Virtual Teams and the Critical Role of Effective Communication

Dr. Rachel Cubas-Wilkinson
Principal Organizational Development Consultant

The Myers-Briggs Company

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Please post your questions throughout our session. We will answer these during and following the webinar.

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Presenter

Dr. Rachel Cubas-Wilkinson

Principal OD Consultant, The Myers-Briggs Company

- Passionate about people development

- Consultancy Services Lead for The Myers-Briggs Company, US

- Partners with organizations to create robust staff development programs and to solve people development challenges in selection, onboarding, individual/team effectiveness and leadership development.

- Master's and Doctoral Degrees in Organizational Leadership. Graduate specialization in Adult Learning.

- Doctoral research: Qualitative multi-case study into the impacts of leadership professional development.

- Based in Jupiter, Fl

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Our mission as the Myers-Briggs Company

" **To inspire everyone to lead more successful and fulfilling lives.** "

| Deposit checks and balance my checkbook	Adjust the temperature on my water heater and AC thermostat	Buy sour cream for a special recipe	Find a birthday gift for a friend	Buy paint for the porch floor
Return décor that didn't work in my space	Catch-up with my old friend Dale	Draft a proposal to help a new Senior leader build cohesion across her management team	Collaborate with my Myers-Briggs Consulting team on 3 new virtual workshops for teams	Participate in a lecture on mindfulness
	Binge-watch the new season of *Better Call Saul*	Talk with my co-worker about how her family is doing right now and strategies for obtaining toilet paper	Find a date	

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The Changing Space and Place of Work
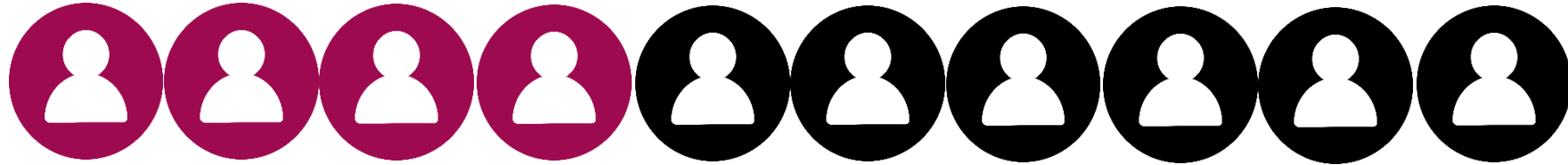
4 in 10 American workers spend at least some of their time, on a regular basis, working remotely

The Changing Space and Place of Work

- US-based technology giant launches *flexible work timing/work from home program*

- 80,000 employees globally.

- New flex work option extended to 80% of employees, who are free to work from anywhere.

- Cisco has saved $196 million in year-on-year real estate costs, while garnering $294 million through building sales. Total savings of $490 million.

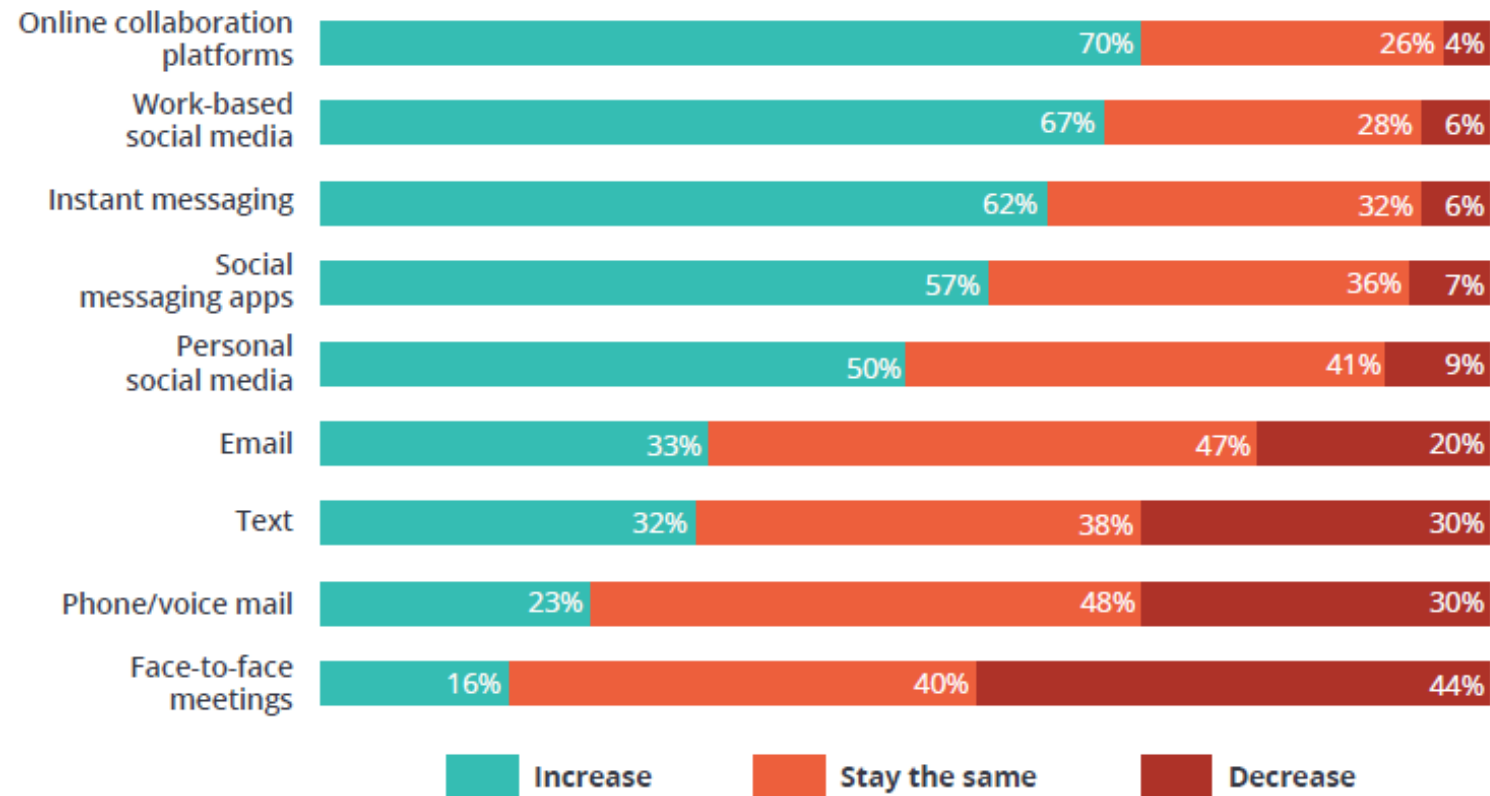- At the same time, *employee satisfaction has increased dramatically.*

