



Effectively Managing and Communicating in Virtual Teams

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Some Questions to Get Us Started...

- Who here works in a virtual team?
- What are the greatest benefits of working virtually?
- What are the biggest challenges in working virtually?

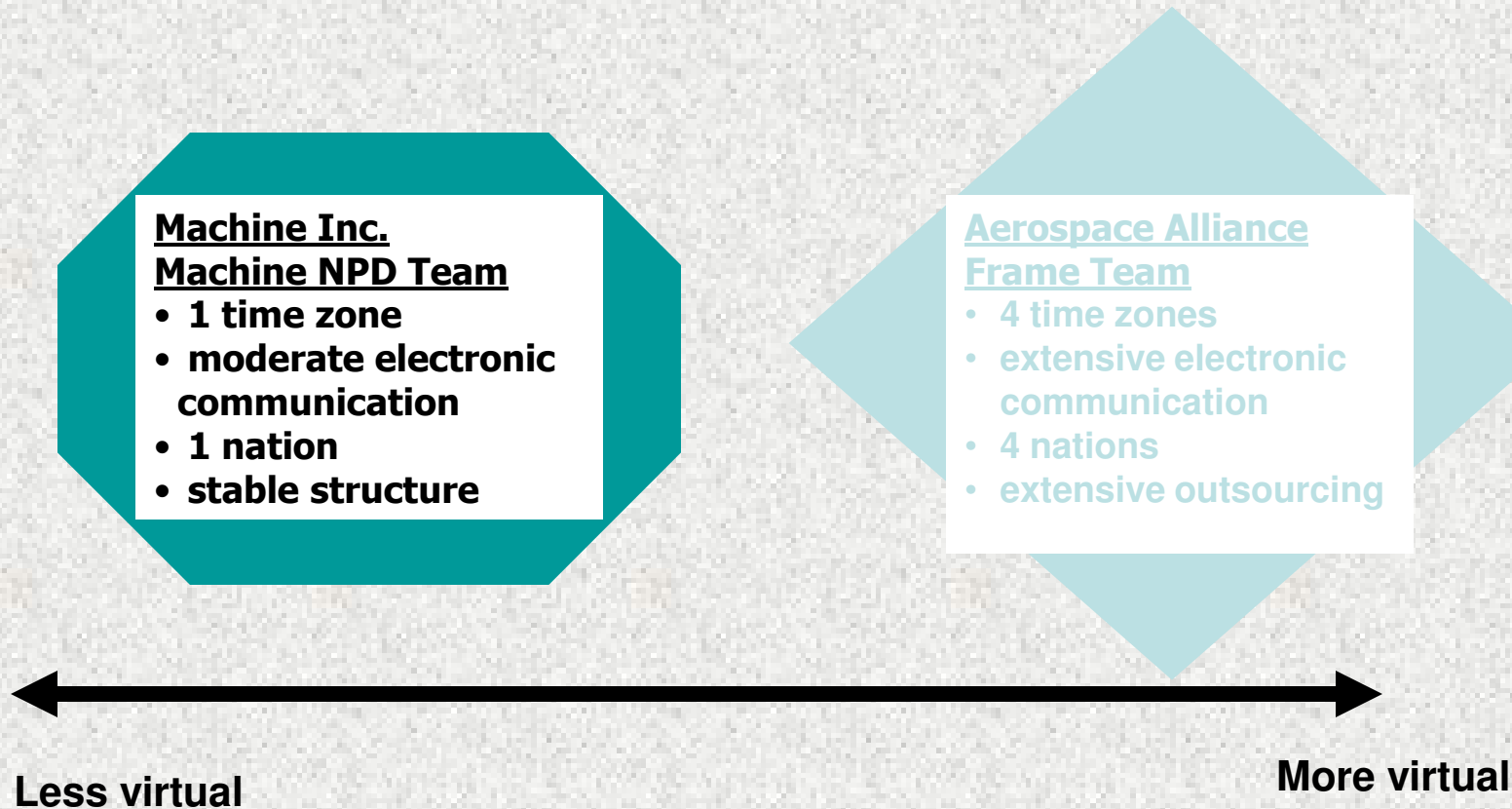
RISE OF VIRTUAL TEAMS

- Globalization of business → new decentralized network forms
- Virtual teams are a critical coordination mechanism and source of innovation
- Advantages:
 - Cost savings
 - Broader market/talent pool
 - More flexible and responsive to change
- Communication challenges due to loss of human contact

