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Cyber Ethics in Virtual Organizations

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Abstract

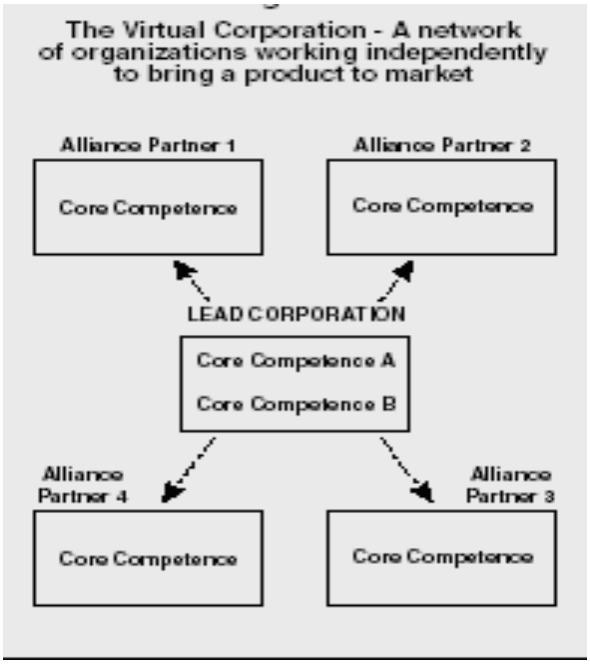
"Nothing is permanent, except change", says an adage. The great digital divide has shrunken the businesses and organization in the global arena. Gone are those days where the organisations of brick-and-mortar played a dominant role, it's the turn of digital or virtual organisations wherein the physical infrastructures are impasse. Now this is the era, where organizations are run by virtual team, virtual project and virtual communication. Many of us may raise their eye brows, whether is it possible to maintain ethics in an unstructured organization. Whatever and wherever might be the organization, the ethics remain to be the same.

Key Words: Virtual Organizations, Market Opportunity

Introduction

Virtual organizations are almost ephemeral, where their function is being temporarily associated with a service. It can be associated with virtual office, virtual teams, virtual leadership and of course virtual conduct. According to Hertel et al., virtual teams are work groups with members collaborating from geographically distant locations, using the electronic communication media, and reflecting recent trends of globalization and interdependent team work. Such organizations are formed by triggering of specific market opportunity.

Figure 1. A typical virtual organization formed by group of individual firms.



(Adapted from the Ray Grenier and George Metes model for a virtual organization)

The Lacunae of Virtual Organizations

1. Virtual organizations are time-specific in their operations.
2. They are mostly decentralized.
3. No line and staff principle. So misuse of authority and responsibility.
4. needs heavy investment and brings delayed ROI.
5. The way of strategic planning is unclear as there is no clearly defined organizational hierarchy and roles.
6. Hence co-ordination among the team members is not that much good, even though the team members are linked by communication technologies.
7. No face-to-face communication among the members.
8. may create ambiguous role among the employees
9. May cause a loss of control among the entire organization.

10. It is subjected to high flexible environment based on the demands and requirements of the customers and suppliers.

Common Sins in Virtual Organizations

The cyber-crimes which are associated with the traditional corporates are common in virtual organizations tool. Cranford (1996) opined that, virtual communications, protected by computers and miles of distance, can create a tendency for more aggressive and disrespectful behaviour. In this era of IT, there are number of sins we are committing, of which are discussed here:

i) **Data theft and data manipulation**: This accounts for 85 % of cyber-crime. It is linked with the hacking mechanism, wherein a illegal intrusion of a system or database is done and precious data can be stolen or misused. This type of fraudulent activity is prevalent in BPOs and other back-office operation.

ii) **Eavesdropping:** This is the practice of following and watching a person's action through cyber by his chatting, mailing, typing or keystrokes.

iii) **Phishing:** commonly called as the Nigerian scam or 514 scam, as it was first identified to be operated from Nigeria. This includes sending a false mail or baiting a person to lure his personal details as bank account details, PIN number, credit card details etc.,

These are some major sins that can be done by the aid of human brain along with the technological inventions. However, these threats are not an exhaustive collection.

Relevance of Ethical Theories to Cyber Ethics

1) **Deontological (duty-based) ethics**: It deals with doing duty in a full morality. The consequences of such ethics can be listed as,

- Do the right thing.
- Do it because it's the right thing to do.

- Don't do wrong things.
- Avoid them because they are wrong.

This duty-based ethics can be performed in virtual organizations as not to steal or misuse confidential customer data, not to indulge in electronic money transactions and last but not the least as perseverance of cyber ethics.

2) The Categorical Imperative of Kantian Ethics

As per the categorical imperative, Kant emphasized the treating of humans as valuable and none should go wrong.

3) Virtue Ethics

The concept of virtue ethics is applicable to international business, where it deals with the morality of the people involved across the transnational borders. According to Flynn, it appeals to those who wish the "right thing" to be done consistently. Different studies were also applied for the international business by Hartman.

Some of the ethical values were defined by the Computer Ethics Institute which are narrated as follows:

1. Thou shalt not use a computer to harm other people.
2. Thou shalt not interfere with other people's computer work.
3. Thou shalt not snoop around in other people's computer files.
4. Thou shalt not use a computer to steal.
5. Thou shalt not use a computer to bear false witness.
6. Thou shalt not copy or use proprietary software for which you have not paid.
7. Thou shalt not use other people's computer resources without authorization or proper compensation.
8. Thou shalt not appropriate other people's intellectual output.

9. Thou shalt think about the social consequences of the program you are writing or the system you are designing.

10. Thou shalt always use a computer in ways that ensure consideration and respect for your fellow humans (Computer Ethics Institute, 1992)

Richard O. Mason 1986 illustrated the ethical issues using an acronym PAPA – information privacy, accuracy, property and accessibility, where privacy is concerned with what information must be revealed to others and accuracy is related with the authenticity and fidelity of information while information property refers to the owner of the information and how information can be sold and exchanged, while accessibility focuses on how an information can be accessed.

Future of E-ethics

As Ford (2001) has clearly pointed out that, virtual communities can become real when they are affective for people and that the term virtual only demarcates the computer environment. Hence computers and information technology can be utilized as a supporting tool for our organizational setup and rest of the things are purely based on humane.

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