Perspectives

Achieving Excellence, Virtually
Organizing, Leading, and Energizing High Performing Virtual Teams

A decade or so ago, virtual teams were almost nonexistent. Today, technology, globalization, and the need for fast responses to marketplace demands have dramatically changed the way business is conducted. Many people—from senior executives to frontline employees—may be physically separated and required to work together effectively without having ever met each other face-to-face.

Demographers and futurists refer to the rise of "the distributed workforce" as a highly significant trend. According to a December 2005 article in *BusinessWeek*, distributed workers are people who have no permanent office at their companies, working instead in home offices, cafés, airplanes and airport lounges, client conference rooms, or some combination of what Richard Florida, author of *The Rise of the Creative Class*, calls the "no-collar workplace." They are working as teams to drive projects via wireless technology and broadband Internet, and report to bosses who may be thousands of miles away.

Clearly, virtual teams are becoming the norm for organizations that require people in multiple locations around the world to work together. We already live with the reality that most teams do some or all of their work in a virtual setting, where teammates housed in another building may be as virtual as those across the globe.

The new test facing businesses is how to get virtual team members to work well together across geographic, cultural, and organizational boundaries to deliver results quickly, effectively, and consistently.

The Ken Blanchard Companies® has studied these special challenges and is making its findings and recommendations available to business leaders. Whether their virtual teams are in the beginning stages, have recently taken on new members, or are in the process of troubleshooting team problems, leaders and managers can use the strategies described in this white paper to get teams off to the right start, address ongoing working relationships, and ensure that their teams achieve and maintain high performance.

Demographics

In November 2005, *Fast Company* reported that there were 19.5 million "distributed workers"—up from 10.9 million in 2000.

Charles Grantham and James Ware, executive producers of Work Design Collaborative, LLC, in Prescott, Arizona, estimate that currently, about 12% of the U.S. workforce qualifies as distributed. But in urban areas, they figure the number is closer to 15% and predict that 40% of the workforce will be distributed by 2012.

A prominent technology research firm agrees. Gartner Research predicts that by 2008, 41 million employees around the world will spend at least one day a week teleworking and nearly 100 million will work from home at least one day each month. The largest proportion of these employees are anticipated to be workers in the United States.

According to *BusinessWeek,* many technology companies are already operating successfully with virtual teams and as virtual organizations. The magazine reported in its December 12, 2005 issue that at IBM, 40% of the workforce does not have an office at the company; at AT&T, a third of managers are now off-site; at Sun Microsystems, nearly 50% of employees can work from home, cafés, drop-in centers, a company office, or some combination thereof— saving the company $300 million in real estate costs. And Sun says its virtual workers are 15% more productive than their office-tethered brethren. In 2003, Agilent closed 48 U.S. sales offices and sent people home to work. The company estimates that these virtual workers cost 60% less. *BusinessWeek* says, "Indeed, at many companies across America, the most innovative new product may be the structure of the workplace itself."

> **"Anytime 15% of any population is doing new behavior, you know it's going to take off."**
>
> —Charles Grantham
> Work Design Collaborative, LLC

The Challenges of Virtual Teams

Although it is a relatively new way to work, organizations are already seeing the benefits of virtual teaming; however, this approach is not without its challenges. For one thing, technology in itself is no guarantee that virtual teams will thrive. The most advanced technology will not cause people to share their knowledge or become productive while working in diverse environments.

In the June 2005 edition of *Training* magazine, Jack Gordon confirms that the tribulations of the virtual workplace parallel those of the traditional work environment. "Even when people who know one another can sit down in the same room, efficient and productive meetings are rare. Likewise, even when members work in the same place, forging high-performance work teams is no easy undertaking."

So how do you organize and manage all those workers who may be several times zones apart?

How do you reduce virtual distances so pepole feel comfortable in the new working format? Gordon frames it as a "smaller globe, bigger headaches" situation, pointing out that while technology makes virtual teams possible, only people can make them productive.