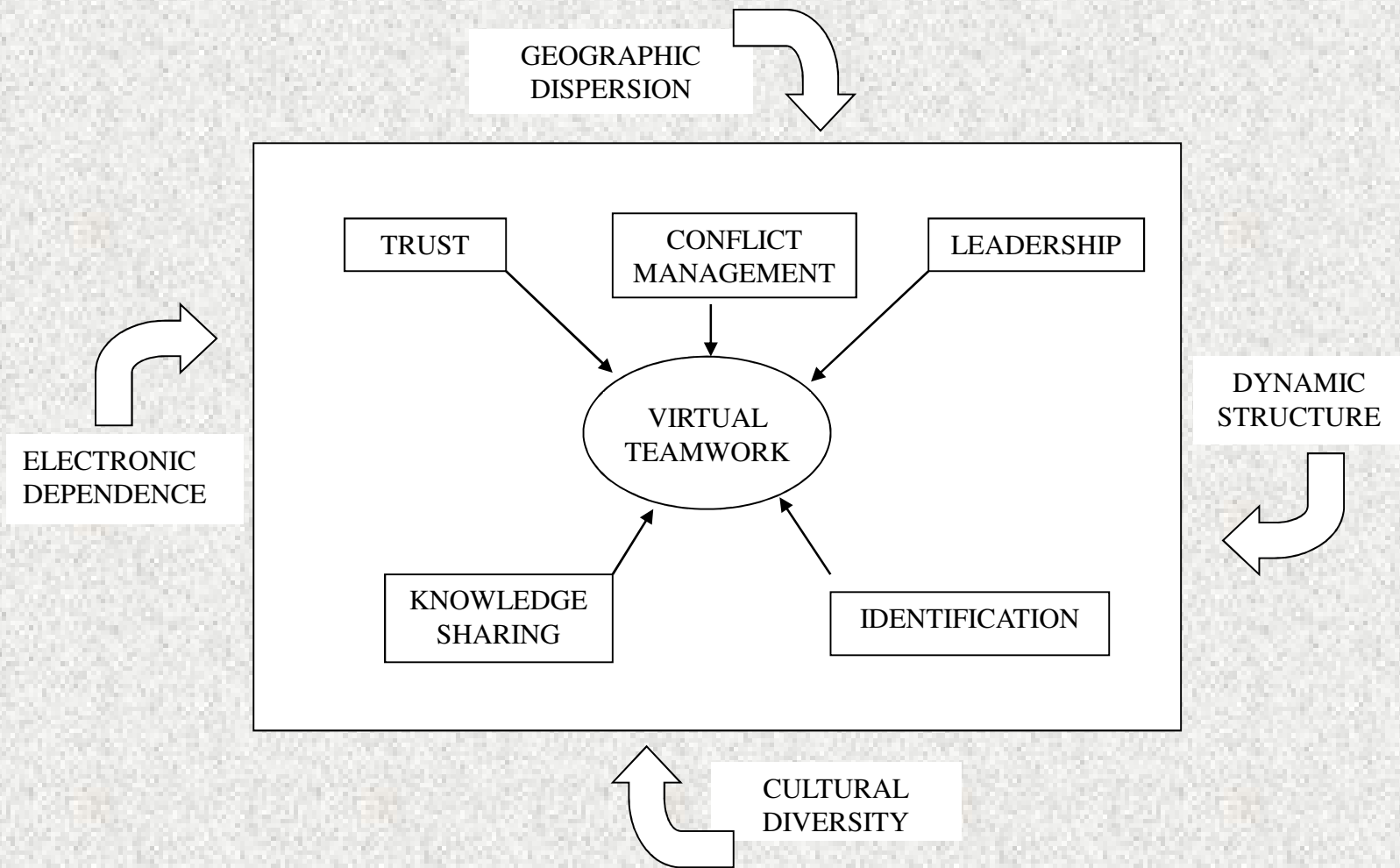
FEATURES OF VIRTUALITY

- **Geographical distribution**
 - Location and time zone differences
- **Electronic dependence**
 - Use of electronic communication
- **Cultural diversity**
 - National, organizational, functional
- **Dynamic structure**
 - Short-term, transient nature of work

VIRTUALITY AS CONTINUUM



MODEL OF VIRTUAL TEAMING



TRUST

- Challenges:
 - Lack of face-to-face contact and limited social cues
 - Cultural and organizational differences give rise to political processes
- Solutions:
 - FtF meetings
 - “Swift” trust
 - Regular, predictable communication

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

- Challenges:

- Lack of shared understanding due to time, space, and culture differences
- Lack of nonverbal cues in CMC
- Expectation mismatches likely to arise

- Solutions:

- Establish shared identity
- Surface differences, including different conflict management styles

LEADERSHIP

- Challenges:
 - Leading from afar: inspiring and motivating, monitoring performance, building loyalty, managing conflict
- Solutions:
 - Travel to provide “face time”
 - Build personalized relationships
 - Establish clear expectations
 - Emergent leadership – perhaps a “strong” leader is not necessary?

