

## **Changed Business Model: The Move to Project-Based Work and Virtual Teams**

In the last twenty years, business has changed from a local and regional model to a global and virtual one. The changed model of business follows from the changed nature of work... the job (a more-or-less set task you do every day) is disappearing as routine office and factory work are automated, and project work has become the norm. We now spend our days on projects such as designing and launching a new product, or reengineering business processes. Projects are conceived, staffed up, completed, and shut down. Rarely are the project team members all assembled in one location and often may not even meet face-to-face. The bottom line is this: **Work has changed from a place you go, to a thing you do.**

These things are certain:

1. **The model of business has changed.** Businesses now rely on computers (to gather and analyze information) and consultants (to staff and manage projects.)
2. **Businesses have redrawn their boundaries,** making them both tight (as they focus on core competencies) and porous (as they outsource non-core work). As a result, work follows a contractor/subcontractor model, not one of vertical integration.
3. **The third change is scale.** Project-based work has been the custom for decades in industries like construction, Hollywood, and many professional services. Now even the oldest, largest corporations are moving toward this model.

Arguably, project work was the standard before the industrial revolution. Most activities took place in small, independent shops, and craft and craftsmen were the economy's centerpiece. The industrial revolution changed all that. As skills and tasks were narrowed, thousands of people went to work in the same building. Now, thanks to new distributive information technologies, we are returning to the craft tradition, and the essence of craft is the project. It may turn out that the 150 years from the time of Dickens to 1980 will have been the anomaly. What's normal, on the job or off, will end up being craft, learning, adding value -- i.e., the project.

The lifespan of a project team can be in terms of years or months. Dynamic, short-lived project configurations will be commonplace as networks of bits and pieces of companies will come together to exploit a market opportunity, perhaps stay together for a couple of years, then dissolve never to exist again in the same form. A project/network can readily include employees of a firm located throughout the world, special resources (consultants with specific expertise), suppliers, distributors, and customers. Through the use of current technology including the Internet and other problem-solving tools, the project management process is changed forever. Meetings now take place in cyberspace, documents are created remotely and sent to secure Intranet portals, and email has replaced office memos. It is important to recognize the benefits of this shift in the business model. A well-composed project team will be more important than ever as we each become subject matter experts and respect the contribution of the other experts.

This changed business model has given corporations a lean structure and a powerful advantage in the global economy. As individual employees become subject matter experts and key players on project teams, consulting companies are quickly becoming important allies in the model, providing the perfect-fit project members when and where necessary. Technology has facilitated this transformed business model by eliminating the impact of physical location allowing team members work together remotely, instantly exchanging information and documents, thus enabling a corporation to assemble a team of the best of the best.