# The Human Side of Virtual Work

## *Managing Trust, Isolation, and Presence*

### Laurence M. Rose

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# Abstract

The virtual work world is upon us. It is ever increasing as both workers and organizations become more familiar with this new structure. The way leaders and managers deal with the virtual worker will become increasingly more important. This book takes a look at the virtual work environment from a view of human perceptions. Trust, isolation, and presence are the three main human perceptions discussed throughout the book and are the foundation for the theory presented. The Change–Self-Efficacy Loop Theory provides the basis for a new tool to maximize the productivity level of the virtual worker.

The book takes a journey from the Industrial Revolution through a second shift or technology revolution which we are currently experiencing known as the virtual work environment. It presents argument and ideas to encourage all of us to take action now to prevent the potential negative outcomes that could affect many working in the virtual work environment. The book walks through the three human perceptions and provides questions at the end of each chapter to spark thought and potential dialogue associated with humanistic management approaches related to the virtual work environment and the human perceptions.

The book is designed for anyone associated with the virtual work environment. Based on the premise that the virtual work environment needs to be a productive alternative to the traditional work environment, the book focuses on variables that can create the most successful outcome. Whether it be the leaders, managers, virtual worker, or coworkers, this book is designed to provide practical insight into the human perceptions and the human touch that needs to be a part of the virtual work environment.

# Keywords

# Contents

# Preface

The book is about a realization that I have come to and that is technology and the virtual work environment might have a large impact on human behavior. This behavior is impacted by the use of technology that was designed to allow people to have greater freedoms in their work and life. Yet I am concerned that the use of technology might produce unrealized negative effect on the virtual worker. This unrealized effect could be causing virtual workers to be less productive, ultimately making organization less successful. I explore the human perceptions and relate the new management approach to the humanistic management approach that is critical in maximizing the individual's benefit in balancing between the individual and the organization.

As I raised children in the first full generation that had the type of technology that literally could replace other humans in the day-to-day activity, such as playing, communicating, and entertaining, I wonder what lays ahead. Would it be the beginning of what could eventually control the minds of many individuals behind screens that could occupy their mind for hours upon hours without the need of other human beings? I know some could argue that television (TV) did this first. The point I make is TV was often family event, a social situation. The work place is also a social situation, and therefore, we must allow it to be so. We need to be careful that the virtual work environment does not place the individual in a situation where trust is strained, isolation is created, and presence is only at the individual level.

The technology that we call computers, Nintendo, Xbox, PDAs, BlackBerry devices, mobile phones, smart phones, iPhones, Androids, and so on are things that people do by themselves. At times, ok my view, often times they prefer to use these devices rather than interface with others. These are antisocial tools or crutches that have become commonplace.

As I began to watch the work environment change into the virtual work environment, I saw these things start to control work life as well. After all, we have all sat in meetings when the majority of people in

attendance are looking at the smart phone responding to other things rather than focusing on the meeting. We have also seen where coworkers working in the same location have attended meetings in their private office so they can multitask rather than sit in a shared conference room. With the increase in virtual workers needing to rely on technology greater than ever before, will these tools be more of distraction in the long run then a benefit? With the increase in virtual work and the reliance on technology, I started to worry that not only in our private lives but now in our work lives we have begun to move away from the human touch and focused more on the technology touch.

I began to study the effects of the virtual work environment related to the success of the organization. At first, I submit that there might not have been a tremendous change in the way work was done and performed. However, as the number of virtual workers and the newer technology increases, I began to worry that maybe thing have gone too far.

All of my concerns resulted in my research that took a look at human perceptions. That study resulted in a theory that focused on virtual workers' productivity.

I believe through the use of humanistic management and a focus on the human perceptions that we can head off any long-term ill effects. I submit that the time to act is now. As I discuss, we saw the way the Industrial Revolution affected the work force. I want to draw a comparison to that revolution and make sure that we don't have the same effects with this technology revolution. What I mean by that is let us not wait until it is too late to recognize that changes in the work structure really affected the workers in a way not anticipated by the changes to the organizational structure.

This new structure appears to be here to stay. It does provide benefits to all. We must take this opportunity to make sure that the individual virtual workers are both individually and organizationally successful. We must ensure that the tools that we are using are used by humans and the tools don't dumb down the work force or allow the work force to become a nonsocial creature. There is no argument that human beings are social creatures and to be the best, they need to rely on others, care for others, and support others. They must have strong trusting relationship, not work in isolation, and be in the presence of their coworkers and

organization for all to be most productive. Let's take a look at how we can fulfill the needs to the individual in making them flourish in their new environment and keep focus on the benefits of the virtual work environ-ment for the positive attributes it allows in the work–life balance. Let us come together and find the most productive way to use this new structure and establish the balance that is required in doing so.

# Acknowledgments

The inspiration for writing a book comes from many different places. There is the unyielding support that I got from my wife, Rhonda, who has stood beside me from the very beginning of my educational journey to the many rides in the car discussing "can you believe I am doing this," to the readings of draft after draft after draft, Rhonda I can't thank you enough.

The support I have received from my children, Andrew and Brittany. You know how much you mean to me. You also know that you really helped me with this concept of the virtual, electronic world. I won't mention which side I was on when this project started but I think you know. Thanks for everything and most of all believing that your Dad could do this.

My Parents, Dad even though you have passed, I am glad we had the talk when I received my Doctorate and you told me that was only the beginning. This book is part of you for all the lessons you have taught me. Mom, your support has been tremendous and you have always believed in me even when the hill was steep. Thanks for your support and raising me to believe that I can do what I put my mind to, even if the little drummer boy set didn't do what I wanted it to do.

I also want to say to Lou, my father-in-law who is no longer with us, thanks for the talks we had and telling me to keep going when I had doubts. You will be missed and I understand fully when you told me to walk the line. Margaret, thanks for never letting the concept of Vic ever fade away. You have helped me make it real.

From my academic support side, there are many to thank. I want to thank two people in particular. Dr. Janet Salmons, from the day we met, you told me I was on to something, today that is this book. Your continued support and guidance have helped me reach another milestone that was only a distant dream before we met, thank you! Dr. Don Forsyth, what can I say? The day at the Virginia Commonwealth University when I was sophomore who signed up for a course called group dynamics,

who would have known the inspiration I would have received from you during that class. The day you asked the class to define themselves as either ground beef or steak still inspires me today, and with your support, I still believe I am a steak.

To my friends and coworkers. Thank you for putting up with the hours of dialogue about the virtual work environment. Dale and T, thanks for listening all the many times, I am sure you would have rather talked about anything else but the book. JD, over the past five years and the many trips, thanks for your understandings when it came time between the academics and the micro brews and which way I had to go.

To the virtual workers who I have had the privilege to work with and manage and all of those who I have never met but know you have made this possible, I THANK YOU! Without your courage to work within this new structure, there would be nothing for me to research. Through my research, I have tried to make the virtual work environment a better place for you all, I hope you will reap the benefits of my work. I hope you are encouraged that I have tried to bring light to the human side of the virtual work and that by doing so, I have made your life a little better. Managing trust, isolation, and presence is what I believe is the cornerstone to this new push to bring humanistic management to the forefront of management theory, and there is no better place for it then in the virtual work environment.

Thank you all,
Larry

# CHAPTER 1

# Introduction to the Virtual Work Environment

*I live in a world, a virtual world. Facebook is my house, Linkedin is my office and Twitter is my playground.*

—Panchatapa Goswami

When I sat down to write this book, "The human side of virtual work: managing trust, isolation, and presence," which is about the virtual work environment (VWE), I was asking the question which many of you might have asked: how can the VWE be anything other than a good thing? Virtual work offers flexibility and cost savings not only for the individual but also for the organization and the ultimate in work-life balance. Seems pretty good, almost too good to be true. You know what they say about that.

As we take the journey together looking at the VWE in this book, we will look at how it might not be all that it appears, no pun intended on the virtual aspect. As mentioned earlier, if it seems too good to be true, maybe it is. I write this book not to bash all of the great things the VWE allows but to explore the VWE from a different lens and perspective that might not have been revealed before. The perspective is the foundation of the book, looking from the lens of the human side of things. This perspective comes from three main areas. First, I have led virtual workers for the past 15 years for both large and small, private and public companies. Second, my research was about the VWE and change, which resulted in a theory that will be discussed in Chapter 8. Third, and finally, through observations of friends and families all of whom have encountered a human side of the VWE.

The human side of things is an interesting approach because much of what has been studied has been about technology and lacked the focus

on the human beings, more will be discussed about this later in the chapter. For now, I want to mention that we must think about how humans are impacted so we can look for ways to allow humans to flourish. After all, for an individual to truly flourish, they must be able to navigate the obstacles. Don't we always look at things from the human side? Is it not a benefit to the humans who work virtually or have had their lives changed by telecommuting? I will introduce a person called Virtual Vic in Chapter 3 which is an example of how individuals can function without the engagement of other human beings. Back in the early 1970s, when telecommuting became a way of life for a few, many others longed for the day that they too could try this new life style. What Niles coined as a phrase to depict a new way of working would become a new life style for many some 40 years later. With change comes challenges, Chapter 4 will discuss management challenges.

Many books and articles have been written about the changes the VWE has created in both professional and personal situations. I submit to you today that many of these changes have focused on the VWE's structure. What I mean by that is the focus has been on the how and what of this environment, not on the humans who actually work within this structure. Books and articles are focused on the technology that enables this structure to take place. They focused on the shared office space that can now be used by many instead of just one. They focused on organizational savings and the investment in technology to enable the VWE. Their focus was not on the effect on human beings behind this new way of working but behind all the benefits that could be realized through the structure. They lacked a look at the feelings and the human touch behind this structure. Unfortunately, for many, there was no focus on the impact on the human being that is carrying out this new way of working.

I know that there will be many doubters who say, come on, everyone benefits. There can be no negative outcome of this great concept. That might be true, but I simply ask that you walk this journey with me with an open mind and we together explore some of the aspects that affect the people within the VWE. We shall look for ways within this structure to allow humans to flourish and be successful.

So let's start to explore this world that has been created some by the desires of workers, some by desire of organizations, some for the reason of

being more competitive in a global world, and most of all some because the world that we work in has evolved.

## History and the State of VWE

### *A Brief View of the World That We Live In*

Have you ever been in a situation where you believe that you have seen the future and the future is now? As the famous Lawrence Peter "Yogi" Berra once said "it's like Deja-vu all over again" and "the future ain't what it used to be." In order for it to be real, do you have to actually experience it for real? Do you have to live or work there for it to be real? Can it be the future if we are actually living it now? These are some of the thoughts I have had over the past few decades as I have not only managed people who are virtual workers but I have also raised children in a world full of technology that has allowed them to hit the big red button to start over without the understanding of what that means and how to develop the long-term views of the world. Technology is bringing us back to the old days by allowing many to be at home again. It allows for the blending of work and life balance by eliminating a structured work day, and it might be zapping the minds of many to only be able to think in the here and now. It is technology that enables the virtual world. It is also the technology that has become to many the enabling mechanism rather than the tool it should be to help humans function rather than escape from reality and pretend to see a different version of reality.

This version control of reality is what the virtual world creates. By working virtually, are you in the same reality as those away from you? If you are working in your pajamas from your home office, is that the same reality from the office that you once worked? Reality is a difficult topic, and I will discuss a concept often associated with reality later in Chapter 7; that topic is presence. Looking at version control of reality has been a struggle for people not just because of the virtual world but prior to the invention of virtuality. People often want to find a reality that fits for them even when the facts bare something different. Have you ever been with other people and witnessed the same event yet the descriptions of what just happened are very different? Let's take an example to highlight this aspect of version control of reality.

Let's look at a business meeting where there are two people on the same team yet they have opposing views to a solution. When a third person presents a position that favors one person's approach to the solution, there most likely will be two versions of reality. At the end of the presentation, we might very well have one person supporting the presentation and discussing the positive attributes, while the other person only heard the negative aspects and found all of the problems with the presentation. Same presentation, same solution yet two different versions of reality. Why does this happen? There are many reasons, but part of the problem stems from the lens that each team member is looking through while they listen and absorb the facts. We try and fit the fact pattern into what we have preconceived. This is the way the mind works. This is also affected by self-efficacy as we all focus on what we are good at doing. Self-efficacy plays an important role in the theory discussed in Chapter 8.

Let's look at one more example of version control of reality. When people witness an accident and they are asked what happened, often times, the stories are close but not the same. Sometimes it was a blue car that hit the red one when in reality it was a red car hitting the blue car. Sometimes it is that a car was turning when in fact the car was going straight. The reality and the facts are what they are yet the witnesses see something different. I don't want to spend a lot of time on all the reasons this might happen but rather want to point out that this does occur. When it does, the story told by each will become theirs and over time their belief will grow stronger. At times, so strong that they will defend it as the truth, keep this concept in mind, as we later talk about the perceptions of trust, isolation, and presence and how individuals define their feelings and beliefs associated with them.

There are many reasons for this to occur. This concept has been studied by experts and they are more qualified than I am as to the actual reasons this happens. One of the most pointed books that addresses how the brain functions and why this might happen is the one written by Guy Harrison (2013) called *Think*. Another book, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*, written by Carol S. Dweck (2006) does an excellent job in talking about the details that can affect how we react to situations based on our mindset. If you are interested in exploring this concept more, I recommend you read these books.

The point for bringing this up is that even in the same exact environment, people can have different versions of reality. Imagine when we start to work apart from each other how realities might change or be influenced. Introduce all capitalized e-mail or text, missed nonverbal clues, and garbled conference calls; talk about a version of a different reality. I want this thought to carry through to those of us who manage virtual workers to understand that their reality most likely will be different from ours.

Now that we have seen what version control of reality is, imagine how the virtual world can affect the perceptions of those dealing with a given situation. Take that a step further, and imagine how work and productivity might be affected by the VWE and version control of reality. So how do we know what reality we are living in and working in? We must be ever aware of our situation and those we work with.

As Orwell (1949) once wrote "big brother is watching" talking about how the world would be in 1984, now 30 years later, as I put pen to paper, we must deal with this real aspect and concept of the virtual world and the ability to have big brother watching. We are in a situation where big brother can watch based on technology. It might not be as we originally thought, meaning in the terms as Orwell wrote that we would be observed; a society where authority figures could watch every move that was made by the citizens, or has it evolved that way?

Today, we can be observed by "big brother." Sometimes this can be a very good thing like that in the recent Boston Marathon Bombing when the "eye in the sky" was able to identify the individuals who set homemade bombs near the finish line. In this case, without the ability to observe, we might not have been able to bring these people to justice. However, is this ability to be observed all the time a good thing? Big brother might be your manager who is using technology to monitor if you are really working in your remote location. Big brother might be your virtual team who is monitoring its member to ensure that the progress is being made on the task it was given. Big brother might be your network of Wazers, the newer GPS type system available on your smart phone that is interactive while you drive, who are watching how you are getting to and from wherever you are traveling, including maybe going to work. The bottom line is that we have the capability to monitor our whereabouts

when it comes to working and we are using that technology in a way that appears to provide freedom and flexibility, but is it really? Do you feel trusted when you are being monitored on the number key stokes you are using on your computer. As social creatures, are we flourishing when you are isolated by yourself? Can you maximize your output when you are not in the presence of others?

What is the purpose of introducing big brother in the conversation of the VWE? The reason is that "big brother" is a part of what the VWE can be and is. It is already part of the VWE in many aspects of managing and leading within this new structure. We use technology to monitor work output. We use technology to have virtual meetings where people can be observed during the meeting. We have big brother watching with FaceTime and Skype applications which bring far away people up close through the use of screens.

Now that we have realized that big brother really can watch we must look at what that means to those being watched, the virtual worker. Big brother being able to watch was a far off concept back in Orwell's "1984" but it appears very real today. We must talk about what the future of the VWE really is in terms of the humans that function within this world. The perceptions that people feel are real, and they need to be a part of the VWE to make it as beneficial and productive as it can be.

Later, I will look at the human perceptions of trust, isolation, and presence. For now, I want to discuss the concept and structure of the VWE and how it has come to being.

## The Coming of the VWE

In the beginning and prior to the Industrial Revolution, people made a living by manufacturing goods in their own homes. Before the Industrial Revolution, many people worked the land. People used hand tools and basic machines. Farmers worked their own property and women spun wool and flax into thread used for clothing. Work then evolved into workshops or small-scale industries very close to where workers lived, if not on their actual home site. New machinery for manufacturing goods meant that instead of working at home, people went to work in factories in towns. The shift in population was massive; in 1800, 75 percent of the

population lived in the country and 25 percent in towns; by 1900, these percentages had been exactly reversed. Rather than working for themselves, most people were now employees of someone else.

Industrialization marked a shift to powered, special-purpose machinery, factories, and mass production. The iron and textile industries, along with the development of the steam engine, played central roles in the Industrial Revolution, which also saw improved systems of transportation, communication, and banking. While industrialization brought about an increased volume and variety of manufactured goods and an improved standard of living for some, it also resulted in often grim employment and living conditions for the poor and working classes.

There was a shift in working conditions and location for many. This shift created a separation between work and home. Now there was a distinct line between work and home. This shift could be directly related to the Industrial Revolution that had profound impacts on organizations, management styles, and workers. The Industrial Revolution widened the space between home and work. This widening was seen in terms of both geographical and psychological distance (Baruch and Nicholson 1997). As individuals began to travel longer distances to and from work, the distinction between a work and a nonwork life began to take hold in the postindustrial years.

We now face a second shift again caused by technology and engineering advancements. As we saw before, the impact on the humans was great; we are potentially seeing the impact on humans again with this second shift, the VWE. It can be great as well (see benefits of VWE). The difference between the Industrial Revolution and this second shift is that we have the ability to address the impact now on the working people and not after the revolution happens. We don't need to wait for history books to be written to explain the effects. We can make changes and alter our thinking now to head off potential negative or harmful changes to humans based on the change in working conditions associated with the VWE.

Before jumping right in on what is the VWE, I want to be clear about how the business needs have changed over time. This will help to place this discussion on the VWE in the right context? It will also serve as the beginning of introducing the human side in the VWE. As you will see, we have indeed almost come full circle.

As mentioned earlier, work and home were considered the same for many people prior to the Industrial Revolution. People worked their land and used their homesteads for their livelihood. Even though I talk about coming full circle, I believe that it is important to say that this will never be exactly the same for many reasons. Most importantly, technology advances prevent the loop from ever really being the same. Even though we are heading back toward working at home, we will never be disconnected from our communities like we once were because of technology. This aspect will have similar and other effects on the people, but as an example, the isolation once felt by farmers who lived miles away from their nearest neighbor will most likely never be repeated.

To highlight the point of things not being the same, all we need to do is look at two situations that have occurred since the famers worked their land long ago. I am referring to things that have occurred within the United States. HughesNet makes the following statement: "As America's #1 choice for satellite Internet, HughesNet® provides high-speed satellite Internet that's accessible anywhere in the contiguous United States." In another situation, the U.S. Government used money designed to stimulate the economy to get broadband technology out to rural areas within the United States. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (Recovery Act) established several broadband initiatives. One initiative included funding for the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP), which was administered by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration in consultation with the Federal Communications Commission. The BTOP was designed to develop and expand broadband services to rural and underserved areas and improve access to broadband by public safety agencies. Another initiative included funding for the Broadband Initiatives Program, which is administered by the Rural Utilities Service of U.S. Department of Agriculture. This program was designed to support the expansion of broadband service in rural areas through financing and grants to projects that provide access to high-speed service and facilitate economic development in locations without sufficient access to such service. As can be seen with the ability to get technology such as Internet access, things will never come completely full circle, technology will always advance the environment. The farmer might never be isolated again.

The evolving business needs and the distinctions between where work took place and where the workers resided soon became part of the social network that many individuals functioned within. Individuals had a work and a nonwork social life or network. The separation from home while at work became common place. The traditional work place now was separate from the home life. The VWE is now challenging this once standard situation of work and home life. The Information Age, as defined by Alvin and Heidi Toffler (1990), is one that is becoming information based, electronically connected, and globally interdependent. This definition is supported by the descriptions of virtual work by Lipnack and Stamps (1997) which grew out of the third wave of change, which began in the mid-20th century.

With the advances in technology in the early 1980s enabling effective communication, this work–home life has started to once again merge together. Today people are working countries apart while being part of the same team; however, work–home balances are beginning a pre-Industrial Revolution cyclical turn. The virtual workers, even though working with others countries apart, might be doing so from their homes.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, it was believed that the technological innovations in microelectronics and telecommunication "could shift literally millions of jobs out of the factories and offices into which the Second Wave (Industrial Revolution) swept them right back to where they came from originally: the home" (Salomon and Shamir 1985; Toffler and Toffler 1981). The shift of workers was seen to have impacts on such things as transportation, energy consumption, air pollution, labor markets, the family, and educational institutions (Salomon and Salomon 1984).

This shift appeared not to be seriously considered from the point of view of the employees (Salomon and Shamir 1985). These early reports on teleworkers were done more in anticipation of what this new work structure could or might do for organizations rather than how it impacted an individual. The earlier reports were presented as a new way to look at the previous way of doing business, but there was little actual scientific research associated with this new structure, as it related to the human side of the VWE. These reports were more concerned with reporting numbers and facts about this new organizational structure as opposed to undertaking an actual study focused on the individual working in this new environment.

Literature on telecommuting began to appear in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when articles were published about the number of telecommuters. In 1997, Feldman and Gainey noted that over the past 10 years, there were a growing number of corporations, including large corporations such as MCI, Pacific Bell, J. C. Penny, and Hewlett-Packard, that had increased their use of telecommuting (Barnes 1994; Feldman and Gainey 1997; Mason 1993). Today, we see more and more large corporations using some form of teleworking. I am not sure if there is a company that hasn't addressed the issue of working virtually in some form or fashion. The U.S. Federal Government has recently passed the "Telework Enhancement Act of 2010," which requires heads of each executive agency to establish telework rules to allow their employees to be able to telework at some level; it is clear that this new Act will encourage workers to try teleworking to some degree, whether it be during emergency situations or on a regular basis (U.S. Congress 2010). I am confident that any business plan for a new business takes into account the aspects of the VWE. If not directly for their own employees at a minimum for the benefits of those who are working with others who work virtually.

The foundation of the VWE can be traced back to the early days of telecommuting, which involved working outside of the conventional workplace, or facility, for example, like at home (Cooper and Kurland 2002), or a decentralized office away from others, with whom the individual worked on a regular basis. Kurland, back in 1999, working with Diane Bailey, looked at the advantages and challenges of telecommuting in their article, "The advantages and challenges of working here, there, anywhere, and anytime." They found many companies were working toward this new telecommuter in terms of teleworking because they were focused on cutting costs and attracting and retaining top personnel (Bailey and Kurland 1999). Their research was one of the first studies that moved from the reporting of the facts about this new structure, to a study that explored the effects of this new structure on individuals. Today, these effects might even be more important as the numbers of teleworkers is increasing yearly. As can be seen back in 1999, more than 15 years have passed and we are still trying to figure out what the effects of working remotely are.

## People, Process, and Practice

At the end of each chapter, I am going to discuss the people, process, and practice associated with the concept discussed in the chapter with some questions to think about associated with the VWE. The purpose of this section is to provide thoughts that could result in better ways for manager to lead within the VWE.

In terms of the people section, I will define who the people are associated with working virtually and how the particular human perceptions might affect these virtual workers. The process section will focus on concepts and ideas for establishing a process to make the VWE successful. Finally, the practice section will address the practices that need to take place in the work environments to support the aspects of working virtual.

# CHAPTER 2

# The Essentials of the Virtual Work Environment

*The physicality of a real relationship—one that encompasses mind, body and soul—ultimately makes it more fulfilling and powerful than any virtual relationship ever could be.*

—Henry Cloud

## The Virtual Work Environment Defined

The definition of the virtual work environment (VWE) has undergone many revisions, from early descriptions of telecommuting workers who still operated with a central office to descriptions of totally dispersed operations with no central office however, the common factor is that the worker is not colocated with their peers and their managers. They work in remote locations and often do not have a centralized work location owned and operated by their company. Workers' connection to a centralized location, and to managers and peers, varies greatly. Some virtual workers have regular face-to-face meetings, while others have never met their managers or coworkers in person.

It is interesting to note as discussed by Arnison and Miller (2002), embracing the technology revolution is a considerable challenge for most organizations. Walker (2000) stated that the Internet and the dot.com phenomena in particular have transformed many "old-economy" workplaces into modern e-workplaces.

This evolving VWE has several reasons for its existence such as cost benefits (Anantatmula and Thomas 2010; DeLuca and Valacich 2006) and flexibility for both managers and workers (Higgins 2005; Maitland 2008). Much research can be and has been devoted to the technical reasons

behind the formation of the VWE (Lipnack and Stamps 1997). For the purpose of this book, the reasons for the creation is not critical, as it is assumed that the VWE is here and will be here for the foreseeable future. The issues that the VWE presents associated with the virtual worker are also here and will be present in the foreseeable future. Therefore, a look into what is happening in terms of human perceptions and organizations affected by the new environment is critical for future success and survival within the social world called work.

The VWE will continue to increase over the decades that follow. As discussed by Mihhailova, Oun, and Turk (2009), organizations have started to use teamwork as a way to solve business issues during the past 10 to 15 years, the outgrowth of this is the VWE. In terms of the types of virtual workers, however, their types vary and remain plentiful. As Watson-Manheim, Chudoba, and Crowston (2002) stated, "virtual is a potent buzzword freely applied to many situations, with many meanings." The immense variety makes it somewhat hard to actually define the numbers of virtual workers. Bailey and Kurland supported that assertion in 2002 in their article *A review of telework research: findings, new directions, and lessons for the study of modern work* when they commented "establishing who teleworks has never been easy."

There are more virtual workers today than ever before and the numbers will continue to increase unless something drastic is discovered to challenge the benefits of this working situation. By way of drastic, the benefits of saving the corporation money, saving the virtual workers commute time, the flexibility of work–life balance and other such potential benefits must be outweighed by actions that can cause less success for the business and ultimately the individual. Remember the comment I made in the first paragraph of Chapter 1 about things being too good to be true?