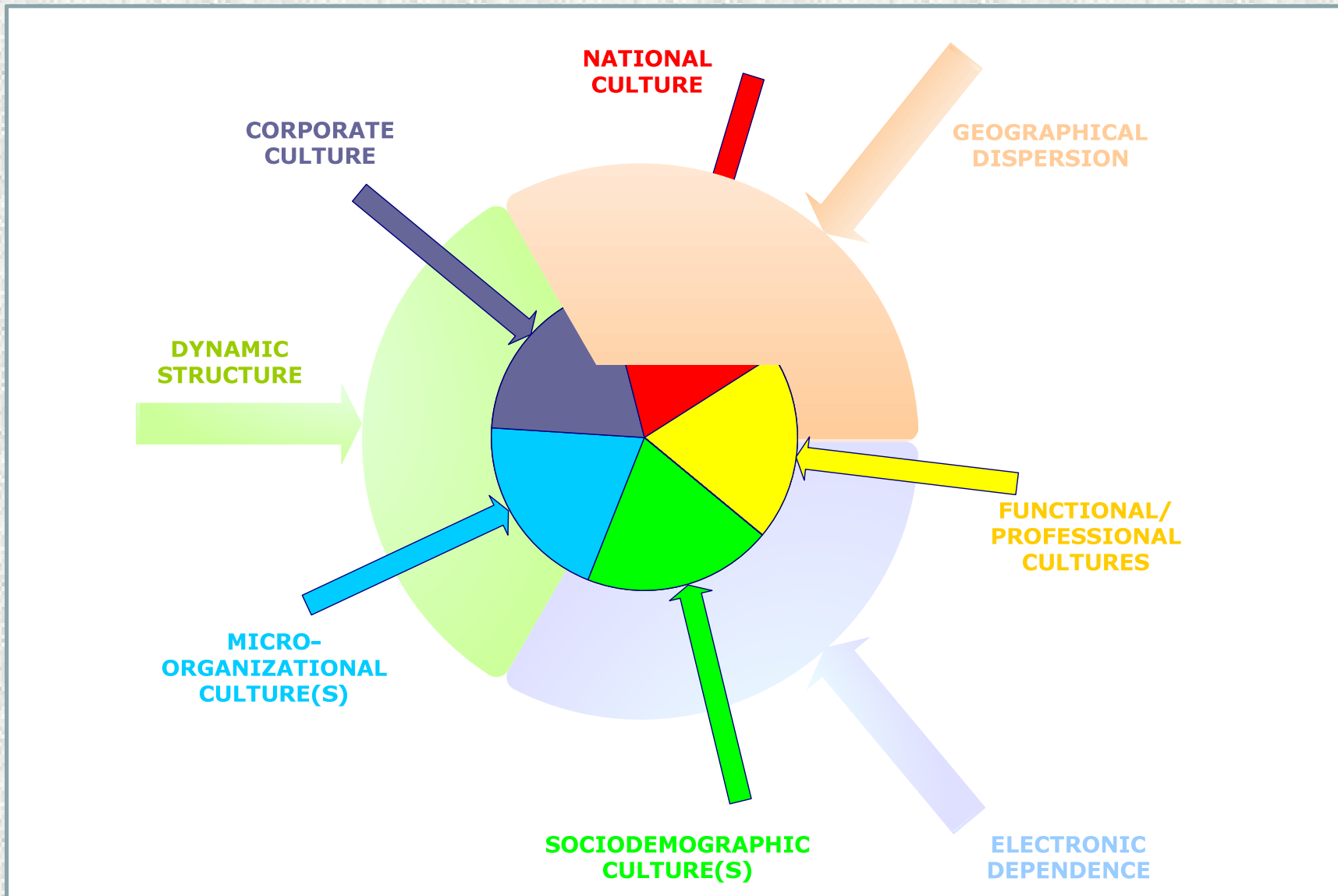
KNOWLEDGE SHARING

- Challenges:
 - Difficulty sharing tacit or “situated” knowledge across local contexts
 - “Situational invisibility”
 - Geographical or cultural “faultlines” or subgroups may divide the team
- Solutions:
 - Travel to different locations
 - Ensure that subgroups are not too strong
 - Engage in team learning behavior
 - Use of social media tools

IDENTIFICATION

- Challenges:
 - Geographic dispersion, multiple identity targets, and temporary work arrangements may lead to isolation and reduced loyalty
- Solutions:
 - Team-building events to foster ID within smaller units
 - Use technology (email, phone, Intranet) to foster team identification

