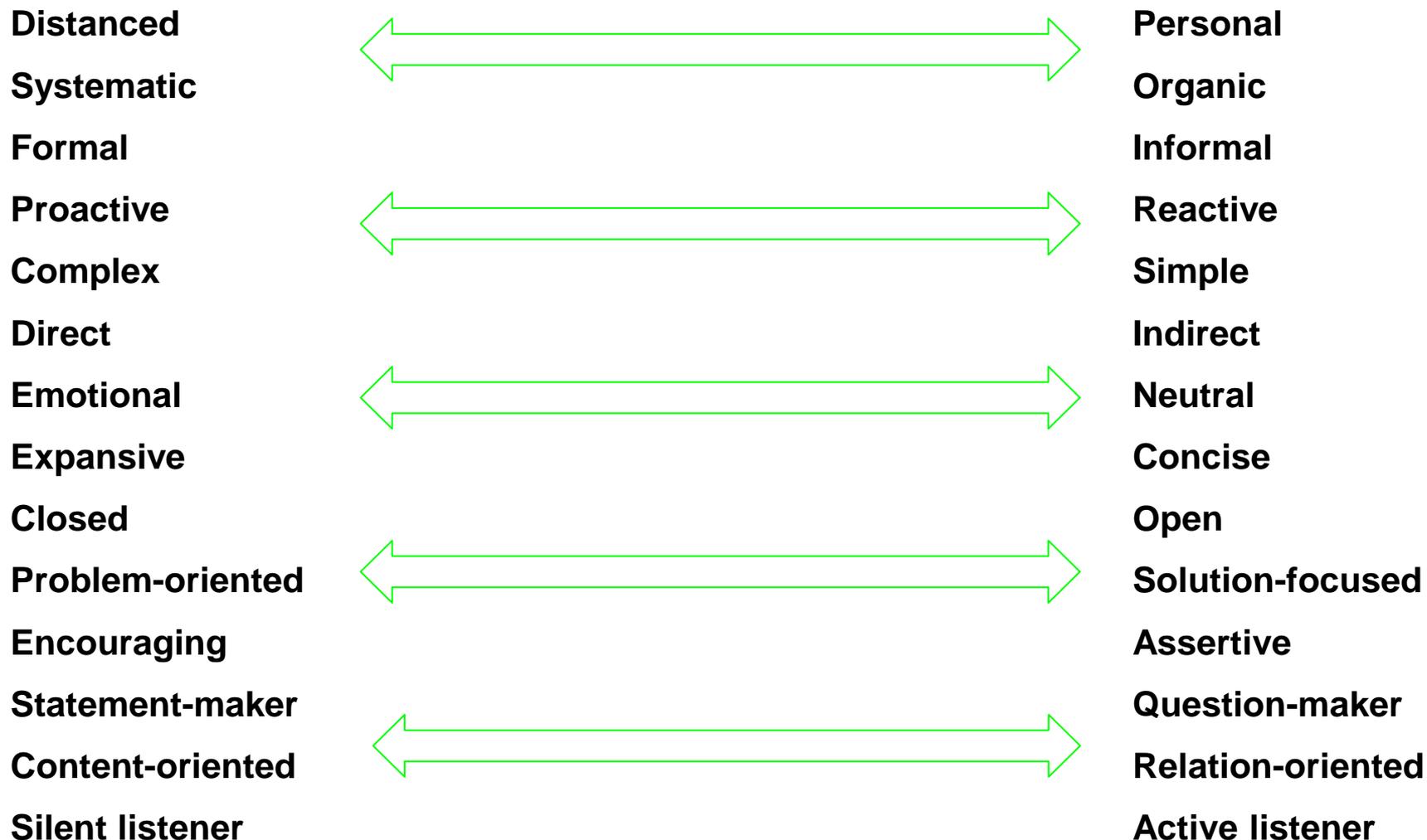# Understanding the impact of culture on communication

Jackie Black
International House
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1. What's your communication style?