What is driving the increase in virtual teams? And, how do organizations benefit?

Tina Hoefling, author of *Working Virtually: Managing People for Successful Virtual Teams and Organizations,* says that the key to successful dispersed teamwork is having a clear understanding of what it takes to get the enterprise ready for virtual work, and of the skills for bonding individuals into cohesive, high-performing teams across distances and differences.

Before organizations embrace the concept of creating virtual teams and/or virtual organizations, they need to address two fundamental questions—does the nature of the work done within the organization lend itself to virtual approaches? And, how will the workers within the organization be enriched or impacted by virtual collaboration?

Research and impact studies conducted by The Ken Blanchard Companies show that virtual teams have the same needs and go through the same stages of development as face-to-face teams.

Both types of teams require structure, direction, recognition, clear communication strategies, problem-solving skills, and flexible and shared leadership in order to be successful—and they need these from the beginning.

Factors Contributing to the Growth of Virtual Teams	Benefits of Working as Virtual Teams
• Advances in technology mean increased use of computers in the workplace and greater availability of affordable technology for home-based and mobile workers • Globalization of business means that team members may not be physically colocated; team members may even be in different time zones • Travel to meet face-to-face may not be practical or affordable • Shifts in employer and employee expectations	• Teams can be assembled based on people's skills rather than their location, and people can work anywhere and at anytime • Increased productivity because the global work day is 24 hours, not 8 hours, and virtual workers spend less time commuting and in inner-office discussions • Reduced overhead costs • More flexibility for workers

"Most companies see the distributed model as a chance to take out significant operating costs. But there's pretty clear evidence that distributed workers are more productive. They're not spending as much time commuting, in hallways gabbing, or in meetings that are fairly unproductive. And people tend to give that time back to the company."

—Jim Ware of Work Design Collaborative, LLC
as quoted in *Fast Company,* November 2005

The Challenge of Getting Off to the Right Start

"Throw new technology at people without the right culture and behaviors, and watch it flop."

—"The Easier Way to Work:
Collaborating in World-Class Virtual Teams,"
Jessica Lipnack and Jeffery Stamps,
Cutter IT Journal, July 2005

Too often the emphasis for launching virtual work is focused only on technology. Organizations that have experience with virtual teaming understand that successfully launching geographically dispersed teams goes far beyond having effective technology—it involves organizing teams composed of qualified members with the right skills and common cultural values, and then building strong team charters.

Selecting suitable team members means finding people with complementary skills or the right mix of skills to do the job assigned. According to David Gould, EdD, whose doctoral dissertation was on Leadership in Virtual Teams and who recently was appointed to the Campus College Chair for Graduate Business and Management at the University of Phoenix in Seattle, Washington, these skills fall into three categories: technical or functional expertise, problem-solving and decision-making skills, and interpersonal skills.

People who operate well in virtual environments can communicate effectively using technology that fits the situation; participate within a virtual community, operating with a sense of trust, respect, fairness, and affiliation with other team members; help to establish and work toward a set of shared goals, expectations, purpose, and vision that are clear and inspiring; focus on obtaining visible, measurable results; self-lead and lead others by example; and coordinate and/or collaborate across organizational boundaries. Research by Blanchard® and others reveals that employees who operate well in virtual team situations already demonstrate these abilities or show a willingness and aptitude for quickly learning them.

Perhaps more significant to the success of a virtual team is finding people with common cultural values. Joe Millach, writing for the June 2005 edition of *CIO Insight,* quoted Karen Sobel Lojeski, program director for the business and technology program at the Wesley J. Howe School of Technology Management in Hoboken, New Jersey, as saying that people often misunderstand what cultural differences mean to the productivity of global virtual teams.

"Most people assume that cultural differences are primarily a matter of demographics—that South Asians, for instance, will have different values than Northern Europeans," Lojeski explained. "In reality, cultural values can vary significantly among team members within the same country, especially in the United States, a country populated almost exclusively by people whose ancestral culture developed elsewhere."

