

Virtual work

[Business](#), [Work](#)



1. Introduction Recent years have witnessed an incredible development of information technology and the structure of traditional work environment is changing. The emergency of virtual work has been reflected in some companies' new work policy. For example, Jetblue Airlines has changed its working conditions and established a virtual call centre where employees can work from home without a central office. Despite the technology advancement that enables virtual working, the amount of people adopting this new working pattern is still very low.

This report will explore the nature of virtual work and analyse the barriers of adopting this work policy, as well as give suggestions on how to overcome these barriers. 2. Nature of virtual work Virtual organisation, by definition, is a principle of management that has been used in a variety of applications, including virtual memory, virtual reality, virtual classrooms, virtual teams, and virtual offices (Mowshowitz, 2002). Unlike traditional organizations, the virtual organization itself has no need for physical representation.

Its output, however, might influence the physical world directly, such as the direct buying or selling of stocks, or indirectly, such as providing decision support for a human agent in a traditional organization. Virtual offices, also known as virtual working, allow employees to operate in dynamically changing work environment. Virtual working as part of the virtual organization can be defined as the use of communications networks rather than buildings and physical assets, meaning that the physical location of work is now less important (Pang, 2001). As the result, departments and teams no longer have to work in close contact with each other.

The common denominator for all virtual workers is that they communicate and perform work duties almost entirely through electronic technology, such as instant messaging, blogs and social networking. Employees in this situation, need a certain level of self-control ability, and very often need to structure the environment and systems they use to perform a variety of tasks, for example, getting familiar with different types of communication software.

3. Advantages of virtual work

3.1 For companies

3.1.1 Less cost

Virtual work enables a company to reduce costs in renting, travelling and labor salary.

Telecommuting allows people to work from home or anywhere they want instead of staying in an office and thus helps an organisation to reduce expenditure in renting the building (Tomic, nd). Also, no office means that the company does not have to hire cleaners or other labors and pay their salary. Additionally, companies can reduce the travel expenses as geographical distance in virtual organization is no longer an obstacle to hold meetings and conferences. Virtual workers can communicate through the internet instead of going to other places to observe and study.

3.2 Increased effectiveness

Companies that implement virtual work policy can increase effectiveness because employees can save the time of commuting to work. Better communication, fewer distractions, better concentration and less traveling time contribute to the increased 15-50% productivity in a virtual organization (Tomic, nd). Employees can also improve work quality due to more strategic use of work time and less disruption.

3.2 For employees

3.2.1 Less stress

Virtual working not only eases their traffic problems, but also relieves employees' office pressure.

Most employees worry about their privacy and do not feel comfortable in office. By working from home or other places employees no longer have to deal with office politics and office gossip (Anderson, 2012). Also, virtual workers do not have to rush bus and metro during the peak hours. By working from home, employees can have more time dealing with work in a relaxing environment, which is beneficial for their mental health.

3. 2. 2 Improved work-life balance

Working from home gives employees the opportunity to balance their work and life. Telecommuters have more flexible work hours and are able to manage their own time.

They do not have work in an office from 9am to 5pm every day and they can do anything they want as long as the work can be finished as planned. For example, they can go shopping and are able to respond to phone calls from their family (Anderson, 2012). Also, when the work is done, remote workers can clean the house, communicate with family members, and take care of their children which are beneficial for improving family life. Furthermore, if employees want to better equip their knowledge, they have the ability to go to school without affecting normal work.

3. For society

Adopting telecommuting brings benefits to the society. Working from home eases the traffic pressure. Remote workers do not need to commute to work, therefore, there is less air pollution and fewer traffic problems. Also, virtual working creates more business opportunities for people in suburbs and rural areas because it is not restricted by region.

4. Why virtual working is still not universal

Innovative workplace strategies that efficiently leverage human capital are becoming increasingly valuable in today's economic environment (Thompson and Caputo, 2009).

Some organizations have long employed virtual work arrangements as a tool to recruit and retain key employees. Despite the technological capabilities that enable lower operating expense and offer employees greater work flexibility, organizations that adopt the virtual work policy and the amount of workers working virtually is still very low. The problem can be analysed from two aspects: companies and employees. 4. 1 For companies As company's major goal is to maximize profit in each activity, virtual working enables lower operating expense.

Adopting the virtual working approach for organization seems the most tendency option. However, basic on company's strategy and structure, in some case, virtual working would more like to be the obstacle for it's development. The communication issues are not always technical in nature, but related to human factors. Members in a virtual team would face the misunderstood messages, thereby resulting in inefficiencies (Pang, 2001). More importantly, as there might be different security data protection in employees network, the risk of leakage of information will be increased.