The VWE has evolved over the past several decades starting in the early 1970s when the term *telecommuter* was coined by Niles (1975). The number of virtual workers continues to increase; estimates fluctuate, but the number of workers performing their duties in some form of a VWE is on the rise. Back in 1999, Kurland and Bailey reported that forecasts in the United States would range from 15 to 44 million workers, or 57 percent of the workforce, who would be using virtual work at

some level (Bailey and Kurland 1999). The trend showed by *Telework Trendlines* 2009 shows how the number of telecommuters, because of the technology, has increased in recent years (Worldatwork 2009). The report also discusses how the different levels of teleworkers are on the increase (Worldatwork 2009). Continuing the growth Global Workplace Analytics presented through their research that telework grew nearly 80 percent from 2005—growth of multiple days per week employee teleworkers (not including self-employed), telecommuting increased 79.7 percent from 2005 to 2012 though the rate of growth slowed during the recession.

There a many different levels including those workers who work virtually full time, those who only do so one day a week, and all the variations in between. Finally, in support of the increase in teleworkers, the shift is from a production work environment and structure to a more service-related business offering, which has created the new generation of workers not tied to machines, but rather able to provide the service in a boundless environment (Kayworth and Leidner 2002).

This boundless environment is what we will call the VWE. It is about a location in which individuals perform their duties where they are separated from their other direct peers, fellow staff members, or organization and management.

It is not bound by walls that surround people in a central location or forces people to commute to a location in order to get their work done. This is not to say that people are still not doing these things, they are. I want to be clear that even though the number of virtual workers is ever growing, we still have a large number of workers who perform their work in a traditional environment, the old brick and mortar style of work environment.

Many individual workers today have technology that allows them to perform their work in remote and decentralized locations; however, the study of VWE s and virtual workers has only really begun. In a review of journals through the use of Academic Search Premier, Business Source Complete, and ABI/INFORM Global, which deal with management, organizational structure, psychology, and sociology, the number of articles

associated with the search word *virtual* found that more than 75 percent of articles were written after the year 2000.

Literature started to introduce the topic of the VWE in terms of the telecommuter with Jack Niles in 1975. It has evolved, and as depicted in Figure 2.1, the terms and challenges brought about by the different methods of remote working is on a continuum. Figure 2.1 is presented from the work of Kurland and Bailey in 1999. They explored the use of telecommuting in ways that would benefit the organization. This continuum discusses the challenges for remote managing in terms of fewest to the greatest number of challenges (Bailey and Kurland 1999). The degree in terms of depth of virtual work ranges from the least challenging with the part-time local telecommuting to the most challenging with the worldwide virtual teams. This continuum is still relevant today and fits with the different levels associated with teleworkers in 2015; it also serves to help define the broad range of types of remote workers or the different levels of the virtual worker (see Figure 2.1).

This varied type of definition of the virtual workers is not only a challenge for those trying to define who is a virtual workers but it creates management challenges as well. The managers and leaders who need to lead virtual workers need to understand this complexity in definition as these different types will require different approaches to lead them successfully. This poses challenges for the managers and leaders. As there are often both types of employees, the skills to manage both sets of employees will require better management techniques. As virtual teams come together, managers will need to use old and new techniques such as phone calls, e-mails, teleconferencing, and making sure that face-to-face meeting are held with all employees. The manager's tool bag needs to grow substantially because of this new work environment. What once worked
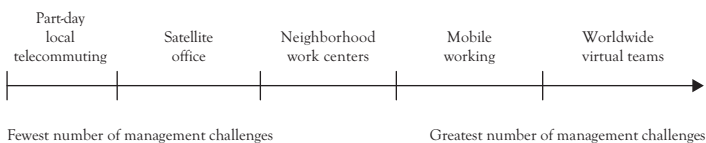


**Figure 2.1  Challenge continuum**

*Source:* Used with the permission from Elsevier and content authors Nancy B. Kurkland and Diane, E. Bailey.

for a manager of a department in a centralized office might no longer be applicable to that department within the VWE.

## A Sneak Preview of Chapters 4, 5, and 6

The human interpretations associated with and related to work relationships within a virtual environment affect the success of an organization at all levels. There are a variety of different human interpretations that come into play within the social and work setting. Some of these are personalities, moods, thinking, likes and dislikes, prejudices, past experiences, and the three human perceptions that will be a focus of this book: trust, isolation, and presence. Chapter 8 will discuss how these three truly can affect the ability of the VWE to be successful. These perceptions have dimensions to them, and often they operate on a continuum. They are indeed human perceptions that are explained in terms of a dimension on a scale that ranges from positive to negative. The range from positive to negative is about how the individual interprets their feelings associated with the human perception. As an example, a high level of trust would be deemed positive, while a low level of trust would be considered negative. The three perceptions and their respective dimensions are central to this book and the success of the VWE. The level of trust individuals have for each other and the organization, the degree of isolation they sense in the virtual work space, and the extent of presence they feel with others will all have a direct effect on the success of this new structure.

Trust, isolation, and presence are human perceptions associated with the social aspects of dealing with others

- Trust
  - How much one trusts another can have a direct effect on that relationship. Relationships play an integral part in the work environment; the ability to trust those on a work team can challenge the effectiveness of the team. The VWE may place even greater emphasis on trust and mutual support when the team members are physically separated from one another.

- Isolation
  - Isolation is a human perception, similar to trust, because it is experienced at the individual level. As such, it is subject to interpretation. A cubicle worker surrounded by others may feel more isolated than a remote worker who is electronically connected to coworkers. Studies have shown that feeling isolated can have a very devastating effect on individuals. The use of solitary confinement in the criminal justice system is a prime example of the long-term negative effects of isolating humans (Kupers 2008). Those inmates who have been isolated for long periods of time have a difficult time acclimating themselves to the general population, and they begin to lose social skills and act out against authority more frequently.
- Presence
  - The third human perception is presence. The aspect of being in a certain setting or situation makes people define their level of presence. The feeling of presence can be determined by people's interpretation of their connection to their surroundings. This personal interpretation of one's place in relation to others, in turn, becomes his or her reality. Therefore, the feeling of presence can affect how well individuals operate in their workplace surroundings.

These three traits provide new challenges for individuals, managers, and organizations in dealing with the VWE. However, existing management styles and organizational models do not adequately explain these traits and their implications for successful organizational productivity. They all may lack the focus for the individuals to truly be their best. We must ensure that as leaders and managers, we provide an environment that allow humans to flourish. These human traits might become magnified because of the distance created by the VWE and, therefore, need to be a part of new management and leadership styles and skills in helping to increase the understanding of the VWE.

## Humanistic Management

As I begin to discuss the aspect of how humanistic management fits within the VWE, it is important to talk about the current status of overall management approaches. There is no doubt that management theories are facing tremendous challenges. As pointed out by Jackson and Nelson, business as usual is taking a hit as the decline in societal trust poses a huge threat (Jackson and Nelson 2004). This can be related to the trade-off between the economic push versus the human push. Management theory has been focused and remains focused on the economic benefit, while it continues to stress the humans behind the organizational structure. I believe that Taylor sums it up best by stating that there is overwhelming evidence that people look for respect, acceptance, communion, and shared values instead of short-sighted personal utility increases (Taylor 2006). We are seeing that the generations of just pushing to get more with less to gain the economic benefit may have reached its limit in terms of human satisfaction. It is time to look at the humans behind this push and start to decide how to establish a balance.

The human perceptions as well as the theory discussed within this book is the cornerstone to relating humanistic management to the VWE. One might wonder why it matters whether it is about the human view or the organizational view. Some might say what matters is that the organization is productive and if we can accomplish that, so be it. I write this book through the lens that people, the human beings, behind the operation of running the business do matter. We often hear the most important asset a company has is its employees. I think that we all want to believe that yet in practice how does that really play out? There is no denying that there are effects on people within the work environment. Whether it is through hostile work environments, long hours with less than ideal working conditions, trouble meeting deadlines, too many deadlines, long commutes, traffic issues, and of course the interfacing with fellow individuals who come from all walks of life. These fellow individuals have different agendas and concerns that either help or distract their ability to get the job done and how that impacts others. Add in the challenges with working virtually, and we can see how the human can be left behind in terms of their perceptions related to their personal fulfillment, success, and that of the organizations.

The concept behind humanistic management, which started to be a new administrative theory and new management method in the 1980s, was to place what really motivates the humans within an economic situation. The motivation of the human was at the forefront of this theory and approach. It has been said by some that the humanistic management approach is of the people, by the people, and for the people. This book presents a theory that takes this approach and looks for how human perceptions can be used to emphasize this management approach and offers a view particularly focused on the VWE to help move this management approach forward.

## Ending Thoughts

At the end of each chapter, I am going to discuss the people, process, and practice associated with the concept discussed in the chapter with some questions to think about associated with the VWE. The purpose of this section is to provide thoughts that could result in better ways for manager to lead within the VWE. The important thing to understand is that with all management styles, there is often not one right answer but flexibility in design by applying specific aspects of a management style to the people who are being led. For example, we have all heard about introverted and extroverted people. When managing these people, the way we need to communicate with them might be completely different, yet the concept of the organizational mission and overall objective is the same. We should not be willing to comprise the mission in order to lead different people. The success of an organization is to make sure that the mission is understood by all. The success of managing virtual workers is to make sure that we find a way to address their individual concerns and circumstances without compromising the mission. We must never forget that no organization can run without the human beings behind it. Therefore, it is safe to say that an organization that allows the human to prosper in terms of individual fulfillment is well on its way to be a productive organization.

## The People

These people we call virtual workers are indeed our friends, family, and neighbors. They will be your office mate, coworker, and people from different organizations, cultures, and countries. They are all of us.

As mentioned, the virtual worker is defined as a person who does not work at a centralized location. They work remotely from their team and department location. They may be located in a remote office or a home office. They might even be the people who are at the local coffee shops.

The virtual workers are separated on part-time and full-time basis; they are with others not part of their team or in total isolation, working alone in a remote location. The virtual worker needs to understand what the human perceptions of trust, isolation, and presence means in terms of fitting in with their coworkers and organizations. These are people who might have different meanings associated with the human perceptions to those who are working in a traditional work environment and those who are not. Either way they are the people behind this structure.

The virtual workers might feel different about the "natural" setting they function within. They are still social creatures now placed in unnatural, nontraditional social setting and are often separated from others? The virtual workers are alone, not in a natural or traditional social setting that exists in the traditional work environment. They must construct their lives differently from their peers or coworkers who are colocated.

The VWE has created the potential for virtual workers to connect to their peers, coworkers, and managers through the use of communication devices and may provide little, if any, face-to-face opportunities for anyone working in the VWE.

Given that the trending is on the rise with more virtual workers appearing in business on a daily basis, managers and leaders need to get trained on how to effectively manage these workers. They cannot be the people who are out of sight and out of mind.

I will shortly introduce you to Virtual Vic. Vic is used to illustrate how a person who shows many of the aspects of working virtual can operate within the business environment. He will use tools that are available to him, and we will think about and question if these tools are helping him or hurting him in managing staff and interacting with the people whom he is managing.

## The Process

The process of establishing a VWE is simple, right? Get technology that enables people to work with each other remotely. Close down the office

and send the people to find a place to work. Issue them tasks and monitor them upon completion of tasks.

Not so simple. There are real people behind these decisions and organization. The process within this structure needs to ensure that the people are clear on the mission in order to have a successful and productive VWE. The process needs to involve a plan and calculated steps to set this environment up for success.

The evolution of this new organizational structure has created a new work environment for employees. Lipnack and Stamps (1997) stated that "in the blink of an evolutionary eye," employees do not need to be collocated to work together. This VWE was not methodically formed rather it was created because of supporting technologies (Balsmeier, Bergiel, and Bergiel 2008). As the business world continues to evolve, this new VWE is becoming part of all future aspects associated with team formation, organizational designs, and the competitive landscape.

Leadership skill is critical to the success of managing a virtual team. Therefore, leaders or managers must set up in their processes with clear goals and direction with the focus on the bigger picture, while at the same time, specific details to help shape the expectations. They must not only promote the organization, but also keep in mind how the employee will interpret the mission.

The virtual worker must also put a process in place that includes things such as frequency of office visits, work hours, office set up, and rules that apply for family members, friends, and neighbors.

## The Practice

It is happening, we must recognize this, and we must plan and prepare to deal with the effect of this new structure. The practice is growing and is upon us today. We cannot wait for this to overtake the effects on the virtual worker. The Moore law is happening to us, and we need to recognize that in terms of technology, this might be ok, but when it comes to humans, we might need to hit the brakes. In practice, if we don't plan and we don't recognize that the effect on the humans, will we outpace the productivity we all achieve? In practice, we need to find ways to connect the benefits of advanced technology with the productivity that organizations strive to achieve.

Moore's law is summarized by defining the speed of technology. It is projected that technology advancements increase with time and the increase might outpace the ability to actually use it.

The following chapters will start to address the skills needed to make the practice of this new structure effective to achieve what we all need and that is a productive work environment. First let's see what Virtual Vic is up to.

## Some Questions to Think About

Can technology be a bad thing in terms of human perceptions?
What does working virtually really mean?
How does trust, isolation, and presence present itself in the VWE?
Do the human perceptions help to define the human touch associated
    with the VWE?
Is the structure of the VWE here to stay?

# CHAPTER 3

# Virtual Vic



*I like live audiences, with real people—virtual reality is no substitute.*
—Hillary Clinton

In this chapter, I am going to introduce you to a person whom I call Vic. His story might not be exactly like the one you have either personally experienced or witnessed of a close friend, neighbor, or family member but I will bet that parts of his story will ring true to your experiences.

The purpose of this chapter is not only to introduce you to Vic but also to get you to start thinking about your actions, as they relate to the virtual work environment (VWE). It is also intended to make you think of the dependency you might place on the tools that facilitate the concepts associated with the VWE and the human perceptions of trust, isolation, and presence. As I mentioned in Chapter 1 of this book, it is not about me bashing the aspects that can come of the VWE but it is to make you think about better ways to manage and perform in the VWE. Ultimately, the purpose of this book is to impart a few steps that can result in a more productive VWE. We must deal with this new arrangement, as it is part of our organizational structure for the foreseeable future. Given that backdrop, let's see what Vic is all about.

The story is about a successful young man, who we will call Virtual Vic. He is entering the prime of his career. Vic has worked for almost 20 years and has chosen to take a management track for his career. After all, his degree is in Business Management and he attended one of the most prestigious universities in the nation.

Graduating from such a school has provided him ample opportunities within the business world to lead and manage staff. He is now ready and has accepted a very good job for a new company in a new city. This job places him at the level he once dreamed of when he was a freshman in school. He told himself that if he ever reached this level of management he would have "made it." These jobs take an individual to the next level and often involve compromise and consideration. This job will force him to relocate his family to a new city. Given the move, he and his wife believe that this is the right thing to do, as it places him at new level of responsibility in terms of management and the overall business world. Vic is now going to be an executive in the business world.

After kissing his wife and kids good-bye, Vic heads to the airport to catch a flight to his new destination. After working through security at the airport, he shows the preapproved Transportation Security Administration pass to a scanner. There is a guard who is somewhat overseeing the process who simply points to a bar code scanner and he places his electronic boarding pass on the screen from his phone. His plane is ready for boarding and he walks on the plane after properly scanning his barcoded ticket under the scanner.

After the mandatory prerecorded announcements, he settles in his seat and starts to ponder how his first day will be. Will he set the right impression about himself, will his people be responsive to him, and will they accept his way of doing business. These are just a few of the thoughts that run through his mind as his journey starts.

After a safe and uneventful landing, he is off to the hotel. He first must get his car which he does by going right to the spot highlighted on the car rental board. The car already has the keys in the ignition and all the paperwork is completed for him, all he needs to do is drive out of the lot. He thinks "as a new executive this is how it should be." In actuality, it is that way for anyone who travels and joins the car rental club. Car rental organizations have everything prearranged so you can function as a self-reliant traveler if you are a member.

He gets to his hotel and parks in a self-park area; because he has pre-checked in all he needs to do is pick up the room key and he is off to his room. It is late so he figures he should get right to bed. He sets his wake up call by using the self-service wakeup call service supplied in the hotel room by using the phone system.

He quickly falls asleep. The next thing he knows is he is startled awake by the ringing of the phone. He notices his heart racing and he is in a cold sweat and reaches for the phone and hears the recoding of a women's voice that says "this is your wake up call, enjoy your day."

As he hangs up the phone, he realizes that he is in the condition because of the horrible nightmare he was having right before the phone rang waking him up. The nightmare was all about his first day. Vic spends a few minutes thinking about how bad it would be if the nightmare was true.

The nightmare started from the beginning of his day. After a shower and getting dressed, he goes downstairs to the lobby of the hotel to be greeted by the front desk attendant who asked if he needed any help. He politely said no but the attendant insisted on helping. All Vic needed was his car that had been valet parked upon his arrival. Vic also needed directions because just using GPS might not tell him about the local traffic issues. The attendant who gets Vic's car gave him detailed instructions about how to get around town and what areas to avoid. Vic thought to himself "without all the details I might have been lost in back allies and stuck in traffic as the GPS didn't highlight areas to stay away from." The attendant stopped traffic to let Vic get out of the busy driveway and to make sure that he is headed in the right direction.

When he arrived at his new work location, he walked in the main lobby where there was a sign greeting him as a new employee. There was also two sponsors, one for his department and the other from human resources who were there to help him get acquainted with not only his surroundings but also the people he would be working with. The sponsors had arranged to have a coffee round table meeting for him and his department. They then took him around to meet other people in the building. They arranged a lunch for him and provided presentations about the company and a question and answer period so he could ask questions as

needed. They even prepared a list of restaurants he could go to for dinner after his first day. Once he decided which restaurant he wanted to go to, they would arrange all the details for him. This would include making sure he was greeted at the door by the owner of the restaurant to see if there was anything special he wanted.

After a great meal, he went back to the hotel, valet parked his car, and headed into the hotel lobby. He was greeted by an attendant who asked if he needed anything and welcomed him to the area as she knew it was his first day on his new job. Vic went to the room and received a reminder note about making sure he called his family and set a wakeup call. There was a knock on his hotel room door and when he answered, he was handed two hot chocolate chip cookies. Again he was asked if he needed anything and was wished a good night.

He called home and started to tell his wife all of the details of the day and that is when he woke up out of this nightmare. Vic thought to himself, as he cleared his head, thank goodness that was a nightmare so my wife didn't have to actually hear any of that. She would have so many questions about me interfacing with all of these people and how they wanted to make him feel part of the new surroundings.

Vic started the real day after shaking off the feeling of this nightmare. After a shower and getting dressed, Vic was off to the office. He went down the stairs and right out the side door to the self-serve parking spot where he had parked his car the night before. He pulled out of his brief case the directions he was able to print off the computer days before that showed the direct route to the office and confirmed these with his GPS which was part of his phone. Neither identified the local traffic issues and he found himself moments later, in major rush hour traffic. Not to worry he thought, I can find a different route later once I am in front of the computer and put in different parameters for a different search of directions. After a long delay from what he thought would be his travel time to work, he arrived and parked in the back lot.

Upon his arrival at the office, Vic walked to the back door that had a card reader and swiped his badge that had been sent to him a few days earlier. He went up the back stairs and went to his new office. It was a large office in the corner of the floor, which had plenty of windows and overlooked the back parking lot.

Once he hung his jacket up, he sat at the nice wooden desk that appeared all set up for his arrival. He saw a note on the key pad of his new computer with the large flat screen which read, if you have trouble logging in please call the help desk at 1-800 helpdesk. He tried unsuccessfully to login so he picked up the phone to call the number. He received a recording that said press 1 if you are a new employee. He was then confronted with a list of other options; after listening to them, he chose number 3 which was for login problems. When he was connected to that line, he was faced again with a series of other options. After listening to that, he pressed 3 again and hoped that would get him to where he needed to be. More options and another 3 was his choice. After this choice, it seemed like he would be getting the help; however, as he listened, it seemed as though none of the options fit his situation so he pressed 9 to repeat the options. After listening a second time and determining that none of the options worked for him he pressed 0 as instructed to get a service person. After some music and an advertisement about how good the helpdesk service was, he heard a voice that said, "sorry no one is here right now to help, please call back" and the phone went dead.

He was not too discouraged by the events as he had his own PDA available and was able to get on the Internet from there. Once on, he was able to get into the helpdesk on line, he sent a note requesting help. He received a note back asking if he was employee 8675309j4r. He responded that he was indeed that employee and they sent him directions on his PDA that allowed him to login on his new computer. So off and running he was.

His first thought was to see each of his employees but that was quickly overcome with the idea that instead of having to figure out which one he would see first he determined that it would be better to send an e-mail to all of his employees, that way he would reach them all and no one could say they were the last one he came to see. Yes, treating each of them the same was the way to go.

So off with the note, it was short and got to the point.

"Hi I am in the office; I look forward to working with each of you. I would like you to send me a list of your activities and tasks as well as a presentation of areas you think you can improve on. Let me know if you need anything, I look for a very productive time with you and want you

to know I am here for you should you need anything." He hit the send button and then quickly went looking through the e-mail that had piled up in his In box. He thought how different it was that even before he started he was getting e-mails, not like the old days. Many of the notes where system generated about the policies and procedures for using the computer and they explained how to manage the workload and storage capacity. He noticed that he had received an immediate response from one of his employees saying how much they looked forward to the change with his leadership and how they saw this to be a great time for the company. The person went on to say because they were approved to work at home their work-life balance was so much better and they thought they were so much more productive. They mentioned how they hoped he wasn't going to change telecommuting even though the numbers for the group weren't as good as they had been when they all worked in the office together and that the complaints from the clients who stated that they never see the program manager anymore were already being addressed and he need not worry about those.

Vic went back to the e-mails and then started to go through the reports that showed the company's financial situation. He noticed that several other welcome e-mails started to come in from his other employees but he didn't stop reviewing the reports to read each of them.

After having his head down in the reports, he finally noticed, by way of his stomach growling, that it had reached lunch time. He thought how odd that with all the e-mails no one had stopped by his office. He wanted to finish the reports and start to work on his first 90-day plan. He remembered seeing a vending machine in the hallway close to the door he came through several hours ago. He ducked out of his office and headed for the machine. He arrived at the machine with only a few dollars in his pocket as he remembered he had forgotten to get more money before he rushed off to the airport the day before. He found some crackers in the machine and a soda in the machine next to the food vending machine. He went back to his office with his lunch of crackers and soda.

Vic jumped right back into the reports and studied them for a few more hours before he realized that he had not responded to the e-mails from his employees. He went through a list in his head of the employees who had responded and realized that one person had not responded all

day. As he was still learning about each of his employees, he pulled up his list that included their titles. As he worked through the list, he started to draw some opinions about these employees based on their responses and the time it took to respond to his initial note. When he reached the end of the list and matched each of the employees, he determined that the one employee who hadn't responded all day might be his problem child so to speak. He matched the name and the title against those he had received notes from and concluded that his Director of Human Resources was the only employee who had not responded. He thought to himself, not a good first impression this person is making, after all they are in charge of HR and can't even find the time to respond to an e-mail; I wonder what they are working on that is so important.

After closing up the files and logging off of his computer, he headed for the door, still no personal visits. He did recall seeing people pass his office. He even saw one of his employees who had sent him an e-mail moments after they passed his office. As he passed the vending machines going to the back stairs to leave, he remembered that he needed to get money. He could do this on the way back to the hotel by stopping by an ATM machine as his bank was a national bank that had ATMs almost everywhere.

As he passed a busy section of town, he spotted an ATM machine with a drive up lane right next to it on the corner so he quickly pulled over and proceeded to the lane. He reached out of the window and punched in his PIN to withdraw cash. As he waited for the request to process, he looked again at the almost empty gas tank and was reminded of the mishap that his car was not full when he picked it up. He thought, don't people do their jobs anymore; how hard is it to just make sure there is gas in the car, "oh I bet it was one of those automatic returns without the prepaid gas and they just returned the car low on gas. Come on don't people care anymore?" With his window down and the transaction almost complete, he smelled a wonderful aroma coming into his window.

After getting the cash and pulling out into traffic, he couldn't get the aroma out of his head, after all the lunch of crackers and soda didn't really do the trick. He knew he needed to review a few more things back at the hotel so a sit down dinner out was not in the plans. He started to think about the home cooked meals he had when he was growing up and

decided that is what he wanted, somehow some way. As he proceeded toward the hotel, he saw a billboard that showed a lovely pot roast and vegetables with the caption that read "the taste of a home cooked meal without all the hassle."

He noticed that it was a grocery store advertisement and started his search for the store. He came upon a gas station a few blocks later and pulled into the self-serve pump. He got out, put his credit card in the pump and filled his car; while waiting for the car to fill up, he looked across the street and noticed the grocery store advertised on the billboard. The pump stopped, he returned the nozzle, took his receipt, and returned to the car. He was pleased the grocery store wasn't out of his way, as he really wanted the home cooked meal. He pulled across the street to the store, walked in and noticed a very large section with a salad bar, hot soups and a variety of cooked meals with the logo like the one he saw on the billboard. He made his selection, a fine selection of hot roast turkey with mashed potatoes and all the trimmings. He even added a salad from the self-serve salad bar and off he went to check out.

He was observing how large the store was and made a note to himself that he thought this would be a good store for his wife and kids to get to know. As he approached the checkout lines he noticed one very long line and a handful of self-checkout stations that didn't seem crowded so he proceeded toward them. He read the directions, placed his items on the scanner, put his credit card in the slot, and  was all checked out. Off he went to his car with his freshly made salad and his home, well almost home, cooked meal.

He arrived at the hotel with the bag still hot so he rushed into the side door that would lead him right to the hallway where his room was. He set up the office desk for not only his work to review but for his meal as well. He took a can of soda out of the  in room bar that was set up to make it easier for the traveler; he knew that the soda would be recorded on his bill and began to read his papers while eating his meal.

