



# **Deceptive Virtualization Theory (DVT)**

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**The wrong norm creates the wrong culture.  
And the wrong culture will be the architect of great crises.**

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# 1 Abstract

Today, various methods have been invented and used to increase employee productivity. But the focus of most of these methods is on improving the performance of a product or a project, and compliance with work health standards is not much considered in them. Most of these methods are implemented in companies through the creation of desired norms of senior managers. Many of these norms are based on personal preferences and maintaining professional ethics is not included in their priorities. Many of these methods have been implemented through the institutionalization of wrong paradigms, the result of which is the spread of wrong norms in a wide range of companies and organizations. But how are these paradigms implemented in different organizations and what has been their result? In this article, the different dimensions of these culture-building methods have been discussed.

# 2 Deceptive Virtualization

It is assumed that science has progressed to such an extent that researchers have been able to create a virtual reality glasses based on artificial intelligence that uses machine learning to process images of dirty environments and show the user a beautiful environment with the same dimensions and obstacles. For example, a swamp is shown to the user as a clear blue pond, or a landfill is depicted as a plain with green hills. If the volunteers do not see real environments and left with those virtual reality glasses in such environments, they will definitely trust the image that the glasses show them. They will swim in the mud, while they think they are in the shallow water or climb and sit on the rubbish heaps, but they are looking at the green meadow. If a device can be created that also simulates the sense of smell, the volunteers will not have the slightest doubt about what they are seeing.

In fact, ***people trust what is shown to them more than the truth behind the show***. This is an established theory that is widely used in businesses such as cinema, theater, advertising, content management and SEO. Therefore, it is possible to divert public opinion from undesirable issues by using alternative content. For example, by institutionalizing some new concepts in the work environment, employers are able to divert employees' thoughts from undesirable things such as high work pressure and low wages. An employer can turn wrong norms and rules into an organizational culture by using deceptive topics. In the Horizon project, this method is called “normalization using deceptive virtualization”.

But the question is, what makes employers want to deceive their employees? Why are they willing to normalize the current situation for their employees instead of correcting the wrong norms? The issue is about being present in competitive and consumerist markets. Employers in a consumer-oriented market are forced to offer a product or service to their customers in the shortest possible time. The thirst of consumers to use new services and goods is so great that a producer must complete and launch its product in a shorter period of time. When the employer wants to reduce the product delivery time, it is inevitable to manage the tasks in tighter time frames. Therefore, employees will be forced to

do more work in less time with less pay. As a result, society will be faced with this undeniable fact: ***“Any enormous progress that has been achieved in a short period of time has only been possible through the violation of workers' rights.”***

But the situation becomes worse when these wrong norms are so normalized in business environments that they become culture. In this situation, even when these wrong norms are criticized, even some employees are not willing to change and improve the conditions based on the paradigms created by the employers. In fact, the main issue that should be criticized is the culture based on the wrong norms that have been normalized by the consumerist systems. The key point in the whole mechanism is that: ***“The wrong norm creates the wrong culture. And the wrong culture will be the architect of great crises.”***

### 3 Normalization Tools

There are many tools to normalize unfair rules in work environments, among which we can mention “reward and punishment system” and “gamification”. These two methods are the most widely used techniques in normalizing faulty systems. These two methods are very popular among employers in a wide range of businesses due to their simplicity and high efficiency.

#### 3.1 Reward and Punishment

The concept of reward and punishment means that in the long run good deeds produce good results and evil deeds lead to a world of evil. Man's intention is thus important for the long-term "reward" of a good world.[1] Rewards and punishments can be divided as to the material (cash, such as a pay rise, bonus, lower wage) and the immaterial (non-material, such as verbal praise, expressing respect for the worker, which is giving him confidence in management, allocating work more interesting, as well as admonition, reprimand).[2] Reward and punishment systems are thought to be involved not only with certain types of behavior, but also with their subjective accompaniments or mood.[3]

In recent researches, it has been determined that rewards and punishments have specific uses in business management, and wrong tools cannot be used in special matters. Because it will lead to negative results. Tali Sharot points out in her article: neuroscience suggests that when it comes to motivating action (for example, getting people to work longer hours or producing star reports), rewards may be more effective than punishments. And the inverse is true when trying to deter people from acting (for example, discouraging people from sharing privileged information or using the organization's resources for private purposes) — in this case, punishments are more effective. The reason relates to the characteristics of the world we live in.[4]

Koobs & Le Moal proposed that there exists a separate circuit responsible for the attenuation of reward-pursuing behavior, which they termed the anti-reward circuit. This component acts as brakes on the reward circuit, thus preventing the over pursuit of food, sex, etc. This circuit involves multiple parts

of the amygdala (the bed nucleus of the stria terminalis, the central nucleus), the Nucleus Accumbens, and signal molecules including norepinephrine, corticotropin-releasing factor, and dynorphin.[5] This circuit is also hypothesized to mediate the unpleasant components of stress.[6] The focus of reward and punishment systems is on increasing productivity and does not pay attention to the amount of “**stress**” increase in employees. In a nutshell, as long as the upstream institutions and government audit organizations do not have the necessary rigor, employers will not pay attention to the requirements of HSE standards.

