

# Working Virtually at the World Bank

## The Challenges of Virtual Teaming in Complex Work Environments



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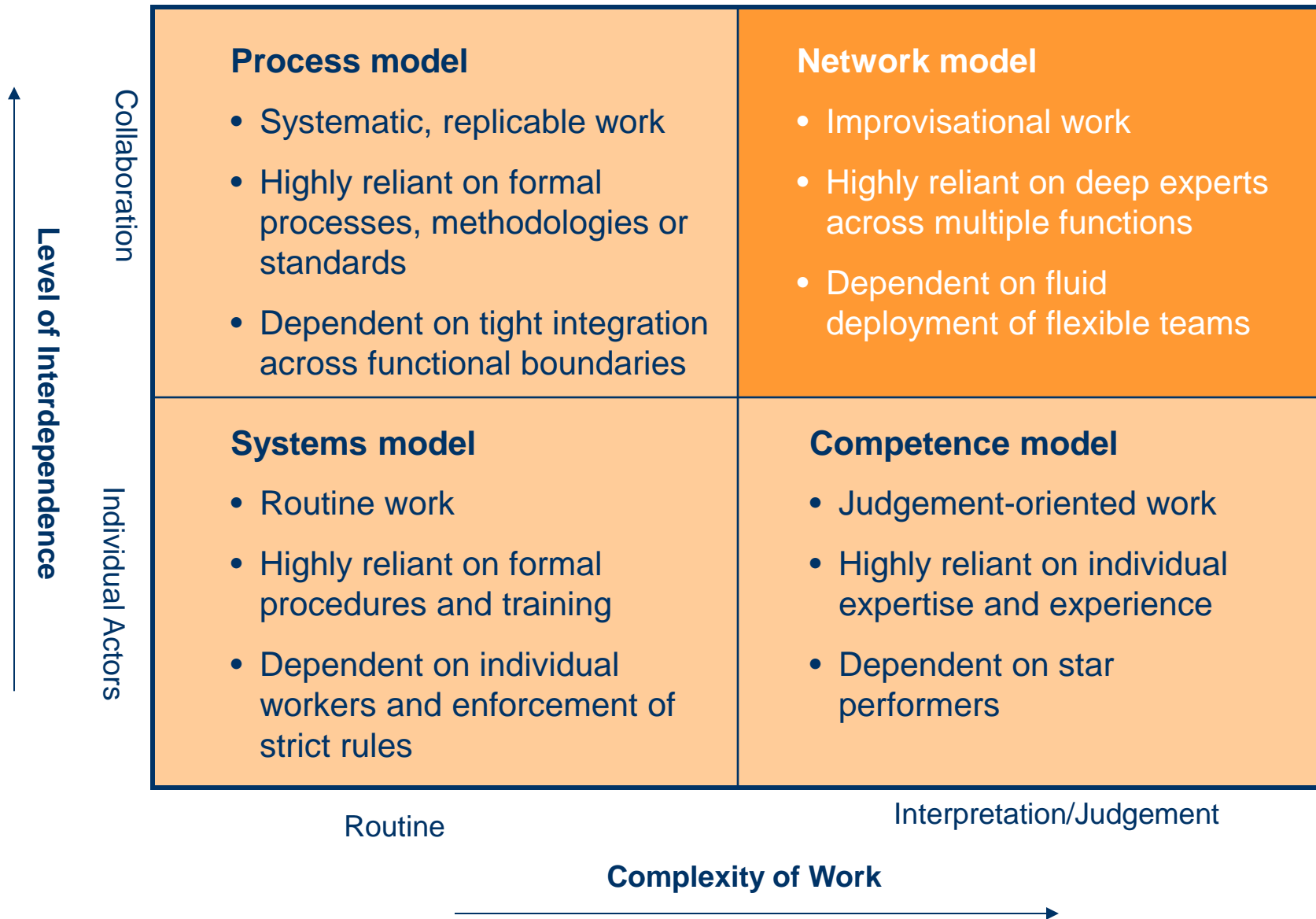
# What is the World Bank?