Source: Business Standard report, 2019

PHYSICAL MEETINGS LOSING OUT TO VIRTUAL COLLABORATION

Face-to-face meetings and phone meetings are on the decline, while work collaboration platforms are on the upswing.

Figure 1. Expected use of communications channels in the next three to five years

Channel	Increase	Stay the same	Decrease
Online collaboration platforms	70%	26%	4%
Work-based social media	67%	28%	6%
Instant messaging	62%	32%	6%
Social messaging apps	57%	36%	7%
Personal social media	50%	41%	9%
Email	33%	47%	20%
Text	32%	38%	30%
Phone/voice mail	23%	48%	30%
Face-to-face meetings	16%	40%	44%

■ Increase ■ Stay the same ■ Decrease

n = 11,070
Source: Deloitte *Global Human Capital Trends* survey, 2018.

Deloitte Insights | deloitte.com/insights

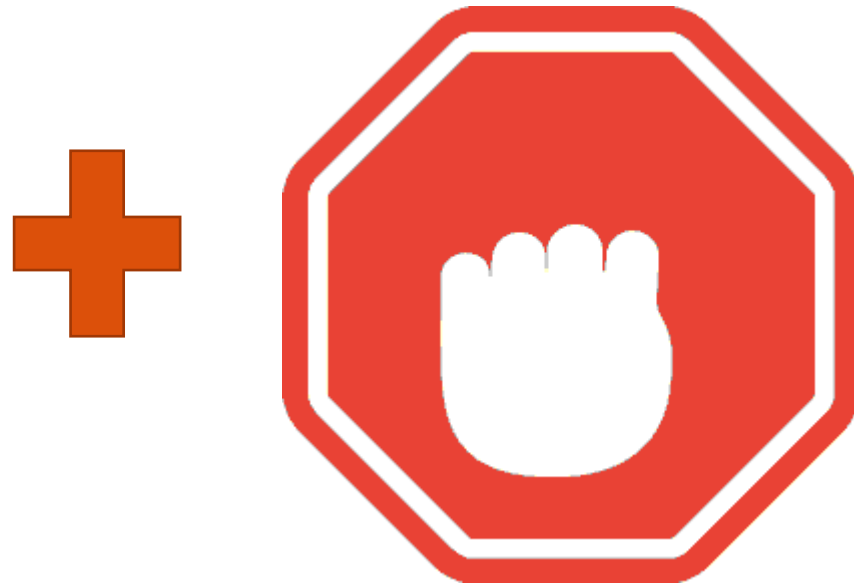*Human Capital trends show a Global Move Towards Virtual Work*

The Changing Space and Place of Work

Increased personal flexibility in the job market to work within a desired job or industry, from anywhere.

For the Individual

Increased use and reliance on remote workers and virtual teams to achieve results.

For Organizations

Global move towards virtual work conditions and collaboration, even in fully co-located and on-site teams.

For the Global Workforce

The New Normal

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The Changing Space and Place of Work

COVID-19

DO THE FIVE

Help stop coronavirus

1 **HANDS** Wash them often

2 **ELBOW** Cough into it

3 **FACE** Don't touch it

4 **SPACE** Keep safe distance

5 **HOME** Stay if you can

The "New" New Normal

Source: World Health Organization, 2020

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The Changing Space and Place of Work

?

- *How are you experiencing the "new normal" personally?*
- *Has the Space and Place of Work changed for you as a result of the "New" New Normal?*

The Human Side of Virtual Work

- **If sudden, unexpected change is introduced, we can experience:**

  - **Loss of daily routines**

  - **Loss of physical connection and presence**

  - **Sense of change coming at a sudden and quick pace**

  - **Uncertainty**

  - **Disorientation**

  - **Stress**

  - **Concerns about the continuity of life as usual**

  - **Concerns for wellbeing (neglect of wellbeing)**

"How do we successfully navigate team communication in a virtual environment?"