## 3.2 Gamification

Gamification is the strategic attempt to enhance systems, services, organizations, and activities by creating similar experiences to those experienced when playing games in order to motivate and engage users.[7] Gamification has been used in an attempt to improve employee productivity in healthcare, financial services, transportation, government, and others. In general, enterprise gamification refers to work situations where “game thinking and game-based tools are used in a strategic manner to integrate with existing business processes or information systems. And these techniques are used to help drive positive employee and organizational outcomes.” [8][9]

Gamification is one of the most modern methods of exploiting employees who receive lower wages for more work. This technique takes the hard work out of the daily routine for employees without realizing how much work they have done during the day. But this method never provides the necessary clarification regarding the health of the employees and the amount of salary they should receive for the work overhead.[10] Moreover, This may lead to the stressor of social overload of users. Thus, the social media element of gamification may increase the stressors that can be associated with gamification design, among which social overload and privacy invasion are the most likely negative effects in gamification health management.[11] It has also been found in extensive research that this method can increase people's game addiction or cause moral abuse of users.[12]

## 4 Crises Caused by Systematic Normalization

Most of the damage is caused by the systematic normalization in the work environment towards the employees. With the spread of wrong culture in the workplace, the problems caused by this process will spread to the whole society. Over time, these damages will get out of control and the cost of managing them will be imposed on the taxpayers. The crises caused by systematic normalization in work environments are:

- **Reducing time for personal activities:** Undoubtedly, when employees spend more time on work, they will not have enough time to do personal things. Even if people are mentally and personality-wise strong enough to be able to do their personal affairs by reducing the time of rest and recreation, over time their life takes on a mechanical and extremely everyday form. In an article, the Mental Health America Organization emphasizes the importance of rest to restore

physical strength. In this research, it is stated that adults need between 7 and 8 hours of sleep at night.[13] This article does not consider the time needed for recreation in its calculations. According to the results of a study, around 8 in 10 Western Australians believe it's important for sport and active recreation to help us feel good about ourselves and build our confidence and self-esteem. Moreover, people who participate in sports clubs and organized recreational activity enjoy better mental health.[14]

- **Damage to family relationships:** According to a research conducted in 2015, the three constructs of work–family conflict, emotional exhaustion and performance-based self-esteem are all related to tremendous negative consequences for the individual, the organization as well as for society.[15] Another article described the effects of over workload on people's health as follows: Stress, Burnout, Poor Physical Health, Depression and Anxiety.[16] The results of research conducted in this field show that the amount of overhead work eventually leads to fatigue and boredom in people and causes them to change their behavior and reduce their tolerance level. This issue reduces interactions in families and causes coldness in relationships.
- **Increased stress:** In the simplest possible case, heavy workloads reduce sleep time in people. Reducing the hours of sleep for each person is one of the factors of increasing stress.[17] In a nutshell, stress is the first crisis that people are faced with it when times of excessive workload.
- **Increasing the likelihood of mental illness:** Decreased sleep time due to heavy work pressure can lead to mental illnesses such as night owls or insomnia (of either chronic or acute types).
- **Lack of time for physical activity and sports:** As mentioned about personal activities, spending too much time on work during 24 hours will eliminate enough time for exercise and physical activities. Reducing daily physical exercises is the cause of diseases such as diabetes, obesity, joint pain, spine pain, back or neck disc, depression, etc.
- **Lack of time for self-study:** Sufficient time is necessary to do any work and activity. On the other hand, employees need to do self-study to improve the quality level of their output. Businesses that focus employees' attention too much on work are not only the cause of the decline of their employees' knowledge, they may be the enemy of their own development and life. Companies that do not take enough time to train their employees will not grow significantly compared to their competitors.
- **Promoting a consumerist lifestyle:** The normalization of false cultures in companies consistently promote overwork to achieve maximum productivity. For example, smartphone and car manufacturing companies try to release new models of their products to the market every year. This volume of excessive production fuels the thirst of consumers for impulsive purchases. Unbridled consumption will lead to double and hasty production, and crazy production will end up in environmental pollution. On the other hand, this unstoppable production machine crushes social issues and human rights of employees in its gears. Governments ignore the negative effects of excessive production in order to increase

employment and maintain voter satisfaction. Therefore, the voice of criticism of researchers in the fields of social sciences, human resources management and industrial engineering regarding the harms of this excessive workload also goes nowhere.