As he read, he reflected back on his first day while also thinking how the meal was good but not how Mom would have made it. He continued thinking and just couldn't move past the one individual who didn't respond all day. He made a note in his PDA to make sure that he pulled this individual's past performance reviews so he could see if his hunch,

that this employee might be trouble, was documented or was it a typical situation that people would just let things slide and look past things rather than confront the issue. Would he be the first to have to talk with this person, coach and mentor them rather than treat them like a number, after all business is about people and run by people not just machines and technology. He shut his PDA off and put his papers away. He finished up his dinner and besides the personnel issue that he was dealing with he concluded that his first day was a very successful day and looked forward to tomorrow.

Vic actually thought of a way to get ahead of this situation with the Director of HR so he sent a text message to them right then, Vic would show them that there is no time like the present to address an important issue. The text message was straight to the point. Message from 759-555-5478 … not heard from u today, was wondering if there was a problem? Please get report as called out in my 1st note 8/14/15 by 10:00 a.m. with any q's. I look forward to reading it and getting back to u with thoughts. He sent it with no signature line as he was sure all of his employees had his cell number and the Director would know who this important note was from.

He was getting sleepy and wanted to finish the successful day off with a movie that he could get right there in the room, like the soda it would be added to his room bill automatically. A pay per view movie would surely end the day on the right note. He decided he would see an old classic "It's MAD MAD MAD world," so he ordered that up to start at the beginning of the next hour, which was just 10 minutes away. He could settle in and make a call to his family before the movie started.

He reached for the phone and remembered he needed a wakeup call so he programmed that in like the day before, remembering the nightmare he had the night before and took a deep breath, thinking how glad his real day wasn't anything like the nightmare, he called his wife's cell number, as that was the best way to reach the family, but there was no answer. Must be in a bad cell spot, he thought, as he listened to the recording. "Hi if we don't answer we must be busy, running from one place to another, your message is important so please leave one and we will call you back."

"Honey, it's me, I am getting ready to settle in for the night and watch a movie before I go to bed, sorry I missed you. Today went really well, I

think I am going to do fine here, the office is nice and the people seem to really respond to me. The city is nice, there are a lot of neat things to do and I even had a home cooked meal, yeah not as good as yours but it was home cooked. I think you are really going to love this place, I can't wait for you to see it and I know we will be ok here, there seems like a lot of nice people around. I love you and miss you, Vic." He then fell asleep after the movie.

Now that we have read the story of Vic we need to reflect on his story in a few ways. Do you think he did the right things as a new manager leading a new group of people? Do you think he established a level of trust based on his first interactions with his new staff? Did Vic isolate himself by trying to establish a level of closeness with his staff or did he indeed isolate himself by his actions. Did his actions create a level of presence that made his staff and himself present at work? After answering these questions, let's move on to the other chapters and look for ideas and ways he could have done things differently.

In this story, we see how Vic made some decisions that could have a different result than what he had planned. He used technology that might have actually hurt his ability to gain trust with his new employees. He also may have created a judgment about one of his staff that could be totally wrong. By the use of technology and making himself nonpresent to his staff, he might have isolated them or at the very least isolated himself. Ultimately, what he tried to do was give his staff space to do the right things but that might have created a level of virtual presence that could create a divide between him and the place he works.

*Virtual Vic*

# CHAPTER 4

# Management Challenge

*Individual commitment to a group effort—that is what makes a team work, a company work, a society work, a civilization work.*

—Vince Lombardi

*The way a team plays as a whole determines its success. You may have the greatest bunch of individual stars in the world, but if they don't play together, the club won't be worth a dime.*

—Babe Ruth

You might be wondering why I have started each chapter with a quote. The purpose of this is to draw your attention to the concept that the chapter will focus on and do so in a short but precise statement. I want to comment on the how for this chapter I found an interesting concept when I looked for a quote to open this chapter. I searched for virtual team quotes. What I found in the first several pages was famous quotes associated with sport teams. I included two for this chapter, as they are a summation of many of the others. It was either about an individual making a team better or a team having individuals that must work together to be better. The parallel here is that a virtual team has to always work as a team. If you look at the Babe Ruth quote, you see clearly that even after having the best player on the team, the team is worthless, if they don't work together. Sounds familiar to a virtual team with great talent yet they can't complete the task.

Management issues associated with the virtual work environment (VWE) begin to take shape as the increase in virtual workers began to rise. I submit that they might have existed when the first person went virtual but as with most things until there is a critical mass, we tend not to focus on the issues that arise.

These issues were discussed in terms of either handling conflict in distributed teams as studied by Bailey and Hinds in 2003 or on employer–employee relationships and the associated pitfalls in the research about telework programs (Mello 2007). There were also issues related to corporate commitment as discussed in the study by Jacobs (2008). In these studies, the focus was on the effectiveness of the team related to the benefits of the organization. Another area that relates to this challenge is associated with conflict that can come about because of distributed teams. There is a body of research about conflict associated with teams that are collocated (Cosier and Rose 1977; Jehn 1995, 1997); however, the challenges might increase with distributed teams. Hinds and Mortensen (2001) did a study that focused on geographically distributed teams where they looked at physical distance of teammates. Their study was associated with some of the issues that could arise because cues within the environments of which people worked could result in misunderstandings and cause conflict. This study was nonconclusive, but it highlighted the area of conflict associated with distributed and collocated teams.

Other studies focused on the traditional structure versus the new virtual structure yet they lacked an exploration of the virtual workers and their perceptions. These studies were associated with the VWE, yet they focused more on the structure and the management of the structure rather than the workers. They only spoke about the virtual worker as an element within the structure and not the workers themselves or their perceptions.

As time went on, focus evolved and studies began to look deeper into the benefits associated with the new structure, the VWE. A study by Lurey and Raisinghani (2001) looked at the effectiveness of virtual work, the effectiveness through such means as trust (Sarker, Valacich, and Sarker 2003), and team performance (Driskell, Radtke, and Salas 2003). The late 1990s and into the 2000s focus started to turn toward managing and leading this new workforce (Beatty, Clair, and Maclean 2005; Gibson et al. 2004), yet the focus remained centered on the structure and not on the workers themselves.

Lipnack and Stamps (1997) have been writing and studying the virtual team since 1991, and in their third book, *Virtual Teams; Reaching across space, time, and organizations with technology*, what they call the trilogy of books on networked organizations, they comment on technologies that

directly impact networks that have significantly expanded the spectrum of how people connect to one another. With the increased attention on how individuals connect to one another, there was now a need to explore how these connections actually facilitate the work to be accomplished. Now that people were connecting within this new structure, which was becoming more popular, the need for connection moved to the background and the focus of how the individuals are affected started moving to the forefront of studies and management styles.

Individuals and organizations had to now concern themselves with the connection that is formed among the individuals. How do they interact in this new structure and rely on one another as they did in the traditional work environment?

This book is designed to offer practical steps and thoughts to ensure that we don't lose the human touch. As I have mentioned, an organization cannot truly be successful without allowing individuals to thrive. The aspect that humans need to flourish and be productive related to their organizations is paramount. This book begins to lay the foundation for this connection at the individual level so that both individuals and organizations can better understand the human connection created by the VWE. A great read about the human touch is the book by Naisbett where he writes about high tech and high touch.

## 20th Century Thinking, 21st Century Change

Whether an organization adapts or dies depends on an interplay of internal and external variables. Management challenges occur at multiple levels—individual, organizational, and societal. Regardless of the level, the challenge distills down to the same plan of action: people need to start behaving in a new way (Heath and Heath 2010). Individuals within an organization are part of all management challenges. If individuals accept a structural change, they go along with it; otherwise, they are often left behind when the organization goes in a different direction. This diversion often prevents the creation of an optimal change situation, thus it challenges the success of the organization.

Organizations, while composed of individuals, have a mission tied to their role in the larger society. When economic, political, cultural,

technological, and other societal changes occur, the organization must change, as well, in order to survive. This survival is highly dependent on the acceptance of change by the individuals within the organization. However, it is not practical to use yesterday's tools for today's challenges. The VWE has created a more interconnected, yet fractured, work dynamic, and using yesterday's models and thinking will impede the organization, leaders, and individuals from deriving the maximum benefit of dealing with change in today's VWE structure.

So what does this all mean? It means that unless we recognize that human beings are still the foundation of getting work done, we might see a less-productive workforce, a dehumanized working class, and an isolated workforce that struggles with basic human interaction and communication skills. The VWE is a huge change to the way businesses operate. If the managers and leaders do not recognize this, there will be chaos at some level. When I say some level, it might not be immediately felt, but it will come with a disconnected workforce. If the workforce is disconnected, eventually, things will start to be strained. Strain at any level is not good for management and business operations. Therefore, we must recognize that there needs to be a new way of managing the workforce and the first step is to put plans in place that acknowledge this new structure.

## Humanistic Approach

Management theory is facing incredible challenges. Not only do we see a steady increase in societal trust that poses a threat to "business as usual" (Jackson and Nelson 2004). We are seeing a new work environment that is causing managers and organizations to relook at policies and procedures while facing increased demands in tough economic times. The term business as usual is directly challenged by the VWE. Business as usual cannot be the same because the old brick and mortar work locations are not first and foremost in the VWE.

Humans are materialistic utility maximizers, we all run with a high level of self-efficacy. If you think about your own life, what you work on is most likely your stronger skills. There are many books and guides that tell

you to tackle the tough jobs first. They tell you this because as humans, we are programed to be efficient. We are designed to take the course of least resistance in getting the job done. Given this to be true, the VWE would seem to be the best of all things. Get up, walk to a home office in our PJs, turn on the computer, and work while we watch our favorite TV show; make our own coffee or morning drink. Talk about efficiency and course of least resistance.

I mentioned earlier in Chapter 1 about things coming full cycle. Management approaches have also become circular in their approach over time. What is old is new again. In particular, the concept of humanistic management is starting to get attention again. I submit that this is not directly related to the VWE; however, I want to make the point that it needs to be directly related to the VWE.

There are two schools of thinking when it comes to management styles. One is based on the human aspects and needs, that is, Maslow. The other focuses on the economic or productivity approach, Ford per se. It can be argued that both ultimately focus on the economic benefit to the business, one by the way of productivity and one by the way of the human desire to produce the end result. The point I am making here is that as a leadership style we are predominantly focused on either the human needs or the production needs. Let's take a little deeper look into the comparison of the two approaches.

Management theory went through many different versions through-out the 20th century. Early on, the approach was to focus on the productivity or technical side of business. Taylor used a scientific approach, Faylo focused on the management aspects, and Ford focused purely on the assembly line (productivity). In all the three cases, the focus was on the technical or production aspects of management. They did not con-cern themselves with human aspects of getting the job done, rather they focused on getting the job done.

The difference from the humanistic to the economic approaches are that with the humanistic approach, the business needs to respect the humanity of the workers, treating them with respect and treating them as an end and never the means to an end, that is, the opposite of what the economic approach does. The economic approach uses the humans much

like a tool to get the end result. See Table 4.1 for an excellent depiction of the contrasting styles associated with the economic versus the humanistic approaches. The table is provided with the permission of Michael Pirson and Paul Lawrence (2010).

One of the first organizational change agents, Frederick Taylor, started to look at organizations in the late 1800s and early 1900s during the Industrial Revolution, during which the dominant business design was mainly manufacturing where Taylor viewed the organization as a machine (Burke 2002). Taylor's focus was on a design that the whole organization was to be involved in maximizing the efficient running of the business.



An early organizational experiment depicted how organizational design can affect individuals. This resulted in the exploration of how the individuals within organizations really effect change within their environment. The Hawthorne studies were an offshoot of Taylor's seminal work. The studies turned into more of a psychological and sociological study, as the researchers began to recognize that the organizational changes made in the environment actually affected the workforce. The experiments showed people's attitudes toward their environment and not simply attitudes toward physical changes in the workplace. This was the first exploration of the relationship between the organizational environments and how individuals begin to interact with their work space.

In the early stages of looking at the productivity of business, the focus was on the mechanical side, getting the task done faster, more efficient, so

*Table 4.1  Economism and humanism*

| Paradigm | Economism | Humanism |
|---|---|---|
| **Individual Level** | | |
| Model | Homo oeconomicus | Zoon politikon |
| Motivation | Two drive motivated | Four drive motivated |
| | Drive to acquire | Drive to acquire |
| | Drive to defend | Drive to bond |
| | | Drive to comprehend |
| | | Drive to defend |
| Goal | Maximization of utility | Balance of interest |
| Disposition | Transactional | Relational |
| View of other | Means to an end | Means and end |
| **Organizational level** | | |
| Organization | Nexus of contracts | Social community |
| Governance | Shareholder oriented | Stakeholder oriented |
| Model in management theory | Agent | Steward |
| Leadership style | Transactional | Transformational |
| Goal setting | Command and control based | Discourse based |
| Goal | Profit maximization | Financial, social, and environmental sustainability |
| Incentives | Geared to 1st and 2nd need (Maslow) | Geared to 3rd and 4th order needs (Maslow) |
| | Drive to acquire | Drive to acquire |
| | Drive to defend | Drive to bond |
| | | Drive to comprehend |
| | | Drive to defend |
| Culture | Mechanistic | Organic |
| Time frame | Short term | Long term |
| **System level** | | |
| State orientation | Laissez faire | Subsidiary actor |
| State-managerial responsibility | Financial value creation | Supporting a balanced society |

productivity would be high. Ford's development of the production line is the clearest point for me to illustrate this.
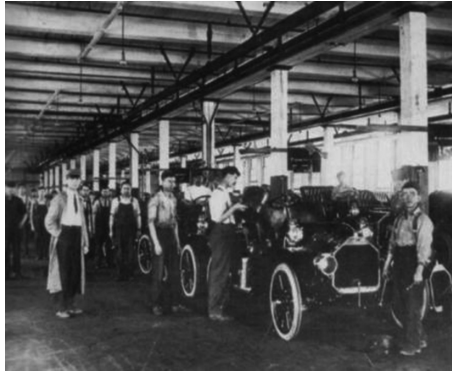


There was no human benefit to developing the production line. I think the concept of a production line benefits the end results and uses the human as the tool to get the end product done. This is about the economic outcome compared to the human satisfaction or human benefit. We can all imagine how doing the same activity over and over again can dehumanize the worker and highlights the worker as a tool rather than the human enjoyment of completing a task.

The humanistic management approach delves into the benefits associated with being a human. Abraham Maslow introduced a new approach by focusing on the human nature. This human nature was a focus on the human needs or human fulfillment. Some of the earlier management theorists such as Follett and Barnard and even Mayo focused on the satisfaction of some level of this human need. Maslow went so far as to define a hierarchy of the satisfaction of this human need. I will explore the aspect of human needs in terms of workers' perceptions in the following chapters.

The human perceptions associated with and related to work relationships within a virtual environment affect the success of an organization at all levels. There are a variety of different human perceptions that come into play within the social and work setting. Some of these are personalities, moods, thinking, likes and dislikes, prejudices, past experiences, and the three that will be the focus of this book: trust, isolation, and presence.

Chapter 8 will discuss how these three truly can affect the ability of the VWE to be successful. These three perceptions have dimensions to

them, and often they operate on a continuum. They are indeed human perceptions that are explained in terms of a dimension on a scale that ranges from positive to negative. The three perceptions and their respective dimensions are central to this book and the success of the VWE.

> The definition of success in theory is everyone is completely on the same page and productively working in lockstep toward the same mission with no sense of confusion.

The level of trust individuals have for each other and the organization, the degree of isolation they feel in the virtual work space, and the extent of presence they feel with others will all have a direct effect on the success of this new structure.

Trust, isolation, and presence are human traits associated with the social aspects of dealing with others. How much one trusts another can have a direct effect on that relationship. Relationships play an integral part in the work environment; the ability to trust those on a work team can challenge the effectiveness of the team. The VWE may place even greater emphasis on trust and mutual support when the team members are physically separated from one another.



Isolation is a human perception, such as trust, because it is experienced at the individual level. As such, it is subject to interpretation. A cubicle worker surrounded by others may feel more isolated than a remote worker who is electronically connected to coworkers. Studies have shown that feeling isolated can have a very devastating effect on individuals. The use of solitary confinement in the criminal justice system is a prime example of the long-term negative effects of isolating humans (Kupers 2008).

Those inmates who have been isolated for long periods of time have a difficult time acclimating themselves to the general population, and they begin to lose social skills and act out against authority more frequently. A question to think about at this point is will the virtual worker be able to resocialize with their coworkers if they are required to colocate again.

The third human perception is presence. The aspect of being in a certain setting or situation makes people define their level of presence. The feeling of presence can be determined by people's interpretation of their connection to their surroundings. This personal interpretation of one's place in relation to others, in turn, becomes his or her reality. Therefore, the feeling of presence can affect how well individuals operate in their workplace surroundings.

These three perceptions provide new challenges for individuals, managers, and organizations in dealing with the VWE. However, existing management styles and organizational models do not adequately explain these traits and their implications for successful organizational productivity. These human perceptions might become magnified because of the distance created by the VWE and, therefore, need to be part of new management and leadership styles and skills in helping to increase the understanding of the VWE.

## Benefits of Working Remote

In writing a book about the VWE, it would be irresponsible for me not to note some of the benefits that can be realized from this structure. Since the beginning of telecommuting, there have been many benefits realized by people and organizations. These benefits have resulted both economic and psychological aspects for the virtual worker.

There is evidence that shows economic, environmental, and societal benefits associated with telecommuting. TeleworkResearchNetwork.com lists benefits in three areas. First, the employer benefits include productivity, real estate and physical cost, turnover, and absenteeism. Employee benefits include saving on gas, work-related expenses, and time. Finally, community benefits include oil, greenhouse gases, accidents, and highway maintenance.

Work–life balance is definitely a benefit for this structure. People are able to better balance the needs of family life working within the structure.

There is time savings in terms of not commuting. There is no doubt that the time people sit in a car can be much more beneficial to all by being able to work regardless of where the work takes place rather than sitting in traffic watching the time click by. Even with the technology such as blue tooth, there is no substitute for being in an office talking to coworkers face to face rather than a car speaker phone.

The environmental benefit to all by having less people in cars driving to work and back home cannot be dismissed. The cost associated with this in terms of real dollars not being spent at the gas pump is huge. This is not to mention and take into account all of the cost associated with fighting pollution and the cost of producing the gas needed to operate the cars.

These benefits cannot be denied. However, at some level, is there a "we have gone too far" mindset that kicks in? How far can we push the technology against the people who need to keep the pace? Does saving money on gas outweigh the social degradation of individual workers?

There are other benefits, and some of them will be discussed throughout the book, but it is clear that this new structure has its benefits. I want to be clear that with all benefits, there is the potential to have negative effects that need to be taken into account so that the balance of this new structure does not put us further behind in terms of human needs in the long run.

## Virtual Workers

This book will focus on the virtual worker who is defined as a person who does not work at a centralized location. They work remotely from their team and department.

A virtual worker is a person who works remotely and is not in a central office for the majority of their time.

They may be located in a remote office or a home office. The VWE creates the potential for virtual workers to connect to their peers, coworkers, and managers through the use of communication devices and

may provide little, if any, face-to-face opportunities. This book classifies anyone as a virtual worker who works remotely and is not at a central office for the majority of his or her work time.

So who are these virtual people? They are your neighbors, your friends, and your family members. As they said in the comic strip back in the 1970s on earth day by the character named Pogo, "We have met the enemy and he is us." Pogo's author, Walt Kelly, first used the quote on a poster for Earth Day in 1970.



What Kelly was addressing through the character Pogo was related to the destruction of the earth by the human who used the resources of the earth. In short, the purpose of the poster released on earth day was to say

stop littering and abusing the earth that we depend on. How does this relate to the VWE?

Are we indeed abusing the traditional work environment by using the VWE? Have we created a situation that cannot be returned to by those who have used the VWE because the resources of the traditional work environment will be gone? Taking a deeper look into the enemy concept will become more apparent when we look in the future chapters concerning the human aspects of trust, isolation, and presence; however, for the time being, let me say that the enemy might be us.

## How Did It Get Here?

Technology enabled it. The current organizational structures are going through an evolution. The traditional work environment is evolving to a work environment that has dispersed workers in remote locations. The evolving structure, coupled with the virtual worker and the speed of this new structure, is stressing the organization and those who comprise the organizations—the workers. There is a gap between existing traditional work environment, organizational structure, and the type of workers within the organizations. There is a more significant gap between the technology that allows for the VWE and the humans now working in this new structure. This gap can be seen by the lack of human interaction, yet an increase in real-time electronic collaboration. Humans deal with technology more and more each day and less and less with other humans.

To point to the importance of filling this gap, a review of the three leading business journals, *The Academy of Management Journal, The Harvard Business Review*, and *The Sloan Management Review*, showed a 60-to-40 split when looking for human aspects versus technology aspects and the virtual world. It should be noted that this was conducted on a high-level search based on these topics; however, many of the hits related to human traits did not deal with the human perceptions discussed in this book but merely mentioned humans within the articles. This combination of human traits and virtual aspects is a critical component of the management challenge associated with the virtual worker.

As managers and business consultants deal with increasing numbers of this type of worker, they will need models and ways to address the evolutionary nature of these employees. The VWE is not just about the technology that allows organizations to have such structures, but it is also about the individual experiences of those functioning in the new nontraditional environment.

## A Few General Observations Associated with the VWE

In today's world of the VWE, and all indications pointing to increasing numbers of virtual workers in the future, there needs to be tools that are current and reflects the realistic view that managers and individuals must deal with in accepting this work environment. Organizations that have been the subject to virtual workers have laid the ground work for such tools. Often they have stumbled into the development of these tools rather than having a tool kit ready for use and application. Many organizations and virtual workers continue to struggle. Their struggles come from the lack of looking at the human side of things and they get caught up in the technology and lose the human touch. Without the human touch associated with the VWE, organization may continue to struggle with the maximization of total output associated with the workers. The benefits associated with the organizations and the workers could start to impact the success, and we might see a pulling away from this structure. The biggest concern is will it be too late before we realize that the humans are not able to fulfill the needs of the organization and will the workers find themselves in a structure that doesn't allow them to be truly productive. Will there be a day that we see that machines will run the humans versus the other way around?

The VWE was not a common organizational structure during prior leadership development. The leadership styles were based on an assumption that all employees were physically present. Managers could easily communicate to their employees with little attention to their location. The feedback loop was real time. Today, individuals who work in a dispersed environment, a VWE, exist in different times and environments and have different influences. Therefore, management styles need to be adjusted for this new type of work environment and ultimately the new

type of worker. They must explore how trust, isolation, and presence play a role within their VWE and affect the virtual worker's ability to be productive.

## The People

So who are these people we call virtual workers? As I mentioned, they are our friends, family, and neighbors. They could very well be your office mate and coworker today. Regardless of the type of virtual worker, they are the ones who create the opportunity for management challenges. Some virtual workers have regular face-to-face meetings, while others have never met their managers or coworkers in person.

The virtual worker is defined as a person who does not work at a centralized location. They work remotely from their team and department location. They may be located in a remote office or a home office.

The virtual workers can be separated as part-time, full-time, others not part of their team, or, in total isolation, working alone in a remote location.

These people need to address their concerns with leaders and managers. They must find ways to work with their coworkers. The people must be involved in the process to make the organization prosper, and they must be part of the fabric that drives the organization to be productive.

As discussed, the trend is on the rise with more virtual workers appearing in business on a daily basis. The people must be able to find ways to fulfill their needs and be motivated to put forth their best efforts. Virtual workers are individuals who need to be informed as to what the corporate mission is and be brought into changes associated with the mission. They cannot be the people who are out of sight and out of mind.

## The Process

The process has to address the individuals within this structure. As mentioned in terms of humanistic management, the process must look at the individual's motivation for achieving the desired outcome. It is not sufficient to simply put policies and procedures in place and hope that

the individuals will go along with them in doing their work. It is easy to say that we have a policy and procedure that needs to be followed in doing a job, yet without the proper motivation of the individual, these fall short.

Using the concepts related to the humanistic approach, the process must look for ways to engage the individuals. It must find ways to dig deeper into the structure to ensure complete understanding and buy in from the individuals being asked to perform the duties. The organization along with the individuals must develop an approach that allows for individual fulfillment, and therefore, all the individuals to flourish. Needless to say, an organization without the individuals cannot flourish or really exist. It is the individuals behind the organization who will develop the processes associated with the true productivity of all.

## The Practice

Similar to the process, the practice cannot fail to look for the motivation behind the individuals. The practice has to be something that will work for all; the leaders, the managers, the virtual workers, and those who still work in the traditional work environment. Without practicing the day-to-day focus on how individuals can thrive in the new structure, it will wither with time. The expectations and promises will dwindle, and the overall productivity will decrease.

The practice has to be an exercise of all involved, and it must be about the human perceptions associated with the challenges of running a business on a daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly basis. The practice of simply reviewing the performance of individuals on an annual performance review will not be successful within the VWE. The practice needs to be a continuous feedback loop watching for areas of concerns and making sure that the virtual workers understand the mission on a regular basis.

## Some Questions to Think About

How would you feel if your coworker was able to take advantage of working remotely while you still had to work at the office and deal with your commute?

Do you think that there is a distinct advantage to someone working remotely?

Who are these virtual workers, and how do they need to be managed?

Can technology be a bad thing in terms of human perceptions?

What does working virtually really mean?

How does trust, isolation, and presence present itself in the VWE?

# CHAPTER 5

# Trust

*Whoever is careless with the truth in small matters cannot be trusted with important matters.*

—Albert Einstein

## What Is Trust?

The human perceptions of trust which is defined in some academic literature assumes that one party trusts another based on the latter's trustworthiness (Bews and Rossouw 2002; Davis, Mayer, and Schoorman 1995; Dirks and Ferrin 2002). Do you trust all your coworkers the same; your family member and friends all to the same level? How did you determine what level of trust is appropriate for each individual and how did you build that trust individually or as partners?

Trust is a human perception that has multiple layers associated with it. These layers are caused by how trust is interpreted. One interpretation is by the individual who is trying to place trust on the other and the second is by the person who wants to be trusted. In a strong trusting relationship, these levels are the same or very close. It goes without saying in a weak trusting relationship the levels are fair apart and both parties decide not to trust one another.

