Coaching Virtual Global Leaders:
The Communications Challenge

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The future of coaching will be shaped by the interrelated evolution of 21ˢᵗ century global collaborations, their enabling technologies, and the ability of coaches to adapt their services to the requirements of this era. This article describes how coaches can help leaders and teams to meet the challenges of our increasingly mobile, technology enabled and globally distributed organizations. A cultural lens is used to facilitate understanding of how communication, relationship building and leadership development are shaped and challenged by virtual global environments. Three case examples are used to illustrate ways that coaching can support virtual global leaders in 'first, second and third generation' virtual workplaces. The closing section addresses the future of virtual global leadership and team coaching.

"If you put a spaceship in someone's driveway, you shouldn't be surprised when they don't jump in and drive it to work. In fact, they are more likely to run to their therapist to discuss how it's not really there, or call the police to make it go away."
- Martha Haywood in *Managing Virtual Teams* (1998)

The evolution of global knowledge work and digital tools, growing individual expectations of technological sophistication and the current economic downturn have combined to accelerate the growth of geographically, organizationally and culturally dispersed work. While research and practitioner literatures on virtual teaming, virtual organizations and virtual leadership have grown exponentially in the last decade, the coaching profession has not fully addressed how coaches can help leaders and teams to meet the challenges of our increasingly mobile, technology enabled and globally distributed organizations (Rosinski, 2003). These major challenges include cross-cultural and technology mediated communication, and the need to build trusting relationships via digital interactions. The future of coaching will be shaped by this interrelated evolution of global collaborations, their enabling technologies and the ability of coaches to adapt their services to the requirements of this era.

The use of a cultural framework on virtual organization facilitates recognition of the cultural practices embedded in business processes, the technologies used to support work activities and brings multi-disciplinary culture-learning tools to bear on coaching practice (Reyes, 1994). *Culture i*s the human-made part of the environment: the patterned ways of organizing space, time, human activity and the material environment (Hofstede, 1997). We can view human interactions (collaboration), organizations (cultural forms) and their technologies (human practices turned over to machines [see for example, Jeorges & Czarniawska, 1998]) through *a cultural lens*.

Large scale changes such as the creation of virtual organizations are generating *new cultural forms* of interaction. From this perspective, individuals from different cultural backgrounds (national, professional, organizational, generational) are expected to interact differently with and through those technologies so that differences in communication practices can actually be mirrored, magnified or diminished. These interactional outcomes can in turn affect any executive's ability to create the trusting relationships necessary for virtual global leadership and teamwork.

This article will use a cultural lens to facilitate understanding of how communication, relationship building and leadership development are shaped and challenged by virtual global environments. Using case examples, the article will illustrate ways that coaching can support virtual global leaders in three phases of organization development: first, second and third generation virtual workplaces. The closing will address the future of virtual global leadership and team coaching.

In multi-cultural and virtual work settings, communication processes are likely to be bumpy with miscommunications and misinterpretations punctuating the uncertain path to understanding.

HOW VIRTUAL ORGANIZATIONS SHAPE COMMUNICATION AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF TRUSTING RELATIONSHIPS

The goal of effective communication is to convey a message and be understood exactly as we intended. When we communicate with people from similar cultural backgrounds in face-to-face settings, communication processes are likely to be smooth and messages are likely to be clearly understood. By contrast, in multi-cultural and virtual work settings, communication processes are likely to be bumpy with miscommunications and misinterpretations punctuating the uncertain path to understanding. The interactional outcomes of a communication can be good or bad. The bumpier the interaction, the harder it is for individuals to manage their reactions to the frustrating process of trying to complete a communication effectively enough to achieve its intended outcomes. The framework below is intended to provide tools for communicating effectively in these settings.