# Personal Communication Styles

Distanced	**Personal**
Systematic	**Organic**
Formal	**Informal**
Proactive	**Reactive**
Complex	**Simple**
Direct	**Indirect**
Emotional	**Neutral**
Expansive	**Concise**
Closed	**Open**
Problem-oriented	**Solution-focused**
Encouraging	**Assertive**
Statement-maker	**Question-maker**
Content-oriented	**Relation-oriented**
Silent listener	**Active listener**

Norwegian-French styles

Norwegian		French
more consensual	←→	more competitive / confrontational
more collectivist	←→	more individualist
lower energy	←→	higher energy
quieter	←→	noisier
slower paced	←→	faster paced
linear	←→	circular
more patient	←→	less patient
taking turns	←→	talking over each other
concern to save face	←→	some may lose face
respect shown through listening	←→	respect shown through engaging
practice first	←→	theory first
experience admired	←→	intellectual argument admired
more egalitarian	←→	more hierarchical
comm. managed by the chair	←→	comm. managed by the boss
more belief-based (heart)?	←→	more analytical (head)?

International dialogue patterns

1.

2.

3.
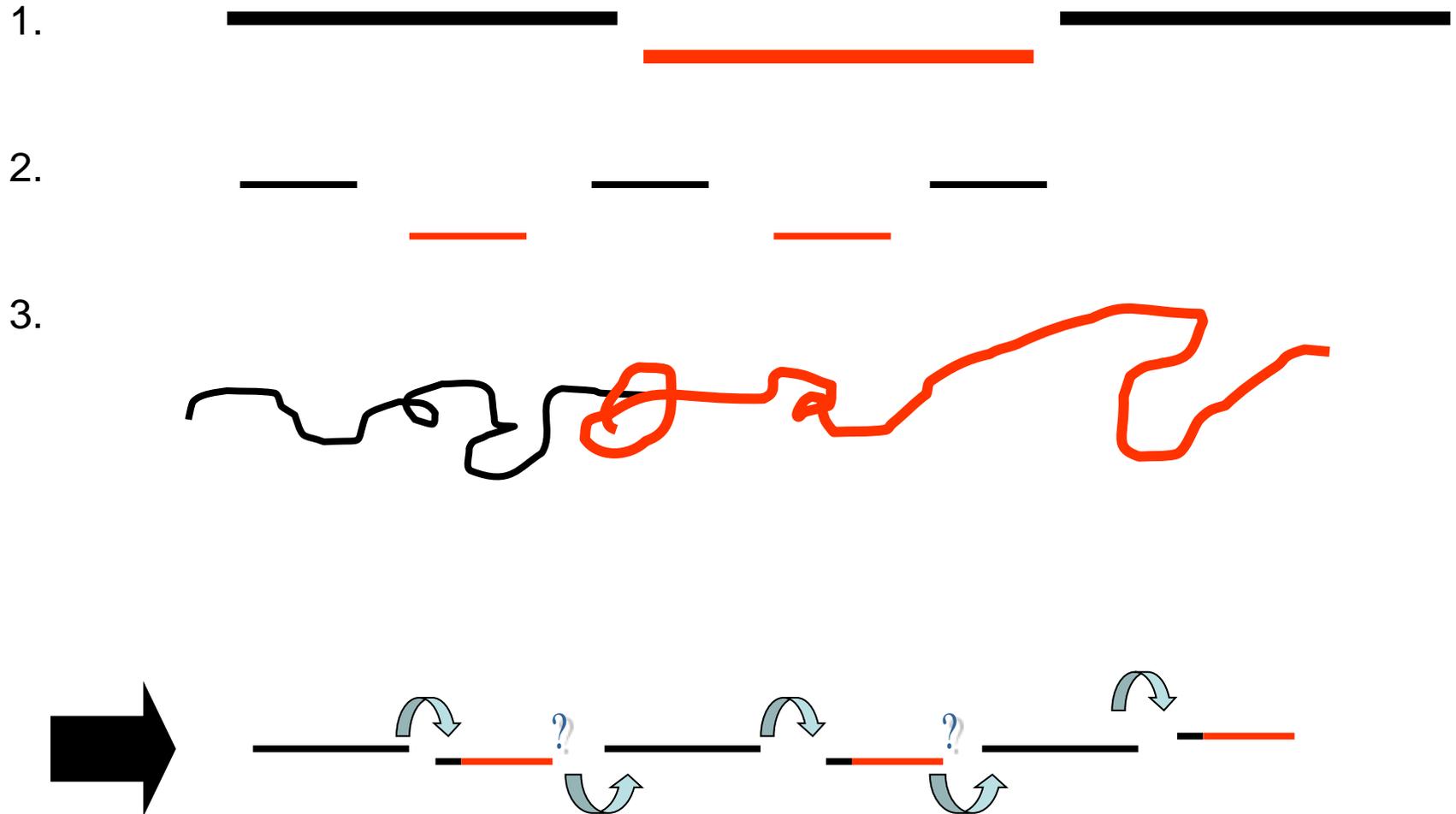
2. One view of culture

Culture and Diversity

Which one are you?

The peach and the coconut

Negative:

Coconuts see peaches as …	Peaches see coconuts as …

Positive:

Coconuts see peaches as …	Peaches see coconuts as …

The peach and the coconut