The purpose of this chapter is not about defining the true and most accurate definition of trust. It is rather to make this flexible, complicated, emotional, and ever changing human perception, which individuals use, part of the fabric of the virtual work environment (VWE).

As Stephen M.R. Covey (2006) discussed in his book, *The Speed of Trust*, whether trust is "defined as mutual confidence or loyalty or ethical behavior, or whether you deal with its fruits of empowerment and teamwork and synergy, trust is the ultimate root and source of our influence" (Covey 2006, p. xxiv). The concept of trust has been explored and explained

in a variety of ways. Costa, Roe, and Taillieu stated, "Research on this topic [trust] has been hampered by the lack of agreement in defining the concept" (Costa, Rose, and Taillieu 2001). Costa et al. go on to say as Covey did that "trust is a psychological state that manifests itself in the behaviors towards others. It is based on expectations of the behaviors of others, and perceived motives and intentions in situations entailing risk for the relationship of those others" (Costa, Rose, and Taillieu 2001). The definition of trust is up for much debate and interpretation. As mentioned above some  definitions often seen in academic literature assume that one party trusts another based on the second's trustworthiness (Bews and Rossouw 2002; Davis, Mayer, and Schoorman 1995; Dirks and Ferrin 2002). Trust is considered as a very important aspect of organizational effectiveness, yet scholars find it difficult to truly establish a definition or measure it (Drapeau and Galford 2003). Kelly and Huff (2003) pointed out that trust is defined as a willingness of a party to be vulnerable to actions of another party based on the expectations. They further pointed out that trust involves both confidences in the party's ability and faith in the partner's benign intentions.

With the challenges of  defining the actual meaning of trust coupled with mixing in a dash of an anxiety for work situations and throwing in an extra dab of stress that the VWE creates, we have created quite a dish to be served up. This dish has to be dealt with by all parties associated with it. That means not only does the individual worker have to determine the level of trust they will be willing to give but the leaders and managers along with coworkers all must also play a part. They play a part by their actions that either increases or decreases the level of trust. Within the VWE, the handling of this dish becomes even more complicated.

## Trust and the VWE

Does it seem funny that I am dedicating a chapter to trust in a book about the VWE? If it does, there are bigger issues with this new structure than I thought. Of course we need to discuss trust, as it is the foundational aspect in all human interactions. In the VWE, it seems to take on an even more complicated yet important perception.

The VWE creates barriers that can prohibit the formation of trust; these factors include less face-to-face time, the possibility of not knowing the other team members, misreading verbal communication because of the lack of nonverbal communication indications, and disconnects concerning cultural and societal norms.

Trust is a foundational aspect of any human interaction. Individuals are often connected to their organizations in terms of commitment. Commitment often involves trust, and as Handy (1995) suggested, trust and relationships will take on an even stronger importance as organizations become more virtual.

Twenty years ago, the topic of trust was being discussed in terms of the effect it might have related to the VWE; however, I am not sure that it has been resolved. Trust was one of the prominent issues of early research in the study of virtual teams (Mitchell and Zigurs 2009). Even though it was discussed, there seems to be a general lack of process or tools to help managers and leaders deal with this human perception in the VWE. Later in this chapter, I will discuss some ideas associated with the process which managers and leaders can use to help the success of virtual teams by focusing on establishing trust with the virtual workers.

As discussed earlier, the one thing that is clear about trust is that there is no scholarly definition of trust that is universally accepted (Rousseau et al. 1998). Many researchers have determined that trust is hard to do empirical research because of its diverse definitions (Nandhakumar and Baskerville 2006). With all of this said about the definition of trust, the individuals who are asked to perform the work and ultimately determine the success of the organization must deal with trust on multiple levels.

First, the workers have to address how trust has to be part of their work situation in order to be allowed to work in the VWE. Virtual workers and their management have to determine if trust is already in place to work virtually or that it is needed in order to be a virtual worker. This highlights the aspect that trust is a critical factor in the ability of workers to be a virtual worker. If trust was already established, thus allowing the participant to be a virtual worker has to be maintained. If trust has to be proven to allow the individual to become a virtual wok, it must be established and a plan has to be put in place to establish a level of trust.

In both the cases, trust has to be related or defined by showing that the individual was or will be a productive member of the organization.

In the VWE, the ability of the workers to trust one another can be stressed beyond what is possible in the traditional work environment. Trust is so important in relationships that it is often argued to be central to the formation of a strategic relationship (Mohr and Spekman 1994). As relationships are formed without the benefit of face-to-face interaction and the ability to observe how the coworker acts in front of another, the aspect of trust takes on even greater importance and significance. This can be further accentuated by the isolation created by the lack of colocation of the workers in the new VWE.

So we need to ask why trust is taking on this a greater complication of importance within the VWE. It starts with asking the question what trust is comprised of. As I mentioned earlier, researchers have debated if there is a scholarly definition of trust that is universally accepted (Rousseau et al. 1998). This lack of common definition of the aspect of trust makes empirical research difficult (Baskerville and Nandhakumar 2006) but not impossible. Trust for the purpose of this book is defined as the connection and commitment individuals have to their organization, coworkers, or managers. If they feel connected and are committed, it will be interpreted as the individual having a stronger sense of trust.

Trust has been cited as one of the most critical aspects related to the success of relationships (Ford et al. 1988; Parkhe 1998). Trust is cited as a key ingredient in the study of virtual teams (Balsmeier, Bergiel, and Bergiel 2008; Coppola, Hiltz, and Rotter 2004). Social interactions have been studied by behavioral scholars with the assumption that most exchanges involve the trustworthiness of the partners (Turk and Ybarra 2009). As an example, management issues associated with trust and distrust have been viewed as opposite ends of the spectrum. However, several scholars presented these two positions as separate but related (Bies, Lewicki, and Mcallister 1998; Hardin 2004). The issue of whether there is trust or distrust has a direct effect on the effectiveness of the team.

Trust plays a role in how relationships are formed and maintained, (Lawley 2006) and this is a key ingredient in any relationship. Agreements are broken both before and during event between workers (D'Amelio, Ford, and Ford 2008). The broken agreements erode trust within the

organization and between individuals. Change has "primitive, infantile origins, which affect the capacity of individuals and groups to assess and cope with change in the routine and status quo" (Diamond 2008). If trust is eroded, it can have a direct effect on the ability to build solid relationships. Trust is a foundational aspect of social order and social relationships. Within the VWE, the strains on trust are great. This is not to say that trust is not strained in all work environments, but it seems reasonable to make the assertion that if I don't really know the other people on my team or I don't see how they interact with others the aspect of trust is indeed a challenge. In order to understand and look for ways to increase trust, we must look at its evil twin distrust.

## Distrust

This evil twin, distrust, often affects the ability of individuals to really conquer the human perception of trust. Trust and the aspect of distrust can be seen as opposite sides of the trust continuum. Morton Deutsch (1958) studied the aspect of distrust for many years associated with social conflict. His studies led to the Prisoners Dilemma Game where players maximize their personal benefit by voting with and against other players.

> The **prisoner's dilemma** is a recognized example of a game analyzed in realm of the game theory that shows why two purely "rational" individuals might not cooperate with each other, even if it appears that it is in their best interests as there can be mutual benefit to do so.

How trust has been dealt with in terms of relationships has been portrayed in terms of broken trust or distrust (Roth and Sitkin 1993). It might seem counterintuitive, but trust is often defined in terms of the lack of trust being present.

The seminal work by Deutsch associated with trust has been used to explore the aspects of distrust, misunderstanding, and conflict. In this book, this concept of how an individual uses trust for his or her own benefit versus others or their organizations is central to the distrust that can occur with virtual teams. There is a body of scholarly work acknowledging that trust and distrust are indeed separate but related (Bies, Lewicki, and Mcallister 1998; Hardin 2004; Roth and Sitkin 1993). The aspects of

trust and distrust are part of both organizational and individual trust. When trying to determine how much one individual trusts or distrusts must be interpreted by the individual using this human perception.

People before and after the formation of the VWE have a need for a connection with their coworkers. There is a need to understand each other and to be able to have confidence in each other to accomplish the task they are assigned. The concept of confidence relates to the ability to ask hard questions of each other and to get honest answers. Workers have to trust not only their coworkers but also managers and leaders of their organization. When commitments are broken, trust is strained and distrust comes into play. Dennis and Michelle Reina in their book "*Trust and Betrayal in the Workplace*" discussed how betrayal can have a high cost related to trust in the workplace. They discussed how there are levels of betrayal that can have different levels ranging from high to low. In all situations, betrayal effects the level of trust; it hurts the individuals and the organization. In a situation that has a high level of betrayal, productivity plummets and a sense of negativity affect the bottom line (Reina and Reina 2006, p. 113). The mere fact that trust is strengthened or weakened by the amount of distrust shows how these twins are indeed related yet at opposite ends of the continuum. Think about your own situations where you have had this human perception changed by the acts of others. If you have had coworkers who have all of a sudden done something that hurts the team, the level of trust you have is strained and a new level of trust starts to form. What about a situation where you didn't have time to develop a beginning level of trust? A situation in which you are put with others to perform a task and then a betrayal occurs. Was trust ever formed in that situation or do you build your perception on distrust and work the relationship from that premise? Individuals not only trust one another but must also place their trust in organizations and the same cycle can occur. Is the relationship built from trust or distrust within the organization? Let's take a look at trust within the organization first and then explore individual trust.

## Organizational Trust

Trust in organizations has been linked to many different aspects including but not limited to how the organization functions in terms of

effectiveness (Kiffin-Petersen 2004). Trust at the organizational level is often focused on communication. Roberts and O'Reilly (2001) discussed communication in their study that addresses upward communication in organizations. When exploring the aspect of communication and relating it more to the concept of trust, Jarvenpaa and Leidner (1998) looked at communication in the global virtual world. They explored how the aspects of communication were effective in global virtual teams. They built their research following the lead of Meyerson, Weick, and Kramer where they explored a concept called swift trust. This was a level of trust that was formed around a task to be performed by the team only for as long as the team needed to complete the task (Kramer, Meyerson, and Weick 1996).

Trust is often explored in terms of long-term relationships. Swift trust, on the other hand, focuses on short-term trust. With swift trust theory, a group or team assumes trust initially and later verifies and adjusts trust beliefs accordingly. This is similar to what I address above about building the perception from trust or distrust. Swift trust happens in all virtual teams because there is limited or no time to build interpersonal relationships. Often trust is based on an early assumption that the virtual team is trustworthy. The problem arises when the initial interpretations of trust is not realized as initially thought. Action taken by team members, managers, and leaders can greatly effect this concept of swift trust; really, these actions can affect all kinds of trust. Because the team is often built for a specific task on more of a short-term basis, there is little time to rebuild or repair trust if it is broken. This concept also works against individual virtual workers; as they are often out of sight and out of mind, they tend to develop a level of distrust when events isolate them from the organization.

The concept of trust in organizations that are different from the traditional work environment need to really take into account how trust is formed and how long it lasts. The basic formation of trust takes time to develop. A team built quickly and the one that also disperses quickly might not have the ability to establish a significant level of trust. If trust is broken in these teams or if a level of betrayal happens, organizational trust can be damaged. The aspect of swift trust becomes potentially more important, as virtual teams are quickly organized and then disbanded

once the task is completed. In the more traditional teams, there is time to recoup or rework things after the task is completed because they are colocated and have time to discuss any miscommunications that could have hurt the level of trust.

The aspect of face-to-face interaction associated with virtual teams has to be part of trust building. Hung, Dennis, and Robert, Jr., (2009) explored different theories in the comparison of the two types of interactions: face-to-face versus virtual teams. They expanded on the concept of swift trust and looked into cognitive trust. Cognitive trust is explained in terms of the expectations associated with it. Kramer and Tyler defined it by stating "trust is a rational expectation that a trustee will have the necessary attributes to be relied upon" (Kramer and Tyler 1996, p. 943). Finally, Hung et al. looked at knowledge-based trust, which is the deliberate cognitive assessment of the attributes of the trustee (Davis, Mayers, and Schoorman 1995). All of these prior studies show how either through communication or decentralized environment the aspect of trust is involved.

For organizations to be successful, they must establish and continually create a level of trust among its members. Within the VWE, this aspect takes on a greater importance.

## Individual Trust

The German proverb—trust, but not too much—has to be taken into account in each individual relationship. Most individuals think of trust in terms of character: a sincere person, having high ethics or integrity (Covey 2006). Trust at the individual level in the work environment involves the relationship between manager and employee or between coworkers. Moustafa–Leonard (2007) discussed how, with regard to the importance of relationships, there has been little research done to examine the manager's trust in relationship to their subordinates. This often places workers in a vulnerable situation because they are alone to be evaluated and interpret the other person's level of trust before they commit to their own. In the VWE, however, the individual has little opportunity to evaluate or reevaluate indicators associated with trust. Things such as nonverbal communication and the interactions of others

in the traditional environment may help the individual determine the level of trust.

Related to the communication between the manager and the employee, O'Reilly and Roberts studied the communication between subordinates and superiors and found subordinates who showed a high level of trust in their immediate supervisors were more likely to communicate effectively (O'Reilly and Roberts 2001). As Davis, Mayer, and Schoorman stated, "the willingness to be vulnerable" is often cited as a definition of trust (Davis, Mayer, and Schoorman 1995). The aspect of vulnerability is directly related to the perception and feeling about trust that individuals have toward others.

The study performed by Erdem and Aytemur (2008) looked at the mentoring relationship based on trust and showed both the mentor and the protégé had shared responsibility in building a positive trusting relationship. This relationship was built by sharing control and fair behavior. The study was designed to measure the trusting relationship within academic organizations and how that resulted in the protégé's feelings toward a positive mentoring relationship. Satisfaction depends on the type of interaction between the mentor and the protégé. This is a powerful human relationship (mentor–protégé) and trust is a key component. It is reasonable to draw the comparison between the academic environment of the mentor–protégé and the work environment with the manager and employee. The relationship in both situations creates a dependency of one on another. This dependency often can place one individual in a vulnerable position, and thus the level of trust is critical to the success of the relationship. Building on the study that Erdem and Aytemur did, there is a direct comparison as to how the planned study as a positive trusting relationship might affect the ability of the virtual worker to expect success. To explore the individual trust even more, let's look at how trust effects the success of an individual in comparison to the success related to that relationship.

## Trust Related to Success

There was a Watson Wyatt survey done of almost 13,000 workers from all different job levels and different industries. In this survey, it was found

that less than two of five employees showed trust and confidence in their senior leaders. Based on these numbers, it is interesting to think if there is any level of trust in the workplace. As discussed earlier about swift trust, the average lifetime of a career in the 1970s and early 1980s was about 25 years. In the 1990s, this average lifetime dropped to five years. With the formation of the VWE and virtual team formation, some have estimated this lifetime to be less than 18 months. Not a long time to build a trusting relationship. Another way to look at this is the number of career jumps that take place by an individual worker. I personally come from a generation that saw the end of long-term relationships with one organization. Gone are the days of retirement pensions and working for organization from getting out of college or graduating from high school through retirement. My grandparents worked for the same company from their first job to their last. They settled in areas that were made up of manufacturing plants and stayed in the community until they retired. My parents saw the first movement's away from their birth place to a new town or city to others where they also worked for companies for longer periods of time. I can recall that my Dad worked for IBM for 37 years; even though he lived in New York and Virginia, he remained an IBMer. Today, even though I started out working for IBM, I have had nine different companies in my career. My family is not unusual. As I mentioned, my grandparent's generation had one maybe two company moves within their career. My parents' generation might have seen three to five companies on their resumes by the time they retired. My generation might have upward of 10 different companies that they will work for before they retire. (If I can ever retire!) As you read this section, I ask that you reflect on your generation and test this point; how many companies are on your resume, or will be when it is all said and done?

Trust, as shown by reviewing literature associated with trust, can and often is defined by the individual's experience. The virtual worker will help determine the role trust plays in how successful the organization and team can be.

The relationship and communication between managers and workers has been a way that trust has been studied. Many of the studies were conducted in a qualitative research method. This seemed to help better understand the effects of trust because it is an interpretation at

the individual level. The environment today (VWE) is less friendly and moves faster, thus not allowing long-term trusting relationships to develop. Globalization, technology advances, and increased competition all create a sense of temporariness of today's work world (Denton 2009). This aspect of temporariness stress the level of trust an individual can feel, and therefore, there can be a direct correlation associated with the level of trust and the level of success.

In the traditional work environment, this could be done by face-to-face meetings and watching how people interact and handle themselves. Because of this face-to-face interactions, trust can be discussed, and therefore, there is the ability to create trust at multiple levels. We have all been in situations where something is stated, and we are not sure how to actually interpret the intent behind the event. Even more glaring to this point is we all have received a written communication such as an e-mail and we are taken back by the tone of the e-mail. Only to find out later that the intent was not as we first understood it. Let's take this a little further and assume that we are not able to quickly get an understating as to the intent. If we are being honest with ourselves, we tend to allow this e-mail to effect the level of trust we feel about the sender. Given this e-mail interpretation over a series of e-mails, we start to challenge harshly the level of trust we feel. We might even start to adjust our approach to the sender, which can affect our level of commitment and therefore level of success associated with the event, task, or individual. How do you think the employees who received the e-mail from Vic felt about their first interaction with him? What was Vic thinking about the people who did or did not respond to him?

To further explore this, let's take a look at a global VWE. The uncertainties and risk increase where the culture and values might be different (Kelly and Huff 2003). These differences will most likely be the contributing factors to the level of trust. The discussion of trust has shown how different interpretations and dependency on others create the level of trust one feels. Not only might virtual workers not share common cultures or values—they don't work side by side and lack the long-term ability to develop trust. The study done by Kelly and Huff (2003) discusses how different levels of trust can shape the ability of individuals and organizations to be trusted.

The goal of team formation in the VWE is to get the best experts together, regardless of where they are geographically located, and get to work on solving the task. It is not about trust building in the traditional sense over a long period of time. Building virtual teams is about getting the task done and not building long-term relationships that might foster a deeper level of trust. Long-term opportunities to build relationships have been part of the traditional work environment yet trust has been a struggle. Now with the VWE potentially stressing relationships even more, the struggle associated with trust will increase. The distance involved in the VWE might stress these relationships beyond what is experienced today.

The human perception of trust has played an important role in organizational structures as well as at individual levels. It is hard to deny that trust is a foundational element in any social interaction. Social interaction, both formal and informal, occurs in all work environments. Exploring the amount of trust one feels can be difficult because what another person feels about trusting their coworkers might be different. As Huxham and Vangen stated, "trust cannot be built in isolation … and trust building requires investment in time and careful consideration" (Huxham and Vangen 2003). Yet, doesn't the VWE create a level of isolation? Trust is a human perception that takes time to develop. This aspect of how trust must be an investment in relationships might be easier to establish in the traditional work environment. The VWE creates separation and may add pressure to this ill-defined term, the important role it plays within organizations, and the individuals who work within these organizations as they are indeed often isolated. Can an isolated organization be as successful as the one that is not isolated and can it be as productive?

## Trust and Productivity

The aspect of productivity comes into play as a way to justify the workers' ability to work in the VWE because of trust. The concept of trust and productivity has to be first defined by the individual and then must be agreed to or acknowledged by the manager or leader in order for this situation to occur. The virtual worker has to prove that they can get more

work without distractions; they need to show that there is a benefit of not wasting time by commuting to the office and getting in a car for a long commute makes no sense. The virtual worker will often say that they are available around the clock if they need to be and that they can crank out work and check e-mail 24 hours a day. This will be how productivity will be measured when the individual is not under direct supervision of their manager.

There is also another way to look at defining trust related to productivity. In this way, workers could define trust and continue to tie it to productivity by having to prove something to both themselves and their organizations to work in the VWE. In this situation, it becomes clear that the workers use trust related to productivity as a way to help justify and put them at ease with their working situation.

The way workers defined trust by tying it to productivity takes the concept of trust away from the more traditional view, that being committed to others versus proving to oneself their own level of productivity. Most individuals think of trust in terms of character: a sincere person, having high ethics or integrity (Covey 2006). This type of definition appears to be tied to two or more people trusting others to perform a task or to achieve a result, not just one person working harder than others. In this concept, it appears that proving productivity was more self-reflective and self-satisfying. As long as a workers can prove to themselves that they were productive, they in turn felt trusted. This way of thinking challenges not only the traditional level of trust but also the concept of swift trust put forth by the research of Meyerson, Weick, and Kramer.

The aspect of trust being related to productivity is similar in part to the definition of trust when trust results in the outcome of one individual to that of another. This supports the assertion that Drapeau and Galford (2003) put forth when they commented that trust is considered as a very important aspect of organizational effectiveness (Drapeau and Galford 2003). For an organization to be effective, they must be a productive organization. There will be more about how trust effects productivity in Chapter 9 when I talk about productivity in the VWE. In order to be productive, the person cannot feel vulnerable; otherwise they limit the risk they will take, and without risk, there is little reward.

## Trust and Vulnerability

Similarly, to be productive, the workers have to express having trust as part of the structure. Thus allowing trust to be formed in the VWE supports what Lawley (2006) discussed about trust as a key element in how relationships are formed and maintained (Lawley 2006). Kelly and Huff discussed that trust is defined as a willingness of a party to be vulnerable to actions of another party based on expectations (Kelly and Huff 2003). It is clear that vulnerability is a key aspect. The organization has to be vulnerable to the virtual worker, and the virtual worker has to be vulnerable to the organization and their coworkers.

Kelly and Huff (2003) further pointed out that trust involves both confidences in the party's ability and faith in the partner's benign intentions. If confidence, as measured by productivity, is key in allowing the VWE to thrive both the ability and the benign intentions of the parties must be present. This clearly points to a challenge that faces workers, leaders, managers, and organizations in the VWE. I submit that there is often a lack of exploration into the actual intentions of the parties, and therefore, it is left to the virtual worker to define their intentions through productivity or vulnerability. The virtual worker will often rely on the fact that as long as they do what the organization has asked, they were trusted and, therefore, productive. It is important to point out here that an individual interpretation or definition of being productive might not be the same as that of their managers or the organizations. For now, it is safe to say that if the virtual worker was trusted to work virtually, they felt that they were productive; if they were productive, they could be a virtual worker.

To further illustrate this point, let's look at how Saker, Valacich, and Staker (2003) defined trust when they talked about trust being defined as team members trusting one another when they typically produce a higher quality of outcome. A higher quality of outcome lends itself to a more productive environment and, therefore, a more successful outcome.

## Trust and Outcome

In the article, "Trust in the virtual teams: Solved or still a mystery?," by Mitchell and Zigurs (2009), this paper looked at 42 studies related to

trust in the VWE. In their review of the studies, they concluded that trust is a complex multidimensional construct. They mentioned that trust as used by Deutsch (1958) in the Prisoner's Dilemma game found that subjects went through a process that the players were either consistently trustworthy or trusting or they were consistently untrustworthy and untrusting. The themes of the 42 studies consistently defined trust in terms of an outcome.

I present that by supporting this definition and following the themes of the 42 studies of relating the aspect of trust not only as an outcome but also by proving the outcome by productivity. I submit that trust is a critical theme in the VWE. I take it a step further by concluding that in order to prove the benefits of the virtual environment, one must be productive. One way of looking at trust supports what Garrison, Kim, Xu, and Wakefield defined as trust in terms of individual performance (Garrison et al. 2010). If individual performance was good, then the results of the individuals made the whole more productive.

A second way that virtual workers can define trust is related to the length of time they work in the VWE. If I can work virtually for a longer period of time, I must be productive otherwise someone would say something. I submit that this is not a good assumption to make, remember the out of sight and out of mind feeling expressed by participants in my research. This is also a common theme when people talk about working virtually, they often state that they feel out of sight and out of mind. In this situation, the workers may falsely conclude how they maintained trust or establish it over time. The workers who had trust at the beginning might find it harder to maintain trust. They in turn might feel that they need to work harder to keep being productive to maintain the trust they started with. This could lead to working harder but not actually helping to establish a greater level of trust. The same is true that if the worker doesn't feel a beginning level of trust, they too might work harder, but again it might not help in establishing a level of trust. It seems that in both these situations, just working harder doesn't necessarily establish trust. As a matter of fact it could hurt trust if the effort is against what the rest of the team is doing or if it is counter productive to the end result. Those that did not have trust felt that they had to work harder to establish it.

## Trust and Humanistic Management

Trust relates to the humanistic management approach in one main area. How can a person find the motivation from within if they are in a nontrusting relationship? At first, it is reasonable to think that if an individual trust themselves, they can find the motivation to do what needs to be done or accomplished. This is a true statement; however, there is flaw to this within the working environment where there is a reliance on others to achieve the desired outcome. It is true that each individuals need to trust and believe in themselves, but can they sustain this over a long period of time? What happens when there is a reliance on others to ultimately achieve a shared end result? In this chapter, we discussed the concept of betrayal and how that effects the level of trust one feels.

Thinking of this related to the humanistic management theory, one must find ways not only to believe in themselves but also to trust others. In trusting others, they will create a situation where all individuals can flourish. If all individuals can flourish, then the greater organization can prosper. Trust is therefore central to all individuals. Within the VWE and using the humanistic management approach, the level of trust must be high for all involved. By understating this connection, the individual virtual workers will be able to establish better short- and long-term working relationships, which will result in a more productive situation for all. The leaders and organizations must also adopt to a more humanistic approach to increase the chances of having an organization that places trust as an important element in its daily operations.

## The People

The people who need trust is everyone. There can be no productive organization if it lacks trust. I am not interested in the one-off situations where things get accomplished regardless of the level of trust. The people need to feel a level of trust to not only be productive over a long period of time but they also need trust to flush in any social situation including work. The individual virtual worker is the key when it comes to people. A secondary person has to be the manager or leader. These people are part of the trust environment, as they play a critical part of the establishment of trust. As I have discussed in this chapter, the human perception of trust

is based on the individual interpretation. Without acknowledging, it is about the people rather than the organization the foundation of trust is weakened.

