

Human Need for Communication in the System of Virtual Organizations

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Abstract

Every day we are faced with new technological advances. Contemporary times make life easier for man. Extensive use of the Internet opened the door to the cyber world. Computer communication and the whole cyber-culture show an inherent connection between technology and society. The man was thrown into the virtual space which, along with the initial enthusiasm about the opportunity to set out in the cyber community and quench the thirst for communication this technology enables, also brings various dilemmas as well as previously established face to face communication needs. Modern man is inevitably alone and his highest goal is the acceptance of others.

Virtuality occurs in many business enterprises and a new form of business is rapidly developing. Business organizations are moving from the real to the virtual world. The connective tissue of the new forms of organization consists of the teams that share a common vision in the formation they are partaking in.

In this paper the authors investigated the possibility that virtual organizations replace traditional type of organization and the willingness of people to fit into such a business system.

Keywords: *Internet, Cyber world, Communication, Organizations, People*

1. Introduction

The reason for the inclusion into groups stems from the sociability of man, the need for companionship and social relationships. Is today's man ready to substitute the realistic, "tangible" world with virtual community, is a question to which there is still no clearly defined answer.

The need for communication and a touch, along with the firm footing on the ground, as well as the challenge set sail for the inexhaustible virtual landscapes and typing of the feelings on the keyboard, are opening a recently initiated odyssey quest for answers. One of the main issues related to virtual organizations is certainly the issue of development of unrestricted human creativity in the space with no doors and windows. Starting from the expansion of information and communication technologies and the growing number of virtual organizations around the world in recent years, what becomes important is the capacity for continual learning. "Knowledge and information are key drivers of growth and key aspects of all stages of business development" [1] Out of the integration of technical and "human" side of learning comes the necessity to take into account the area of emotions and interpersonal relationships, including "social-emotional" aspect of the role of emotional intelligence [2].

Man in the work context must be seen as a single being because he is perceived as a product of society represented by the environment, as the cultural and behavioral contexts of an individual are the consequences of the society and the culture that person was born into and is living within. Online communication we can understand as “cultural aggregations that emerge when enough people bump into each other often enough in cyberspace” [3]. Smart organizations, which are based on knowledge and continuing education of employees, are more likely to adapt to the virtual forms of business, in comparison to the ones neglecting this aspect. Online people do almost everything that people do when they get together, but they do it with words on screens, leaving their bodies behind, independently of the local time or location [3].

If the virtual model of communication is not properly understood, or if there is a wrong message accepted, the main thread of communication may be impaired stress acceptance or rejection of the second communicator. Such misunderstandings are particularly undesirable in the case of cyber business teams, because team members misunderstanding would lead away from a primary business objective. In this case, the creators of business teams have an urgent task to look for ways of educating participants about how their online behavior may be perceived and help them find the ways for misunderstanding prevention. We must also pay attention to the fact that “Nowadays, information security becomes a major issue due to wide spread of the network and Internet that are considered as unsecure communication media. From this point of view, security participants focus their efforts to provide best method to implement information security. One of these methods is Intrusion Detection System (IDS). IDS provides protected environment for organizations that rely on Internet and networks as the principle media for communications.”.[4]

Empathy is the strongest among similar people and people who share similar experiences, such as people in the same profession or siblings [5]. “Communication is a way of exchanging ideas, attitudes, values, opinions and facts, a process that requires the sender which initiates the process and the recipient, which completes the communication link”[6]. In an environment characterized by a high percentage of psychological problems experienced by the general population, the need for finding security within the group becomes more pronounced. Belonging to a group, or a certain collective, apart from security brings also a certain sense of self-evaluation. This phenomenon not only identifies one with a particular group, but also provides the experience that the group bestows some special qualities, thus making one stand out from the others.

2. Virtual communication

The Internet is, by its nature, a place of a quest for something that is missing in the life of the one who is searching. In a situation where an individual is not satisfied with the expression of one's own personality within a social setting, one of the alternatives is the use of the Internet, which can significantly contribute to the alleviating of the feelings of loneliness [7].

The social interactions of millions of people around the world, along with the creation of their virtual identities, social relationships and communities, lead to the scenario in which the computer technology and virtual communication are actually forming the parallel society and the new virtual cultural space. Cyber society is, in fact, a society created by the modern technology, mainly computer technology. However, mobile communication, telephone communication and audio-visual communication also belong to the virtual society, within which every action takes place in real time, but in the invisible, virtual space. Creation of a new social environment includes the creation of new organizational forms of businesses.

From classical organization, thanks to the technological progress, we have moved to the virtual work teams and virtual organizations.

Aspects of rapid advancements in telecommunication technologies have enabled more telecommuting and cooperation among physically distributed employees [8]. These trends suggest that firms are acquiring more virtual characteristics than in the past. Even firms that may not look virtually organized on the surface are performing selected activities and processes virtually.