Negative:

Coconuts see peaches as …	Peaches see coconuts as …
- superficial - not to be taken seriously - childish - too playful - insincere	- unapproachable - hard - rigid in approach - impolite - lacking humour - gruff - Unfriendly / unsociable

Positive:

Coconuts see peaches as …	Peaches see coconuts as …
- open - enthusiastic - friendly - humorous - flexible	- reliable - proper - clear - honest - trustworthy

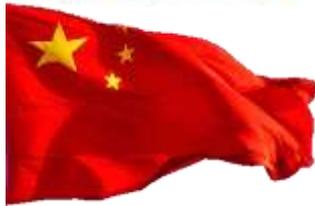**What are the practical implications of this model?**

3. How do we work?

Cultural Dimension

DBC
Digital Business Communication

High and Low Context

Do you think you live and work in a high or low context culture?

High context culture
Indirect communication
Context important for understanding
Avoid saying "no"
Maintain harmony
Long-term relationships
Strong personal networks

Low context culture
Direct communication
Context not so important for understanding
Say "no"
Surface conflict
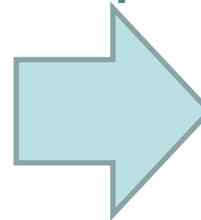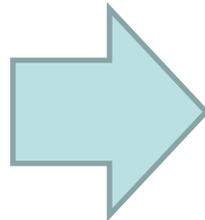Short-term relationships
Task-based networks

Culture, directness and trust

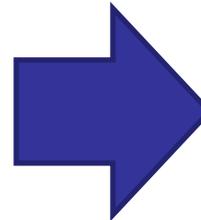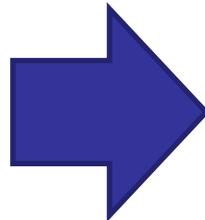**High context**   **Indirect**   **People important**

Low context   **Direct**   **Task important**

Take the "Person or task?" quiz

Task-focused or　　Person-focused?