Effective Team Building Blocks / Derailers

Mission

- Goals and purpose for the organization and team

- Shared understanding of mission

- Employees have the ability to connect their work to the mission

Defined Roles

- What roles are represented on the team

- Task Distribution

- Equality of workload

- Bandwidth and resourcing

Organizational Support

- Employees have the resources they need to do their work

- Clear organizational processes

- Removal of bottlenecks

- Consistent Managerial support, accountability

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Navigating Team Work in a Virtual Environment

The Organization's responsibility in responding to (increasing) virtuality and the use of remote teams:

1

Provide the Tech & Tools employees will need to be successful

2

Appoint a capable virtual leader

3

**Maintain connection to Emotional, Social, and Workplace needs of the employees**

?

Consider Privately:
How would you say your organization is doing on these 3 essential responsibilities? OR
What plans are in place to get there (especially in response to sudden change)?

Source: Pauleen, D.; Dulebohn, J. and Hoch, J.

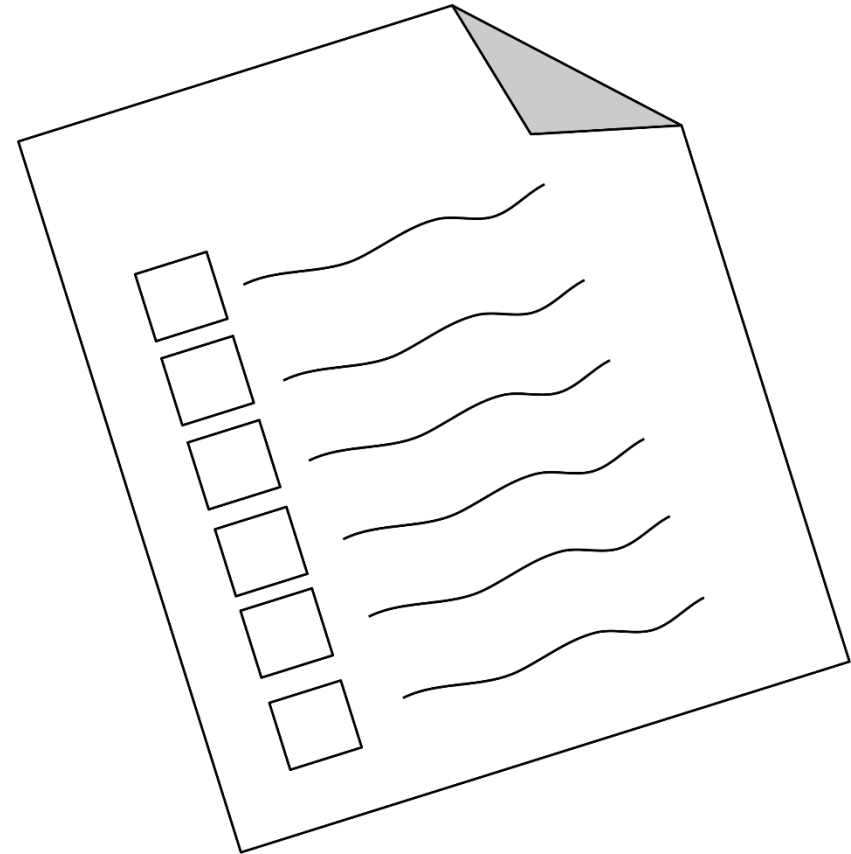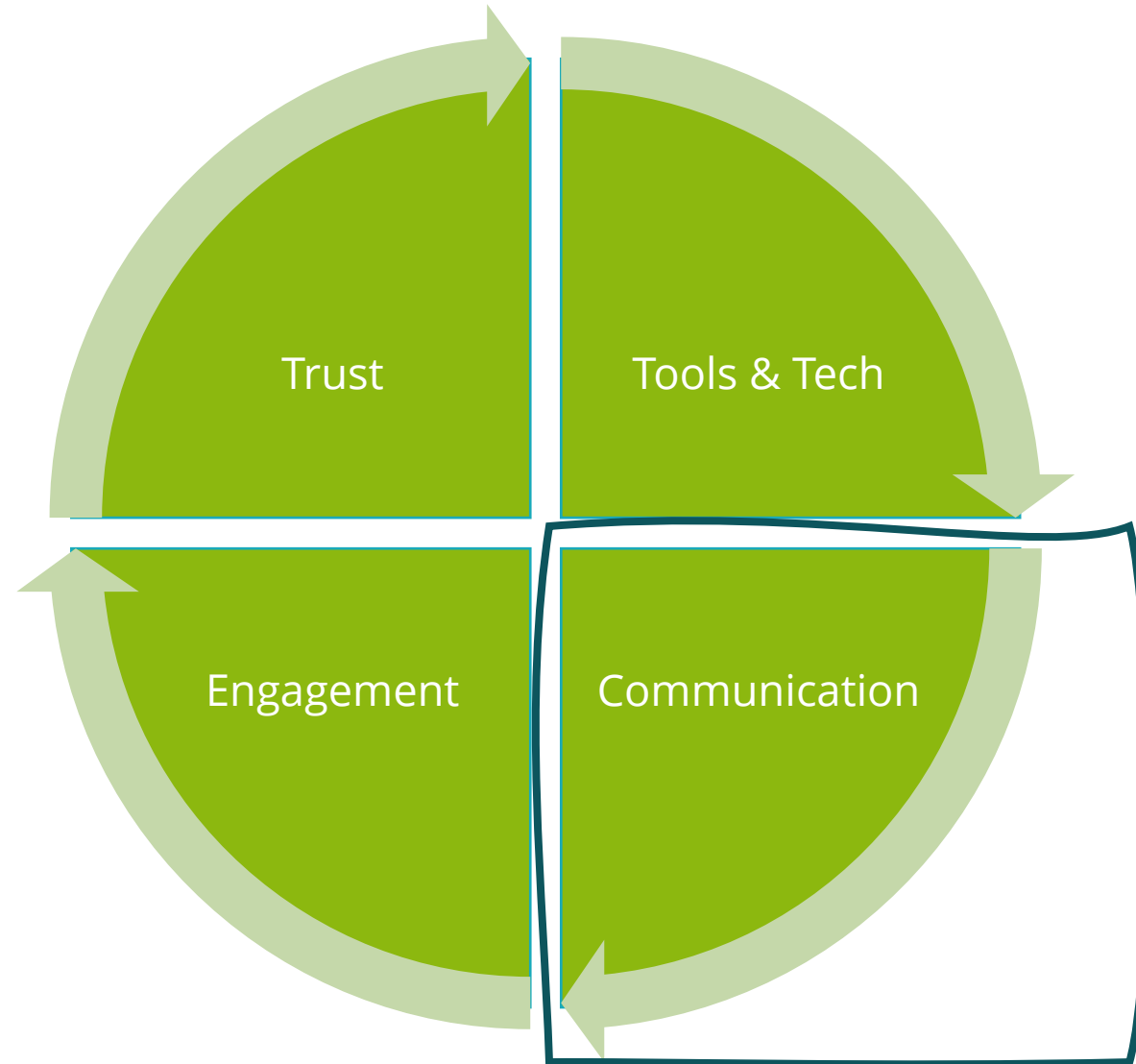The **Myers-Briggs** Company