Communication

Face-to-face interaction is a kind of dance or a *rhythmically choreographed exchange* of communication signals and interpretation cues (Erickson, 1985). Smooth interpersonal interaction or r*hythmic synchrony* elicits feelings of empathy and rapport, or of being "emotionally with" an interactional partner. In contrast, cultural differences cause coordination problems, a kind of *interactional stumbling* or a faulty rhythm of interaction. Metaphorically, these kinds of interactions feel like attempts to dance a waltz with someone who is dancing the tango. *Arrhythmic moments* elicit feelings of discomfort, confusion and of being out of sync. Since adults coordinate interaction mostly on automatic pilot, coordination problems are rarely recognized and the negative feelings elicited by them are usually attributed to personality conflicts or group stereotypes. For example, if a dancer only knows

the waltz, s/he would deem the tango dancer incompetent. If the western musician only knows the classical scale, s/he would judge the Chinese opera singer to be off key. In our increasingly global multi-cultural organizations, *interactional stumbling* has become a normal pattern of day-to-day interaction. Resetting expectations so that individuals anticipate bumpy communication processes helps to set appropriate expectations, mitigate related negative emotions, and motivate interaction repair in real time. This helps to ensure positive outcomes despite bumpy processes.

Digitally mediated interactions are *new cultural forms of communication* and *social influence* that have to be learned, much like the rules and methods of face-to-face interaction that all children learn in each culture. Remote communication preferences, attitudes and behaviors are shaped by the face-to-face communication practices of one's culture(s) of origin. Some cultures may prefer written mediums (e.g., Germans), others the human voice (e.g., Latin Americans); some public 'wall posting' (e.g., Millenials) versus 'private emails' (e.g., baby boomers). Each medium (e.g., groupware, tele-conference, instant messaging) *distorts* particular face-to-face communication *signals* and interpretation *cues as well as their rhythmic exchange and* leads to the same kinds of *interactional stumbling* that we experience in cross-cultural interactions. In our increasingly dispersed work organizations, interactional *arrhythmias* and the negative feelings these elicit permeate our technology mediated interactions. A cultural framework can help individuals to:

- Anticipate communication process distortions in each medium;

- Guide individual and collective reflections on emotional responses to bumpy interactions;

- *Understand and repair communication breakdowns;* and

- Set common expectations for more effective technology-enabled communication protocols.

Communicating remotely makes visible the two-way nature of in-person communication processes (Haywood, 1998). When communication is remote, *sender control* of the interaction is replaced by *receiver control* of the process. For example, sender control in an office setting can be demonstrated by physically standing in front of a receiver until that person comments on the sender's memo. In contrast, when an email message arrives in an inbox with a request for comment, it is the receiver who controls the completion of that communication process. In face-to-face interaction, the crucial communication steps (message transmission, receiver acknowledgement, message understanding and response) occur simultaneously in *rhythmic synchrony.* In remote communications, these four steps are separated in time and the sender cannot control the process. This decoupling of communication content and process in time and the resulting change from sender to receiver control can lead to difficulty

interpreting the intended tone or purpose of an electronic message or response. In fact, without a trusting relationship to motivate receiver responses at each of the four steps in the process, there is no guarantee that a remote communication cycle will be completed. An important implication of this effect is that trusting relationships and explicitly negotiated agreements regarding each step in remote communication are required to ensure common sender and receiver expectations in dispersed teamwork.

Coaches are in a unique position to support effective communications in virtual global organizations. They can help their coachees to notice, understand and anticipate *interactional stumbling* and *perceptual distortions*, to withhold premature judgments and to make efforts to *understand* and *repair* interaction processes as they occur. Coaches can support leadership learning about media selection and help leaders to understand the likely signal and interpretation distortions of a particular medium and how to compensate for those in their mediated communication practices. Coaches can also help coachees to build the kinds of trusting relationships in which communication protocols can be created and respected by diverse and dispersed groups.

Development of trusting relationships

As mentioned above, mobile, technology-enabled and globally-distributed organizations require individuals to build trusting relationships via digital interactions. Trust, or the acceptance of vulnerability in relationships, is crucial for effective leadership and team work. Trust facilitates risk-taking behaviors necessary for learning, creativity, and innovation. Lack of trust fosters fear and therefore lowers one's ability to risk authentic disclosure. Lack of authentic communication in turn creates ambiguity in relationships, processes and task work. Research (see for example, Duarte & Snyder, 2006) shows that people are more likely to trust, or risk vulnerability with, leaders who *perform* competently in their roles, *demonstrate* integrity, and *show concern* for the best interest of others.