- Vision: A World Free of Poverty
- The world's premier development financing agency, the World Bank lends approx. US \$ 20 billion each year
- The Bank provides financing and technical advice to its borrowers (member countries) for building their national economies and reducing poverty
- Today, the Bank has 184 member countries

# How does the Bank do its work?

The World Bank has developed into a large and complex organization:

- Staff come from more than 140 countries
- Over 10,000 staff, with more than 40% based in our 100+ Country Offices
- With 5,000 active projects (currently under preparation or being implemented)
- Addressing local, national, regional and global issues



# Our work environment is changing...

- Some clients no longer need to borrow from us, but still want to draw on our technical advisory services
  - We have increasing competition from other regional Development Banks
  - Some clients want more flexibility in how they can spend money borrowed from the Bank
  - Our partners (other donors, the UN agencies) often look to us to take the lead and to convene collaborative partnerships
- How do you move quickly enough to satisfy the demands of clients who can now access financing from other sources?
  - ...while ensuring that there is sufficient time to conduct due diligence studies before new loans are approved?
  - ... while building coalitions with a diverse set of stakeholders, each of whom has their own agenda and procedures?
- And doing all of this in a virtual environment!

# Context of Virtual Teams in the Bank

- The typical Bank staff person is not the stereotypical lonely telecommuter sitting in their home office wearing their dressing gown!
  
- Our staff are more likely to be:
  - Working in a busy office (either in Washington DC or a country location)
  - Serving on 3-6 teams at any time
  - Traveling around the world for up to 100 days a year
  - Supported by a robust IT infrastructure (web-based intranet and databases, common e-mail platform, video-conferencing, satellite-based communication)
  - While working with people from different cultural and professional backgrounds on some of the most pressing and complex problems of our day

# Complex work in complex teams...

Bank teams exhibit many features of team complexity:

1. Members from more than one organization
2. Members from more than one sector
3. Members transition on and off the team at regular periods
4. Geographically dispersed with some members 5–12 hours apart
5. Members come from more than two national cultures
6. Members whose native language is different from the majority of other team members
7. Members do not have equal access to electronic communication and collaboration technology
8. Members who are not formally assigned to the team

# What are we learning?

1. Team basics matter
2. Understand the sources of diversity in your teams
3. Enable ongoing and timely contact
4. Provide the right tools for the task
5. Enable teams to help themselves



# 1. Team Basics Matter

- Appropriate size for the task
- Build alignment and shared understanding around a common purpose
- Manage the boundaries
- Support people to transition in and out of teams

# Tool: Team Charters


Team Charters are a tool for building the team. It allows you to make the following explicit and agreed:

- Purpose and importance to the organization
- Team Composition
- Scope of the Task
- Sponsor's expectations
- Roles and Responsibilities
- Team Success Indicators
- Team Operating Principles
- Behavioral Norms


## 2. Understand the sources of diversity

Diversity in teams takes different forms:

- Social
  - race, gender, ethnicity, etc.
- Informational
  - education, professional background, organisational tenure, work experience, etc.
- Values
  - Organisational, team, work values