Virtual professional teams are consisting of self-motivated people with a collective vision, enabled by technology to collaborate in achieving a common goal – an innovation – by sharing ideas, information, and work product development, within not just any organizational work process; but a process highly dependent on creativity [9]. The contemporary social model should be based on a high degree of social protection and education as well as a secure social dialogue, since the effort to further improve the quality of work must be directed to the proper set strategy. The strategy must include methods for combating stress and harassment at work, as well as the measures to change the organizational culture and acceptance of ethnic and cultural differences, along with providing special protection for older employees and young people. Management enables successful implementation of defined business objectives along with continuous education and training of employees.

No matter how advanced the technology, the center of business success has always been a man. In order for a virtual team to be successful, people need to get to know each other and communicate.

3. Virtual organization

If we consider an intelligent organization as a business entity, then it differs from other businesses in a sense that its employees have the status of business partners and participate in the decision making. Now, due to communication technology improvements and continued globalization, we have moved away from working with people who are in our visual proximity to working with people around the globe [10].

There are many definitions aspiring to fully explain the newest form of business organization: “virtual team is used to cover a wide range of activities and forms of technology-supported working, [9] or “virtual teams are groups of geographically, organizationally and/or time dispersed workers brought together by information technologies to accomplish one or more organizational tasks”[12]. A networked virtual team is defined by Duarte and Snyder as consisting “of individuals who collaborate to achieve a common goal or purpose”[13].

Virtual teams use electronic collaboration technologies and other techniques to lower travel and facility costs, reduce project schedules, improve decision-making time, and communication [14]. Managing virtual teams can often be more complex than managing traditional teams, however although the effective use of electronic communication and collaboration technologies is fundamental to the success of virtual teams, virtual teams must often find ways to overcome the limitations of technology for communication and collaboration. The effectiveness of a team can certainly increase with the use of appropriate technology [15]. Team members need to be informed and involved in the entire framework of a team task. Trust is a prerequisite for their commitment to a common goal. However, trust is not gained without creating a solid system of communication channels. All team members should understand not only the rules of the team, but also how the team functions i.e. what team member’s roles and responsibilities are within the team. This way, a virtual team is

given structure and transparency.[16]. During the business development process, it may be felt that a communication gap occurred, that some members of the team feel the fear to completely ‘open’ and to share their knowledge and confidence with other ‘intangible’ team members. In the incidence of such a symptom of the inadequacy of a virtual contact, it is necessary to organize a face-to-face meeting, if possible, or mitigate the physical presence of team members with the incorporation of pictures and biographies [16].

Many theorists who deal with this issue believe that communication in the virtual world is insufficient, they doubt the possibility of establishing social relationships without physical contact. Kazlev sent them message: “Critics of the idea of the digital community are those who never put an effort to experience it. As with everything else, it is impossible to understand something, until you have experienced it”[17].

But, it is fact that virtual teams, although offering many benefits, also pose a number of challenges. Improving the creative capabilities of virtual teams should be a central goal in organizations. As an increasing number of organizations implement various virtual communication tools, face-to-face contact has shifted to virtual communication.[18]. In the textual computer communication, emotions are expressed by words or signs, thus the signs of feelings represent a way of conveying emotion into text. The absence of non-verbal cues makes communication difficult [12]. But, there are those who think differently: Brainstorming electronically can yield higher quality results than if conducted face-to-face [19].

However, the benefits of working virtually can only be realized if team leaders and team members are motivated to share their unique knowledge with each other. Virtual technology, as well as the globalist erasing of the boundary lines of space and time, has led to the emergence of a new organizational system - virtual organization. Open systems ensure that employees can obtain the information they need from any location at any time [20].

Meeting of different individual characteristics and needs of employees often differs from the group goals of an organization. Fitting into the group form may have varied intensity. For individuals with strong individuality, blind submission to the group pattern of behavior is unacceptable behavior. If an organization is managed by a person who, out of all managerial skills uses only the power, conflict becomes inevitable. Personal conflicts are part of the normal communication and we can often expect them either at work or in social life. An individual, regardless of the personal endowment, also understands oneself as a member of a social group, who wants to feel an acceptance of a collective and has a constant desire to appeal to the collective. We need the audience to notice us and give us confirmation that we exist. Communication is a key element of success in the business world.

How successfully is the modern man coping with a globalized, alienated world where there is less and less time for face- to- face contact. It is but a small group of people who can successfully cope with the unstoppable current of daily changes, who are able to build their own social capital. Such individuals or groups achieve an advantage over other players who are struggling in the modern age. Such individuals are ready for virtual forms of business. They are ready to go to work and to replace the smell of coffee in the morning with the “turn on” button on the computer.

However, regardless of the choice of the business form, we are discussing, the fact is that the social capital is equally important for both real and virtual ways of organizing and doing business. No matter what century is taking place around a man, the very essence of human survival has always been about communication. Each organization (regardless of whether it is a traditional or virtual organization) is a system of communications [21].