Research also shows that sustained engagement and familiarity help to build trusting relationships in face-to-face settings. This has led some virtual organization designers (Sobel Lojeski & Reilly, 2008) to conclude that trust must be developed in person and therefore to emphasize *investment* in periodic in-person work and/or in the use of synchronous communication tools (e.g., instant messengers, phone) or those that are as close to natural face-to-face communication as possible (e.g., high definition video conferencing). An alternative perspective suggests that similar behavioral strategies (i.e., demonstrating competency, integrity and concern for others) foster both virtual and in-person trust. From this perspective, it is only the behavioral signals and cues used to indicate trustworthiness that change in virtual interactions. Use of an asynchronous trust building model and online trust tool show that engaging in explicit dialogue about the important indicators of trust in a particular virtual group

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and collectively committing to displaying those behaviors, can build trusting virtual relationships (Francovitch, Reina, Reina, & Dilts, 2008). For example, a leader who supports her virtual team in the context of a customer complaint, but does not explicitly 'cc' her team on her supportive response to the customer can unwittingly generate mistrust. Similarly, a virtual team leader that manages a web meeting schedule efficiently can be misinterpreted by faraway colleagues as someone who is not trustworthy because s/he does not show shared concern for the well-being of his/her team members by explicitly making time for small talk within the team.

From the start, virtual global organizations require intense support to coordinate work and to build a sense of community and external recognition among dispersed and diverse team members and stakeholders. It is important to proactively address developmental idiosyncrasies and support needs in order to establish virtuous cycles of interaction. Supporting the ongoing risk-taking necessary for the development of trusting relationships is crucial among people who may rarely meet. Dealing with emotions, such as frustration, that can attend disrupted or poor team communications is necessary for the maintenance of trust. An example of the kind of efforts required to support authentic communication and trust is the initiative of CEO of ABB, Goran Lindahl, to promote information sharing in his globally dispersed and diverse workforce by pronouncing "Bad English," or the less than perfect English of foreign speakers, to be the official business language of his company (Govindarajan & Gupta, 2001).

The formidable technological, logistical, and task-related complexities of virtual global organizations can dominate the attention of new virtual global leaders and distract them from the need to focus on establishing trusting relationships. Mastering the technologies necessary to do the work can be difficult and time consuming. Managing the extensive diversity of profession, function, organization, geography, time zones and languages of the workforce can be demanding from both international business and human resource perspectives. Grappling with the dynamic nature of knowledge work can involve complex problems with no right answers.

In these contexts of communication and trust-building complexity, coaches can help coachees balance expectations of process improvements with acceptance of bumpy but 'good enough' communication processes for achieving desired outcomes. Coaches can support the patience and persistence required to create innovative practices for mapping multiple cultural perspectives, navigating different interpretations of task work and negotiating creative solutions. Coaches can help coachees to attend to the nuances of conveying trustworthiness in dispersed and diverse settings by maintaining predictable role performance, consistently walking their digital talk, and engaging, onboarding, developing

and promoting their team remote team members. Coaches can suggest that coachees explicitly discuss how trust might be gained and lost in their particular virtual team relationships and help coaches to commit to monitoring those explicitly discussed trust-building behaviors in those work relationships. Coaches can help leaders to mitigate the known costs of inadequate attention to relational trust (Govindarajan & Gupta, 2001) which include fewer and less effective interactions due to logistical problems, more frequent miscommunication, misinterpretation, less group cohesiveness and effectiveness, and ultimately, less creative business solutions. Coaches can collaborate with leaders to consider ways to cultivate trust and cooperation among team members, manage unproductive conflict, and facilitate expression of diverse views that foster the kinds of innovation that virtual organizations are created to deliver.

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LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES AT DIFFERENT PHASES OF VIRTUAL ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT

During two decades of coaching and consulting experience, I have observed that virtual global leadership challenges differ within three phases of virtual organization development that exist at this point in history. In this section, I will describe my understanding of these three generations and offer a coaching case example[1] to illustrate key leadership challenges and coaching areas of focus in each generation.

First generation organizations

First generation organizations are new to virtual global teaming. Work practices are designed for collocated work. There is a cultural assumption that people must be collocated to collaborate effectively so when teams are dispersed, people travel to the sites where the work is being done. Collaborative technologies beyond email and phones are outside the normal frame of reference and are rarely used. Their leadership challenges in these organizations involve designing the human and technology infrastructures and making the mindset changes required to begin to engage in virtual global teaming.

