



Fact Sheet

Virtual Working

July 2007

What's meant by "Virtual Working"? Is it another piece of technology, or much more?

Our E-Business Advisers discuss how your business could benefit:

1. What is "Virtual Working"?

The growth of low cost telecoms such as email and Virtual Private Networks, Wi-Fi Hot Spots, home-working & teleworking, the need for staff to be productive whilst travelling, and the increasing number of projects in which several firms collaborate, have all led to the emergence of a new form of team working.

Although staff members continue to work with colleagues based in the same offices, they can now also expect to find themselves working more often with colleagues based at their homes, in different departments, or even travelling to or based in other countries.

They could also be working as part of a team with people from other companies on a particular project - perhaps never actually meeting these people face to face.

This mixture of new technology and new patterns of work is what has become known as "Virtual Working".

Another driver for the growth in this new, virtual working pattern is the increased emphasis on work/life balance.

In April 2003, new flexible working rights were introduced by the UK Government.

This gave working parents with children under 6 the right to request flexible working. There are 3.8 million people who fit this category in the UK.

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development conducted research in October 2003 on the impact.

28% of employers saw an increase in requests for flexible working, and 62% have approved at least half of all such requests.

The research also found that 91% of employers were prepared to consider requests for flexible working from all staff.

A recent survey of graduates by Price Waterhouse Coopers also found that the number one motivation to work with any company was not the money or opportunities for travel, but the work / life balance offered.

Virtual working is a way of offering this - and, as importantly, it's a way of making sure that your business is the best placed it can be to adapt and grow. More and more of us will be engaged in Virtual Working.

2. What kinds of Virtual Working are there?

What kinds of technology might facilitate these teams?

According to the business consultants, MaST International, there are 4 types of virtual teams.

Each team may have different reporting structures, may meet - or may not, and might well have perhaps conflicting goals:



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- Departmental Virtual Teams - people who work for the same department, but could be based in different places - e.g. sales reps out of the office or working from home.

Typical technological aids to the problems faced by such a team might include email, VPNs, PDAs, Smart Phones, Wi-Fi, Voice over Internet Protocol - VoIP (e.g. Skype) Video-conferencing, Data-conferencing and other forms of Teleworking etc.

- Company Virtual Teams - normally people who work for the same company but within different departments and possibly locations.

Aids to the problems faced by such teams might include email, Intranets, Wide Area Networks, Voice over Internet Protocol - VoIP (e.g. Skype) Video-conferencing, Data-conferencing etc.

- Organisational Virtual Teams - made up of people who do not all work for the same firm. An example might be a marketing team, working in partnership with an external design agency, carrying out particular work on their behalf.

Aids to the problems faced by such teams might include email, Extranets, Voice over Internet Protocol - VoIP (e.g. Skype) Video-conferencing, Data-conferencing.

- Multiple Virtual Teams made up of a mixture of virtual teams: an example might be a cross department team, all based in different locations, that also works with an external supplier based in another country.

Aids to the problems faced by such teams might include email, Extranets, Voice over Internet Protocol - VoIP (e.g. Skype) Video-conferencing, Data-conferencing.

3. What are the problems faced by such Virtual groups?

Technologically speaking, the problems faced by such working arrangements are fairly straightforward.

What is likely to not be straightforward - and could cause difficulty if unaddressed - are the managerial and team aspects of such arrangements.

The issues are likely to revolve around:

- Trust between team members
- Communication issues
- Common values, standards and behaviours across the team
- Team culture issues
- Project evaluation

All the above are managerial issues anyway - however, the virtual aspect of the relationships tend to magnify the issues.

We recommend (as these issues are outside the scope of this paper) that you contact either 360e - our web site address is below - or your local Business Link. They will be able to put you in touch with a consultant who will be able to assist you.

Details of the national Business Link web site are in "Useful Links" below - they will put you in touch with your local Business Link organisation.



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4. Useful Links

www.businesslink.gov.uk -
National Business Link web site

www.microsoft.com/uk/office/officeessentials/articles/virtually.aspx -
Microsoft site related to Virtual Working

www.mast.co.uk -
Learning and development Consultancy

www.knowab.co.uk/ka.html -
Firm providing training and consultancy in
Virtual Working

www.agility.co.uk/ai.html -
Consultancy promoting “business agility” - new
working methodology

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