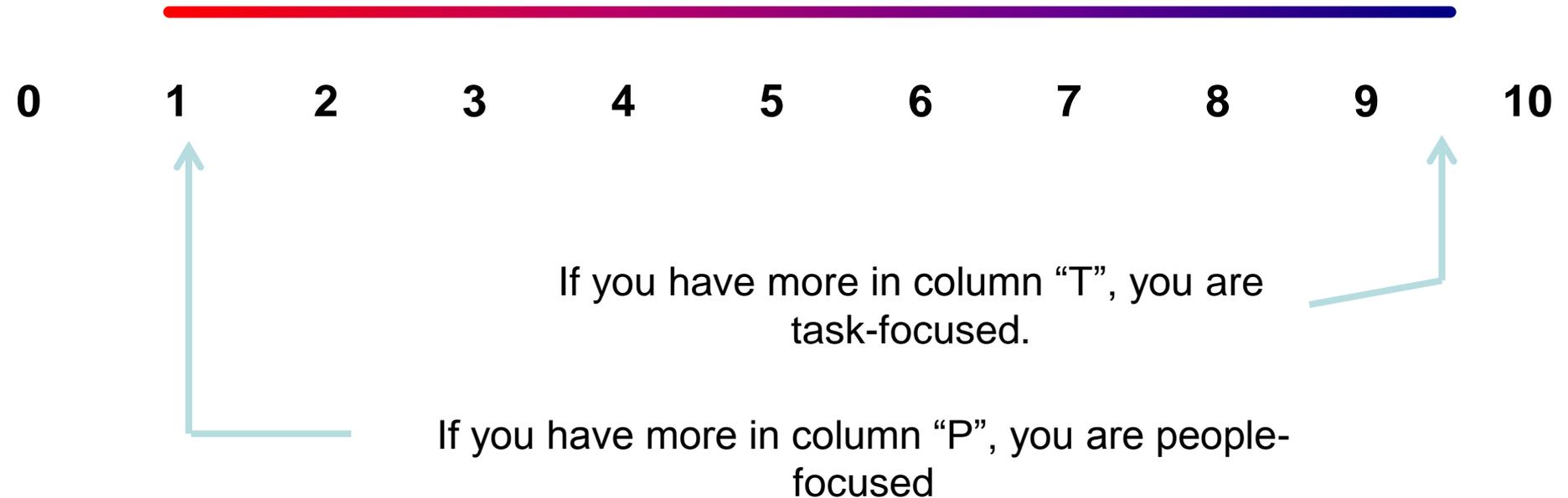| Task-focused	Person-focused
Concentration of technical aspects of work.	Concentration on relationships with people at work.
Little small talk, distance from personal questions.	A lot of small talk, interest in personal questions.
Interest created by information, logic, technical data	Interest created by relationships, trust, prestige.
Customers stay with the product even if the sales representative changes.	Customers stay with the sales representative even if he or she changes firm.
Results have priority over harmony and "face".	Results come from harmony and "face".
People with expert knowledge are valued.	People with many relationships are valued.
Distance from people who are not useful.	Distance from people who are not loyal.
Conflicts resolved by logical use of arguments, contracts, laws and compromise.	Conflicts resolved by evidence of loyalty, prestige, mediators, authority figures and new formulations.
People concentrate on the task.	People mix work and private life.
Friends and colleagues are kept separate.	Colleagues are also friends.

Task-focused or person-focused?

Place yourself along the line.

0   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

If you have more in column "T", you are task-focused.

If you have more in column "P", you are people-focused

What's going on?

A group of German academics were meeting for a Friday afternoon seminar. A paper was presented, after which there was a heated discussion. An American guest professor was disturbed by the atmosphere, and had the impression that the professors didn't like each other at all. She was surprised that after the discussion had ended they all left the room in a good mood, wishing each other a good weekend.