Coaching case example. The following case example illustrates Virtual Global Leadership coaching in an organization new to virtual global collaboration. This executive coaching assignment with John, one of the Business Heads of a top tier Asset Management Organization, was initially focused on building a virtual global teaming infrastructure, internal and external team communication plans, and convincing John's new leadership team members that "virtual" teaming was a legitimate way to work. Specifically, the three areas of business-aligned executive development were:

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[1]The case details and names for each coaching case example have been changed to protect the confidentiality of the individuals and organizations described.

1. Building broad multi-regional organizational support for transforming one of several regional businesses within the larger asset management organization into a new global business entity in order to respond to its multinational client demands for 'global' financial products, sales coverage and services;

2. Creating partnerships with individuals in the other asset management businesses and regions of the world, including team stakeholders and sponsors, the previous regional business heads and new team members in several regions added to the team as a result of a merger;

3. Developing virtual global team leadership capability to ensure virtual collaboration among regional team leaders and their members across locations in the United States, Europe and Asia in order to develop and deliver new products and enter new global markets.

The sheer cultural complexity of these individual and organizational changes required John to engage in a continuous triage of opportunities and challenges related to the three areas of focus above. The three examples below illustrate how executive coaching was used to help anticipate, navigate and bridge cultural differences in order to help integrate the team members in each world region into the new global entity. Coaching also helped to begin to build a technology infrastructure to support virtual global teamwork.

On John's new global business team, Harrison was assigned to head the Asia region after the merger. Despite his excellent credentials and professional background, Harrison's previous experience was in a more "aggressive" business culture than asset management's. Additionally, his "American" cultural demeanor and leadership style contradicted his Asian ethnicity. His demeanor confused his new Asian team and created conflicts with the previous, traditional and older Asian team leader who had been passed over for Harrison's role. Coaching helped John to map this cultural landscape and to provide Harrison with quietly gathered feedback about the *interactional stumbling* that characterized his interactions with the Asia team. Coaching also provided John with guidance on how to navigate the business and regional cultural differences.

When John was appointed global head for this new business, he was also provided with a management advisory group to help guide the integration. The group was comprised of one senior leader representing each region, each of whom had a stake in their own regional businesses which interacted with John's new global model. Coaching helped John navigate the political situation and balance his need to take charge and to partner with others in this realignment. Coaching also helped John to strengthen his relationships with each of these stakeholders by helping him to analyze his strategic,

relational and cultural alignment with each advisor and then to build partnerships around common goals and aspirations.

An in-person executive team development offsite was specifically designed to create effective virtual collaboration practices and to accelerate leadership team member integration and the changes required to operate globally. Data collection and feedback were used by the coach to partner with John on the design and delivery of a virtual team chartering discussion that included best practices and implementation ideas learned from the previous virtual and global teaming experiences of group members. Additionally, a virtual team trust-building presentation, exercise, debriefing and discussion co-led by John and the coach led to the discovery of desired practices for building trust and communicating effectively in this particular virtual global team. Lastly, a dialogue about required collaborative sales and new product development efforts led to an agreement to build and support a global customer relationship management system so the entire business could virtually access sales and service information across the globe. While John and his regional leaders continued to travel heavily to collaborate in person outside the initial agreed upon areas of virtual work, coaching helped John to explicitly address and gain global team commitment to collaborating virtually on their two most important business goals, i.e., global sales and new product development.

Second generation organizations

Second generation organizations are the most common at this point in history. At this stage, organizations include a wide range of individual participation and competence in virtual work and use of collaborative technologies. Effective organizational support systems for this form of work are not in place and people prefer in person collaboration at least for "high stakes" work. In this environment, there are few enterprise-wide guidelines for technology-mediated work and communication, and there is a sense of "psychological distance" when people are working remotely (Govindarajan & Gupta, 2001). Leadership challenges involve identifying or accessing resources to support effective teaming and technology use, and designing effective leadership and work practices across teams.

Coaching case example. The following case illustrates coaching in a Fortune 500 professional services organization in which world class collaborative tools were available and a variety of professionals engaged in virtual and global collaboration. Yet, there were no consistent guidelines or training and support systems beyond tool use training. This targeted coaching assignment with Jennifer, a new regional CFO, focused on building remote management and virtual team building capability.

Following the merger of two lines of business and the outsourcing of 50 percent of a job class to India, Jennifer's virtual team was created with members from both of the merged organizations.