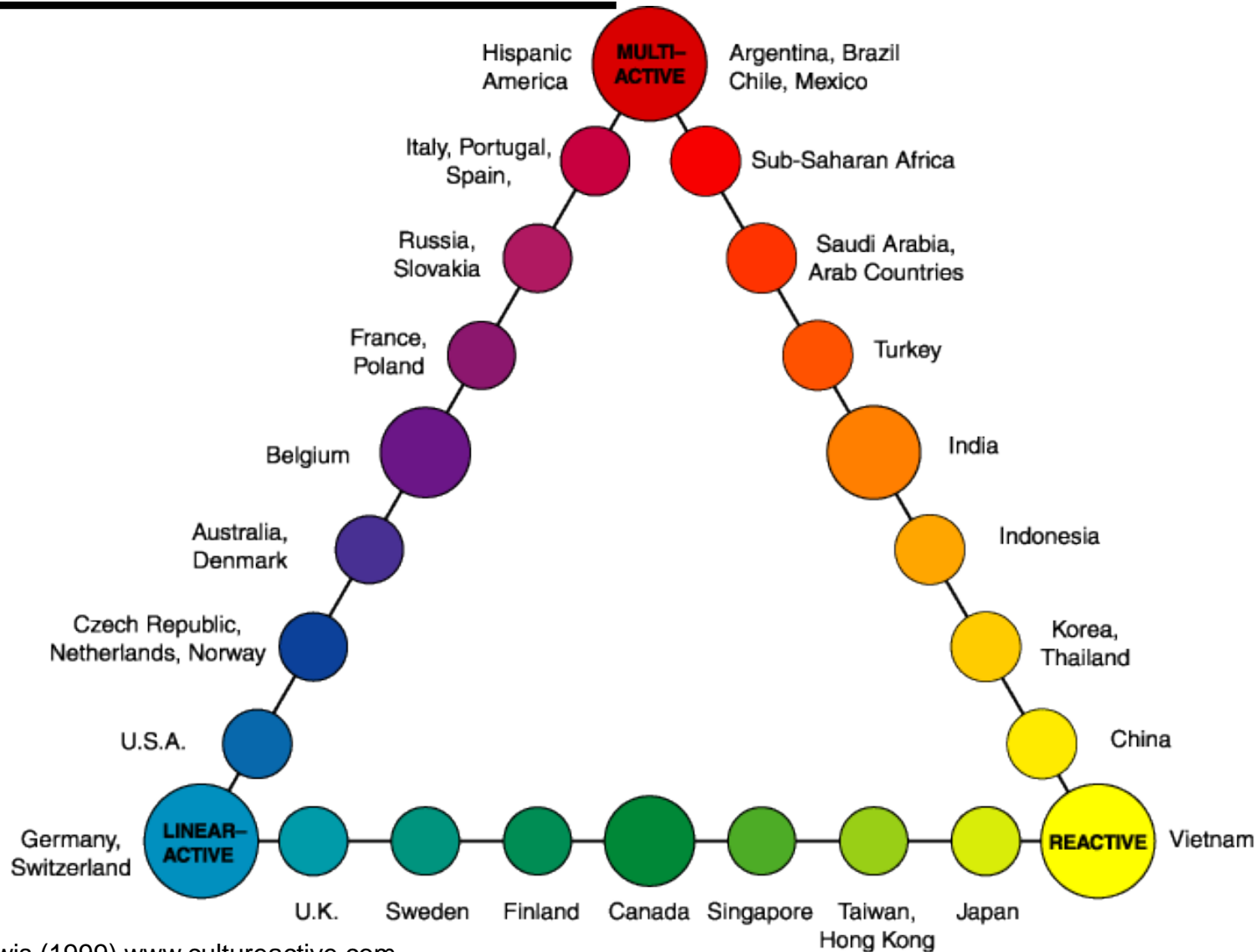


Greater diversity brings broader range of views and approaches



Greater alignment fosters collaboration towards a common purpose

# Tool: CultureActive

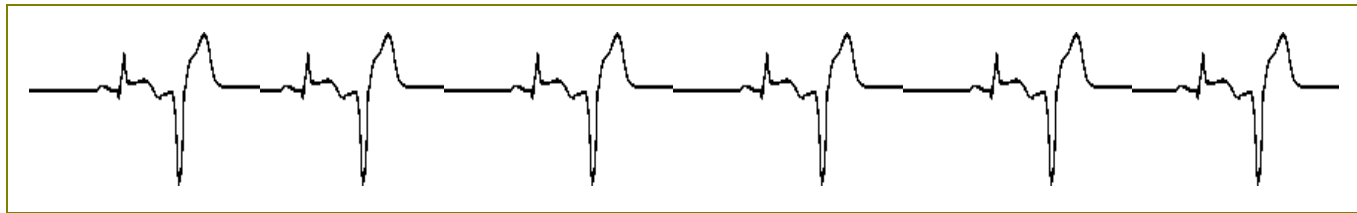


# Tool: CultureActive

LINEAR-ACTIVE	MULTI-ACTIVE	REACTIVE
Talks half the time	Talks most of the time	Listens most of the time
Does one thing at a time	Does several things at once	Reacts to partner's action
Plans ahead step by step	Plans grand outline only	Looks at general principles
Polite but direct	Emotional	Polite, indirect
Partly conceals feelings	Displays feelings	Conceals feelings
Confronts with logic	Confronts emotionally	Never confronts
Dislikes losing face	Has good excuses	Must not lose face
Rarely interrupts	Often interrupts	Doesn't interrupt
Job-oriented	People-oriented	Very people-oriented
Sticks to facts	Feelings before facts	Statements are promises
Truth before diplomacy	Flexible truth	Diplomacy over truth

### 3. Enable ongoing and timely contact

- Work on the task is ongoing, but there are spikes in activity