The German professors were focused on the task at hand (i.e. the discussion of the academic paper), while the US colleague was concentrating on the relationship between the people present and misinterpreted the tone of heated discussion as meaning that the people didn't like each other.
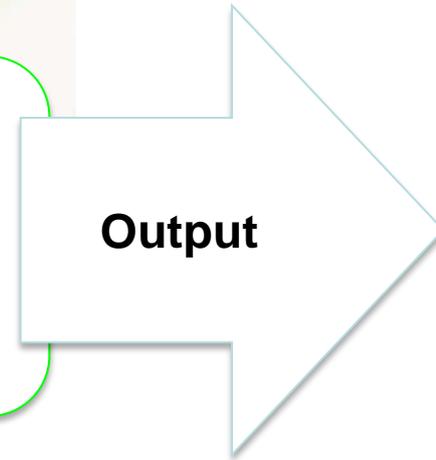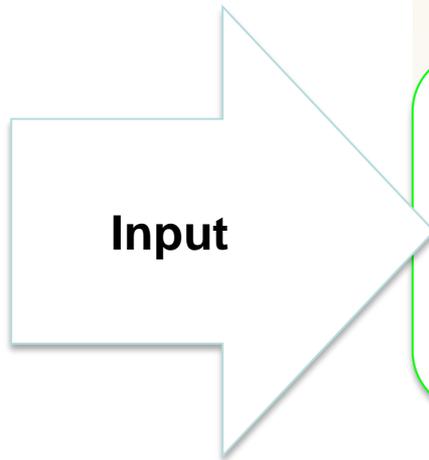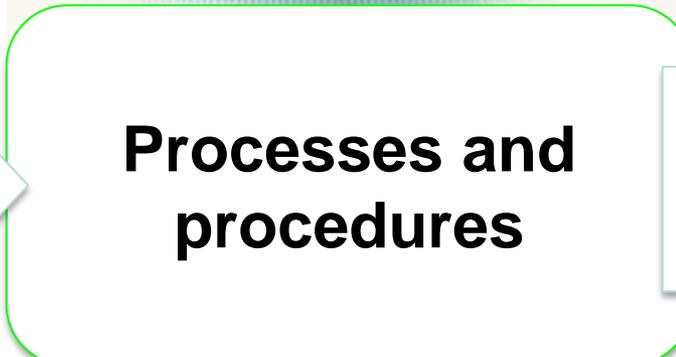
4. Communication channels

Where we communicate

Input → **Processes and procedures** → **Output**

Low context	High context
I/You focus	We/us focus
Starts with task	Starts with relationship
Feedback in message	Feedback deferred to phone or face-to-face
Direct and explicit	Indirect and implicit
Clarity is primary	Saving face is primary

Case study: the right message?

Background: Tim (British) and Janine (Australian) are both leaders of small teams which are part of a much bigger multinational team spanning 5 continents.They have never met , but have worked together on several projects in the past. They have always communicated with each by email because of time differences.

Situation: the current project is due to end shortly but there are some tasks outstanding and deadlines are fast approaching. Tim is anxious to know what is going on so meets with Phil one of his less experienced team members based in Kuala Lumpur. He returns to London worried and drafts a mail to Janine.

Best practices

- Maximise any opportunity for face to face contact, especially at the beginning of a project to allow for relationship building

- Don't rely too much on email. Use email for information exchange not sensitive communication.

- Avoid giving any kind of feedback via email where possible.

- Book phone calls well in advance because task and time-oriented people may not cope well with unexpected calls.

- In virtual projects, use the phone to build relationships but also consider using on-line presentations to bring the team together.

- Use conference calls for top-down messages as it allows the team to respond personally.

- Communicate frequently to ensure everyone knows what's going on.

- Remember the acronym KISS in all forms of communication.

Native English speakers

Do

- Speak slowly and build in more pauses
- Use simple words and sentences (active vs passive / if / complex frames)
- Articulate clearly and project strongly
- Take care with contractions, weak forms and ends of words
- Avoid unnecessary filling phrases
- Reformulate, summarise, and check understanding often
- Facilitate others
- Listen to other people and listen to yourself
- Ask someone for clarification if you don't really understand their point

Don't

- Try to be funny
- Be ambiguous
- Make local (i.e. British / American etc.) cultural references
- Use idiom, colloquial expression or complicated grammatical forms
- Dominate the talking time with overlong interventions

eye contact

touch

body distance

"Beware of the 100 missed messages"

paralanguage

Voice

Body Language

What the British say ...