Effective Virtual Team Building Blocks / Derailers
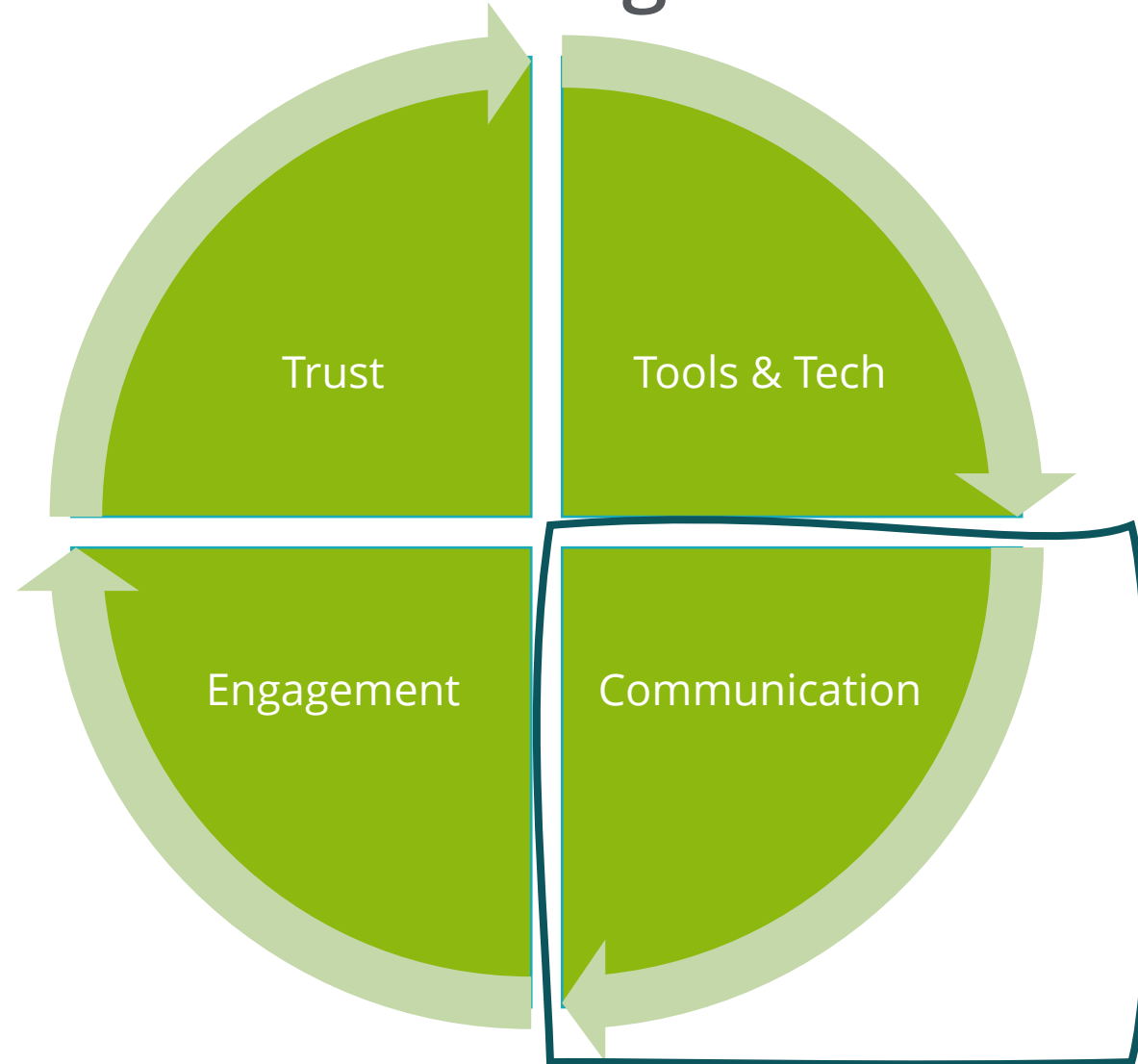
Poll

