ways. People are now able to work interdependently across space, time, and organization boundaries.

Our electronic technology together with strong trust are what links virtual teams and makes them function well. This element of trust is so important it deserves its own section later on in this chapter. But for now, let's look briefly at what we mean by this new electronic technology linking virtual teams.

NEW TECHNOLOGIES

Digital communication may be real-time or time-disconnected, and it is effectively unlimited in terms of the number of people it can reach. Today's almost miraculous interactions are not only fast, but thanks to increased memory capabilities, we are able to recall, reprocess, and link to other information in ways we only imagined a few years ago.

Now we can interact with people in entirely new ways. We can have on-line conversations, meetings, and conferences—in real (synchronous) or "disconnected" (asynchronous) time—using various interactive media. We are now privileged to be able to choose our methods of communication. We know that face-to-face meetings help build trust. Real-time media keep people in synch. And asynchronous media create the ability to link over time and across boundaries.

GENSLER REDEFINES PLACE

The move to virtual teaming is happening in all industries; with it comes a rethinking of the meaning of physical space. The architecture, design, and consulting firm, Gensler, responded to a client's question: "Can we sustain growth and performance as a purely virtual network?" The client, Paragon

Biomedical, runs clinical trials for major pharmaceutical companies, with 150 people working mainly from home offices. But Paragon was concerned with creating more collaboration and connectivity than T1 lines, state-of-the-art laptops, and DSL lines had to offer.

In a February, 2000 interview with us, Loree Goffigon, VP and director of Gensler Consulting, said that Paragon wanted new real estate featuring "corporate hearths"—ideal settings for face-to-face interactions. They wanted new places where Paragon people could meet, train, and find workspace on demand in key locations including Irvine, California, the company's original home.

"Philosophically, the creation of these places is about learning, access, and building community," says Goffigon. Her firm finds itself working with "a greater number of providers, including technology consultants, ad agencies, and graphic design firms. Our work is happening much more collaboratively and across a broader spectrum of organizational areas because the questions our clients are asking are more comprehensive and systemic."

We use the word "sites" today to mean much more than physical space. Sites are the on-line "corporate hearths"—places people visit digitally. Sites may range from little on-line rooms to sprawling corporate campuses like Microsoft's in Redmond, Washington, to vast cyber-facilities like America OnLine.

People create on-line places from the ground up. To do so, they use virtual analogs of desktops, rooms, offices, factories, malls, and communities. These and other familiar "place" metaphors serve as the building blocks for local cyberspace. We anticipate that these metaphors will rapidly evolve from cartoon-like storefronts and graphical menus to increasingly sophisticated three-dimensional virtual realities that members will walk into and around. As the early computer game-playing generations of kids grow up, they are incorporating the representational features of game technology into virtual team interfaces.

To operate effectively across boundaries, virtual teams become masters of media in preparing and delivering results as well as in running their own organizations.

We like to encourage people to imagine having "process rooms" on the web where you can grow the intelligence of the team as people collaborate over