- Virtual contact (via e-mail and discussion databases) creates a ‘virtual space’ that surrounds the team and enables a solid foundation for periodic meetings
- Meetings – whether face-to-face or virtual – will be more collaborative if there is a solid basis of trust to the relationship

# Tool: Good Meeting Practices

## The “Meeting Sandwich”

### Purpose

- Meeting Room – choose the right one, and prepare it (whether for face-to-face or virtual)
- Identify Process Roles – who, which ones?
- Manage Participation – who, how?
- Make Decisions – how, who, when?

### Outcome

# Design for the potential of virtual tools

Washington, D.C.  
(Staff and Partners)



Kiev, Ukraine (Staff)



**Purpose:** prepare response to a new government anti-poverty strategy in Moldova

**Challenge:** Involve Bank staff in 3 locations across 7 hour time difference

**Traditional approach:** individual team members send comments to Team Leader via e-mail; who integrates and prepares draft (2+ weeks)

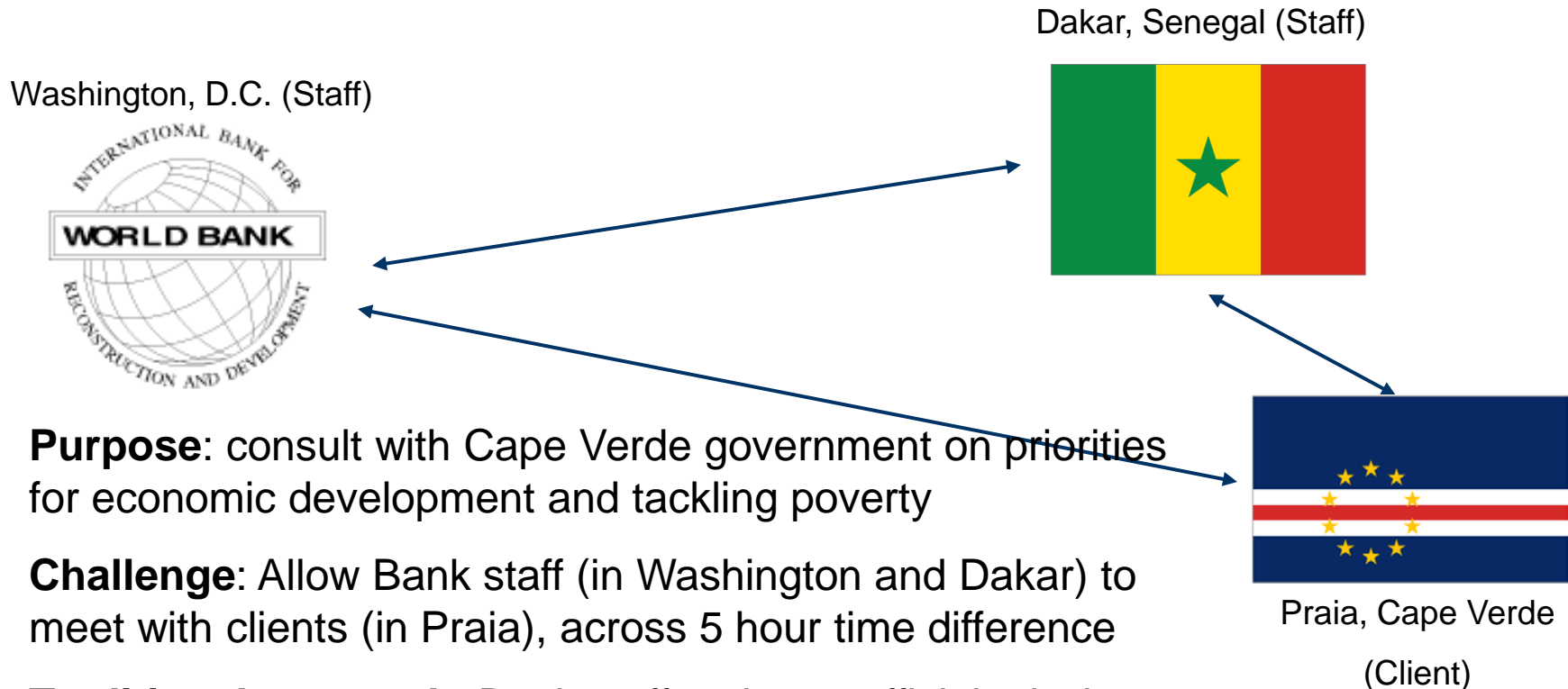
**New approach:** 4 hour video conference, using sub-groups in each location, to collect and discuss all comments; Team Leader prepares draft (2 days)