- **Would you say that your virtual team(s) are communicating effectively?"**

Please enter your response to the poll.

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Today's Objectives

Objectives

1. **Examine the most crucial team elements which support high-quality communication.**

2. **Consider personal and organizational strategies that can impact and improve the effectiveness of virtual teams.**

Setting Norms, Expectations, and Predictability

- Especially in times of sudden change such as moving to a virtual team unexpectedly, your team members may simply be wondering:

What am I to be doing right now?

What is my focus?

Setting Norms, Expectations, and Predictability

- Historically, on-site work environments have provided **Structure** and **Focus** through physical and tangible means.

  - Structure- *There's a place and time I come to in order to do work.*

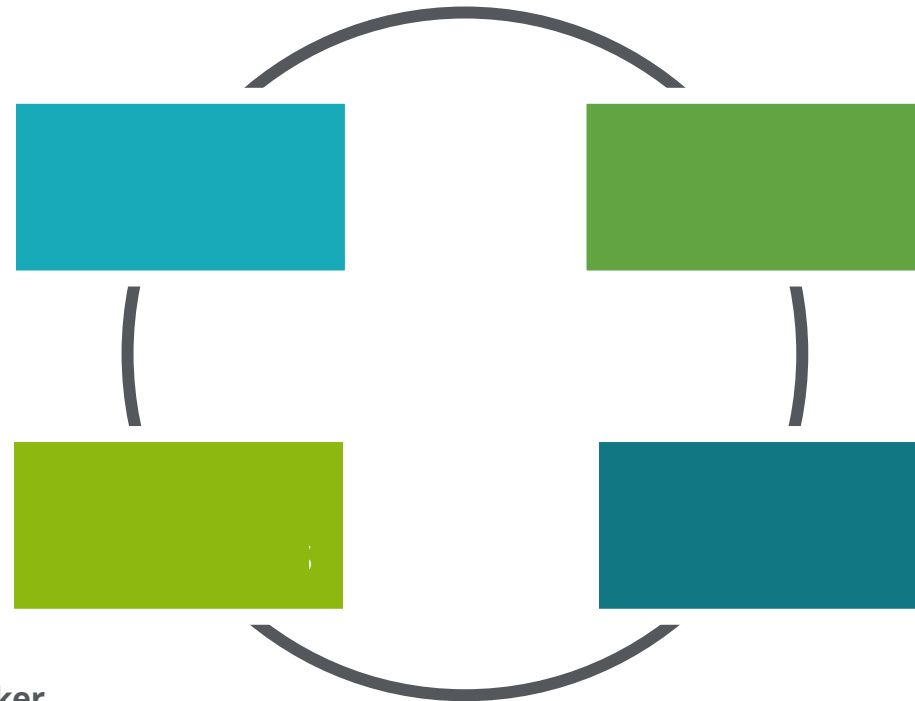 - Focus- *My on-site desk, cubicle, work areas, and meetings invite me to focus on work tasks.*

- In a virtual environment, it is often up to the employee to create their own structure and focus. This can be ***daunting***, especially for new remote workers.

  - How do I work now? Will I have what I need to do my work? Are others doing something I am not doing?

  - Can lead to uncertainty, loss of productivity, loss of employee engagement.

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Setting Norms, Expectations, and Predictability

Results of Setting Norms, Expectations, and Predictability

- Guides continuity of communication necessary to complete work tasks and remain productive

- Creates continuity of environment conducive to working and collaborating

- Uncertainty
- Misunderstandings
- Angst
- Frustrations with co-worker interdependencies
- Peer Trust

- Guides engagement with work tasks, productivity, and pace of work

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Setting Norms, Expectations, and Predictability

Norms

- **Moving online or toward virtual work requires rethinking the ways the team needs to work together and setting the form / format for how this will occur virtually.**
  - When will we meet?
  - How will we discuss and resolve problems and come to decisions?
  - What tools will we use to communicate?

