




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## Exploring Virtual Enterprises Using Activity Theory

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### Abstract

From joint Industry – University research into the key success factors that sustain Virtual Enterprises (VE's), it has been observed that conditions for the establishment of a VE do not necessarily sustain it. Transactions that are valued by the participants, a balance between similarity and complementarity attributes of the participants and effective utilisation of time are seen as important sustaining factors. Different communication and ICT tools are utilised in different circumstances, and successful collaborations develop formal or informal "rules" underlying their operation. Considering such attributes helps us understand what happens within a successful VE, but not necessarily how. Two case studies describing long-standing collaborations – one relating to a manufacturing network, and the other to a professional virtual community are presented. A third case study relating to the development of ICT tools to be used in a VE is also presented. Activity Theory is used as a framework for discussion of the organisational attributes associated with these cases and how they operate. It is suggested that exploration of the nature of tools, communities etc is helpful in understanding VE operations, and applied at multiple levels, Activity Theory is also useful in understanding the evolution of those tools, communities etc.

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