Highlighting how important the people aspect is, let's briefly look at what Covey said about trust in his book. When there is a reliance on the confidence of another, thus the amount of trust is defined in terms of how much the confidence can be understood or relied upon. Covey (2006) discussed the following:

- Only 51 percent of employees have trust and confidence in senior management.
- Only 36 percent of employees believe their leaders act with honesty and integrity.
- Over the past 12 months, 76 percent of employees have observed illegal or unethical conduct on the job—conduct which, if exposed, would seriously violate the public trust.

This work shows how trust is defined in terms of the lack of trust when felt at the individual level about others. This means the confidence one worker has to others will define trust in terms of the feelings workers express toward another at the individual level. Individuals define and interpret the level of trust. Without people, there is no real sense of trust. The bottom line is trust is about the individual and the individuals are the people who make the work environment happen whether virtual or not.

## The Process

As discussed in the distrust section of this chapter, it is very important that managers and leaders develop a process to continually test trust of the virtual team and its virtual workers. This process has to focus on making sure that any miscommunication or events that hurt trust are given time to repair. These events need to be acted upon quickly. The process of open communication related to addressing issues as they arise has to be paramount in maintaining a high level of trust.

Supporting this assertion, we have all heard comments were tools that can "measure key strokes" and by "monitoring the use of phones," time

logged onto the computer or the length of phone calls are process steps that challenge the level of trust. Often the intent is to establish a level of trust by using tools; however, they often back fire and are actually friends of the evil twin, distrust. There are other process steps where actions or comments are made, which show how if the individual wasn't in the sight of managers, they (managers) would worry if work was being done. Sounds like the evil twin again. Right intention, wrong result.

## The Practice

This chapter addresses the aspect that trust must be a critical component in a decentralized work environment for that structure to be successful. As mentioned earlier, the issue of trust is interpreted at the individual level. This is more important to understand, as individuals are left alone to determine the level of trust they will have with their decentralized coworkers and organizations. The practice cannot simply be measuring key strokes or the amount of time the computer is turned on. Practice face to face meetings, practice giving real time feedback and practice expressing real expectations. The practice of trusting needs to be done on a daily basis; it has to be a shared responsibility. The practice that leaders and managers have to use it to create an open and fearless environment. In order for a team to be productive, they must trust each other and the larger organization. As often talked about in many walks of life, practice make perfect. Trust is a human perception as we have discussed that has multiple levels so it might not always be perfect but the practice of creating trust has to be at the forefront of all participants.

## Some Questions to Think About

Can you always define the level of trust of your coworkers?

How do you define trust related to your coworkers?

Have you ever felt a level of trust and then lost it? How did you get it back if you did?

What happens when the intent is misunderstood, how do you repair the intent or relationship?

What is stronger, the twin that we call trust or the evil twin we call distrust?

# CHAPTER 6

# Isolation

*We don't function well as human beings when we're in isolation.*

—Robert Zemeckis

## What Is Isolation?

Isolation is about being alone, apart, and separated from others; a lack of connection to others. This could be about anything not just humans; a lone flower in a field is isolated from the others. A dog miles away from its owners is isolated in surroundings. This aspect of being alone relates to a level of separation from others. When we talk about separation, it might be in terms of a detachment from others of like kinds or of other flowers, owners, family members, friends, neighbors, or coworkers.

When we focus on isolation related to humans, we need to think how does one become isolated or define isolation. Isolation for humans is an individual interpretation of one's sense of aloneness, connection, or attachment. For example, a cubicle worker surrounded by others may feel more isolated than a remote worker who is electronically connected to coworkers. This happens because individuals interpret their feelings of being isolated or connected to their surroundings. Their connection can be their coworkers collocated or otherwise. This could also be friends near or far, and it could also be family members either immediate or extended. The concept of connection doesn't have to be in the same physical location, but it has to be a feeling of attachment.

Like trust, isolation has a continuum of the actual feeling. We all have felt isolated at times even when we are surrounded by others; this feeling comes from the connection we are experiencing at the time. This is the continuum that I am speaking about. At times, we feel very isolated regardless of the actually surroundings, and at other times, we feel the complete opposite. We can actually be miles apart, yet we feel

very connected. Let's take an example that has happened to all of us. When we go to school, whether high school or college, we have a certain feeling of connection to our classmates. What happens to that feeling of connection when we graduate and then come back years later? How do we feel about those once close relationships? Are we still connected or do they start to feel isolated from them? We can even at times be in a room alone and not feel isolated. I know that throughout your career and within whatever work environment you have experienced, you have felt the aspect of isolation. This aspect of isolation can be explored as it was in the study by Fiedler (2009) where the cooperation in the virtual world was investigated by looking at the richness of the communication between workers. If there is a lot of communication, it doesn't guarantee individuals who won't feel isolated, yet the likelihood will be reduced.

Studies have shown that feeling isolated can have a very devastating effect on individuals (House 2001). One question we wrestle with in the work situation is: is it still devastating if the actual work product gets completed? Early organizational scholars such as Mayo (1949) and Maslow (1954) stated that social interaction and other meaningful connections in the workplace can lead to employee motivation and need fulfillment (Fonner and Roloff 2010). In research performed by Harlow, Dodsworth, and Harlow in 1965, they made the statement, "it is difficult, if not impossible, to study scientifically the impacts of culturally produced social isolation at the human level" (Dodsworth, Harlow, and Harlow 1965, p. 90). This study focused on the aspect of social distance. Social distance is defined as the perceived distance between individuals and groups (Charness, Haruvy, and Sonsino 2007). Let's explore this a little deeper. How can a person feel isolated if they are being communicated to and the work product gets completed? This happens because we cannot look at the feeling of isolation from the outward perspective. The feeling of isolation is an inward looking feeling. In the question above, I asked about the outward indicators: there was communication, there was an end result the work product was completed, yet an individual experiencing this situation can indeed feel isolated. They can feel disconnected to the events taking place. The individual creates a distance from the communication, the work product, or both.

The concept of social distance or the feeling of being isolated is part of the dynamic structure of the virtual work environment (VWE). Related to the feeling, one experiences with being isolated can lead itself to how present an individual feels within their surroundings. Managers and coworkers must deal with the feelings of isolation created by the VWE.

When individuals work virtually, they are physically separated from other; they are out of sight. They are like the lone flower alone in the field.



This feeling of being out of sight (and out of mind) may make the employees worry about being isolated from critical events or decisions being made by others elsewhere (Cooper and Kurland 2002).

In the VWE, the interaction opportunities may be limited, and at times, nonexistent; thus, the ability to determine the impacts of isolation needs to be explored by the individual's interpretation associated with the connection and commitment of individuals.

The aspect of isolation can be defined in terms of the individual's sense of separation. It will be interpreted that if an individual feels separated and has a sense or feeling of loneliness, that will be related to a high sense of isolation.

A review of isolation literature highlights that it is a feeling expressed by the individuals experiencing it. Individuals are often within a group with others, but can experience the feeling of isolation by being individually separated. An interpretation of how they feel about the current situation individually and not in comparison to how others might feel in the exact situation determines the level of isolation felt. Many studies use qualitative research methods, which is an effective way of exploring the concept of

isolation. This research methodology is effective because we are exploring a feeling that cannot necessarily be measured by a set of variables that form a pattern. It is true that variables in a certain pattern can lead to a sense of isolation, yet it is still the individual interpretation that sets the true meaning of an individual's feeling of isolation. Interestingly, as pointed out in the research by Dino, Golden, and Veiga in their quantitative study, they state, "clearly more research is needed to fully understand how professional isolation detracts from job performance" (Dino, Golden, and Veiga 2008, p. 1416). I submit what doesn't need more research is that people do feel isolated in all situations and at different times even, given the same circumstances. If, for the purpose of this discussion, we take for a fact that isolation is an individually defined feeling, we must find ways to resolve the potential conflict that the VWE places individuals in. If we build on this aspect and make another assumption that working virtual places an individual in a state of isolation, we must then look deeper into the other factors associated with feeling isolated. Later in the chapter, I will discuss the process and practices that can help, but it is incumbent on all of us dealing with the VWE that the structure starts off with a challenge. That challenge is the separation that is created by its structure. More importantly, if we acknowledge this structural design challenge, then we need to look at connection, communication, and a way to stay attached.

It is truly anyone's guess how individuals will feel about the perception of isolation; however, we must look at other aspects that might lead us to an answer. More importantly, as leaders and managers, we need to take a step in the direction to fend off the issues related to isolation. An individual who feels isolated has a few options available to them. They need to find a way to get connected and find a way to stay engaged. This can come at a high emotional cost to the individual. First off, if they already feel isolated, they must overcome the initial feeling of being out of sight and out of mind. They must then take the steps to get in sight and in mind of those that they feel isolated from.

Some virtual workers will say that they feel connected when they really don't because the feeling of isolation often makes individuals feel like a victim. They are isolated because they don't fit in so to acknowledge that might be painful. That is the high emotional cost that can occur.

Research might also find that those who don't feel isolated are doing their job and everything is ok. I would suggest that we take this a step further. Would they still feel ok if they believed that they deserved a promotion or a new responsibility and they were not provided that yet the opportunity went to someone who was not virtual?

Individuals might reach out to others who are experiencing similar consequences from isolating behavior to create their own subculture of support. They may do this so they become an effective nucleus in the organization from which a more positive culture can emerge.

It is critical in this described situation that the individuals know the organization's goals and strategic directions. More on this later but right now, it is safe to say that demonstrating a knowledge of organizational priorities helps the individuals be perceived as part of the team, rather than as an outlier.

Isolation can result from a lack of strategic relationships within the organization. If individuals are experiencing isolation, they need to reflect on whether they have taken the time to really connect with others. They must get a better feel for how the organization operates and what is important in its corporate culture. It is critical that in this situation the individuals are proactive in getting a sense of others' beliefs and priorities, so that they can reflect on them in how they present their ideas and suggestions.

## Isolation and the VWE

The reason for the human perceptions of isolation is part of this book, and one of the key perceptions is because isolation is actually created by the new organizational structure. Because isolation is created by the structure of the VWE, the feelings associated with isolation is central to any organizational behavior view associated with the VWE. The aspect of physical isolation could be the main challenge facing the virtual worker. It creates a reduction in the level of direct contact with coworkers and the organization, which in turn can create a sense of detachment (Bartel, Wrzesniewski, and Wiesenfeld 2012).

The psychological effects of long-term isolation within the VWE will not be discussed, yet I submit, the longer a person works in a VWE,

the greater the chances of feeling isolated at some point will come into play. The topic of length of time away is not new to isolation and virtual work. Even though few studies to date have explicitly examined the length of time associated with teleworking arrangement (Bailey and Kurland 2002), the obvious correlation of the longer the time, the more reasonable it is to imagine the greater chance of feeling isolated at some point. In my research, individuals' feelings toward isolation also seemed to go through an evolution; at first, when the individuals start working as virtual workers, the sense of isolation was greater. For the majority of the individuals, the longer they worked in this environment, the less they felt isolated by their interpretation. The interesting aspect here is even though they talked in terms of not feeling isolated, the longer they work away from others, their behavior actually showed more signs of actually being isolated. This was seen in terms of not wanting to go to the office to meet with people. They looked for ways to interact with others outside of the coworkers. They would find ways to go to coffee shops to perform their work. They would even at times look for others in their neighborhoods who were also working virtually, and they would plan walks throughout the day to make sure they had interactions with others.

It is important to highlight that I am making a point that the perception of isolation can happen in both a short- and a long-term situation. The difference is that the more one is actually separated, the greater is the chance that they feel isolated from others. Therefore, when we are dealing with the VWE, we must recognize the perception of isolation. Not only is the perception of isolation an important aspect, the justification and the rationale that virtual workers create to ease the pain associated with isolation also come to the forefront by the actions. I am worried that the longer we allow for an individual to be disconnected from others, the worse the effects of isolation will be.

As studies have shown, there could be long-term effects based on individual isolation (House 2001). To summarize, the human perception of isolation and the purpose of it being discussed in this book is if an individual is isolated and "out of touch" with their coworkers and organizations all might suffer. Later in this chapter and in the chapter about productivity, we will see how isolation can have a negative effect on the success of the organization.

Earlier researchers such as Adler, Heckscher, Kern, and Schumann believed the new development associated with the VWE was an era of increased autonomy (Adler 1992; Heckscher 1988; Kern and Schumann 1992). However, this autonomy can lead to a sense of isolation. Isolation can be related to a feeling of separation, despair, and disengagement.

The sense of autonomy explored in terms of the trust, isolation, and presence helped create the theory that will be discussed in Chapter 9.

The exploration of isolation will help bring technology and the human perceptions together, making the VWE a more effective and secure place to work. Workplace isolation is related to social isolation. The workplace is often a place for socialization, and with the VWE, there might be a lack of opportunity for social relationship building.

The VWE can cause a sense of isolation for the individuals who take part in this new organizational structure. The feeling of isolation can happen to individuals at different times and in different places (Bredin 1996). The feeling of isolation experienced by individuals can create a feeling of depression, stress, lack of motivation, and eventually, burnout (Bredin 1996). The words that are used to explain feelings associated with isolation also serve to help define the term isolation.

Isolation can be felt in terms of a personal relationship, within a group of people, or even in a crowded mall. Isolation can be described as a feeling of being alone, or distant from others. Everyone has experienced the sense of isolation at one time or another. In the VWE, working alone or separated from others is the way of doing business. It is reasonable to assume this feeling of isolation would be present for those working in this environment. In this work environment, it is possible for isolation to occur at two primary levels, at the organizational or company level and the individual relationship level, such as those relationships shared with close workers or fellow department members.

Justification can be used to hide the feeling of isolation. Individuals when dealing with a painful situation often justify the feeling by masking it with individual rationale. Let's take a closer look at this concept. If an individual changes their behavior to make sure that they have interactions with others like going to a social place to do their work are they trying to be less isolated? What about the individual who takes breaks throughout

the day to talk with neighbors so their actual day now lasts a total of 10 hours to accomplish the work that could have been done in 8 hours, are they finding a way to feel less isolated?

Going back to some of the participants in my study who addressed this concept of justification when they explored the feeling of isolation that changed over time. Some would make a point of going into the office or making visits with neighbors or other businesses to get a sense of human touch. Again I think the point here is that individuals used justification to make the feeling of isolation go away. Let's move the discussion to the organizational level and how isolation can be involved between the individual and organization.

## Organizational Isolation

Isolation from an organizational standpoint is really twofold. As I have mentioned, isolation is an individual interpretation; however, when we deal with organizational isolation, we must take into account how the organization functions toward the individual. Management, therefore, has a large part to play with organizational isolation.

Managers seem to fear that they will lose control over the workers if they allow the VWE to occur. This sense of losing control often makes managers tighten the reins even more. We all have felt that we are losing control at times and we all do the normal reaction and that is to hold on tighter. I am not talking about riding a roller coaster or some other sort of thrill ride. I am talking about the aspect of work life when things feel like they are slipping away, we tend to react by tightening up. As the words of the song by 38 Special states, hold on loosely or you will lose control. Losing control can happen on both ends of this complex situation. Is the organization the one holding on tighter to control or does the individual tighten the reins related to their sense of isolation? The organization has to take responsibility in terms of how they treat the individuals. There are a few examples that happen within organizations that create a level of organizational isolation.

Let's first look at management style. Are there times when the management style is to hold all bad information so that no bad news is ever reported upward to the leaders of the organization? This concept

happens at multiple levels and comes in many different flavors. The old adage of "don't kill the messenger" is what I am addressing in this concept. A more direct old story related to this concept is the story about the only person who would speak up was a child, who might have lacked the fear of telling the truth to a leader or more senior person or how the story goes about an emperor. Remember the old story of the "Emperor has no clothes" where people were afraid to tell the emperor that he didn't have any clothes, as they were afraid of the consequences. Isn't that what it is like at times within organizations, don't let bad news get to the top or else? This type of management isolates the workers from the organization as it places them in a no-win situation. They must in turn go into a level of isolation concerning the news.

Organizations also can create isolation by the way they allow individuals to work together. This can be seen by the number of times they allow interactions between workers. This also includes the way they interact with one another. Can they talk openly about social activities, can they talk while they work or must they only focus on the task at hand? This is a level of social isolation that the organization creates.

## Social Isolation

As just discussed, organizational isolation can lead to social isolation. When does a structure create social isolation or is the question when do people create social isolation? Individuals express the feeling of isolation, as they are the ones who have to determine if they are separated and detached from their surroundings. Yet it is easy to see how an organizational structure could have an impact on an individual's feelings of separation and detachment.

I want to discuss a few elements associated with social isolation as we move forward. First, let me say as did Harlow, Dodsworth, and Harlow in their 1965 study of total isolation in monkeys, "that it is difficult or impossible to study scientifically the impacts of culturally produced social isolation at the human level."

In their report read before the National Science Academy in 1965, Harlow, Dodsworth, and Harlow noted that "human social isolation is recognized as a problem of vast importance" (Dodsworth, Harlow,

and Harlow 1965). The report goes on to discuss how isolation arises from the breakdown in family structures. The same might be true in the VWE. The workers in this environment might feel isolated and interpret a breakdown in the traditional work environment. The social effects of the long-term or even semi-isolation resulted in "different degrees of social damage and permit variable behavioral adaptations" (Dodsworth, Harlow, and Harlow 1965).

As discussed by Diekema in 1992, professional isolation is a state of mind or belief that individuals are out of touch with others they work with in the workplace (Diekema 1992). The concept of professional isolation is similar to social isolation for this discussion. In any work environment, individuals can be in a social setting, yet feel disconnected and isolated. Individuals may impose a feeling of isolation on themselves, thus creating a sense that they are socially separated. This topic is also seen in the popular press. For example, an article, appeared in 2005 titled, "Home alone, Stir crazy," concluded that "working on your own, all day, every day, will wear down even the most resilient and spirited individual. Many full-time home workers say they feel forgotten and undervalued as a result of their isolation" (Eatherden 2005).

Looking in terms of an evolutionary perspective, social isolation has elicited alarm in humans (Bowlby 1973) because they have existed in social circles. Even though a literature review has not found one pure adequate definition of workplace isolation (Marshall, Michaels, and Mulki 2007), it is still critical to understand its effects. What is critical is that the feeling of isolation exists and it is often cited by individuals in their workplace situation.

The negative side is where social isolation or stressful social interaction is associated, and this can be detrimental to one's health (DeVries et al. 2009). The traditional work environment has been and will remain a social place. The traditional work environment is a place where people interact, see each other, and can engage in social relationships. A VWE might not be such a place. It might be a room in a house that needs to be quarantined off from others within the household. It could be a single office in a remote location; it could even be a table at the local coffee shop. Regardless of the physical location of the office, the virtual worker might very well be alone. This isolation, in addition to having potential physical

and mental issues for the individual, might affect the ability to perform and work with others. To emphasize the importance of this aspect, as previously stated, Charles Planck, CEO of Articulated Impact said, "you find that if you're home too much, you lose your edge in dealing with people" (Reed 2007).



In several studies, the issue of social isolation is given as a reason why people do not telecommute (Baruch and Nicholoson 1997; Gainey, Kelley, and Hill 1999; Khan, Tung, and Turban 1997). In the research by Gainey, Kelley, and Hill, they discussed how employee isolation that results from telecommuting can affect individuals directly and indirectly. In their model associated with the impact of telecommuting, they suggested that individuals are affected in terms of their level of comfort, turnover, satisfaction, and commitment (Gainey, Kelley, and Hill 1999).

You can imagine the problems that would arise if we tried to truly experiment with humans and the effects of social isolation. Not only would we cross the ethical line but we would most likely damage those in the study, thus rendering them outcast from society for the remainder of their life. I make this statement because of the study done by Harlow, Dodswoth, and Harlow that I mentioned earlier and the effects that the isolated monkeys experienced, as well as the results from my research.

When discussing the aspect of social isolation in particular, the participants in my research said that they missed the interaction with others. Some of the participants found ways to deal with this social isolation, but none of them related this to wanting to go back to the traditional work environment. Many of them talked about how they found outside ways to address this loss of social interaction by creating non-work-related activities. It is this nonwork-related social interaction

that will separate the virtual worker more from the organization. This will create more autonomy from the organization that will have a direct impact on the productivity levels matching—individual versus organizational definitions.

It was interesting that even with the acknowledgment of feeling isolated at times or having a loss of social interaction, none of the participants found it to be substantial enough to give up the VWE. This appears to support the premise that increased autonomy and productivity to create a sense that the individual is okay and does not need to be directly connected or concerned with the organization mission but rather they have to stay productive. This supports the concept of self-efficacy that will be discussed later in the book in the chapter that addresses the Change–Self-Efficacy Loop Theory.

An article by Jessica Olien (2013) discusses some of the disturbing effects of social isolation. She mentioned that studies show that elderly people and social isolation concluded that those who were socially isolated were likely to die prematurely twice the pace compared to others. As people are living longer, we are seeing this trend increase. More and more elderly individuals are feeling the aspect of social isolation. One other comment made my Olien was that social isolation "impairs immune function and boosts inflammation, which can lead to arthritis, type II diabetes, and heart disease." It is not only a state of mind, the feeling of social isolation, but it has physical effects on all of us. I don't want to spend too much time on this topic, but I do want to draw a comparison for all of us to think about.

We all are aware of isolation confinement which is used within our correctional system. There are many studies that have been done associated with this type of treatment. I am not presenting a position for or against solitary confinement in the correctional system rather I am drawing a comparison for us to think about in terms of the effects of social isolation. Many of the studies do conclude that those prisoners that are held in solitary confinement for a longer period of time (three months or longer) suffer long-lasting effects such as psychosis and display functional disabilities when they return to the general population.

Prisoners who are in this type of confinement must deal with growing anger and they become anxious. In closing on this topic of social isolation, there can be a parallel drawn between solitary confinement and the VWE. Will those individuals who work virtually be able to reconnect and function within the traditional work environment when and if they return? Let's now turn our attention to individual isolation.

## Individual Isolation

Isolation can mean simply being alone, by oneself with no other individual interaction. Isolation has been studied in a few different ways in regards to this individual isolation. Langfred (2000) studied isolation in terms of the autonomy and the cohesiveness of groups. This directly relates to the individuals within the VWE as the study showed how those relationships were affected by the cohesiveness and group effectiveness related to isolation. In the VWE, the individual is often completely alone for the vast majority of the time. The ability to develop a cohesive group can be a challenge within the VWE. In a traditional work environment, workers would be able to socialize with others on a regular basis.

There is individual isolation, as studied in the Kingsley Davis (1947) work that dealt with a child who was isolated from all other humans in the early years of the child's life. This type of isolation leads to psychological concerns and often stunts the full development of the individual in one way or another. Similarly, individual isolation has been studied regarding patients as first explored by Faris in 1934, or how prisoners in solitary confinement are affected by this form of individual isolation (Kupers 2008). These types of isolation studies are often associated with the individual in a unique situation compared to the normal situations or what is seen as a more traditional environment. Researchers have described workplace isolation as a construct that represents individual perception associated with others (Marshall, Michaels, and Mulki 2007). In the VWE, the construct created by isolation needs to be explored through the interpretations of the individuals.

In situations where the individual is in a nontraditional environment, they have to rely heavily on themselves for any sense of normalcy. Based on the unique circumstances of the VWE, their perceptions could be different from what they would experience in a traditional environment. The prior research is relevant to the new VWE, because the condition created by the new organizational structure is a nontraditional environment. There is a potential similarity to the prior research with this research concerning individuals functioning in normal conditions after being isolated for a period of time. To illustrate this point, it might not be possible for the virtual worker, because of the separation caused by this type of environment, as I mentioned earlier,  will it be easy to reacclimate themselves to the traditional environment.

This research will not be exploring any psychological aspects associated with the effects of the virtual worker being separated. The VWE, as shown in Figure 2.1 and as discussed by Kurland and Bailey, also has varying degrees of isolation based on the virtual work situation (Bailey and Kurland 1999). The virtual workers can be separated part-time, full-time, with others not part of their team, or, in total isolation, working alone in a remote location.

Social interaction is often an indication of how well the mental and physical health of an individual is determined (House 2001). Social relationships can be highly generalized as either positive or negative. On

the positive side, there are supportive relationships and positive mental and physical health; on the negative, there can be long-term illness and depression.

## Working Alone

An article in the October 2007 issue of *Network World* discusses how many teleworkers quickly begin to feel isolated (Reed 2007). Whether the popular press talks about going stir crazy, as in the article in *Management Today* (Eatherden 2005), or the 2007 article, the story is the same; working alone causes individuals to feel a level of discomfort and/or stress about their situation. In this regard, Dino, Golden, and Veiga (2008) looked at studying professional isolation in their quantitative study. They created a measurement for professional isolation and built on the study of Cooper and Kurland (Cooper and Kurland 2002) where they started to explore the negative effects of working alone. Cooper and Kurland discussed how, with respect to the state of research associated with telecommuting, scholars need to gain a deeper understanding of the constructs associated with telecommuting before they can "advance theoretical and practical knowledge" (Cooper and Kurland 2002). They went on to research one such construct, employee isolation, in their study and used a grounded theory approach. They concluded in their study that telecommuters are likely to perceive they are professionally isolated (Cooper and Kurland 2002). In the article "Set up remote workers to thrive," it is stated in the research that employees report the most serious liability of working remotely is "workplace isolation" (Bardhi et al. 2009).

## Isolation and Autonomy

As suggested by the literature associated with isolation, there is a pulling away or pulling back from the group. As discussed by Adler (1992), isolation is a creation of increased autonomy. He mentioned this in terms of what is part of the VWE. I want to point out that individuals who feel isolation often justify it by focusing on things other than being isolated. There are times when individuals feel embarrassed they feel isolated. Therefore, they overcompensate with a strong feeling of self-reliance.

Taking this a step further, this justification and self-satisfying relationship of feeling isolated yet justifying it by being productive can be seen as how a sense of autonomy can occur. It is this aspect of autonomy that raises concerns from my point of view. Taking this aspect of autonomy with the self-imposed justifications, show how the two interact and create a cause for concern to the long-term viability of the VWE.