Expectations

- **Guiding team members on what is expected of them will reduce disorientation, disengagement, and loss of productivity.**
  - When will we be "online"? Response times and availability. Timezones.
  - Peer-to-peer interdependence and accountability
  - When do I solve problems independently or escalate / ask for help?
  - Employee development / skills building on communicating effectively

Predictability

- **Team Members need to hear from leaders about what is going on organizationally**
  - Cascading & consistent communication, reinforcing priorities, providing support
  - Manager models communication standards and expectations
  - Setting the tone and predictability for communication

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Assess your organization's current state

SETTING NORMS, EXPECTATIONS, AND PREDICTABILITY

✓ **Doing Well**

✗ **Needs Improvement**

! **In Progress**

MEDIATING DISTANCE & MAINTAINING CONNECTION

✓ **Doing Well**

✗ **Needs Improvement**

! **In Progress**

AVOIDING THE TRUST TRAP

✓ **Doing Well**

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Virtual Teams and Effective Communication

SETTING NORMS, EXPECTATIONS, AND PREDICTABILITY

MEDIATING DISTANCE & MAINTAINING CONNECTION

AVOIDING THE TRUST TRAP

Mediating Distance / Maintaining Connection

- Effective communication is more than transactional interactions. It transcends the transactional into genuine collaboration.

- It is achieved through meaningful exchanges between people:

  - *sharing ideas, taking risks, having respect for one another, appreciating differences in each other's styles and motivations.*

- Transparency and awareness of team members, one to each other as well as to the organization forms "**shared context**" (common ground) and can promote reaching beyond transactions into **relationship forming**.

- In virtual environments, teams become susceptible to **"virtual distance",** making it harder to create and maintain "shared context" with peers and the organization.

Source: Karen Sobel-Lojeski, Harvard Business Review, 2015

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Mediating Distance / Maintaining Connection

Causes of Virtual Distance

It's often assumed that the usual suspects are to blame: *physical separation or time zone gaps*.

However, this is not the case.

Virtual Distance

Physical Distance	Operational Distance	Affinity Distance
• Geographic Dispersion (What we think about most)	• How we go about getting things done	• Degree of relational and human connection

Source: Karen Sobel-Lojeski, Harvard Business Review, 2015

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The Costs of Virtual Distance

- Innovative behaviors fall by over **90%**

- Trust declines by over **80%**

- Cooperative and helping behaviors go down by over **80%**

- Role and goal clarity decline by **75%**

- Project success drops by over **50%**

- Organizational commitment and satisfaction decline by more than **50%**

Source: Karen Sobel-Lojeski, Harvard Business Review, 2015

Mediating Distance / Maintaining Connection

- Look for ways to build transparency in team communication

- Connect team members to each other and to the organization, forming "shared context"

  - Increase social connections

  - Regularly showcase team member contributions

  - Promote teamwork and sense of community

  - Humanize team members

  - Build team member self-awareness, awareness of others, and appreciation of differences

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Considering the optimal <u>frequency</u> of communication for your virtual team
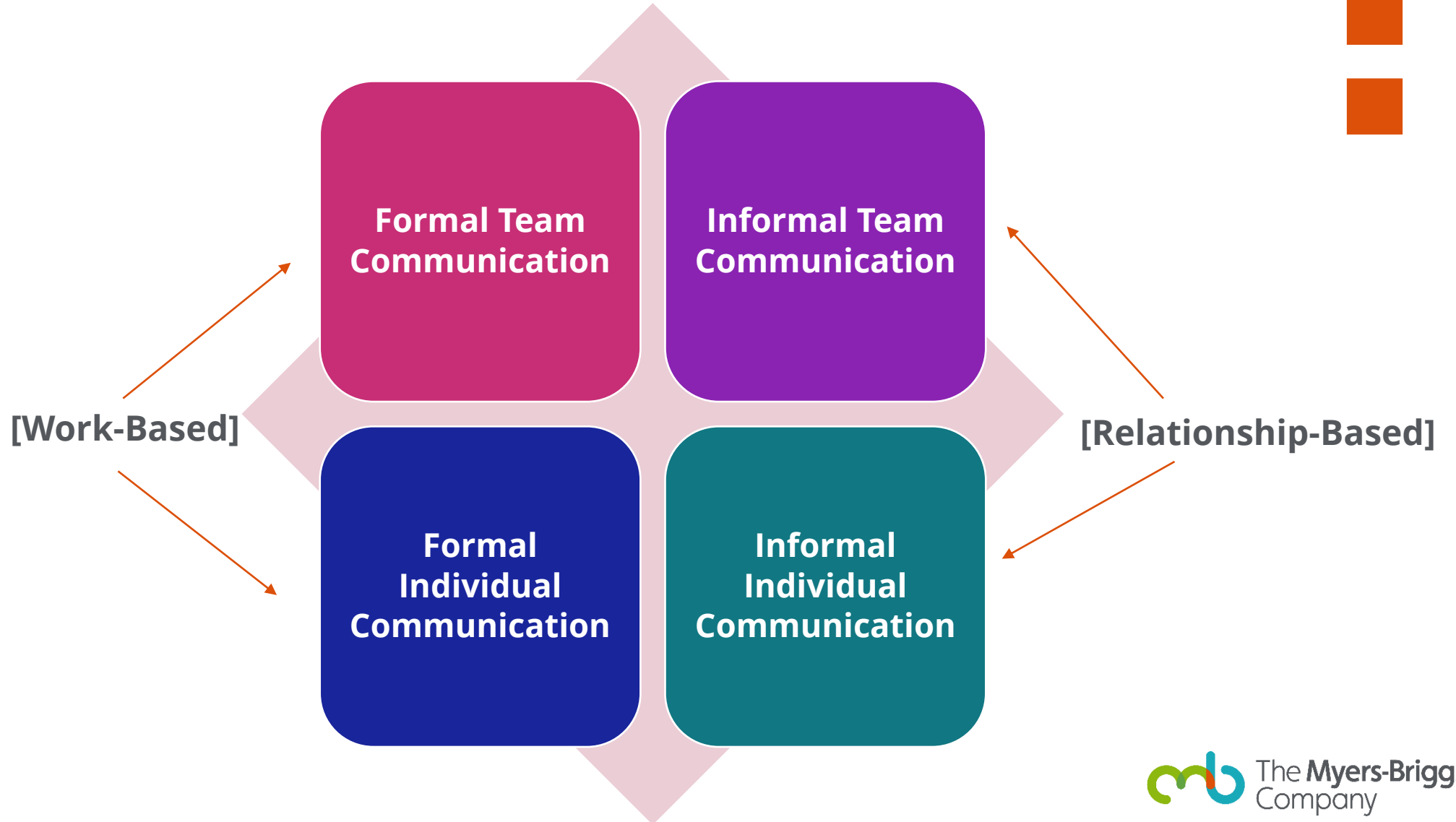
Special Circumstances:

- Newly-formed Teams

- High Uncertainty / Disruption (within or impacting the Org)

- Organizational Change (New Products, Services, Roles, Responsibilities)

- New Remote Work Conditions

- High levels of team diversity

- Organizational Barriers (slow or impede task completion, collaboration, decision-making, who does what, bottlenecking)

Fostering work and relational communication

Formal Team Communication

Informal Team Communication

[Work-Based]

[Relationship-Based]

Formal Individual Communication

Informal Individual Communication

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Virtual Teams and Effective Communication

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Avoiding the Trust Trap

High quality comunication in virtual teams is linked to *interpersonal trust*, which is in turn linked to **individual and team performance and productivity.**

| Employee to manager trust | Employee to employee trust |

High-quality communication in teams provides:

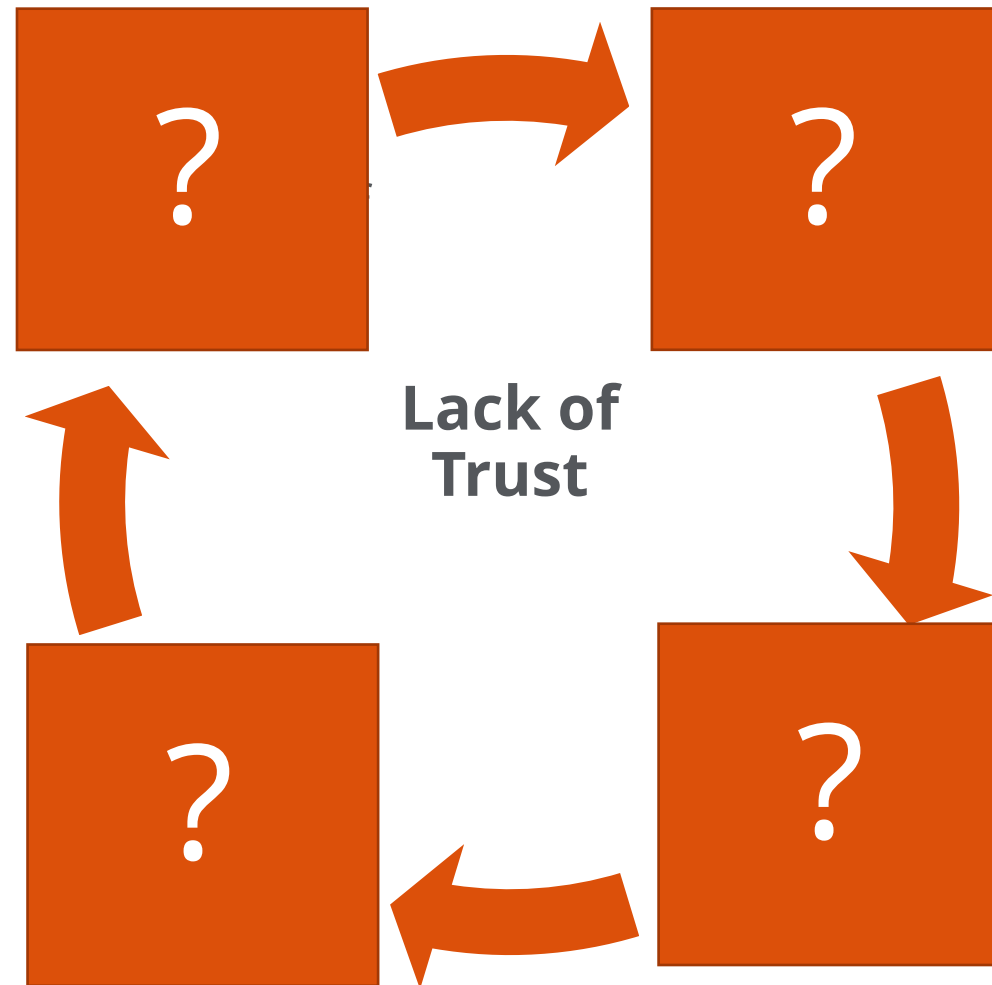| reassurance that others are attending to the task at hand | increases member **trust in the team and feelings of cohesiveness, supporting strong working relationships.** |

All the recommendations we've looked so far, are designed to develop *high-quality communication*, which is linked to important gains and results.