As significant as the influence and impact of cultural compatibility are, thought leaders at The Ken Blanchard Companies emphasize that the most challenging and important task during the early stages of a team's development is to develop a set of agreements about what the team wants to accomplish, why the goal is important, and how the team will work together to achieve results—creating a "team charter."

"The team needs to develop a team charter that creates a solid foundation for the work of the team and makes sure that all the needs will be satisfied."

—*The One Minute Manager Builds High Performing Teams*
by Ken Blanchard, Don Carew, and Eunice Parisi-Carew

A team charter provides the team with a shared model for working together. The Blanchard Building High Performing Teams® Model addresses the need for agreements in several key areas. These include organization and team vision, purpose and values, team norms, team member roles, key responsibility areas and goals, communications strategies, decision making (with accountability and authority defined) and resources needed by the team to accomplish its goals. Once these are defined, strategies can be derived to help the group in its development. Managers can develop a specific action plan for managing the journey to team empowerment. And here is where the challenge of leading teams through their various stages of development comes into play.

The Challenge of Leadership

A team's performance hinges largely on how well they work through the classic stages of team development. In its October 2005 issue, *Workforce Performance Solutions* presented an overview of the stages of team development and the leadership skills required to successfully address each stage.

The article demonstrates that as Ken Blanchard, Don Carew, and Eunice Parisi-Carew wrote in *The One Minute Manager Builds High Performing Teams*, teams go through a series of development stages as they grow from a collection of individuals to a high-performing unit. To achieve goals and fulfill the team's potential, team leaders need to diagnose their teams' development stages and determine the appropriate leadership style required to help teams progress through these stages.

Stage 1: Orientation

In a team's initial stage, team members need to learn where they are going, why they are serving as a team, what they are supposed to do, and what values will guide their journey. The challenge at this stage is getting the team off to a good start by giving it vision, developing a strong team charter, and building relationships and trust. To get the team started, the leader needs to provide background information and outline the skills that are needed.

Stage 2: Dissatisfaction

Team work is more complicated than dealing one-on-one. Once teams are launched, they often move quickly from the exuberance of their formation to a state of dissatisfaction. Communication can break down, and subgroups can form that polarize the team. The team leader needs to provide coaching leadership and TLC as issues of power, control, and conflict are worked out.

Stage 3: Integration

As a team develops confidence that it knows how to operate, morale begins to rise, tasks are accomplished, and skills increase. The team begins to think in terms of "we" rather than "I." There is greater clarity and commitment about purpose, values, roles, and goals. At this stage, team members tend to avoid conflict for fear of losing the positive climate—an atmosphere that can slow progress and lead to ineffective decisions. At this stage, the leader needs to be supportive, helping team members focus on building confidence and cohesion.

Stage 4: Production

At this stage, both productivity and morale are high. Team members are confident and proud of their work. Communication is open, and leadership is shared. When you see a high-performing team operate, you don't know who the leader is, because the group is providing both direction and support for itself. At this stage, the team leader needs to recognize the team's capacity to provided its own leadership and celebrate individual and team accomplishments. Team dynamics are powerful and can create great results and satisfaction—if properly managed. That's the job of the leader: to move the group from being dependent to becoming a productive, high performing team.

> **"Today's leader must be an enabler of people and a facilitator of teams—not only as an effective team leader but as an effective team member as well."**
>
> —Don Carew

Nurturing Individuals

Leaders of virtual teams lead individuals who go through stages of development similar to that of the overall team. The Ken Blanchard Companies has worked in the area of high performing teams for more than 25 years, developing a map for managing teams that sparked development of the Situational Leadership® II Model. Just as good leaders and managers meet one-on-one with their colocated direct reports, they need to make time to "meet" with their virtual reports. Each person needs an opportunity—outside of the virtual team meeting where the focus is on shared tasks and problem solving—to share successes, challenges, needs, and wants, and receive support and empathy. Team leaders and members need to recognize the humanness of those on the other end of the technology. Listening, coaching, and providing support and recognition truly take little time, and benefit not just the individual but the entire team as well.