Organizational restructuring resulting in an increase in virtual workers and decrease in on-site employees can yield cost savings (Pang, 2001). However, having a human capital management strategy for newly transitioned virtual workers would cost an amount of money for training. Controlling and monitoring off-site employees become essential. For organization restructure, large amount of money would be invested for supporting the restructuring. That would be the difficult for company to adopt the virtual working. 4. 2 For employees

Despite the conveniences of telecommuting, the potential downsides of the virtual workplace often go overlooked (Heidrick, 2011). Employees who work outside the office, feels isolated from coworker. In some cases, these employees start to feel disconnected from company culture and come to believe they are less respected in their organizations than their colleagues who work together in person. An organization's ability to flexible depends on employees' commitment to the organization, their motivation to stick with it. Respect ensured that employees are up to the challenge.

Most employees generally feel respected when managers and coworkers hold them up to the same standards as everyone else at the organization. As employee feels isolated and disrespected while working by telecommuting, an organization that adopted the virtual working approach will most likely turn into less efficiency.

5. Barriers to virtual working

5. 1 For companies

5. 1. 1 Technical issues

Increased data security concerns One of the biggest barriers for companies implementing virtual work policy is the concern for data security. Virtual work needs technical support, which creates safety hazard potential nowadays.

Due to the fact that multiple clients are in a web-based architecture, there are many points of possible intrusion into the centralized applications and data sources of an organization (Pang, nd). When a company holding e-conference to make important decisions or transfer confidential documents, hackers who have ulterior motives may filch the core strategy or information of the company by attacking system vulnerability.

5. 1. 2 Managerial issues

Controlling and monitoring difficulties Controlling and monitoring

telecommuters' work is the most difficult section in managing a virtual organisation.

Lipnack and Stamps (1997) stated that managing a successful virtual company requires 90% people and 10% technology. Productivity can be reduced without controlling and monitoring system because some employees are not self-disciplined and can be interrupted by an overabundance of distractions around the home (Hortensia, 2008). There are also some critical situations where managers are not able to contact subordinates and make remedial measures timely. Employee incentive difficulties High productivity of a company will largely depend on good employee incentive.

However, in a virtual organization which has inefficient measuring methods to evaluate employee's contribution, the manager may not detect potentials of different employees. Employee incentive is often overlooked in virtual organizations (Liu, 2004). Therefore, companies need to adjust their internal performance assessment and salary system, and spend a lot of time establishing a complete system for training and motivating employees. 5. 1.

3 Communication issues As virtual team members are usually in different area or even different time zones, communication can be a big issue. Lack of trust

The lack of face-to-face interaction of remote workers can lead to difficulties in building trust. Virtual work is based on Computer-Mediated Communication, which is different from the communication pattern that traditional work has. When communicating face-to-face, the speaker can use visual cues from the audience to gain immediate feedback quickly and make

necessary rapid adjustments (Storper et al, 2004). Visual cues and social existence in face-to-face dialogue also help team members to know background, skills, experiences, and areas of expertise of each other (Rosen et al, 2007).

The traditional communication pattern can help people build trust within groups, but remote workers can find it difficult to achieve this. Additionally, virtual organizations are usually short termed. Employees may feel that the team will break up when the task is finished, and they do not feel their membership in the organization. Mayo George Elton pointed that employees need good inter-personal relationship, and also need feel being cared by the organization, the satisfactory feeling of being cared by the employer is very helpful to improve work productivity.

Lack of trust in virtual organizations may cause low motivation and low productivity. Cultural barriers and limited knowledge/ experience sharing Virtual workers are usually separated by geography, which restricts knowledge or experience sharing opportunities by working together. Also, cultural barrier exists and is adverse to good teamwork in a virtual organisation. Members of a virtual team sometimes come from different countries. Virtual works go against the transfer of tacit knowledge, or knowledge that is not written or definable, but are gained through experience (Griffith et al, 2003).

It is clear that many of the behaviors of a good teamwork are culturally rooted. For example, in some cultures, sharing information is both a manifestation of power and a way of building relationships. In other cultures a number of information sharing take place in off-line settings, which are <https://assignbuster.com/virtual-work/>

limited in the virtual work environment. Furthermore, direct communicators who are low-context focus on sharing just the facts, which will leave high-context communicators feeling under informed. 5. 2For employees 5. 2. 1

Reduction in chances of promotion

At an organizational level, virtual employees' efforts may not be recognized and valued and therefore chances of promotion in career are far less than traditional office counterparts. Adams(2012) noted researchers' finding that managers are 25% more likely to attribute the traits ' committed' and ' dedicated' to people who logged extra hours in the office instead of those who work remotely. As a result, employees are not willing to work from home, holding the belief that managers consider them less committed to their task, and give them less career support.