You might be wondering why there is an issue with being more autonomous. On the surface, there is not an issue with this feeling. It is important that we have a strong sense of self-reliance. However, given that virtual teams come together to accomplish a given task if individual interpretations or strong-will comes into play, the end result could be less than optimal. By an individual being autonomous, they could create a level of separation from others that they are not aware of. This could hurt the end results. We have all been in situations where strong-minded individuals work together and the difficulties this creates. An example of this is when we witness two people arguing with each other but in reality they are saying the same thing just using different words and finally someone else tells them so such. Without the face-to-face interactions, this could strain the team and the end results associated with working virtually. People might very well turn off their coworkers' concerns and ideas and simply focus on their own. Keeping in mind as we go forward that the definition of the word autonomy means independence and freedom, self-governing. I submit that this might not be the best situation for having a successful outcome.

## Isolation's Negative Side

One final aspect of isolation that needs to be discussed is the negative side. I have mentioned in some of the other sections that isolation can create a feeling of depression, stress, lack of motivation, and eventually burnout (Bredin 1996). These are all negative effects that isolation can have on the individual feeling isolated. Based on the prior discussion about autonomy and adding the potential negative elements discussed by Bredin (1996), the concerns could actually increase over time. At first, the concerns could simply be a result of the individual not fully engaging with coworkers and

the organization. If the individual becomes stressed out or burned out, the concerns could increase and anxiety, fear, and apprehension could be magnified. This increased disconnection might be difficult to predict, as there is no way to make sure that the individual stays connected with the coworkers or organizational mission at some level.

However, it is clear that isolation has a negative side and it must be dealt with by all. Organizations dealing with the aspect of social isolation need to help individuals stay connected to the organization rather than finding ways that move the individuals away to find social connections.

Books such as the one by Fried and Hansson titled *Remote*, which is a book that strongly supports the benefits of working virtually, states that some individuals find it harder to get into the flow when sitting in complete isolation. We cannot hide from the fact that isolation can cause a negative result for some individuals. Whether the reaction of the individual is mild or severe, there can be a negative effect related to working in isolation. I wanted to emphasize this negative side to isolation to make sure that there is no doubt that we must accept that this is part of the VWE. Even though individuals will present arguments for working harder and accepting isolation as a means to an end, they all must acknowledge how they most likely miss social interaction.

## Isolation and Productivity

Therefore, when it comes to the aspect of isolation whether at the pure individual level or at the social level, individuals will measure the feeling by making sure that they are productive. The concept of being productive might work at first when there is a direct connection between the organization's mission and the individual producing the needed results. With time and the increased autonomy or greater distance of the individual caused by being isolated, the organizational mission and the results produced could separate, and this could be a less than ideal.

In my research, the responses to the questions related to isolation confirmed that isolation is part of the VWE. Even though the participants acknowledged the fact that they felt isolated at times, they quickly

found positive attributes that nullified the feeling of being isolated. This ultimately resulted in some sort of discussion of productivity. Once they defined their feeling of isolation judged to productivity, the participants appeared somewhat matter of fact about isolation. They acknowledged it, and like the perception of trust, they again moved past this human perception by justifying how productive they could be. They commented on how they were not distracted and how they could focus more readily on the work, thus producing more work.

The reasons the participants provided for nullifying the negative aspects of isolation and that this feeling was okay was because they could show the organization that they were productive. These reasons and rationale often appeared to be offered as a way to make sure that they could remain in this VWE. The sacrifice of being alone when it related to work productivity was supported by being more prolific related to their output. However, did this create too much separation?

We have acknowledged, or at least I have, that the VWE can create a higher degree of autonomy. If the individual is only concerned with their sense of productivity, we must measure that against the mission they are asked to perform. There must be a relationship to mission of the team or organization. If this is not the case, we could see a very direct correlation with the individual virtual worker producing elements that do not fit with the main focus of the organization. The increased sense of autonomy and the self-serving definition of productivity could create a disconnect between the workers and the company that might not be identified until it is too late.

## Isolation and Humanistic Management

For the basic concept associated with the humanistic management approach to work, there has to be a balance between the individual and the organization. Another way to look at this is the larger enterprise and the staff that makes up the enterprise must function in harmony. As I discussed within the chapter, those who live or function in isolation often lack the social skills needed to coexist with the larger group. There is the example I used about the inmates who were in solitary confinement and how they lacked the skills to go back and function within the general

population. I even asked the question, will those who are working in the VWE be able to reestablish themselves in the traditional work environment if they had to.

Therefore, it seems pretty clear that for both an organization and its individuals to flourish, the level of isolation needs to be minimized. The effects of isolation will erode the connection needed between the organization and the individual. The VWE by its very structure already creates a level of isolation and this is counter to the basic aspect of a humanistic management approach. We do not want to isolate individuals if we expect them to thrive within a work environment where connection is important to the success. Consequently, when we focus on the aspects of a humanistic management approach isolation must be kept as the exception and not the norm that already exist because of its structure.

## People

The people who feel isolated are the same people who work in the VWE. But this is not an absolute truth, as a matter of fact, all people can and do feel isolated. They feel isolated at different times and in different places. So in reality, all people feel isolated. The difference is that as most people can and often do feel isolated, they do so based on their own interpretation of their surroundings and their individual feelings associated with their world. The difference with the VWE is that for people who work within the VWE, their structure has a direct impact on this feeling of isolation. People who are placed in situations where isolation is created from their environment need to find ways to deal with the pain related to isolations. As I discussed in this chapter, the pain associated with isolation is often lessened by justifying the feeling with rationale that makes the individual appear that they are not really dealing with the true perception of isolation.

## Process

No man can be an island. As we often heard said it takes a village to raise a child. The work environment is no different, it takes individuals working together to accomplish the task at hand. Therefore, the process of working virtually must take into account the human perception of

isolation. Placing individuals apart from one another and not recognizing creates a feeling of isolation, which is a major flaw in the process of setting up a virtual team or allowing individuals to work virtually.

As leaders and managers decide to allow for this flexible work structure, they must put in place processes that make sure that individuals stay connected to the mission of the organization. They must also make it clear that the individual does not detach from the others on the team. A successful VWE will have built in processes to ensure all individuals are clear on the organization mission, that they stay connected to the work and coworkers, and that periodic face-to-face meetings take place.

## Practice

Leaders and managers need to understand the individuals' interpretation associated with the human perception of isolation. In practice, it is unacceptable to allow individuals to be out of sight and out of mind. This has to be practiced by all involved in the VWE. There cannot be long periods of time that take place without personal touches to each individual. Practice reaching out often, practice including all individuals in conversations and practice open communication.

We cannot create a situation that I discussed earlier that appears to have the feeling of solitary confinement in the working world. The practice of being conscious to the feeling of individuals related to isolation is paramount. It is paramount because individuals feel isolation at different levels and at different times. Therefore, the practice of measuring isolation and its effects can never rest.

## Some Questions to Think About

If you are not in the same location with others, are you isolated?
Does isolation grow with time spent away from others?
Do justifications ease the pain associated with isolations?
How do you measure the feeling of isolation?
If I am with others, can I really be isolated?

# CHAPTER 7

# Presence

*If your presence doesn't make an impact, your absence won't make a difference.*

—Trey Smith

## What Is Presence?

Presence similar to trust and isolation discussed in the prior chapters is a human perception that has a range from minor to sever in its interpretation. Presence is the last human perception I will be discussing directly. There are other human perceptions that effect the virtual workers, but as I have discussed, the trust, isolation, and presence are the three that I believe are critical to the success of the virtual worker and, therefore, the success of the virtual work environment (VWE).

Presence creates the final yet equally important aspect of the triangle of human perceptions associated with the VWE. You will see that I use the terminology "triangle" to describe the use of the three human perceptions: trust, isolation, and presence. This is the first time I have used it as a concept in this book as I didn't want to discuss this concept before I introduced each leg of the triangle. However, the concept of thinking of trust, isolation, and presence as the TIP triangle will go a long way in helping you think about the concepts addressed in this book. The triangle of trust, isolation, and presence are foundational to everything that I am discussing in the book. Triangles not only provide strength and stability but are also hard to move once established because of their base. I firmly believe that these three make a perfect equilateral triangle. I believe that each of the sides is no greater than the others and that the stability formed by these three human perceptions support one of the strongest formations there is in dealing with the VWE. A sneak preview of things to come in Chapter 7 is the model that will show how the triangle of these perceptions interact

with one another in a way to help managers and leaders understand the human aspect of working in the VWE.

The level of presence one feels to their surroundings may have a direct relationship on both trust and the feeling of isolation. Along with trust and isolation, the aspect of presence is critically involved in the VWE.

Before discussing presence, I want to reemphasize how these three human perceptions are involved in the VWE. So how do these three human perceptions play with the VWE? As I will discuss in the next chapter, these three human perception translate to the TIP triangle which if used properly by managers and leaders will help set the course for greater success in the VWE. The lack of potential face-to-face interactions, using technology to communicate, and the loss of a support system establish a foundational link for these three. Now on to defining presence.

## Presence Defined

In dealing with the perception of presence, we must first establish the concepts of feeling present versus being physically present. I believe it is not much of a stretch for everyone to see the connection of the VWE with the concept of physical presence. If we are not physically present, are we indeed present? On the other hand, I am not convinced that everyone can appreciate or connect to the concept of the feeling present. Let's take a deeper look into this concept while we explore the overall human perception of presence. If we assume that the extent of presence an individual feels with others and their organizations can influence the way they respond to working in a virtual environment, we must find a way to define feeling present.

The human experience is often termed in the concept of presence (Steuer 1992). The experience is real if the person believes that it is real. How people interpret their sense of presence is critical within social interactions. There can be the presence people feel within their environment, social network, and even at an individual level.

When it came to the human perception of presence, there was a clear distinction on how the individuals responded to this perception. One way individuals feel about presence is a feeling of a loss of presence from their department, work location, and organization. Individuals identify

with their surroundings and develop a sense of belonging. The aspects of loyalty, fitting in, and attachment are all part of presence. It is clear that those who are not physically present lack the ability to truly feel physical presence. If an individual is part of a team and is not physically present with the others, there is no doubt that there is a challenge to find the connection with each other.

A second way to look at the aspect of presence is what those who are separated do to find a level of presence. Often they create a sense of presence that makes up for the actual loss. They create a work presence by themselves. Some individuals will create a work presence to make them feel like they are at work. Those who work in a VWE create an office in their homes, they go to coffee shops so they feel the presence of others, or they establish meeting places so that they can interact with others. This creation of the work presence is a way to fill the gap created by working virtual. It is important to mention at this point that not all individuals feel this way, some individuals will indeed thrive in the VWE and are capable of feeling presence with or without others around. I submit this does not last forever. As I discussed in the isolation section; after a time period, because we are indeed social creatures, we need to have some level of interaction and, therefore, we find ways to be present with others. This holds true for all of the perceptions I have discussed. Some people don't need a high level of trust to be productive; there are people who do very well in an isolated situation and of course the loss of presence might not affect all individuals.

Within the aspect of virtual reality, presence is a key component. There is no consensus about the exact nature of presence (Bouchard et al. 2008). Presence can be defined in terms of how one individual might be connected to a given situation. The concept of presence and how it is defined can be different depending on the actual environment an individual is functioning within. Presence is generally related to the subjective feeling an individual expresses in terms of existence within a defined environment (Atkinson 2008).

Presence is and can be linked to the concept individuals have of reality (Mantovani and Riva 1999). Mantovani and Riva suggested that different ontological stances support different criteria for presence, telepresence, and virtual presence (Mantovani and Riva 1999). There is social presence,

personal presence, environmental presence, and cognitive presence. The following bullets will provide a short definition of each:

- Environmental presence: The extent to which the environment itself recognizes and reacts to the person.
- Personal presence: The extent to which the person feels physically present in the environment.
- Social presence: The extent to which the person has the feeling of being together and communicating with others to achieve meaningful interactions, establish and maintain relations, and create productive social systems in online environments.
- Cognitive presence: The extent to which the person feels the potential to participate in critical thinking and community of inquire (Banos et al. 2008; Garrison, Anderson, and Archer 2001; Heeter 2003; Kehrwald 2008).

In each case, the term *presence* is modified with another word to help define it. The reasoning for this modifier might rest in that individuals can feel a different degree of presence based on their current situation.

One individual might feel presence while another might not. What makes this feeling arise is an individual's interpretation of how they are connected to the current situation and environment. While one person in the room might feel he or she is connected to the others, there might be one who feels the opposite. Many people can be in the same room, yet they can feel very far apart or absent from each other and their situation.

Going forward, I ask that you think about presence in the following manner. How can individuals feel connected to the event they are working on. Think about this in terms of performing your duties or task and your feeling of being connected to duties or task.

Remember Vic in Chapter 2, was he connected to his duties when he was writing e-mails to his employees and in turn did he feel a sense of presence with them during his first day?

Within all aspects of social interaction, there is the concept of feeling present. A connection with one's environment is often part of the definition of presence. At times, the feeling of presence might simply be

that a person is connected with their surroundings and, therefore, they feel present.

## Presence Background

As I have mentioned, the third human perception is presence. As pointed out by Renaud, Robillard, and St. Jacques (2008), presence is a key component of the virtual reality experience. What they explored in their study was how an individual actually feels about the "real" situation and surroundings and one that is created as real. The level of presence one feels in the relationship to their organization and coworkers may be affected by the VWE. An important contributor to the feeling of being present is one's perceptual experience (Harvey and Sanchez-Vives 2005). The feeling of actually working with others who are colocated versus working with others who are not physically present may create a lack of commitment to each other. This has a direct connection to the VWE because a team that is separated from each other has potentially a different feel than one where the individuals are colocated. Individuals interpret their presence in relation to others, and that perception becomes his or her reality. Therefore, the feeling of presence can affect how individuals operate in their workplace surroundings.

Looking at the increase in the use of social networking tools such as Twitter, e-mail, Facebook, and other social networks, the sense people feel about their presence is part of a learning process and a connection process (Lowenthal 2009). The concept of presence is related to the subjective nature or feeling individuals have to their existence within a defined situation (Atkinson 2008). The VWE creates a defined situation that is new and nontraditional for many individuals. Their interpretation of their connection and feeling of existence to their organization and work product will determine if they feel a high level of presence or not.

When dealing with the human aspect of presence, there are many interpretations and there is much debate among social behaviorists related to this topic. Presence is a very difficult topic to define. The reason I used presence as the third leg of the TIP triangle is because I believe, even though it is hard to define presence and there is much debate as to the actual definition of presence, any relationship that is formed has

to address how people interact and, therefore, must deal with a level of presence. In particular, presence or the lack of presence is part of the VWE by its structure. I have looked for a consistent definition to this often vague perception but submit to you that I have not found one size that fits all. This is not different from the other perceptions that I have discussed. Each of the three perceptions has an individual interpretation associated with them. My hope for using presence in the TIP triangle is to help all of us, including social behaviorists to better define the term and understand its effects on the VWE.

In my research, the participants responded to the human perception of presence in vague ways, but they all concluded by saying that they created a work presence in their virtual work space. The participants talked about how they created a sense of a traditional work environment to perform their duties in the VWE. This again was a way to help justify their feeling related to not being present with their coworkers and organization. The creation of a work-like environment gave the participants a feeling of being present for work-related proposes thus being productive in their current work environment. Based on this creation of a work presence, let's further explore the concept of physical presence.

## Physical Presence Advances

Dating back to the early 1990s, presence was about being in one place. Schloerb spoke about the physical presence in terms of an object in some particular place (Schloerb 1995). Being located in the same physical space where events occur (Heeter 1992; Sheridan 1992) was how presence could be seen or felt. However, this type of physical presence is called into question when the concept of virtuality enters the situation. It raises the question of whether it can be possible for one to still be physically present, as just discussed, when there is a virtual element or virtual environment creating a different location from where the event might be taking place.

In 1998, Singer and Witmer defined presence as a "subjective experience of being in one place or environment, even if physically situated in another" (Singer and Witmer 1998). Building on their concept, now a person could be located at a different place than where an event was occurring and still feel present in that event. Unlike the definition about

being physically present, the concept of presence has to be about how the individual feels about their connection to where the event or people are rather than his or her local physical location.

To help advance the thinking for the research associated with Singer and Witmer and to further explore how presence can be looked at by not purely being physically present, it is important to understand the questionnaire they created to understand the degrees of presence. Singer and Witmer (1998) developed the "Presence Questionnaire" to help understand and look at the degrees of presence. In their article, "Measuring presence in virtual environments: A presence questionnaire," they discussed how attention is divided between the physical world and the mental world (Singer and Witmer 1998). The mental world could include things such as memories, daydreams, and planned activities (Singer and Witmer 1998), while the physical world is the here-and-now; it can be touched and is tangible to the individual. Later, Slater challenged the use of a "Presence Questionnaire" in determining how presence might be related to an individual in the virtual environment. He did so by asking the question related to the maximization of presence (Slater 1999). He challenged the concept of physical presence, as it was defined in the prior study. The two studies differ in terms of definitional aspects associated with how immersive the virtual environment is or is not. Slater defined immersion as the aspect associated with how the environment can allow for the individual to feel immersed. For example, if one virtual environment had a larger field of view than the other, the first one would be more immersive (Slater 1999). Witmer and Singer defined immersion as a person's responses to the system (Singer and Witmer 1998; Slater 1999). These two studies dealt with the view of the virtual environment in terms of making one place feel and appear like another. Does this sound familiar to an individual creating their own work environment to feel present at work?

It is important to understand that all of this is related to how the individual interprets the perception of presence. Whether or not they use the physical presence definition or the immersion definition of presence, each individual has to accept the connection they feel with their environment. With that said, let's take a look at virtual presence and see how this plays with an individual interpretation of presence.

# Virtual Presence

This aspect of being immersed in the larger virtual world that is made to appear real is not entirely the same as presence in the VWE. This is because the VWE where the individual works is indeed their local physical place (real to them) while they may have a work event somewhere else away from their coworkers or organization, another real place. Just making the environment appear or feel real does not adequately depict the VWE for the virtual worker. The reason for this is there remains a fundamental issue when dealing with presence within the VWE. This issue remains at least at two distinct locations often times. One is the actual created physical work location of the virtual worker and the other is where the organization is located. There are at times no physical location of the organization; however, in those situations, there is at least one other person at a different location, whether that be a coworker or the end customer the virtual worker is performing the task for.

Presence in the virtual world has focused primarily on making the individual deal with a level of feeling present by placing the individual in the lived experience as though the virtual and the real place were one (Bouchard et al. 2008; Fontaine 1992; Singer and Witmer 1998). Individuals perceive and use the environment to help them define their connection to the event, thus affording the ability to feel present even when the event might be elsewhere. This concept is similar to what was presented by Mantovani and Riva when they discussed and expanded on the theory laid out by Gibson where "reality" is within the social settings that take place such as in offices, classrooms, and homes (Mantovani and Riva 1999).

Related to the virtual environment, it is easy to see the connection between how an individual might be present but not physically present at the same time. The virtual environment gives a level of presence to individuals who are different when compared with the older traditional organizational structures of business where being present meant being physically present. The VWE by its creation has challenged the interpretation of the degree of presence an individual worker might have or feel with the event or their coworkers.

## Coworkers and Managers

One aspect associated with the virtual team is the location of the coworkers and managers. In a traditional work environment, managers made their presence known by physical aspects, such as sitting in meetings, locating their office in a strategic location, and seeing specific body language (Zigurs 2003). Coworkers were collocated and in the physical presence of each other. It was not difficult to have ad hoc meetings to discuss current situations that occurred real time. Whether it was a manager who needed to communicate to his or her staff or if it was a group of coworkers who wanted to collaborate about a topic, all they needed to do was walk out of their office and communicate to who they needed to. It was not uncommon that work discussions took place during breaks and at lunch. The water cooler discussions that took place and might account for real business decisions throughout the day are long gone in the traditional sense within the VWE. Today, even with the use of technology that allows more real-time communication across boundaries, things need to be much more coordinated to have the ad hoc meeting. I would be remiss, however, if I didn't comment on the use of instant messaging (IM) and being available by phone 24/7.

OK, so here comes a soap box. Yes, it is true that people can use IM to communicate real time much like walking into your coworkers office. It is also true that you can call anyone on their mobile phone almost without regard to time and location. The difference is the expectation associated with such communication. In the traditional environment, when you walked into the office of your coworkers, it would be obvious to all if they were busy and occupied with another matter. If they were, you simply asked for a time to come back and discuss your topic. In today's fast paced virtual world, there is a different expectation. If the IM is not responded to immediately a panic sets in. In the old traditional environment, if the coworker was on the phone, again you would simply back out of their office and wait until the call was completed. In today's hectic no time to waste mind-set, if a person doesn't answer their office phone, their mobile phone is called immediately. If their mobile phone isn't answered, back to the office phone and back again to the mobile phone. After this fails, another person who might know the original person trying to be reached is called, and when they answer, it goes something like this.

Caller:    I tried to call Larry but he didn't answer do you know where he is?

Response:  I believe he's at the office.

Caller:    No I called his office number and his mobile and he didn't answer, so do you know here he is?

Response:  The last I knew he was at the office so maybe he is tied up with something.

Caller:    Ok, but I really need to get in touch with him.

Response:  Ok I will let him know.

Caller:    OK Thanks

Now the next event in this frenzied world we live in happens.

The person who was contacted about the whereabouts of Larry now begins to call his office and mobile number. All along Larry was in his office holding a face-to-face meeting and after all the many calls, he must interrupt the meeting, because no one would call this many times unless there was a true emergency. He politely apologizes for the interruptions, asks if he can take the call. When he answers the original caller's call,

because they have not stopped trying to reach him, he answers and the following occurs:

Larry:    Hello

Caller:   Larry where have you been I have trying to get in touch with you for the last three minutes.

Larry:    I know you have called 12 times on both my office and mobile phone

Caller:   I know I really needed to get in touch with you.

Larry:    I was in the middle of a meeting which is still going on but since you kept trying to reach me I figured it was really important.

Caller:   It is, I wanted to see if you knew where Barbara was?

Larry:    I think she is in the office

Caller:   I am not sure as I have called her office and mobile and she hasn't answered

Do you recall the movie that Vic watched before he went to bed in Chapter 2? It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World. Well that above dialogue sounds pretty mad to me. The problem with technology that allows us to be connected as I mentioned 24/7 is the expectation that everyone is always available 24/7. We all know the world doesn't function that way and that we will have meetings and other such events that will not make us unavailable all the time. Before I get off my soap box, I just want to say … I am not sure how we as a society functioned when we didn't have IM available and we were carrying mobile phones with us everywhere we go. I won't even go into the fact that these mobile devices share more information with us through direct feed, Twitter accounts, Facebook updates, and many other such apps that we literally could lose all day just trying to stay current with this information they provide.

All of these aspects are missing in the VWE. In the traditional environment, all could experience the presence of each other. The virtual world creates a layer of presence that did not exist earlier. The feeling of a different dimension might have existed in the minds of individuals; however, until virtuality became a true dimension, it did not really exist. "Virtuality is a characteristic that can be defined on many dimensions,"

this is how Zigurs explained it (Zigurs 2003). She further went on to explain that the more a team becomes virtual, meaning moving away from the traditional environment, the more complex the issues are created that need to be addressed (Zigurs 2003). With the onset of the VWE, a concept known as telepresence was introduced (Zigurs 2003).

## Telepresence

This newer concept means that one could feel a sense of presence in a place different form their physical location. Steuer (1992) defined telepresence in terms of dimensions of "vividness interactivity." He went on to state that vividness allows the telecommunication medium to produce a rich environment for the senses, whereas interactivity is the degree the user influences from the content with the communication medium. With this view of presence, it measures the feeling of creating reality, not the sense of presence associated with the event perceived by the individual. This creation of the concept of telepresence is allowing individuals to feel presence when they are not really present. What does that mean?

With the use of technology, we are now allowing individuals to feel as if they are present or to have the feeling or effect of being at a different place rather than where they really are or their true location. I must take you back to the beginning of the book where I made the comment about the future. Is the future here? Have we found a way to teleport ourselves to other locations simply by thinking of them? I joke a little bit here but the point is we are now allowing people to work in one location and feel like they are actually at another.

One reason for the growth in the VWE is the aspect of telepresence that as I discussed; with the use of technology it allows workers to be not physically together, yet function as one team. Another aspect associated with presence is that the world has become smaller because of the technology associated with telepresence. There is a sense all should be omnipresent; present everywhere at all times. Again, these definitions and interpretations of presence create a "real" sense of being present when the actual event might be elsewhere. Regardless if the environment feels real or not to an individual, it might affect the individual's sense of presence related to where the event is taking place.

## The Now Presence versus the Past Presence

In the book, *Presence*, the authors talk about how at one point, presence was thought of being fully conscious and aware in the present moment. They continue to explore that to be truly present, an individual needs to access the field of the future in presence (Jaworski et al. 2004). Wow, that seems pretty heavy for a concept that is left to individual interpretation. The authors observe the importance of letting go of the old identities, controlling less allows for a state of letting go, or the acceptance of the new presence. This perception allows for a process to not simply reinvent the past but develop the future, thus become present in the "what-will-be," not the "what-was." As I have discussed related to the social networking culture, this concept can be seen with people creating identities in Second Life, Facebook, and other media outlets, allowing an individual to create a future or wished-for reflection of self. This approach of creating a second sense of self might be what happens to the virtual worker, as their identity might be twofold, the lone worker and the team worker. The dichotomy might be a needed component in the future for organizations, as they reshape themselves through the use of the VWE.

If we take a look at this dichotomy, it might render a lack of trust if the individual is acting as someone they are really not. Or does the lone worker feel a sense of lack of presence and hide behind these feelings of the team worker? More on this will be discussed in the next chapter. I hope you are starting to see how these three human perceptions rely on each other and can magnify the feeling of one human perception to counter the feeling of another.

The degree of presence seems to be directly related to the level of awareness an individual has in terms of presence associated with the event and not merely where they are physically located. Even though it is difficult to define or measure presence, understanding it can be used to help gauge the perceptions associated with the event and the virtual worker to their organization.