The Triple Challenges of Trust, Communication, and Attentiveness

The authors of *The Virtual Teams Handbook*—Carmela Sperlazza Southers, Eunice Parisi-Carew, and Don Carew—identify challenges and success factors for virtual teams, share processes for setting a solid foundation, and offer strategies for high performance. They provide specific strategies for dealing with three key success factors for virtual teams—Trust, Communication, and Attentiveness.

"Trust building strategies are important, but they do not have to be traditional or serious.

In a virtual team, building trust simply requires more creativity and attention.

Consider this team's lighthearted approach: 'We gave everyone on the team kazoos and when someone made a terrific contribution in a meeting, we would all buzz the first line of "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow" over the phone.

It sounds hokey, but people competed for the recognition.'"

—From *The Virtual Teams Handbook*
by Carmela Sperlazza Southers,
Eunice Parisi-Carew, and Don Carew

The Challenge of Trust

People enjoy and are most successful at work when they are interacting with people they trust. When trust is present, they feel comfortable embarking on projects, setting goals, sharing resources, and making deals.

Trust is the core issue for all teams—both virtual and colocated. Teams that are based on trust have an easier time pulling together, organizing their work, and managing themselves. A solid foundation of team trust is built upon

- Having a shared vision, purpose, and values

- Valuing others' skills and contributions

- Establishing processes that ensure contribution and accountability

However, in a virtual team, people are typically operating without the face-to-face meetings, and as a result, many trust-building interactions do not occur.

In the June 2005 edition of *Training* magazine, Jack Gordon talks about the importance in the virtual situation of team members and team leaders "assuming positive intent"—in other words, giving each other the benefit of the doubt. This is vital when members do not meet in the flesh because they cannot see each other's facial expressions, read body language, or otherwise pick up the nonverbal signals inherent in face-to-face communications. Gordon quotes Michael Santo, PhD and author of "How to Develop and Nurture Self-Directed Business Teams," who says that positive intent and expectations of positive behavior flourish when team members are on time, meet their deadlines, honor their commitments, and think twice before sending terse emails. He calls this "positive, predictable behavior."

Even in a virtual world, the fastest way to build trust among team members is getting them together face-to-face. Good old-fashioned "team building" may be as essential to virtual teams as to those who physically work together. Evidence shows that groups that invest in team building activity perform better than those that do not. In Right Management Consultants' research, 35 percent of virtual team respondents who report having effective team building sessions scored significantly higher on leadership, decision making, innovation, and team performance.

The Challenge of Communication

Effective team communication is an extremely complex process even when members meet face-to-face. And, the difference between communicating virtually and meeting coworkers who are across the hall, three floors up, or across the street—even if they do not see each other very often—are huge.

Something almost magical happens when people meet in person—a nonverbal connection and a sense of camaraderie is created. Research shows that the productivity of people who are located in the same office begins to suffer when their primary means of communication are email or instant messaging. The situation is even more problematic when team communication is conducted entirely via technology.

Communication without knowing and seeing others on a virtual team is complicated because of the absence of body language and the limitations of phone and electronic communication. And, in the case of globally dispersed workers, English may be a second language for some.

Technology only reduces problems caused by distance. The *T+D* article titled "Virtual Work" suggests that virtual teams and companies should still get together in person from time to time. "Those who have face-to-face interaction with colleagues score highest on effective team leadership, creative ideas and approaches, and managing multi-cultural differences." Having project kick-off meetings face-to-face—at least by videoconference—is the best way for globally dispersed teams to feel that they have met coworkers. Face-to-face meetings have also proven to be the best way for virtual teams to build enthusiasm, get clear about team goals, everyone's roles and responsibilities, and project deadlines. Then phone conferences and email can be used for routine meetings and communications, with the group coming together at major milestones.