Chisinau, Moldova  
(Staff)



# Design for the potential of virtual tools



**Purpose:** consult with Cape Verde government on priorities for economic development and tackling poverty

**Challenge:** Allow Bank staff (in Washington and Dakar) to meet with clients (in Praia), across 5 hour time difference

**Traditional approach:** Bank staff make an official mission to Praia and hold meetings with individual ministries (but consider the time to set up the visit, and the cost of air travel)

**New approach:** 4 hour video conference, involving all 3 locations, to present a framework for prioritising and to discuss with Government. Simultaneous translation in English, French and Portuguese (large time and cost savings)

## 4. Provide the right tools for the task

- Use the right tools for the purpose you are trying to achieve
- Don't rely on technology when you really need to meet face-to-face

### Synchronous Tools

- Audio/Tele-conference
- Video Conference
- *SameTime*
  - Instant messaging
  - Web meetings

### Asynchronous Tools

- E-mail and distribution lists
- Activity Room database
  - Document Library
  - Discussion Space
  - Group Calendar
- Team Web page

# Appropriate Tools for the Work

	Audio-conference only	Video-conference only	E-mail/Chat only	Face-to-Face
<b>To Generate ideas and plans</b>	Marginal	Poor	Good	Good
<b>To Solve routine problems</b>	Good	Good	Marginal	Good
<b>To Solve ambiguous or complex problems</b>	Good	Good	Poor	Good
<b>To Negotiate interpersonal or technical conflicts</b>	Poor	Marginal	Poor	Good

## 5. Help teams help themselves

- Learning together as a team has a dual focus:
  - it seeks to support teams in building the capacity to deal with the current challenges
  - it also aims to develop in them a long-term mastery to learn how to deal with the challenges that will confront them in the future.

# Tool: Team Learning Techniques

- Learn Before: Peer Assist
  - A structured way for a team to learn from the experiences of others who may have relevant experience to share:
  
- Learn During: After Action Review
  1. What was supposed to happen?
  2. What actually happened?
  3. Why was there a difference?
  4. What can we learn from this?
  
- Learn After: Project Retrospective
  - Revisit the team's purpose and deliverables, review the process and identify lessons to inform the work of other teams.

# References and Resources

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