- **Loss of ethical work practices:** When companies enter the unfairly competitive market, in some cases they will have to accept unethical behavior in order to compete with their competitors. In such a situation, only acquiring a larger share of the market is prioritized by business owners, and the strict implementation of human resource standards will be postponed regularly.
- **Increasing the rate of corruption:** Addiction to production will create an indescribable thirst for income generation in investors and business owners. Income generation and its growth is a positive thing that ultimately improves the welfare index in the society. But the excessive speed of capital increase can cause corruption in the society. For example, mega-corporations with large budgets can acquire small companies and disrupt competition in the market. This issue seriously harms the growth of independent ideas and community-oriented activities.
- **Reducing attention to safety and environmental principles:** Many environmental or occupational health standards place restrictions on the working methods in companies that prevent irresponsible activities and indiscriminate production in such companies. Therefore, many senior managers downplay such standards and avoid complying with them. This issue has caused irreparable damage to the physical and mental health of employees and may even destroy the environment.

## 5 Normalization in the IT Industry

In the world of software production process management, a concept called “Zombie Scrum” has recently been proposed, which means a warning for the spread of indifference in software development teams that use Scrum methodology. Johannes Schartau and Christiaan Verwijs have dealt with it in a detailed research field.[18] Referring to the same research, Barry Overeem emphasizes that one of the signs of the emergence of Zombie Scrum in the organization is the silence of the team, the passivity in presenting ideas and the absence of a beating heart in product review meetings.[19] But the painful point in all these researches is the lack of attention to the main cause of such failure in software development teams.

Although employees have knowledge and ability to sort out an organizational issue, they prefer to silence due to a number of reasons, for example, jealousy, fear of bullying and others.[20] But the Scrum methodology was created to implement a kind of systematic bullying at the organization level. One of the main goals of such methodologies is to significantly reduce product delivery time. Therefore, if a specialist announces the completion time of the assigned task in the grooming meeting beyond the expectations of his managers, he will most likely face an organizational bullying by the scrum master. Even if that team member's schedule is reasonable and accurate.



When senior managers use a tool to reinforce organizational bullying, they should not expect enthusiasm from their employees in the technical meeting. If a manager complains about her/his team's lack of participation in scrum meeting discussions, the question should be asked how this manager's team has been treated in past meetings. The cause of all defensive and passive behavior in employees is nasty, aggressive, humiliating, insulting and aggressive behavior of managers or senior staff. Therefore, as long as tools are used in the information technology industry that reinforce the wrong behavior of managers and stabilize inhumane paradigms in organizations, talking about the correction of the same tools seems insidious.

## 6 Conclusion

Wrong norms can be institutionalized through a law or work method in companies and organizations. These methods and tools may sometimes find many fans at the international level, and this volume of reception in many cases makes the work of criticism difficult for people who seek to correct wrong laws and norms. It is the habit of human societies to follow paradigms and no one can blame them for this natural behavior. But all these restrictions do not mean to stop criticizing and improving work processes and methods. The presence of wrong norms in an organization will have negative social consequences even outside the circle of that organization. As a result, it seems necessary to deal with the spread of these wrong norms by the thinkers of every field. But this confrontation through coercive force will not be effective. Rather, this culture should be institutionalized in society so that employees do not follow the deceptive virtualization of employers and complete their evaluation based on the facts in the organization.

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## 8 Appendix I: About Author

Mahyar Esteki is a system analyst who pursues his research in the field of improving and upgrading banking, fin-tech, and e-commerce systems. He holds a bachelor's degree in software engineering from Staffordshire University. Esteki conducts separate research to improve the software development process. He has created Horizon Research Project (HRP) to centralize his range of activities.

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## 9 Appendix II: About Horizon Research Project

Horizon is a research project to find new solutions in the field of information technology project management, which tries to ensure the health of the developers' work environment and the existence of social justice in technology companies in addition to providing consumer opinion.

### Objectives:

1. Is it possible to use a methodology in the software development process that in addition to improving the development process and product implementation, the interests of all project stakeholders are fairly provided, and social principles are observed throughout the project?
2. Is it possible to ensure the human rights of the employees during the project without interfering with the project obligations?
3. Can this model become a permanent culture in the organization?

GitHub Page of the Project: <https://github.com/mahyaresteki/Horizon>