Communication is the vehicle of social structures and social interactions in a specific organizational context or culture [22]. In relation to the social interactions, the significance of relationships is a resource for social action. One of the primary characteristics of the informal structures in organizations is their communication network [23]. Blanchard and Horan (2000) note that the exchange of information and knowledge in organizations takes place in both off-line and on-line modes of social capital [24].

As always happens, a new phenomenon causes various controversies conditioned by the different attitudes. In contrast to denial of success of virtual contacts, we have the theorists who argue in favor of the merit recognition of virtual communities for the improvement of human communication. By Rheingold the electronic world is an authentic community and it is comparable to the real lives of its participants, as they “use words on screens to exchange pleasantries and argue, engage in intellectual discourse, conduct commerce, exchange knowledge, share emotional support, make plans, brainstorm, gossip, feud, fall in love, find friends and lose them, play games, flirt, create a little high art and a lot of idle talk” [25]. Virtual organization provides an opportunity for employees to be more independent and take on more responsibilities, instead of just working at the company. This type of work provides flexibility in the choice of the workplace and working hours. It offers a completely different way of doing business and organizational connections. Virtual organizations are economically justified because they decrease operational costs and enable efficiency in response to the business requirements. The Internet is becoming a comprehensive space for data distribution, collaboration, and performing work tasks. Yong had a different opinion. He pointed out that: Unlike traditional workplaces, the nature of virtual teams is such that working relationships are typically short and often there is no actual personal contact [26].

4. How are the employees managing in the midst of all this?

The answer is based on existing literature and research conducted by the authors. The data were collected from 102 subjects from Belgrade, Serbia. The questionnaire was anonymous, with a few requested pieces of personal information pertaining to participants' age and gender. Given that the authors, based on consideration of the available literature, concluded that the importance of virtual teams and virtual communication can be recognized by only those who are ‘computer literate’, in conducting of their research, they were concentrated on the so-called younger population (20-40 years) and highly educated one. From a review of literature, a survey questionnaire was developed to collect data for the study which was undertaken in the end of year 2013 and in early 2014.

That group of respondents was questioned on issues expected to help in shedding light on the motives “driving” people to the virtual contacts. Also, the respondents were asked whether our society is ready to fully opt for a virtual form of doing business.

Based on the introduction relying on the relevant literature, the two hypotheses had been introduced, that authors expected to be confirmed by summing the responses we received through surveys.

H1: Unable to meet their social needs in the real world, people enter the virtual community.

H2: Our society is not yet ready to completely reorient to a virtual business form.

Research analysis has shown that just over half of respondents claimed that our society is ready to respond positively to this innovative challenge. However, only a third of

respondents accept the possibility that cyberspace can enable them to make new friends. These results lead us to the following conclusions:

The value and effectiveness of the human-technology partnership which is manifests in the virtual forms of business is accepted as an economically viable way of doing business. However, countries that are still in the transition stage does not have sufficient capacity of “own knowledge”, so they are forced to make the first steps in this direction through networking and building alliances with partners across the global markets.

Changes are taking place at such a rate, that they are seriously threatening the traditional understanding of the organization and the organizational connecting system and work engagement. Countries in the post communist area are still, most often, societies of closed structures, not recognizing their interest in achieving social values. Their interest is focused on the field of personal interests or the interests of the elite.

Traditional work places have been decimated by the crisis and unsuccessful privatizations. The labor market is not working so that employees are forced to perform their duties in order to provide a bare existence.

In such circumstances, there are no motivational incentives, or a positive provocation for exchange of experience and knowledge within an organizational group. However, despite the dissatisfaction with such real life environment, only one-third of respondents believe that the virtual world brings new friendships. Given that virtual organizations represent short term forms of association and that they last until the realization of the set goal, it is most likely that lasting friendships of people connecting in such a way cannot be discussed.

5. Conclusion

New communication and information technologies have enabled the emergence of efficient, flexible and temporary organizational structures. Virtual organization is gradually becoming a part of reality, development of which has been based on the conjunction of information and communication technologies.

The starting position for product development activities in the virtual organization consists of people from different functions and companies that do not have a previous history of working together. Given that virtual organizations are usually short-lived (lasting until the end of the set business objectives), the people who are involved in virtual social networks do not have enough time to realize the mutual connection of trust and experience, so there is concern that such a network does not lead to the exchange of knowledge, experiences and beliefs.

How are the employees managing in the midst of all this? Are they motivated by a new form of work engagement? The value and effectiveness of the human-technology partnership which is manifests in the virtual forms of business is accepted as an economically viable way of doing business.

Changes are taking place at such a rate, that they are seriously threatening the traditional understanding of the organization and the organizational connecting system and work engagement. Technology does bring economic benefits, but the area of human communication remains, for the most part, unfulfilled. The need for physical contact is still present even when the computer screen goes dark, and we are faced with the real world. A man must seek and find communication's compromise. New age cannot be overslept, for after awaking, the changes will still be there.

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