The virtual concept in the larger sense has created a situation to make an individual feel that their current situation is real compared to what might actually be occurring around the individual. In terms of the VWE, the aspect of presence puts forth a different view. The work environment

is not made up to feel real; it is real for the individual but has two dimensions: one where the individual is located and one where the event is taking place. The virtual worker has two levels of presence to deal with: how they feel about their actual physical location and how they feel about where the event is taking place. The person must feel both and might act differently in each case. They might feel physically present in their work location, yet feel a lack of presence where the event takes place. The exploration of this dual aspect of presence might lead to a deeper review of how the individual feels rather than just making them feel present in a made-up or false environment.

## Presence Related to Department or Organization

In regards to the feeling of not being in the presence of their department or organization, comments made by the participants of my research discussed how long they had worked with their peers before they went virtual and how their role over a long period of time made up for the lack of being in the presence of others. They did use the tools available to them to connect albeit through the use of technology to others. The new normal might very well be this dual feeling that an individual has to develop. The other aspect that needs to be considered with this concept of feeling presence needs to be looked in terms of the size of the organization. A larger organization might make it harder to develop the dual feeling, as there are many more factors to consider in larger organizations. This could be related to the feeling of respect that they receive from their organization. If there is an emotional connection, the dual aspect might be easier to create. The emotional connection can help establish the feeling of belonging with the other individuals and, therefore, allow for the lone worker to feel present when they are working with the team, the team worker.

## Creating a Work Presence

When individuals create a work presence for themselves, they do so in a variety of ways. Some may do so to feel more comfortable with their personal sense of self. After all, if individuals can work in the PJs all day,

there is no need to worry about how they appear to others. The lack of a regimented approach to starting the work day is no longer an issue. However, does this lack of preparation for going to work set the right mind-set? The concept of making a work environment might be a way that people who need to have the right work mind-set help establish some level of defining it is time to work. Some participants went so far as to set rules about working. Some would get dressed as if they were going to work, take a lunch, and clock out at end of the day. Some changed their clothes to establish a sense of work and nonwork activities. This aspect of creating a personal work presence needs to be examined, as this trick might not really address the level of presence needed to accomplish the task at hand. The bottom line when it comes to presence in the work environment is clear that it is an individual interpretation associated with getting work done.

## Presence and Environment

Presence is ultimately defined as how it generally relates to the subjective feeling an individual expresses in terms of existence within a defined environment (Atkinson 2008). This has a direct relationship to the topic just discussed in terms of the participants creating a work place environment. By creating a feeling of work (productivity), within an individually defined environment as Atkinson discussed in his definition, people create a defined environment within their VWE. As discussed earlier, presence would be how an individual feels connected to the event they are to work on. A connection with one's environment is often part of the definition of presence. At times, the feeling of presence might simply be that a person is connected with their surroundings, and therefore, they feel physically present.

The fact that the people do and need to establish a work place and a work environment points to how important the element of creating a work presence is. This aspect may challenge the traditional thinking presented in the older literature in terms of actually being in the presence of others. What I have discussed and shown in this chapter points to an interesting concept associated with the perception of presence. The dual aspect discussed earlier seems to be critical to this individualized

human perception. The mere fact that individuals create work presence to perform their work is truly part of the VWE.

This might not be a significant new element to the human perception of presence but it might point to the importance of the virtual worker needing to create a work presence for them to justify that they are, indeed, at work.

It appears that if individuals created a sense of work presence, they also established a line of defense that their work was still important to the organization and that justified their virtual working conditions. As we move forward, it is very important to draw a conclusion that even though not all individuals do create their own work environment, all people do search out ways to be with others at some level.

## Presence and Humanistic Management

It can be argued that to get the best out of people, we need to find ways to motivate them to maximize their efforts. If we are to get this maximization out of individuals that comprise an organization, we must make sure that they feel a level of presence that supports the overall organization. As I have discussed, people who work remotely often will create a self-defined level of work presence. By doing so, they might lose the feeling that they belong to the greater organization in getting their work done. They will rely on their own strengths in accomplishing the tasks they confront. The level of self-efficacy will enable them to work more effectively on things that might not be in line with the organization's expectations or missions.

To get the most out of the balance between individual flourishment and organizational success, there needs to be a shared level and understanding of presence. It is critical that the feeling of presence be in a shared sense and not in different levels of presence: one for the organization and one for the individual virtual worker. Therefore, the organization must work to provide and create a level of presence that involves the virtual worker in the here and now of the organization and not to allow them to develop an individualized sense of presence that is separate and apart from the rest.

## People

The people who need to deal with presence are the virtual workers. They are not alone in this concept, as the managers and leaders must acknowledge

this feeling of presence. The dual aspect is all about the individuals who work away from others. They must acknowledge a level of working alone and then how they work with others. People need to address their feeling of presence in both situations to make sure that they are able to deal with the VWE. The longer the individual works virtually, the higher degree or level of establishing this dual aspect will help the person maximize their output.

Let's take a look at the story of Vic. Did he feel present when he arrives at this office? When he communicates to his staff through e-mail and had no personal interaction with his staff, was he presenting a feeling of being present?

## Process

Organizations need to be aware of this concept of the individual dual aspect. The process that only allows for the lone worker to thrive will fall short in providing a productive environment if the individual needs to find a connection to others. To have face-to-face or not is the process we need to explore. So if the concept of being present is about the feeling of an individual, then can we be present if we are not there? The process must take into account this feeling of being present.

## Practice

The aspect of a presence practice requires work from all individuals. If someone removes themselves they are make sure they are not creating their own work presence away from others. The practice of presence is all about awareness. Being aware of ones connection will determine the true level of presence. Watch for withdrawal activity. This includes the individual, the leaders, and the managers. It also includes the coworkers and how they interact with the virtual worker. Practice creating an open office environment, practice a requirement to visit others, and practice providing support at home offices.

## Some Questions to Think About

Does the concept of physical presence outweigh the aspect of creating a work presence for the individual?

Does an individual need to have a level of physical presence to be a
successful virtual worker?

If the individual makes a work presence available to themselves, does
that help in terms of connection to the organization?

How important is it for individuals to have a level of presence while
they work in the VWE?

# CHAPTER 8

# Change–Self-Efficacy Loop Theory

In this chapter, I will be addressing the theory and model that came from my research. The Change–Self-Efficacy Loop Theory started by me looking at deep organization change and how it affected the virtual worker and it ended with the focus being on productivity related to working in the virtual work environment (VWE). The VWE as I have discussed in the prior chapters has human perceptions associated with it in many different ways. The structure creates challenges associated with human perceptions. Individuals effect how minor or severe human perceptions are played out in work situations. Leaders and managers need to be aware and look for processes to help control the human perceptions from overtaking the ultimate goal of the VWE, which is to allow flexibility in producing a productive work environment.

As I have been discussing throughout the book, there are indeed human perceptions associated with the VWE. These human perceptions create a challenge for all involved in the VWE. That challenge comes in the way the structure and the humans react to the work environment. This includes coworkers, managers, and leaders. Since my study, I have personally continued to manage virtual workers and have shared this theory with other managers who manage virtual employees. In my personal experiences and those of other managers, we have seen this theory realized in our experiences.

## Recap of Human Perceptions

Before going into the theory in greater detail, I believe it is important to summarize the prior chapters by presenting Table 8.1. The table lays out the human perceptions associated with people, process, and

*Table 8.1  Dos and Don'ts*

| Dos and Don'ts | Trust | Isolation | Presence |
|---|---|---|---|
| People | Do follow through with your commitments and don't let betrayal or a broken promise go unaddressed | Do include the virtual worker in decisions and don't leave them out of important discussions | Do make a work place available for the virtual worker and don't leave them alone to define their own level of presence |
| Process | Do test the communication process all the time and don't let signs of disengagement go unattended | Do involve the entire workforce in the change process and don't make a change and inform the virtual worker after the fact | Do create a sense of inclusiveness for all and don't ever forget the virtual worker in an ad hoc meeting |
| Practice | Do develop a daily practice to monitor the workforce and don't treat traditional and virtual workers differently | Do establish regular face-to-face meetings and don't ever let the virtual worker go longer than a few days without checking in | Do provide all traditional office support activities and don't establish engagement rules and then let them lapse |

practice. This table should help in reminding each of us how the human perceptions discussed in this book related to the people, process, and practice need to be part of managing the VWE. This table along with the theory are the cornerstone for leading and managing the virtual workers.

## Summary of the Results

When designing my study, I anticipated that the human perceptions would have a direct effect on the ability of the virtual workers to accept change because of the negative aspects felt by the virtual worker in regards to several human perceptions. I had picked trust, isolation, and presence for the reason I have discussed in the other chapters and how they interact with the VWE.

In addition, I have always believed that these three human perceptions have a direct effect on all humans and how they interact with their

environment. To help illustrate this point, I will provide an example related to each so that the point of how these perceptions are part of all environments is clear. If it is vivid, then you can look for other areas where the human perceptions I have used can be highlighted throughout your different environments.

For trust, it is not a reach to think of any personal relationship that you have and how trust directly effects the feelings associated with this human perception. In terms of isolation, if you are a parent or if you have ever been a child, which I know all of you have been at some point, you know the feeling of isolation. According to my wife, I still have some very childlike behavior. The example for isolation is when we have either sent our children or have been sent as a child to your room. Remember the feeling of isolation associated with this environment. Finally, as an example of presence, we have all seen when a child plays a sport at a young age and their athletic prowess can often be directly related to their level of presence in their sport. We have all witnessed the young child standing in the outfield looking at the daisies or watching a butterfly go by versus watching the action of the game.

Therefore, I begin to think that these three human perceptions must be involved in the work environment and, in particular, these must have an impact on the VWE. I had thought that the issues I had faced with managing virtual workers was somehow related to the lack of trust, feeling of isolation, and overall lack of work presence felt by the worker. I had been managing virtual works for some time at that point and was noticing that I was having difficulty in different ways, yet they always seemed to come back to one of the human perceptions. Other managers were also experiencing the same things, and we all struggled with what was challenging us as managers who had thought allowing people to work virtually would be an easy thing. We thought that by simply letting people to work where they wanted, we would get better results and the individuals would be markedly happier.

Not so easy. The reactions that I often faced was comments such as "I was the last to know," "I don't feel connected to the group any longer," "things just seem to happen and then I find out," and "at times it is hard to get my work done as I don't have all the things available to me." The one that I believe really set the course for my work and the

focus of not only my research but also the knowledge is that one day I would write a book to share with other managers to find a solution to this work structure which has resulted in a passion of mine was the comment that goes something like this: "I can't make that happen [meeting, call, deadline] because I am working remote." "I would like to help but when I am working at home it is really hard for me to get these things done." Come on, isn't that the crux of the VWE. It is called *work* not virtual, it is not "I can get to it when I can" or "if I was in the office I could participate." Let us not forget, it is called *virtual work*. Therefore, I set out to find out if my hunch was true.

Even though my initial hunch revolved around the concept of change in the VWE, what came out of the research was a far more reaching valuable concept. That concept related to how the virtual worker often defines their reasons for being able to work virtually revolves around productivity. What became evident was that the human perceptions were related to productivity and not directly related to change acceptance.

What the participants were worried about was making sure that they showed the organization that they could be productive before and after the change occurred. This pointed to a new look at how change is actually dealt with within the VWE. This new view was related to productivity and not really about the acceptance of change. What became clear in the research was that the participants wanted to focus on productivity and not on change as I once thought. One very interesting point that occurred to me right from the beginning was the participants reported what they thought was defined as productive and not what the company might have thought was productive. They did not tie this to the organizations' version of productivity in their focus on productivity.

This became what I called a self-fulfilling concept in regards to their productivity level. This starts to lay the groundwork for a potential separation between the self-fulfilling virtual workers' level of productivity and the organizations' level of productivity they are supporting. It is not a far reach to say that at some point, the self-fulfilling approach to productivity might start to deviate away from the mission of the organization.

Based on the study's findings, the draft prototype model was modified to represent a new theory and model, named *Change–Self-Efficacy Loop*

*Theory.* The results supported a modification to the initial prototype model by creating interlacing circles associated with the human perceptions rather than the interplay of the human perceptions causing a direct acceptance to deep organizational change. This new model also includes a new element of self-efficacy to help define the productivity level discussed by the participants in the research. The new model is depicted in Figure 8.1.

The model is designed to show the outward world or forces of change or events that make up the outer ring. This outer ring is in constant motion and serves as push and pull to the trust, isolation, and presence inner circles. The push and pull comes from the fact that as events occur and put pressure or release pressure on the inner circles of trust, isolation, and presence, they effect the environment. The pressure forces the human perceptions to be either more or less a focus for the individual related to working and defining how they need to look at productivity. This moves the individuals from their current state to a new state. Every time an event occurs, which happens often in the work environment, the perceptions of
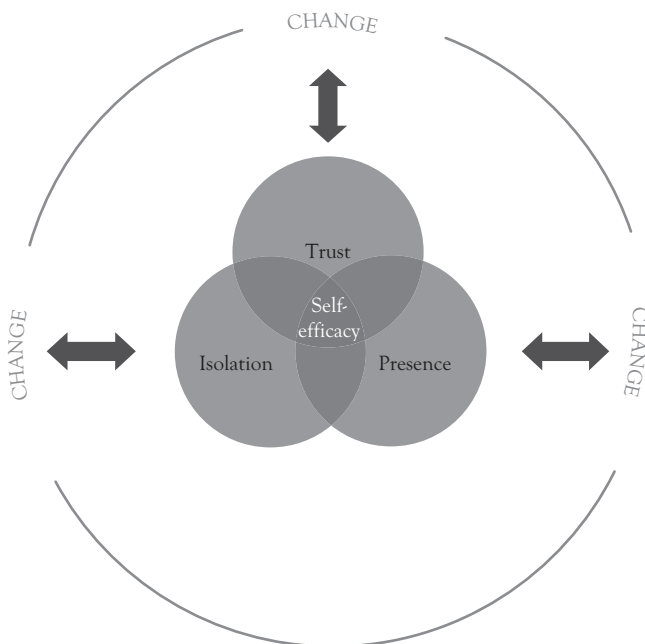


*Figure 8.1  Change–self-efficacy model*

trust, isolation, and presence are tested. They need to be reset or evaluated by the individual experiencing the event. The individual needs to make adjustments to their current level of trust, isolation, or presence. As an example, does the individual trust more or less based on the event occurring? Does the individual feel more isolated than they did before the event? Is my level of work presence impacted by this event?

## Applying the Theory

The study gave me a profound relook at the initial model and the concept behind change acceptance in the VWE. An aspect not originally thought of was that even though change occurred, what really mattered was the productivity of the participant. This was not a factor of whether the participant was in a traditional work environment or a virtual one but that productivity had to be established and proved before and after the change occurred for the virtual worker.

A conclusion associated with this element of change acceptance and productivity pointed to a new look at the prototype model of the research. When the research started, the model looked at the interplay between the human perceptions related to change acceptance. There was a design and a thought that the level of trust, isolation, and presence would drive the virtual workers' ability to accept change. This assumption was based on the premise that if there virtual worker felt a lower degree of trust, felt isolated, or felt a lack of presence, they would find it difficult to accept deep organizational change.

What the research showed was that change acceptance was not directly related to the human perceptions but rather that change would occur and the virtual worker had to accept it to keep their position. The perceptions became a focal point for the participants to help define productivity rather than change acceptance. Instead of the interplay between these human perceptions and how they would affect the virtual worker's ability to accept deep organizational change, the model needed to show how the virtual worker perceives their level of productivity related to the change. By adjusting the model to show a Venn diagram with the overlapping areas creating a level of productivity creates a more accurate model. This model as shown in Figures 8.2 and 8.3 has two interesting aspects related

to managing virtual workers. The first diagram (Figure 8.2) shows how the trust, isolation, and presence circle overlap to create a self-efficacy circle. This is important to have the balance associated with these circles. It is the responsibility of the leaders and managers to watch how closely related these circles remain to ensure the balance needed for the common mission. By monitoring the closeness of the circles, the leader or manager can determine if there is a potential problem that needs to be addressed.

The fact that all the human perception circles come together supports the premise that there is a connection between the organizational goals and mission and the individual's self-efficacy. There is a connection between the organization and the individual. This makes for success in accomplishing and achieving a good productivity level for both.

The second model (Figure 8.3) shows how if the perceptions get further from the middle and move away from the self-efficacy point the sense of productivity defined as self-efficacy might create a void between the self-defined level of productivity of the individual versus the level of organizational productivity. As mentioned earlier, this is when there is a
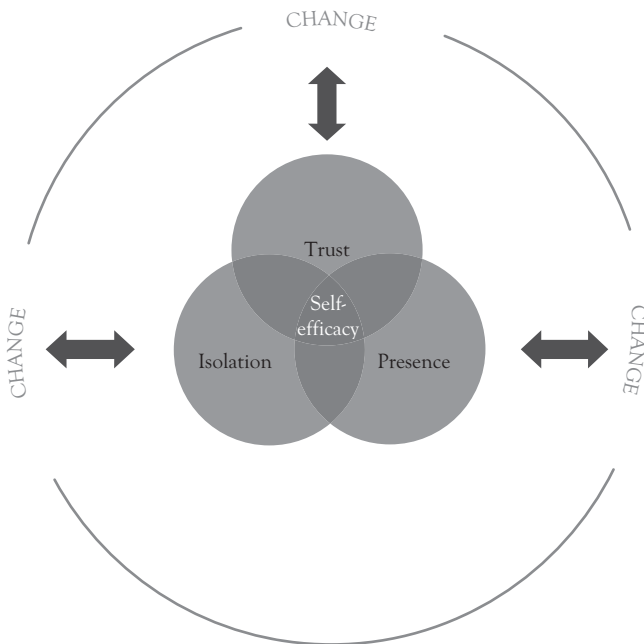


*Figure 8.2  Change–self-efficacy loop model with congruence*
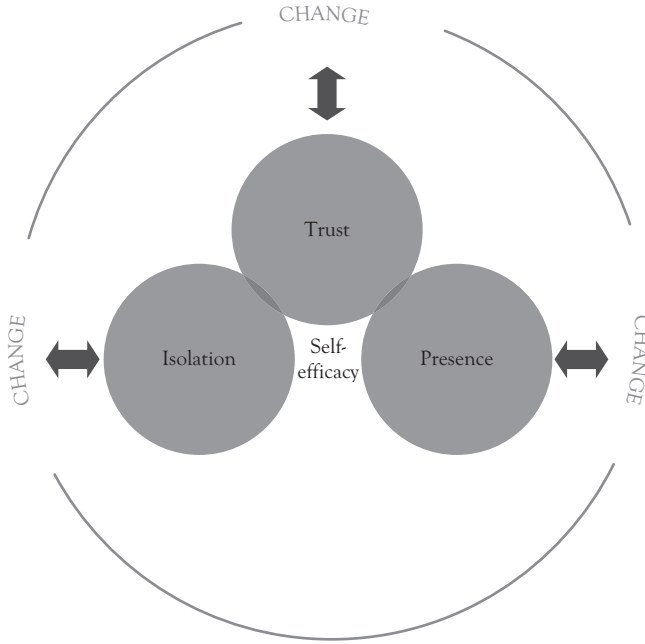
*Figure 8.3  Change–self-efficacy model with less congruence*

potential problem occurring and the distance of the circles needs to be closed. As the individuals' feelings change and they pull the circles away from the middle, the individual's self-efficacy will increase.

The aspect of the human perceptions being connected or overlapping, thus creating a joined self-efficacy point and, therefore, a common productivity level, is where the theory puts forth the benefits of how an organization can manage virtual workers to have a common productivity level. When the human perceptions are not connected or overlapping, they create a void or disconnected self-efficacy, thus a mismatched productivity level. The theory presumes the number of events that occur without being managed by the organization will allow an ever-widening disconnect between the organization and the individual. The more events happen or the more loops that occur the further away the human perceptions will be thus forcing a deeper disconnect and disjointed self-efficacy point.

This widening is the foundation of the theory. The distance of the overlapping human perceptions circles drive the connection between the

individual's level of productivity and the organizations. The concept of this new look at productivity is discussed in the following. This is followed by how productivity is compared and redefined as self-efficacy.

## Use of the Theory

The study resulted in a new theory related to productivity and the VWE. Based on the results of the study, what became clear was that a theory had to take into account how human perceptions affected not the acceptance of change but the virtual workers' productivity level before and after the change.

By using the concepts associated with the theory, it provides a practical approach in monitoring the human perceptions. It is not something that has to be actually measured but the concept is about getting a read of the individuals' interpretations associated with the human perceptions. By doing so, the leader or manager can get a feeling at any given time and make the appropriate adjustments to ensure that the level of trust, isolation, and presence is suitable to have productive and successful virtual workers.

The practical implication showed that productivity and the human perceptions of trust, isolation, and presence would affect the virtual workers' ability to work effectively in this structure. It brought to light the aspect that individuals use self-efficacy in defining productivity. This was related to the virtual worker accepting change at the organizational level by a justification of productivity of the participant to either remain or become a virtual worker.

The model reflects that trust, isolation, and presence need to be monitored in order to determine how productive the virtual worker will be after an event occurs. In regard to these three human perceptions, it is important that the organization keep in mind how the individual's self-defined productivity stays in line with the needs of the organization. If there is a continued self-defined productivity that is derived through self-efficacy related to the virtual workers' tasks that occur over an extended period of time, there could be a divergence between the individual's results and what the organization needs.

## Change–Self-Efficacy Loop Theory

The results of the research has produced a theory related to how individuals deal with changes and human perceptions. The Change–Self-Efficacy Loop Theory provides a loop or circular reaction to an event that occurs within the VWE. This loop creates tension between the individual defined level of productivity and the organization's definition of productivity. As reported by the participants, they justified their reaction to the human perceptions by comparing them to a productivity level. This productivity level served to ease the virtual workers' perceptions related to isolation, trust, and presence.

As the models depict, congruence is an important aspect related to this theory. Congruence allows for the exploration of the individual's beliefs versus their actions. Value congruence is defined as the similarities of a person's values compared to those of the organization (Gordon, Lamn, and Purser 2010). Value congruence deals with individuals dealing with events occurring to them and how they react to those events.

If the individual's and organizational values match, there is greater congruency. If they don't match, there is greater resistance and a lack of value congruence occurs. Cognitive dissonance is often mentioned when it comes to the individual associated with change (Heath and Heath 2010). This struggle between what a person thinks and feels about a situation and what a person does is often a major factor in an individual's commitment to the event. Individuals simply accepting the event and then justifying their acceptance by being productive supports the aspects of value congruence and cognitive dissonance. Building on these two concepts and redefining the productivity expressed by individuals as self-efficacy, this theory establishes the tie between an event and self-efficacy. Further elaborating on this theory, it is the premise of the theory that the more that an individual deals with events, the more they will rely on their own productivity level; they will exercise more self-efficacy. This connection is the foundation of the theory, in that if an individual's focus on self-defined productivity rather than the organization's, there will be a mismatch. If the organization does not make sure that there are clear expectations associated with productivity and the more organizational change occurs, the more the individual will separate their productivity level to that of the organizations.

I want to lay out a scenario that can be used for this chapter. I would also ask that as we work through this, we reflect back to Chapter 2 and the way Vic handled his new job and the situations he encountered to see if he was creating a future state that could result and be affected by this theory. Let's look at each of these three perceptions related to this theory. Trust is the first perception.

## Trust and the Theory

If an event occurs that strains the level of trust or, as discussed earlier in the book, raises its evil twin distrust, what will the individual do? Trust is a foundational element associated with relationships. I believe that we have established that within the work environment, it is critical to form relationships; therefore, trust is in integral part of how the work environment functions. If an event brings forth a betrayal, it is common for the individual to feel less trust associated with the event and the people associated with the event.

In terms of an example related to this aspect, let's look at a situation where an individual is approved to work virtually. On doing so, the manager assures the individuals that they will not miss out on any opportunity related to advancement and the top tasks associated with the department. After a couple of months, it is announced that there is a promotion in the department. The manager explains that all of those who were eligible for the opportunity were given a fair chance for it. The virtual employee calls the manager and asks why they were not given a chance to interview for the position and the manager responds by telling the employee that they believed that there was enough challenges with them working virtually and that if there was a future opportunity, they would be given a chance to interview. What level of trust does the virtual employee now have toward the manager? Do you think the action taken by the manager will endear the employee to them? Given this situation, the employee will now begin to focus on a level of self-reliance related to working within the department.

Therefore, the individual will start to rely on self-efficacy in trying to complete the task they were assigned. Given this situation, the individual will still try and complete the task but they will do so by relying on their individual strengths, as they no longer trust the manager to give them

a fair chance. By relying on their own strengths, a mismatch between the individual accomplishment and the expectation of the organization can occur. This results in the individual having trust pulled away from the self-efficacy circle in the model and creates a gap between individual and organizational productivity. This begins to pull the circles apart, thus creating a lack of congruency related to self-efficacy and organizational mission.

## Isolation and the Theory

Similar to trust, let's assume the event now strains the level of isolation felt by the individual. In this situation, the event may isolate the individual more than prior conditions. Let's take this following situation to illustrate this effect. A virtual worker calls into the department meeting at the scheduled time. As they wait for others to join the call, they hear people gathering in the meeting room. When the meeting starts, the manager references the meeting that the department had on the previous day afternoon and says that based on that meeting there will be changes to how the department meetings will run going forward. At the conclusion of the meeting, the virtual employee asks to speak to the manager. The manager agrees and says that they will call the employee once they get back to their office. After 15 minutes, the virtual employee calls the manager's office. The manager answers the call and when questioned about the previous day's meeting and the new way department meetings will run, the manager explains that several of the department members stopped by the office late previous day. The manager continues to explain that he called an ad hoc meeting with the department members and they all decided how to run the department meetings going forward. When the virtual employee asks why he was not called, the manager simply responds with "since it was an ad hoc meeting that just sprung up that they in inadvertently forgot to call the virtual employee." The virtual worker now is isolated from the rest of the department. Even though the manager explained what had happened after the fact and briefed the employee, the employee now senses that they are out of sight, out of mind and they begin to feel isolated from the rest of the department.