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Shortly afterwards, Jennifer asked HR for support in managing her virtual team. She reported to a Controller who resided in a different State and had a core team of one full-time and two part-time reports in three different locations. Eight dotted-line regional controllers each devoted ten percent of their time to her core team's work and directly reported for ninety percent of their time to their regional business heads. Team members had never met one another in person. Because no enterprise support resources were known to HR, an external coach was sourced for Jennifer.

Coaching initially focused on helping Jennifer to articulate her team creation story and remote management challenges. These included: trusting, motivating, challenging, developing and monitoring people that she had never met and who she could not see. Team members did not know when to escalate problems, when to ask for assistance, how much decision making autonomy they should have or how much new work they should accept on part-time schedules. Further, due to the fast pace, long hours and time zone differences, the new team had not had any meetings. Coaching helped Jennifer to consider how she could use the suite of available tools to create remote management practices as simple as using individual phone calls for the kinds of activities that she would have liked to do in person. For example, she decided to start by simply using individual phone calls for regular individual status check-ins, supervisory communications, and to get to her team's individuals goals, strengths and development areas. She was then able to delegate or create challenging developmental activities.

Jennifer's work involved analyzing financial reports and supporting forecasting. Her core team members prepared schedules for analyses and gathered information from the more peripheral regional team members. They collaborated on non-routine work about half of the time using teleconferencing, email and instant messaging tools. Although the newly created virtual team had clearly defined performance goals, team members had no guidelines for how to coordinate their geographically dispersed, day-to-day work. Coaching provided just in time presentation materials on best practices in virtual teaming focused on the above areas that Jennifer found problematic. Coaching also helped Jennifer to tailor coaching templates for virtual team development work and then to use these to conduct team development sessions with her team. For example, Jennifer eventually used the online calendar to schedule monthly virtual lunches with a social or team development agenda, in which no business talk was allowed. Instead, via video and webconferences, they shared travel pictures and social news. Biweekly work meetings were scheduled alternating the core team and the whole team and their senior management. In order to motivate attendance, the meeting agendas for the regional controllers were strictly limited to financial topics. Lastly, coaching helped Jennifer to identify experienced virtual team leaders in the organization in order to learn and share best practices.

Third generation organizations

Third generation organizations engage in broad-based virtual work. Because virtual global teaming is part of the fabric of their everyday work, these organizations leverage and support collaborative technologies and the teamwork that these enable. Their development focus is on building enterprise-wide virtual global teaming capability and leadership. Virtual workforces in these settings make conscious decisions to engage in distributed global teamwork, to leverage digital technologies for complex work processes and to use virtual work practices designed to enhance trusting human relationships. Their leadership challenges involve continuous improvement and innovation in collaborative capacity building across the enterprise.

Coaching case example. The following case example illustrates virtual global management team coaching in a third generation, multinational software organization. Coaching was used to collaboratively design and deliver a large-scale virtual organization development intervention with the objective of building virtual leadership and teaming capability. Ronald, the head of this large division had several specific objectives:

1. To create, pilot and refine a protocol for virtual management;

2. To leverage previous team building with another division;

3. To ensure that remote management development was aligned with virtual team building work; and

4. To help his division leaders to experiment with the use of their world class tools for virtual collaboration.

Since Ronald's management team was geographically dispersed, team coaching took place during regularly scheduled management team meetings via video and web conferencing. The first coaching meeting was used to help Ronald's team outline their organization development objectives, define their desired leadership roles in the planned activities, and select the collaborative tools for each of those activities. Next, a 300-person teleconference was used to kick off the virtual organization development intervention with the entire division. Teleconferencing best-practice protocols were designed to elicit large-group participation and engagement. An overview of an upcoming virtual global teaming effectiveness assessment was discussed with the large group.

Group interviews were conducted via teleconference with the virtual team leadership triads of each of twenty teams to learn about their challenges and team development expectations. Since the coach, the team leaders and many in the division worked remotely and did not know each other, a data validation process was designed to begin building division-wide trust. The interview data for each team was summarized by the coach and emailed to

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each set of team leaders for validation of the data with their entire team before sending it back with approval for presentation by the coach to Ronald's leadership team. When all twenty teams had validated their assessment data, another video and web conference meeting was scheduled with Ronald's team to review the findings and discuss possible team building scenarios for the division.