Effective communication in the virtual mode also necessitates careful diagnosis of any given situation to address not only the task or objective in question but also glean "emotional content". Leaders must take care to model the organization's values and team ground rules, encourage all team members to participate fully in conversations, and conduct coaching and feedback in ways that convey respect and support.

The Challenge of Attentiveness

Virtual teams often achieve better results than face-to-face teams because they bring together various cultures, backgrounds, and perspectives. But, the reality is that when people are not in the same room, team members need to be intensely attentive to individual and group dynamics. This is a critical skill for virtual teams, and even more important than it is for face-to-face groups.

The reason: the body language of individuals in a face-to-face team provides clues to agreement or disagreement, confusion or withdrawal, conflict or concern; and noncontributors in these situations can be quickly recognized. However, in a virtual team, members lack these visual clues, therefore, disagreement or concern about an issue or decision may not be so easily detected. Therefore virtual team members and leaders must be sensitive to

• Participation levels

• Conflict management

• Decision making

• Equality of access and recognition

Virtual teams must make a concerted effort to share information about the personal styles of team members, the cultural differences within the team, and the reality in which others operate. This attentiveness helps reduce the level of conflict, keeps individuals motivated, and builds trust among team members.

Without the personal knowledge and shared reality experienced in face-to-face teams, issues such as communication styles or response times can become major barriers to team functioning. Since virtual team members often have fewer opportunities to learn about and from each other, the motivation to listen carefully, respect others' ideas, and appreciate their contributions is greatly diminished. When team members discount each others' ideas and contributions, the team's potential for success immediately drops.

To work together effectively, virtual team members need to be attentive to the differences in work and communication styles of other team members. They need time to get to know each other and explore the similarities and differences in their personalities and working styles. Instruments such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® or DiSC® can help individuals become aware of their own styles and develop respect and appreciation for the value of others' styles.

Without information to the contrary, team members tend to assume that other team members share their reality—after all, they are working "together." People tend to interpret actions in their own context. They may make assumptions that the person on the other end is inattentive or not engaged in the project when the reality may be that the work environment is naturally distracting. Sharing information about workspaces in the beginning stages of a team can dramatically increase the amount of patience team members will have with each other.

In a virtual team, individuals who feel a lack of recognition or experience discomfort with the way the team is progressing or being managed often respond by withdrawing. Silence on a conference call could mean agreement, disagreement, disinterest, distraction, concern, or a dead phone line. Although individuals may contribute differently according to their expertise on any one task, the team leader or facilitator must conscientiously monitor participation and contribution levels in the group by asking the following questions

• Has everyone shared his or her ideas fully?

• Has everyone had a direct opportunity to voice his or her opinions?

• How can everyone's participation be ensured?

Team leaders must communicate equally with all virtual team members, and near simultaneous timing of communication is critical. By the same token, team members can stay attentive to equality of recognition by

• Soliciting everyone's input on decisions

• Clarifying their understanding of someone else's views through active listening and checking for understanding

• Expressing appreciation for others' ideas and efforts

Unfortunately, virtual teams typically experience more conflict than face-to-face teams. Since virtual team members have both lower levels of personal knowledge and commitment and less effective communication tools, actions taken to resolve conflict may have unintended negative consequences. An issue that might be awkward to confront in a face-to-face meeting can easily become a flaming email. One flaming email forwarded to others can, almost instantaneously, cause major damage to team trust levels and effectiveness.

Effective conflict management begins with group norms. Once norms for decision making and conflict management have been made, team members must remain highly attuned to current and potential conflict levels in the group. Individuals must have ready access to methods of identifying and resolving conflict that help rather than hinder team effectiveness.

A team's ability to make effective decisions is one of the variables that lead to its success. Teams make hundreds of decisions within their lifetimes. The way in which teams make decisions, however, is as important as the decision itself. Once made, a decision will need the unqualified support of the entire team to ensure its implementation. In a virtual setting, where people operate independently, failure to gain emotional enrollment or buy in to a decision promotes procrastination, withdrawal, and sabotage.