By the individual feeling more isolated, they will still desire to finish the task. However, because they now feel more isolated, they again will have to rely on their own strengths, thus they are focused more on self-efficacy. It is natural for an employee who feels left out to start to draw conclusions that they must work harder to prove themselves and try and find ways not to be left out of future decisions. In terms of the feeling of isolation, it creates a feeling of being alone. If an individual feels alone, they are less likely to check or validate their actions compared to others even though they believe that they must do this. The doubt that creeps into the thinking of the virtual worker makes it more stressful and they begin to doubt if they should check with others to get clarification or if this checking will make them seem insecure and weak compared to the other members of the department. Without a validation of one's actions, it is easy to see how the action of one individual might be disconnected to others. This points to another movement away from the self-efficacy inner circle, thus creating a gap. A second movement away from the combined congruency leads to a separation between the individual's and organization's definitions of productivity.

## Presence and the Theory

The third and final human perception associated with the theory is presence. To better illustrate this perception, I want to use a real example that has occurred to me in managing virtual workers. I have a staff that involves both traditional and virtual workers. To keep this simple, they perform the same function for the business. Some do this function colocated, while others perform this function as virtual workers.

In this particular case, the virtual worker started to have trouble making the deliverables required and was also missing deadlines. I asked their direct manager what was going on and when the last time they had a face-to-face meeting. I was taken aback by the answer. The manger responded after a long pause "well it has been a while." I stated that our policy was that we wanted to make sure that we had regular face-to-face meetings with our virtual workers. This policy was acknowledged but what happened next was interesting. The manager responded with

statements that tried to justify the lack of following the policy. The comments focused on how the individual virtual worker's performance was less than expected and that they needed the virtual worker to step up and start performing to the expectation. I suggested that before we judge the situation, we travel to see the individual.

We traveled to see this individual and soon found out what was going on in the first few minutes. After the individual thanked us for coming to see them, they went right into the trouble they were having in completing the tasks assigned. This individual had created their own work presence by creating an office at their home. They took this work presence to the level that was causing the problem in performance. Not only did they create their own work presence but they also started to have technical issues with their computer, printer, Internet, and the like. This lack of proper working equipment resulted in a hardship that was the root of missing deadlines. Their company-provided computer had stopped working. The printer they were given had broken and their Internet connection was slower than needed to effectively communicate to the organization.

When they were asked why they had not called the company helpdesk to get it working, they responded by saying they didn't think they would get the support, as they were working from their home and they thought they needed to fix the problems themselves. When they were asked if they were working in the office what would they do, they said that they would have placed a helpdesk ticket to get the problems fixed. This highlights the struggle that takes place when a virtual worker creates an individual work presence. The answer was simple yet the question for help never came forward and the results were a lack of presence to the organization and ultimately effected the performance. In this example, the individual virtual worker took it upon themselves to try and fix the problem, as they created an out of sight, out of mind mind-set. It is easy to see after the fact that creating a personal work presence resulted in poor performance and productivity was negatively impacted. Related to the theory, the gap became obvious and the results were less than acceptable. The pull that occurred from the lack of presence moved the individual to fend for themselves, which resulted in less than optimal working conditions. The theory played out very clearly that the more an individual relies on

themselves, the gap between individual and organization productivity was strained.

It is interesting that the individual knew that the company was responsible for making sure that they had the tools they needed to accomplish the task and even acknowledged that if they were in the office, they would get a helpdesk request but yet once they created their own work presence, they had no longer seen this as an option. I used this to illustrate a clear example of how presence is effected in the VWE. I submit that this happens more often than not; it might not always rise to the level in the example, but it does occur as individuals rely on themselves for getting the work done. In this case, the individual's technology expertise was not very strong, as they were not able to fix the problem yet they still believed that they were indeed fixing the problem. They were unable to see the true fix, calling in a helpdesk ticket, and relied on their own ability to fix the problem. This level of work presence pulled the individual away from the inner circle and made the individual rely on their own ability rather than the organization's working structure.

These three examples show how trust, isolation, and presence are part of the VWE, and if they are not properly managed, they pull away from the organizational expectations and cause concerns related to working in this VWE. The concern as illustrated in the model shown in Figure 8.3 shows how if the trust, isolation, and presence circles don't overlap with the self-efficacy point, then the individual is indeed reacting and managing through what they believe is important. This pulling away is the foundational aspect of the model and explains why if the perceptions discussed don't overlap, the individual is left to their own interpretation of productivity.

In conclusion, the model shows how the overlap of the three perceptions is critical to ensure that the virtual worker and the organization need to have a common understanding to truly define a level of productivity that will result in success for both the individual and the organization. It is reasonable to expect that an individual left to work in an environment that lacks trust, creates a level of isolation, and produces a presence that is different from others will lead to a disconnect between the individual and the organization.

I offer for future or additional reading related to self-efficacy that you look to the leading expert on self-efficacy, Albert Bandura (1997). In particular, his book titled "Self-efficacy: The exercise of control" is an excellent read concerning the different aspects of self-efficacy.

# People

The people who are affected by this theory and model is everyone. This model even though focused more on the VWE relates to all working conditions. People need to feel a sense of trust in all they do. Whether it is in a family, friend, or work relationship, trust is needed for the connection to be healthy. People need to feel secure in their surroundings. People are social creatures and the level of trust one feels helps to define how socially secure people feel. As was discussed in the trust chapter, the level of connection one has helps determine the level of trust one feels. A secure social environment will allow people to focus on the task at hand and not worry about the insecurities that arise when the conditions lack trust. This aspect of feeling secure in their surrounding also can be seen in terms of isolation and presence. If a person feels isolated, they will have a feeling of being disconnected. If a person lacks presence with others, again they can also feel disconnected. Therefore, it is critical that all people are subject to this theory and model.

# Process

The organization has to look for processes that make sure that all individuals are part of decisions. As we have discussed, the lack of being part of decisions can lead to a moving away from the organization. The concept of self-reliance through self-efficacy is what the theory and model addresses. We have all been in situations where we have a different level of confidence in the organization if we are asked to be part of the decision. Even when we don't get our way if we have been asked to participate, we feel better about the situation. We have seen through the use of the model when trust, isolation, and presence are part of the solution for the individual, the individual is left standing on their own to determine the level of productivity and how they produce the task they are required

to complete. The organizational process must ensure that the circles of trust, isolation, and presence stay overlapping with the point of self-efficacy to produce the most success in the work environment.

## Practice

It is not enough to have a process that attempts to ensure that all people are involved in the decision-making process. The daily practice exercised by leaders and managers as well as coworkers is critical to reap the maximum benefit of the VWE. As I mentioned in the people section of this chapter, the theory is not only for the VWE but to all aspects of a working environment. As the old saying goes, practice makes perfect. I am not going to submit that the theory will make any work environment perfect but it will help. Anytime we are dealing with humans as a major variable in any aspect of functioning, we will run into situations where the mere aspect of human interpretations and complexities will arise. If you are a leader or a manager, you understand the complexities that comes with managing people. I simply ask that when you deal with virtual workers, you practice the concepts discussed in the theory and focus on the overlapping circles. Practice making the work environment a trusting place, a place where people are not isolated and where people are present in decisions.

## Some Questions to Think About

How do the circles of trust, isolation, and presence affect the concept of self-efficacy?

Do the aspects of trust, isolation, and presence really affect the virtual worker?

Can a person still be successful when they lack trust in their working relationship?

Can a person be successful when they are isolated from others?

Can a person who creates their own level of work presence be successful related to the rest of the organization?

# CHAPTER 9

# Productivity

*The productivity of a work group seems to depend on how the group members see their own goals in relation to the goals of the organization.*
—Ken Blanchard

As we reach the end of the book related to the virtual work environment (VWE), I hope it has been clear that productivity is a driving force behind this work structure. It is a driving force not only because of the theory and model that I discussed in the book but also because organizations define their success by being productive. What started out for me to be a look at acceptance of change in the VWE resulted in what is fundamental to the success of an organization and that is measuring productivity. This driving force has always been part of any work performance; however, it seems to take on a different view when we are dealing with virtual workers. This different view is because virtual workers seem to define the ability to work virtually by comparing their existence to the output that they can achieve. You might argue that all people focus on productivity to maintain their work. That is true; however, the aspects with working virtual seem to take on a justification that being productive allows for the VWE to exist. It seemed obvious to say that all organizations and structures must be productive to exist. I ask you to reflect on this for a moment. When we worked in a traditional work environment, did you justify your job by comparing it or justifying it by comparing it to how productive you could be in that environment? Did you look at changes that occurred or events and draw a comparison to those by being more or less productive? I submit that you did at some level but that the level might have involved all department members. It could have been mentioned in how the organization really affected productivity. Let's recall the discussion early on when we looked at how Ford designed the production line and used humans as a means to an end to produce more. Those line

workers weren't justifying their job by being more productive; they were working collectively to produce more product based on how the organization structured itself.

What about when Taylor defined the organization as a machine. There were no individuals justifying their jobs as a part of the machine rather the organization was defined as a productive machine. The aspect of being productive is not new. It is, however, taking on a different approach when we justify the employee's activity within an organizational structure as being individually productive.

I want to use a sports example to drive this point home. We all have seen when teams go out and get the best players money can buy, yet they fail to achieve their collective goals because the individuals are functioning and are more focused on their individual accomplishments (productivity) rather than that of the team. You can find this in almost every one of the major sports that have been played in the United States. Baseball has had the Yankees who have had the highest payroll yet have not always won the World Series with those high-priced teams. American football has had the Washington Redskins and Dallas Cowboys whose owners have spent well beyond the other teams yet failed to achieve Super Bowl victories with their high-priced teams. These examples are presented to highlight that even paying for the highest or best players does not guarantee success. I am sure that you can find others that show this point.

Recalling that part of the virtual team concept is to get the best available employees regardless of where they are to form the best team to achieve the best results. Hopefully, we can see that this is not a guarantee for success. Therefore, we must look for ways to get the best out of the virtual employee related to the goals and mission of the organization so that collectively they are the most productive and, therefore, the most successful.

To measure productivity, we need to look back at the definition of success for the organization.

Success: The definition of success in theory is everyone is completely on the same page and productivity working in lockstep toward the same mission with no sense of confusion.

It can be said that to be productive, one must accomplish the task given. Again let's go back to look at the beginning chapters associated with how the early organizations' behaviorists defined productivity.

They looked at the productivity of businesses that focused on the mechanical side, collectively working faster, more efficiently, so that the organization would have high productivity. The production line is the clearest point for me to illustrate this. There was no human benefit for the workers in developing the production line. There was great Societal human benefit because of the creation of the production line, as we are now able to get more products to the market. I ask at what cost to the individual worker? This was about the economic and collective human outcome compared to the human satisfaction or individual human benefit.

This book has attempted to draw the line through the use of the Change–Self-Efficacy Loop Theory between the mechanical side and the human side.

The humanistic management approach addresses the side of the individual worker related to their individual benefit. Abraham Maslow introduced the human approach by focusing on the human nature; he focused on human needs. The earlier management theorists such as Follett and Barnard and even Mayo were focused on a satisfaction level achieved at the individual human level. Maslow even defined a hierarchy of the satisfaction of this human need.

## A Quick Look at True Productivity

We have determined that the production line allowed more product to get to the market. I would be remiss if I didn't quickly mention the Just in Time manufacturing or the Japanese production system. This process that was highly successful started in the Japanese factories and was mimicked in many industries throughout the world. It was designed to eliminate waste related to the production of a particular product. At its origin, it was still about getting more product to the market without waste associated with the increased production. As this concept spread throughout the world in the 1980s, there was greater success related to waste, yet the aspect of still producing more products for the greater market remained

in place. I wanted to mention this type of manufacturing to make sure that the discussion was complete. I did not want to change the focus of the point I am making here, but also felt that it was important to be thorough in terms of the different type of manufacturing related to production. Back to the point related to a true look at productivity.

Creating or enhancing a way to bring more goods or services to the market defines productivity. In an office environment, this might be a little harder to truly see, as there is not always an end product to show that productivity increased. Because of this, within the service environment, we often find ourselves measuring our productivity by time.

Let's use the following example to make this point clear.

If we produce 80 widgets in an eight-hour day, that equates to 10 widgets per hour. On the other hand, if we produce 80 widgets in 10 hours, that equates to 6.67 widgets per hour. Producing the same number of widgets (80) within longer hours does that mean that we are more productive?

I believe that there is a mental dichotomy that occurs in this situation. We feel like we worked harder because we worked longer hours yet we actually produced less per hour because the number of actual widgets did not increase. Think about this in the VWE. People are now working longer and longer hours yet they might not be actually producing more.

With the blurred line between work and home life balance, all of a sudden the realization happens where we are producing less rather than more. We feel like we are working harder so we must be producing more. We are working harder and we spend more time refining the process that we know or believe we are good at (enter self-efficacy), yet to the organization, we are actually less productive. How can this be? As we press harder and harder to be more productive, we become more and more disjointed with the organization and panic begins to set in. Looking at a quote from Timothy Ferriss, "The way we measure productivity is flawed. People checking their Blackberry over dinner is not the measure of productivity." Yet, don't we feel this way? If we are working more hours and at all hours of the day, we must indeed be more productive. In the VWE without proper leadership and management related to this situation, this could be the beginning of the end.

## Support of This Thinking

In my research, I found that the virtual workers tended to justify their ability to work in the VWE and accept changes or events by measuring it through a self-defined perception of productivity. Productivity was the cornerstone in not only allowing the virtual workers to be and remain a virtual worker, but it also showed that this self-defining definition of productivity strongly correlated to self-efficacy.

What came out of this study was the new theory, the change–self-efficacy loop theory, which shows that virtual workers are more concerned with proving self-defined productivity levels versus acceptance of changes associated with the organization. It is important to look at the acceptance of change or reaction to an event as it relates to the VWE for a few reasons. This book is not about acceptance of change, but it is very important to spend a little time discussing change, as change often occurs for the virtual worker. Recall the discussion on  swift trust that discussed the aspect of a team coming together for a particular task. Often the tasks assigned to virtual teams are for short periods of time. The virtual workers change not only by team composition, but there are organizational changes that occur. An example of this is when the virtual worker's management changes or a policy or procedure changes and the virtual worker is not fully aware of this change. I discussed these as examples in prior chapters.

Therefore, it is my assertion that the more times a change occurs within and between the organization and the virtual worker, the wider is the connection between the individual's productivity level, which is positively correlated to self-efficacy, and to the goals and mission of the organization. The theory I have identified can help managers, organizational leaders, and virtual workers to be more successful in terms of productivity related to the VWE.

An interesting aspect that occurred when the participants discussed productivity they was that talked about both the advantages and disadvantages related to productivity. The following excerpts from my research show how the participants introduced productivity in their work environment.

## Comments Related to Productivity

Some of the comments related to individual productivity also spoke to how the company measures productivity. The organization's productivity level was expressed in terms of being monitored or having the company watch how much they worked. One participant commented that "if people can't be visually monitored they are not productive" in terms of the organization's belief related to the virtual worker. They added that there appears to be a "productivity or trust cycle." Another participant commented that he is "driven internally to get the job done." They also said that the organization "can check calendars on line to see if you are busy or not."

Participants said that "I am much more productive without the distractions." They commented that things such as "phones ringing, social chatter, coffee breaks and talk around the copier and printer where eliminated by working virtual." Some participants further explained that they liked to be by themselves and this allowed for the highest level of productivity. They listed that they did not have to commute any longer thus being more productive and could also throw a load of wash in and that "this made life so much simpler." Some of the participants did mention being isolated in this discussion as a negative, but commented that the "productivity outweighs this negative issue."

Some points made by the participants were that there was no time wasted sitting in traffic and that there was more "family time." The work schedule is convenient in this work environment and it saves time in getting into and out of meetings. They also said that they "still have to crank out the work" and commented that they can "check e-mail 24 hours a day and they are on the clock 24/7, they enjoyed this but it can be a burden."

They were able to set their own schedule, even if it means working late into the evening. They could plan their schedule and their days without an organization telling them when to do things.

Finally, comments on the productivity issue such as "I get a lot more work done as there are no water cooler discussions, and I don't have to go to lunch" were made. They said, "the bottom line is I am not just killing time by 'jaw jacking'."

All of this highlights the fact that even though we might feel like we are more productive, are we? Going back to the example of the number of units produced in the allotted work hours, are we indeed more productive, or do we justify the feeling of being more productive against the end results. I want to take a look at each of the human perceptions against productivity to close.

## Trust and Productivity

The aspect of productivity is a way to justify the participant's ability to work in the VWE because of trust. If the virtual worker was trusted, then they would be allowed to work virtually.

The aspect of trust being related to productivity was similar in part to the definition of trust when trust resulted in an outcome from one individual to another's. This supports the assertion that Drapeau and Galford (2003) put for when they comment that trust is considered a very important aspect of organizational effectiveness. For an organization to be effective, they must be a productive organization.

Virtual workers might believe that as long as they did what the organization had asked, they were trusted. If they were trusted they had to be productive. This places the virtual worker to maintain trust or it would erode.

In this way of defining trust and tying it to productivity takes the concept of trust away from the more traditionally viewed way. Most individuals think of trust in terms of character: a sincere person, having high ethics or integrity (Covey 2006). This type of definition appears to be tied to two or more people trusting others to perform a task or to achieve a result. The self-defining aspect of productivity and using trust as way to work virtually seems to redefine the aspect of trust shared among others and established a self-defined level of productivity, thus proving a trusting relationship.

This appears to prove productivity as a more self-reflective and self-satisfying way. As long as the virtual workers could prove to themselves often through self-efficacy, they were productive and in turn felt trusted.

## Productivity and Isolation

The aspect of productivity and isolation is once again a self-defined concept because the individual virtual worker will determine their productivity level by their actions. If I am working in isolation, how would I define my work day? I might very well measure it by the clock. If I work 10 hours versus, when I am in the office, I worked eight hours, don't I feel like I was more productive? I could also look at the output of my work.

Employee productivity can be an assessment of the efficiency of the individual worker. Productivity can be evaluated in terms of the output of an individual employee over a specific time period. If I am working alone, how do I really know at any given time how productive I am versus the output of other workers? As in the example above, if I produce 80 widgets in 10 hours yet the rest of my team produces 80 widgets in eight hours, what is the relative comparison to who is more productive. This is what I call pseudo-productivity. Pseudo-productivity means that an individual thinks that they are more productive than or at least as productive as their coworkers. In reality, they are actually less productive but don't realize this lack of individual productivity, as they lack the consistent measure needed to truly determine the actual comparison of overall productivity. Think of this like the concept of social loafing that occurs in the office. When employees are colocated, the concept of social loafing can occur. The social peer pressure that happens tends to set the standard or expectation of all workers. When an individual is isolated, they may very well establish a level that they think is acceptable, yet it is not compared to the expectations of the organization as measured by the other workers. In reality, productivity can only be truly measured when a third independent person, often a manager, compares the two outputs.

Typically, the productivity of a given worker will be assessed relative to an average for employees doing similar work. Because much of the success of any organization relies on the productivity of its workforce, employee productivity is an important consideration for businesses. It seems clear that working in isolation could result in a skewed view of productivity.

## Productivity and Presence

Presence similar to isolation can have an effect on the interpretation of being productive. The perceptions might seem similar, but there is a fundamental difference between the two. This difference can be seen in terms of the lens in which one defines productivity. As I discussed, isolation can set a false or pseudo-productivity level. The lack of presence can also relate to a level of pseudo-productivity, but with presence, the measurement of the corporate mission might be when the disconnect happens. In this situation, the concept of self-efficacy is more important. When an individual creates an individual work presence, they might be working on things that are completely different from the desire of the organization. It is not a matter of simply producing less widgets compared to the coworkers but with the lack of presence, the actual output could be different. Instead of producing widgets, the virtual worker might be producing gadgets, as they lack the messaging of the organization. Let me provide an example to get this point across.

If there is a virtual worker whose job is to produce proposals for the organization, they might write it in a way that they believe is important but it doesn't match the expectations of the organization. I have personally seen this happen. The work product requires rewrites, as the virtual worker's proposal lacks the themes and other aspects the organization expects to be in the proposal. By the individual relying on self-efficacy, they will tend to write how and what they believe is important, a self-defined approach, versus the themes expressed by the organization.

I believe that this is why Yahoo CEO Marissa Mayer sparked a controversy when she announced an end to the company's telecommuting program. A leaked internal memo emphasized that "physically being together" will be important to communication and collaboration within the company. This has raised questions about the benefits of working from home.

If the virtual worker is working alone and lacks colocated local presence of coworkers, how can they truly asses the results of their productivity in real time? The aspect of collaboration is challenged without local presence. The only way the disconnect is found is after the work

product is done and a review takes place, thus causing rework associated with the end product.

## Final Thoughts

There was one specific study that explored the productivity related to telecommuting. The study performed by Bulter, Aasheim, and Williams (2007) explored if telecommuters were more productive than their counterparts. The study was limited to one specific organization. The study showed that telecommuters in their sample proved to be more productive than their counterparts. The study measured productivity not by self-reporting but by the number of service calls that the virtual workers handled. The result of their study showed an increase in the number of calls handled by the virtual workers over a 27-month period. They concluded that there was positive support for increased productivity; however, they suggested that more than one organization needed to be examined to measure their results. I submit that studies need to look at the concept of pseudo-productivity across a larger sample and within different areas to really determine how productivity is effected by the VWE. Recall that the study I mentioned was not done by self- reporting but rather by a third party measuring the output.

Keep in mind the position that I am taking is that self-reporting might skew the results of productivity. There is no doubt that productivity is a critical aspect of validating the aspect of working in the VWE. When the participants of my study spoke passionately about how they all wanted to remain in the VWE, they talked about how their productivity was the cornerstone of this environment. We see this aspect in many different reports associated with a more productive work force. I challenge this to make sure that it is truly productive and not a pseudo-productivity. It is critical to think about if self-reporting productivity is a cornerstone for the virtual worker to justify their working in this VWE. This self-reporting definition needs to be matched with the mission, goals, and productivity of the organization to make the organization successful.

There was a circular mind-set that was repeated with each human perception. That circular mind-set related to the justification associated

with the human perceptions and the self-defined productivity levels. This circular mind-set was associated with each human perception and laid the foundation for the theory. A change–self-efficacy loop theory was created by the individuals consistently comparing their view of changes or events and equating them to productivity. This change–self-efficacy loop theory serves as an indicator to how successful the virtual worker will be in comparing the individual productivity to the organizational productivity. The comparison of the individual productivity to the organizational terms of productivity is a critical link in determining how successful the virtual worker will be within the new organizational structure.

It is reasonable to conclude that if the individual virtual workers continue to focus on their own productivity through self-efficacy related to occupational functioning, there could be a devaluing of the concept used by organizations. Organizations and managers who have virtual workers need to be aware of how the individual virtual worker perceives the human perceptions of trust, isolation, and presence to ensure that they are capable of staying in sync with the organization. It is equally important that the organization and the virtual worker measure productivity in a shared way. What the virtual worker does in terms of defining productivity needs to be the same as what the organization deems to be productive.

This will have a serious and direct effect on how the virtual worker can and will be a productive member of any organization. The change–self-efficacy loop model and theory can be the tool to ensure that there is mutual benefit for both the virtual worker and their organizations.

## People

As mentioned in the other chapters, the people are all of us. We have seen that the human perceptions of trust, isolation, and presence affect all of us. The people behind this new organizational structure must work in unison to be successful. Whether you are the virtual worker, the leader or manager of the virtual worker, or a coworker of the virtual worker, it is paramount that we understand all people are effected by the construct of the VWE.

## Process

I hope that you see that the process is critical to the success of the VWE. Organizations must implement processes to ensure that the virtual worker doesn't feel a lack of trust to the organization and coworkers. Equally important, the virtual worker must ensure that they do not individually create processes that alienate them from coworkers and the organization, thus creating a feeling of isolation or solitary confinement. Finally, the process developed by both the organization and virtual worker must establish a level of presence that allows the most productive environment for all.

## Practice

In terms of the practice that has to take place, we must really develop a working practice and not pay lip service to the people and process put in place to allow the VWE to exist. As I mentioned, practice can help make things perfect. I have repeated this phrase in the practice section because we must do this consistently and always. Practice will not be the magic that will make all of the challenges associated with the VWE go away. The true practice of some, if not all of the ideas discussed in this book will, go a long way in helping the VWE and the virtual worker be most successful.

## Some Questions to Think About

Is productivity the real measure of success for the VWE?

Is the concept of pseudo-productivity real?

Can an organization and an individual worker share a common definition of productivity?

Does a self-defining level of productivity equate to a stronger sense of self-efficacy?

Does the aspect of working longer hours and being on the clock 24/7 mean a person is more productive?

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# Index

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# The Human Side of Virtual Work
## *Managing Trust, Isolation, and Presence*
### Laurence M. Rose

The virtual work world is upon us. It is ever increasing as both workers and organizations become more familiar with this new structure. The way leaders and managers deal with the virtual worker will become increasingly more important. This book takes a look at the virtual work environment from a view of human perceptions. Trust, isolation, and presence are the three main human perceptions discussed throughout the book and are the foundation for the theory presented. The Change–Self-Efficacy Loop Theory provides the basis for a new tool to maximize the productivity level of the virtual worker.

The book takes a journey from the industrial revolution through a second shift or technology revolution which we are currently experiencing known as the virtual work environment. It presents argument and ideas to encourage all of us to take action now to prevent the potential negative outcomes that could affect many working in the virtual work environment. The book is designed for anyone associated with the virtual work environment. Based on the premise that the virtual work environment needs to be a productive alternative to the traditional work environment, the book focuses on variables that can create the most successful outcome.

**Laurence M. Rose (Larry) PhD** has been an executive leader for more than 14 years and has more than 30 years of government and commercial business and operational experience. He has coached and managed teams of multiple sizes and prides himself on their success. He taught classes at the business level in topics of contracts management, negotiations, and program management and has been recognized for his outstanding presentation style and approach to teaching. Larry received his BS in administration of justice at the Virginia Commonwealth University, his MS in administration of justice from American University, and his PhD in management and organization leadership from Cappella University.

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