Ronald's leadership team designed and conducted a division-wide teleconference with parallel kickoff presentations at both sites to introduce the upcoming organization development work. This included a face-to-face large-group training session at each geographic site and follow-up team development assignments. The two half-day training workshops consisted of a large group behavioral simulation and debriefing session, and an intact-team feedback and participative team redesign assignment for each of the twenty teams. When the teams submitted their proposed redesigns to Ronald's leadership teams for approval, coaching was used to help Ron's leadership team collaborate with the twenty individual teams to design more effective virtual global teaming protocols and desired training and support systems for teamwork.

The distributed leadership team coaching model used to collaboratively design and pilot virtual work practices for the division-wide assessment and intervention also served as a pilot for many leadership practices in this division following the intervention. This organization continued to build on this initial virtual teambuilding work. It is currently a recognized best-practice virtual global teaming company where day-to-day work is conducted in globally distributed and diverse teams using leading edge collaborative technologies. By all measures, this workforce is highly engaged across the employee spectrum. There is an enterprise-wide talent management focus on supporting and building virtual and multi-cultural collaboration and leadership capabilities.

Although the cases above illustrate how first, second and third generation organizations present their virtual global team leaders and members with special challenges, the themes related to complex communication processes and relationship building cut across organizations. We are clearly headed towards greater dispersion, diversity, mobility and technology mediated work. These trends will transform how we live and work and the skills necessary to do so well (Harris, Gammage, & Basso, 2008). The section below addresses the implication of these trends for leadership and coaching.

THE FUTURE OF VIRTUAL
GLOBAL LEADERSHIP COACHING

Coaches will continue to help leaders focus on human development and leadership impact, and help teams collaborate effectively. In this closing section, large-scale environmental, global, technology and leadership trends will be briefly outlined along with important implications for coaching.

Global futures

Recently, futurist Mary O'Hara Devereaux (2004) used 'Navigating the Badlands' of the old west as a metaphor for the great potential and hazards of our current "global" journey from the industrial to the information age. She characterized the first quarter of the twenty-first century as the biggest natural cycle of continuous technological, social, governmental and natural disruptive innovation since the Middle Ages and predicted that there would be an opportunity for a new Renaissance Age at the end. For the first time in history, there is awareness of the existence of one interdependent earth and humanity. Within this new framework, sustainability is of growing importance and new technologies and their resulting human interconnections are fueling rapid changes. She predicted that by the end of the cycle, this volatile context will lead to the reinvention of civil society and its governance.

In fact, the growing awareness of global interdependencies, sustainability challenges and related complex system change needs across the planet has created a *collaboration imperative* for diverse organizational scholars (see for example, Hart, 2005; Senge, Lichtenstein, Kaeufer, Bradbury, & Carroll, 2007; Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski, & Flowers, 2008). For example, in one model of leadership for a networked economy (Ancona, Walone, Orlikowski, & Senge, 2007), leadership is distributed and collaborative by definition, and occurs through either direct involvement with change or through creation of environments in which others are empowered to act or both. The diverse, fluid, mobile, rotating, and collaborative leadership models fashioned by second and third generation virtual global teaming organizations have direct implications for how coaching must evolve to remain valuable and viable.

Evolution of collaborative technologies

Knowledge management expert Buckman (2005) described three technology trends that exemplify the kind of natural disruptive innovation cycle described above. These trends will shape the nature of globally dispersed work. Firstly, digital connections between people will spread to form national, then regional and then global networks of connected groups. Those organizations with the highest quality and fastest digital connections will achieve competitive advantage by offering web services and activities that simply cannot be provided on network connections of lower quality and speed. Secondly, technology developments will eventually lead to automatic language translations and to natural language recognition so that computers will facilitate spoken and written forms of multi-national communications. These developments will spur more virtual global work. Additionally, faster digitized communications coupled with semantic search software will support sense making, help to reduce digital information overload and so facilitate knowledge work in virtual global teams. Thirdly, mobility will be facilitated by attenuated market boundaries between consumer and work tools. For example, mobile worker

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products and services will be designed for remote and distributed workforces and virtual training. Collaboration systems will move towards single devices that meet multiple communication needs. Coaching work will also be affected by these trends such that those that can adapt to mobile and distributed digital work and leverage enabling tools will remain valuable and achieve competitive professional advantage.