Effective team decision making requires

- A clear understanding of the boundaries and authority levels

- Agreed-on decision-making methods, e.g., consensus and majority rule

- Appreciation of the higher quality of decisions made by teams

- A focus on the process (how the team is making decisions), as well as the content (what is being decided)

- Attentiveness to the dynamics of team decision making means ensuring that

    – All ideas are heard
    – Everyone's opinion is solicited
    – No one person's ideas are allowed to dominate
    – Roll-call voting is utilized

Effective decision-making processes pave the way for managing healthy conflict so that the best ideas are used as the basis for decisions.

"If team conflict isn't managed well, virtual team members may simply stop participating."

—*The Virtual Teams Handbook*

Without vigilance around group dynamics, team conflicts, and dysfunctions often go undetected until they reach their potential for damaging levels of conflict. Managing conflict effectively is one of the skills that make the difference between a high performing team and a mediocre one.

The Challenge of Solving Team Problems

"Under the stresses of distance and differences, people must work together as well as they typically do in face-to-face groups."

—Jessica Lipnack and Jeffrey Stamps

All teams run into problems sooner or later. But difficulties that face teams in traditional settings can be significantly magnified in the virtual environment— problems with communicating; working together; and producing high-quality, on-time results is typically heightened by distance.

Small problems that can be observed and addressed swiftly and easily when people work face-to-face can quickly escalate in the virtual setting. Effective leaders need to quickly, confidently, and competently diagnose such issues and take deliberate actions to keep project team relationships, productivity, and outcomes on track.

For virtual teams the problems may not be visible for significant periods of time. The nature of the independent roles and diversity of team members and the reluctance to express concerns when not meeting face-to-face are significant factors.

"Social distance" can be magnified by cultural values as well, says Karen Sobel Lojeski of the Wesley J. Howe School of Technology Management. "In India and some

other Asian countries, for example, employees are generally discouraged from challenging a superior. In Japan, it's taboo to directly contradict any team member in public. That can be problematic for Americans, who expect others to be honest and forthright."

Because members of a virtual team operate "blind," people must deliberately build awareness of individual dynamics, such as work conditions and cultural differences, and of group dynamics, such as participation and conflict management.

Because today's teams are a complex alliance of talented individuals from different locations, different skill sets, different backgrounds, different languages and cultures, and even different organizations, it can be difficult to agree on standards, accountability structures, and sanctions for nonperformance. The chances to derail are enormous.

The most important factor in avoiding problems within teams seems to be having an early agreement that everyone is mutually responsible for the team's progress and success. Individual responsibilities must be clearly defined with roles and accountabilities being translated into specific objectives to help everyone to know what is expected to be done, by whom, and by when.

Creating performance ground rules that all team members agree to helps build positive team morale. Some teams develop a "code of cooperation" with members pledging behavior that will help avoid typical team problems. These might include promising to

- Attend all meetings and carry out assignments on schedule

- Listen to and show respect for the views of others

- Criticize ideas, not people

- Resolve conflict constructively

- Avoid disruptive side conversations

- Strive for win-win situations

Some virtual entities include "etiquette" guidelines in their code of cooperation, such as responding to email or voice mail messages within 24 hours, notifying people when out of the office for extended periods of time, and posting their work schedules.

In addition, a guideline for decision making may be useful. Consensus is frequently used probably because it is the most democratic approach, but other methods such as the manager making the decision or the majority rules are also possibilities. Regardless of the decision-making method adopted, it should be defined and documented.

Undeniably distance and technology can create problems, but involvement and compassion will improve most situations. Team leaders need to emphasize that relationships are as important as tasks. Essentially, virtual teams need to connect and then collaborate.

The Power of Collaboration

In their 2005 article in the Cutter IT Journal titled "The Easier Way to Work: Collaborating in World-Class Virtual Teams," Jessica Lipnack and Jeffery Stamps state, "The true promise of virtual teams working in global structures is rich: people working together at unprecedented levels of capability and innovation…The way forward to achieving these benefits is through world-class collaboration."