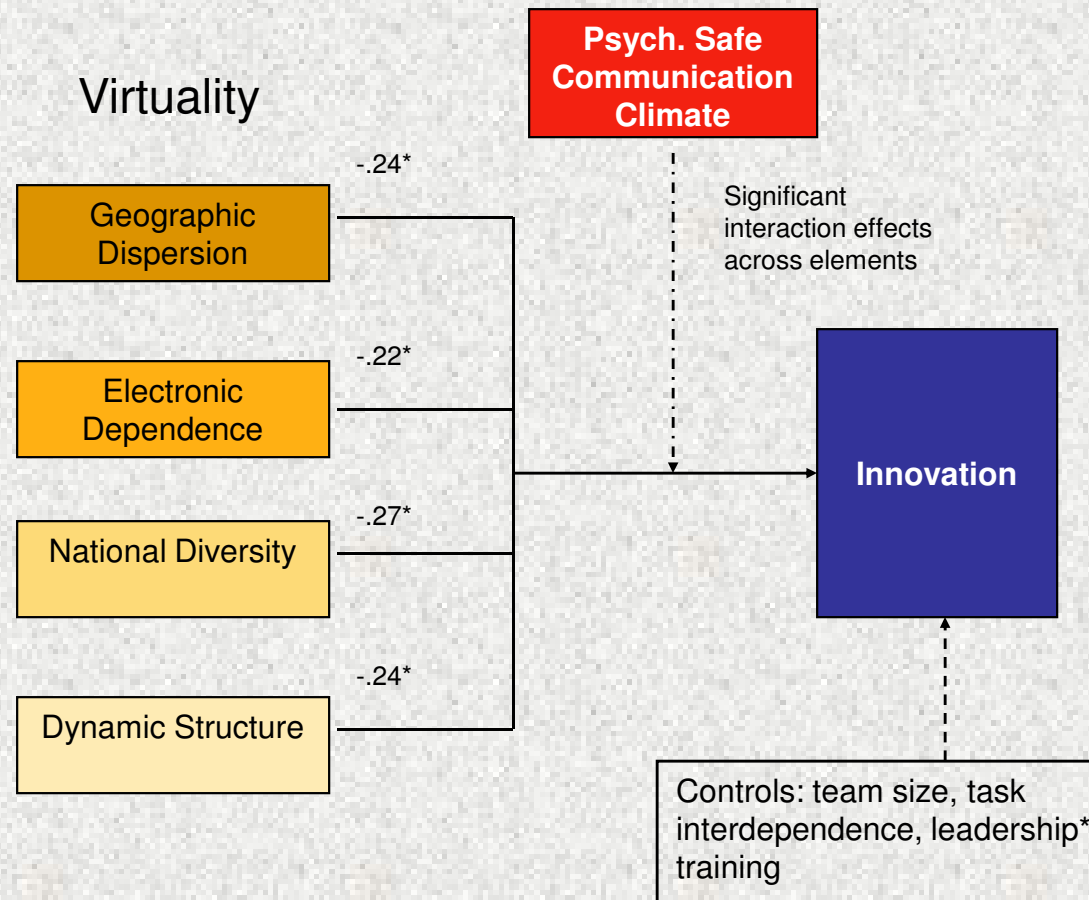
CULTURE AS KALEIDOSCOPE



ESTABLISHING A PSYCH. SAFE COMMUNICATION CLIMATE (PSCC)

- Characterized by support, openness, trust, mutual respect, and risk taking
- Encourages virtual team members to speak up, voice differences of opinion, ask questions, and admit mistakes
- Has been found to increase knowledge sharing and innovation in virtual contexts

ROLE OF COMMUNICATION CLIMATE



* $p < .05$

ROLE OF COMMUNICATION CLIMATE

	Relationship between geographic dispersion and innovation	Relationship between national diversity and innovation
Teams with highly psych. safe communication climates	(+) “The fact that they are virtual, spread out, has introduced points of view that we wouldn't have gotten if they weren't virtual...If we made everyone move to the same place to do the work, that would alter their point of view; and wouldn't be a very effective solution for this kind of work.” (Office Systems, Design Team)	(+) “I never felt that the cultural differences were a real problem. In most every case, those differences are known by the partners and accepted by the partners. Those things don't make any problems, they can be an advantage for bringing up new ideas.” (Auto Unification, Function Team)
Teams with the least psych. safe communication climates	(-) “The geography is going to prevent our team and theirs from ever becoming a cohesive unit. Everything is geared toward the field. Our job function is never incorporated into it. For example, we rolled out a new tool, and nothing has been communicated out to the field. We've received a lot of brick walls.” (Travel Service, South Market Team)	(-) “Yes, there was discussion. But most of the time they were not discussions in which new ideas would come up. It's really two sides and it stays like that.” (Europe Connect)

TIPS FOR VIRTUAL TEAM SUCCESS

- Bring team together for FtF kick-off meeting and at other critical points
- Establish a rhythm of critical meetings – regular, predictable communication
- Establish explicit communication protocols and expectations
- Use communication liaisons to bridge cultural and geographical differences
- Use social as well as task-related communication to build relationships

Thank you!

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