

These days, virtual teamwork is so commonplace at global enterprises that some of their managers claim to see almost no difference between co-located and geographically dispersed teams. In ideal cases, these managers may have a point: with the right team environment and leader, and supported by advances in technology that help bridge gaps, virtual collaboration can indeed look seamless. The sobering reality of most companies and virtual teams, however, is a continuing struggle to overcome the challenges imposed by distance and time zones, as well as language and cultural differences.



strategies and recommendations for leaders in virtual global environments. The book's authors concentrate on five areas: **Inclusion** (what makes members feel included in a group), **Organization and Process** (the organizational conditions and work processes that influence virtual performance), **Space and Time** (the framework of geographical locations and time zones), **Members, Tasks and Objectives** (dimensions with a project management and social-capital focus), and **E-Culture** (the framework for group interactions that enables virtual shared collaboration).

Each major section is accompanied by a real-life case study that unfolds continually and illustrates the principles presented. Good practices in virtual teaming in each of the five areas receive ample discussion and serve as helpful guidance. A discussion of the right use of media and technology in high-performing virtual teams adds further icing to this cake.

Here, *Closeness at a Distance* offers help but could also raise suspicion: the book's German team of authors are either employed by or associated with one and the same intercultural training company, and the mantelpieces of their work are a diagnostic tool and the corresponding improvement process that are being marketed by that very company.

Throughout the book, the authors relate to a concept they call "purple space." Just like mixing the colors of red and blue on a palette will create a new one, they argue, reducing the complexity of the interaction space in which a "red" and a "blue" group meet and work together will nurture frictionless communication and collaboration. If all goes well, the result is a new common identity—something from which not only global work teams would greatly benefit.

Too much self-serving business promotion here? Fortunately, the answer is 'no.'

Quite to the contrary, *Closeness at a Distance* is a solid and well-balanced compendium of



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