What the British say	What the British mean	What others understand
I hear what you say	I disagree and do not want to discuss it further	He accepts my point of view
With the greatest respect...	I think you are an idiot	He is listening to me
That's not bad	That's good	That's poor
That is a very brave proposal	You are insane	He thinks I have courage
Quite good	A bit disappointing	Quite good
I would suggest...	Do it or be prepared to justify yourself	Think about the idea, but do what you like
Oh, incidentally/ by the way	The primary purpose of our discussion is...	That is not very important
I was a bit disappointed that	I am annoyed that	It doesn't really matter
Very interesting	That is clearly nonsense	They are impressed
I'll bear it in mind	I've forgotten it already	They will probably do it
I'm sure it's my fault	It's your fault	Why do they think it was their fault?
You must come for dinner	It's not an invitation, I'm just being polite	I will get an invitation soon
I almost agree	I don't agree at all	He's not far from agreement
I only have a few minor comments	Please re-write completely	He has found a few typos
Could we consider some other options	I don't like your idea	They have not yet decided

Thanks for listening!

Any questions?

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

Task versus technology

Synchronous

VoIP
Web Meetings
Video Conferencing
Audio Conferencing
Personal Webcams
Phoning
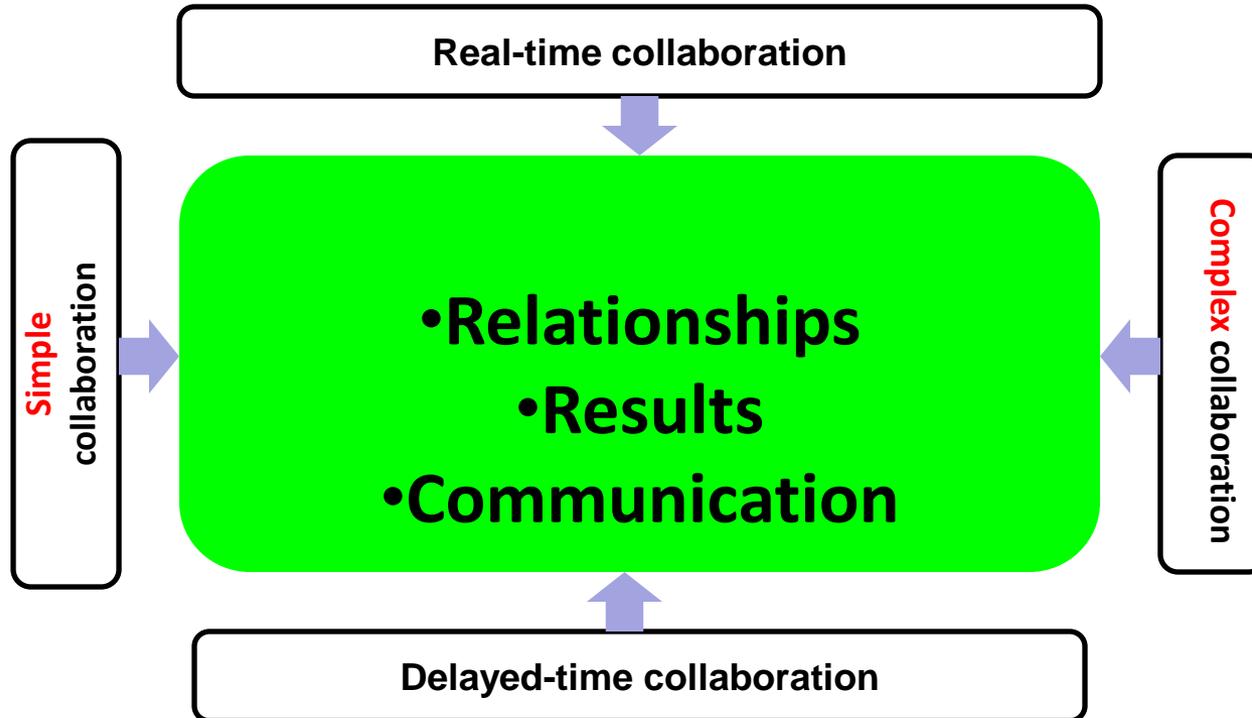Telepresence

Asynchronous

Threaded discussions
Messaging
SMS
Wikis
E-mail

Matching technology to task