtual team maturity curve.”

It’s important to understand the maturity or readiness of a group or individual to work in a virtual team in order to determine which tools and processes will need to be used in order to have them work effectively. For example, we’ve found that in teams where the members know each other or have worked together before, they are able to get started in a virtual environment more quickly. However, simply having worked together face-to-face in the past is not a guarantee that they will be successful in a virtual environment; there are other factors to success related to tools and processes.

The virtual team maturity curve acts as an indicator of the likelihood of the organization or individual to be successful in a virtual team environment. The curve looks like the following.
A typical distribution of people in a company or organization looks something like the pie chart “General Distribution within the Maturity Curve”.

Avoid

Individuals and organizations that are in the Avoid stage typically are uncomfortable or unwilling to participate in a virtual team environment. Typically, in a large population, this stage represents the fewest number of people. People in this stage are unlikely to move up the curve. Individuals in the Avoid stage