Lipnack and Stamps say this requires a balance between what they call the "twin pillars of collaboration": people and tools. "People need a virtual means to get to know and learn from one another. They have to master new ways to learn—many new ways to learn. Most of all, world-class performance requires exceptional teamwork in every way: individuals working together to achieve shared goals, both the goals that move local efforts forward as well as those that align with global objectives."

Reinhard Ziegler and Craig Mindrum, writing in Accenture's Outlook, 2002, Volume 2, state that companies looking to introduce virtual collaboration to some or all aspects of complex work should begin by "virtualizing" simpler forms of work, and then move to more complex types over time.

They explain that movement up this virtual collaboration curve occurs only under certain conditions: if the technology platforms become sophisticated enough to support the more complex work involved, and if, simultaneously, the needs of workers are taken into account so they are able to labor together effectively in that more complex, more richly nuanced virtual environment.

In this sequence, organizations become much more self-learning and self-managing, according to Ziegler and Mindrum. "When this happens, we move well beyond a sense of 'the old work done better.' It will truly mean an unleashing of the real power of people and of organizations."

Three Stages of Virtualization

Stage 1 Emphasize Virtual Communication

– Work is more routine.
– Focus is primarily on communication, whether among individuals, teams or larger parts of an extended organization.
– This focus involves the use of technology as well as familiar interaction styles : conference calls, email, and instant messaging.
– Groups come together for meetings, but task are asynchronous.

Stage 2 Learning to Labor Together

– Workers move into synchronous accomplishment of job tasks, e.g., group brainstorming, team discussions, application sharing, distributed project management, and online design reviews.

Stage 3 Organizational Learning

– The organization moves beyond the sense of "old work done better," to a state of self-learning and self-managing. This allows for live and virtual complex problem solving being seamlessly integrated to meet challenges that are only vaguely defined.

Conclusion

Virtual work is already a fact of life. By using new technologies, companies are finding ways to get essential tasks done while their people enjoy greater flexibility. "It's not that offices will ever become obsolete," says BusinessWeek. "But companies used to figure that the talent would come to them. More and more, they are going to have to figure out how to get the work to the talent."

"Leaders need to start thinking of corporate offices like town halls— a gathering place where people come only when they need to be together …."

—Charles Grantham
Work Design Collaborative, LLC

In creating virtual workplaces, organizations need to think about more than technology. They cannot ignore the need to get teams off to the right start, address ongoing working relationships, and ensure that their teams achieve and maintain high performance and enjoy an enhanced sense of satisfaction. Leaders must learn new ways to direct and guide virtual teams and organizations—staying focused on people as much as results.

To create excellence, virtually— organizations need to develop, implement, and integrate technology with human-focused approaches that amplify the power of interactions and create quality experiences for people across time, cultural, and geographic boundaries

In "Virtual Teams: The Future is Now," Jessica Lipnack says, "Cyberspace is a vast new civilization, containing places of commerce and an already deep social life…. In time, virtual teams will become nothing special, but rather the natural way to work."

And, according to Lipnack, virtual work represents much, much more. "In the Network Age, human, social, and knowledge capital are as potent a source of value as land, resources, skills, and technology," says Lipnack. "Human capital increases when more people work together in more places, meeting new challenges, and acquiring new competencies. Social capital accumulates when virtual team members vastly expand the number and diversity of their relationships."

High Performing Teams and Virtual Teams Thought Leaders

Don Carew and Eunice Parisi-Carew are Founding Associates of The Ken Blanchard Companies who joined with Ken to formulate the foundation for developing successful teams in Building High Performing Teams®. Their latest work on virtual teaming transitions these time-tested approaches into the 21st-century workplace. Both are thought leaders and authors, and each is an accomplished and respected management consultant, trainer, and educator, as well as a dynamic motivational speaker.

Carmela Southers, consulting partner, is a principal driver of the company's virtual teams intelligence. She specializes in helping organizations manage the demands of creating high performing virtual teams.

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