Employees' desire for organizational identification is not necessarily satisfied due to negligible mentoring from supervisors and the lack of opportunities for developing relationship with crucial person in the workplace. To conclude, working from home distance employees from their manager, and leave them with less support and direction than on-site workers may get, thus reduce the chances of career advancement. 5. 2. 2 Social and professional isolation Perception of isolation from the group is one of the major concerns for employees who work from home.

When employees are isolated in remote workplaces, the physical distance can diminish their opportunities for interacting and communicating with colleagues, further raising their perception of being separated. Marshall et al (2007), cited in Buss (1996) found that humans have long perceived physical and social separation from the group as negative, for the reason that

isolation means deprivation of support and protection, which are critical for survival. The unavailability of networking, gaining support and recognition from co-workers creates people's consciousness of not being part of the group and sense of loneliness. . Overcome barriers of adopting virtual work
The barriers of adopting virtual work can be overcome by utilizing online communication techniques, conducting prior training and holding regular meetings etc. Virtual teams have to develop the better way for communicating, trust between each other and knowledge sharing in the electronic space. Developing a team culture and common procedures are essential for the development of credibility and trust among virtual team members in a virtual environment. (Raghuram, et al, 2001). Utilize online communication techniques

Virtual employees often need to share work-in-progress with others, which may require advance technologies to support. As a result, virtual team can work more effectively by using online communication techniques. Microsoft is the world's largest software maker has developed some software that can be very useful collaboration tools for managing the virtual team, such as instant messaging, live meeting and Outlook (Courtois, 2012). By using collaboration software, virtual employee can check coworkers' status to see whether they are available to chat online.

Manager can held web-based staff meeting, make a shared calendar, and cloud computing that everyone can edit and see any changes instantly (The Observer, nd). Prior training Prior training or experience is positively associated with virtual work efficacy. Organisations should implement adequate training programs in order to provide better understanding of

telecommuting for both virtual employees and their managers. Caudron(1992) suggested that training activities can include dealing with interruptions by family members and friends, communications with virtual co-workers etc.

Hiring the right people can be helpful for the virtual organisation, like someone can be productive in an isolated environment but is wise enough to maintain connections with other outside communities. Managers should always be open to the comments of employees and give supportive mentoring. Hold regular meetings In order to better manage remote employees, ensure efficient communication and information sharing, holding regular meetings is important. All employees should be included in all team meetings. During these meetings, manager should provide the perception of how things are progressing.

This type of meeting is especially valuable in a virtual work environment, as there are fewer opportunities for interpersonal communication. Also, managers can organize employee retreats once a year so that virtual and traditional employees can interact with one another, to share information and to create a sense of unity and teamwork. These can reduces employee's loneliness and make them feel a part of the team. Reward virtual employees' desirable behavior in ways that are meaningful to them (Deannamaio, nd). Manager can simply reward extra holiday time off for employees who work hard.

Benefit from the reward policy, employee would feel more motivating in their job. 7. Future of virtual work Today only a small proportion of virtual teams have reached a level of performance that goes beyond what the individuals

concerned could achieve independently (Benson et al, 1997). Despite difficulties in implementing virtual work, the overall trend for future is the increase of telecommuting. Development of technology is helping organisations to adopt a virtual work policy, and employee expectations will change towards a more flexible working environment. IBM has announced Virtual Desktop for Smart Business.

The new workforce mobility provided anytime, anywhere access to personal desktops from mobile devices -- including tablets, netbooks and laptops (Khalil, 2011). With the significant development of technology nowadays, more and more firms will adopt the virtual working in order to gain competitive advantage worldwide. 8. Conclusion Virtual work as a new pattern of work is exposing invaluable potential advantages to organisations, employees and the society as a whole. As information technology is developing at an incredible speed, some organisations have already evolutionised their traditional office work pattern to virtual working.

However, teleworking is still not universal despite the technology capabilities that enable people to work from home or remote offices. The barriers of adopting virtual work can arise from both companies' and employees' considerations. Companies will face a lot of difficulties such as technical, managerial and communication issues. Employees are also not willing to work from home due to their fear of being isolated and reduced promotion opportunities. In order to overcome these barriers, there are some practical solutions such as utilizing online communication techniques, prior training and holding regular meetings.

Therefore, the future of virtual work is promising, and there will be an increasing number of people who change their professional roles from traditional office workers to telecommuters. Bibliography Adams, S 2012. 'Why Working At Home Could Hurt Your Career', Forbes. Com, p. 39, Business Source Complete, EBSCOhost, viewed 3 December 2012. Anderson, A. (2012). Demand Media. Advantages of Telecommuting Jobs. [online] Available from: <http://smallbusiness.chron.com/advantages-telecommuting-jobs-765.html> [cited 28 Nov 2012] Bullock, C. (2011). 'Virtual Work Environments in the Post – Recession Era'.

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