The e-collaboration state of the art

We are quickly moving towards widespread use of web browser-based tools that support globally dispersed real time meetings of all sorts. These provide audio and video conferencing, desktop sharing, electronic whiteboards, and web touring capabilities that enable dispersed collaborative innovation work. Even "skunk works" can be created across space, time and organization. Similarly, the next generation of web tools already support asynchronous work across time zones. For example, web 2.0 tools (like wikis which support collaborative authoring and blogs which support non-professional written expression and audience comment on societal scales) are ubiquitous in the consumer space. These technologies are quickly penetrating virtual global teaming via grass roots demands for the same low cost, high quality tools that dispersed consumers can access on the web. Social networking platforms are quickly morphing into professional networking and organizational sourcing platforms, blurring the boundary between how consumers and how workers relate. Similar corporate platforms are penetrating corporate firewalls and are even being used for talent development initiatives. Immersive work environments (for example, Weil, 2008), including web-based serious massive multi-player games (such as Peacemaker and Food Source), and 3D virtual worlds, (such as corporate events in Second Life or IBM's virtual world, Metaverse), where employees meet, will soon blur the boundaries between entertainment, learning and work media by utilizing "co-presence," the human capacity to detect and relate to others in 3D environments regardless of whether these are physical or virtual spaces. Eventually the face-to-face dance that is social interaction will be made possible in virtual space by avatars, or digital representatives of individuals online. These new forms of collaboration will create needs for digitally agile coaches who understand virtual and global work and are able to design and facilitate humanizing practices to help leaders and teams seize their business opportunities and navigate the challenges of e-collaboration.

Implications for leaders, teamwork and coaching

Within the current global cycle of disruptive innovation described above, futures are invisible to all. This makes hierarchy a less effective way to lead organizations (Ancona et al., 2007; O'Hara-Devereaux, 2004). Instead, informal 'networked' leadership that can quickly self-organize will be better able to identify quickly changing opportunities, to execute strategy and to innovate across internal and external networks of alliances. In the global, network-

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driven business environment described above, effective leadership functions will be distributed among "incomplete" leaders who are differentially skilled in four critical capabilities: the ability to make sense of the context in which a company and its people operate; the ability to build relationships within and across organizations; the ability to create compelling future scenarios; and the ability to innovate in order to achieve those futures (Ancona et al., 2007). By definition this way of leading is collaborative, involving the ability to negotiate the synergistic combination of different viewpoints that results in innovation. In recent inter-organizational collaborations focused on large, complex systems change work, organizational scholars have argued that such collaboration requires enacting new ways of thinking, creating new formal structures and transforming relationships (Senge et al., 2007).

Coaches who can help leaders to build environmental scanning and sense making skills, and cognitive flexibility in problem solving will help leaders to navigate the complex virtual, global, technology-enabled communication problems that permeate the new business landscape. These coaches will remain relevant. Coaches who can facilitate new ways to build trusting relationships across cultures and other knowledge boundaries in cyberspace will continue to add value. As organizations adopt quickly evolving collaborative tools and focus talent development on virtual global leadership effectiveness, coaching itself will have to be able to leverage the capabilities of advanced digital communication technologies to access new world class knowledge models, resources and methods, and to design new services just in time from anytime and anywhere.

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Ana Reyes is a founding Partner of New Worlds Enterprise, a global leadership and virtual organizational development consulting firm. Ana is an Executive Coach, Organizational Consultant, and Educator specializing in global leadership development, culturally complex collaboration, virtual organization development, and applied ethnographic assessment. Her coaching clients include internationally diverse executives, high potential expatriates, inpatriates, and virtual global team leaders in knowledge intense industries, among them professional and financial services, pharmaceuticals, higher education, aerospace, and software. Ana is respected for her ability to deeply engage diverse leaders and their teams in the 21st century human development challenges of building international businesses and mindsets, mastering geographically dispersed teamwork, humanizing technology mediated collaboration and communication, and coaching individuals and groups, often across distance and time. She is known for her ability to draw from a broad cultural and educational background to create an artful variety of assessment, intervention and education designs, and coaching techniques to help leaders achieve their desired strategic, professional, and personal goals.

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