Chapter VII

Successful Virtual Organizations as Collaboration Networks: Descriptions and Experiences from Two Norwegian Examples

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Abstract

This chapter describes two successful virtual organizations and tries to extract features that may have a role in their success. The first, TESA, is the oldest and was on the height of activity in the 80s. The second, RKK, is still increasing its activities. The chapter describes the lifecycle and recognized conditions for both cases. TESA is a network of private companies working for enhancing the competitiveness of the members, where RKK is a network of public schools working as a virtual vocational
training vendor and enterprise. These cases seem to suggest that a “change agent” combined with a strategy of “open door” policy, relationship building, and shared benefit is important. ICT was never an issue with TESA but has an increasing importance for RKK, enabling a higher frequency of collaboration. Both cases seem to have an extensive relationship with surrounding infrastructure and mutual benefits.

Background

The author has worked with several industrial collaboration networks over a long period. This includes several network start-up attempts, being employed in one, being coordinator/secretary for networks, and being hired as consultant. Literature mentions several types of collaboration networks (Albalooshi, 2003; Goldman, Nagel & Preiss, 1995; Riempp, 1998; Rolstadás & Andersen, 2000; Strandhagen & Produktivitet, 2005, 1998; Wellman, 1999). Most of these are either collaboration of similar companies (former competitors) or collaborations along the supply chain to provide some delivery. Our experience is that virtual organizations for developing/distributing knowledge or developing competitiveness are far more interesting, as their impact for long-term improvement and local society seem to be better.

There are some issues that seem to be more relevant than others when we aim for developing industry by active use of technology transfer and industrial clusters/collaborations (Camarinha-Matos, Afsarmanesh & International Federation for Information Processing, 2004; Jackson, 1999). The hypothesis for our descriptions is that is a few dominating characteristics determine the success of a virtual organization. If that seems to be the case, then development and implementation of ICT tools should emphasis those issues as much as possible.

Cases

Sometimes cases may help us to understand the mechanisms involved in how industry is developing. We have several collaboration networks or industrial clusters in the Rogaland area, and several attempts have also later disappeared.
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