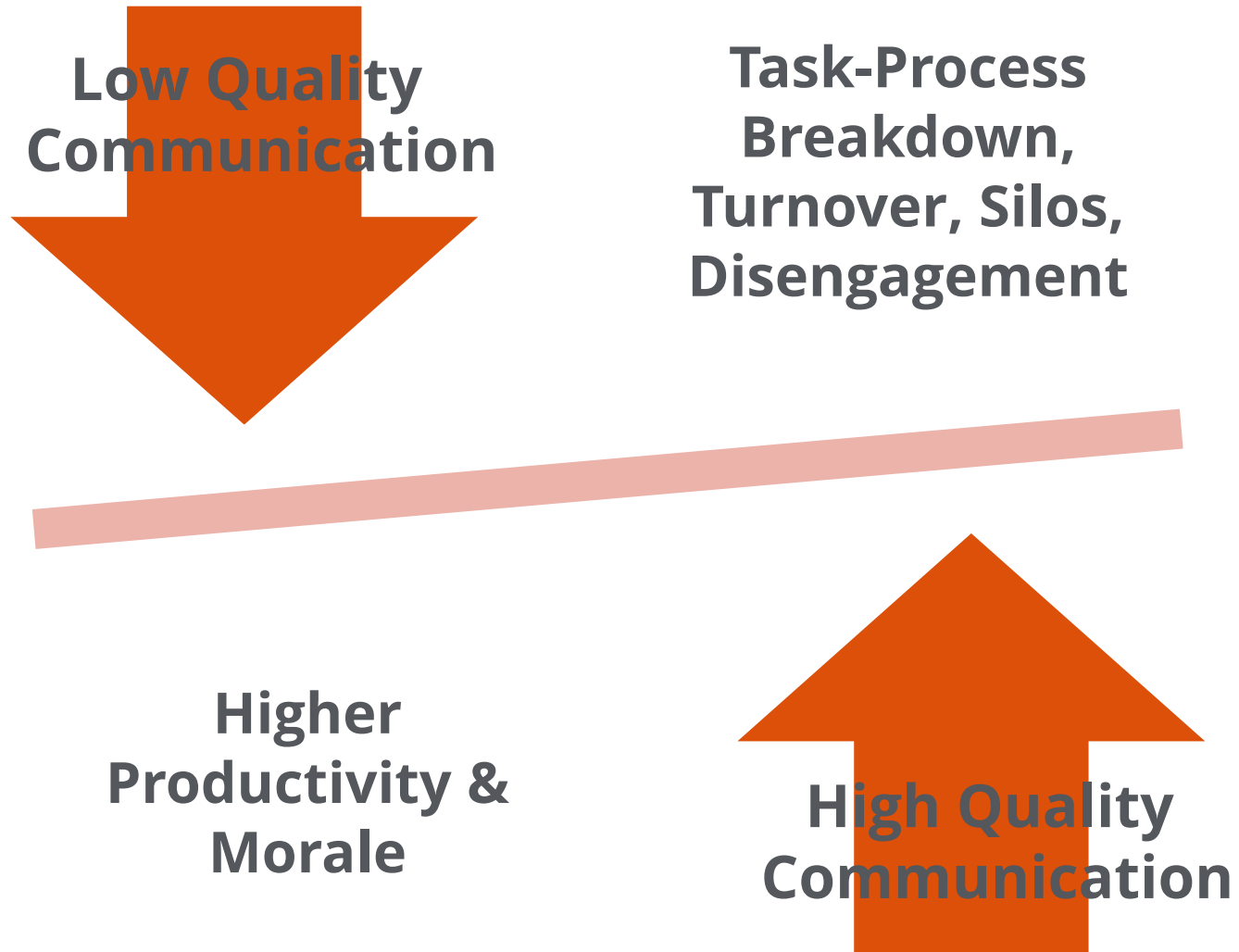Source: Chang, Journal of Total Quality Management & Business Excellence, 2014

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Avoiding the Trust Trap

Lack of Trust

Source: Chang, Journal of Total Quality Management & Business Excellence, 2014

Avoiding the Trust Trap

Low Quality Communication

Task-Process Breakdown, Turnover, Silos, Disengagement

Higher Productivity & Morale

High Quality Communication

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Final Considerations & Takeaways

Creating Pathways for High-Quality Virtual Team Communication

| Assess your team's current communication | → | Evaluate how communication is helping the team (or not) | → | Gauge employee needs in regards to skills for effective communication in virtual contexts |

| Align developmental resources to promote and build necessary skills | → | Bring in outside help | → | Serves as the facilitator of high-quality communication |
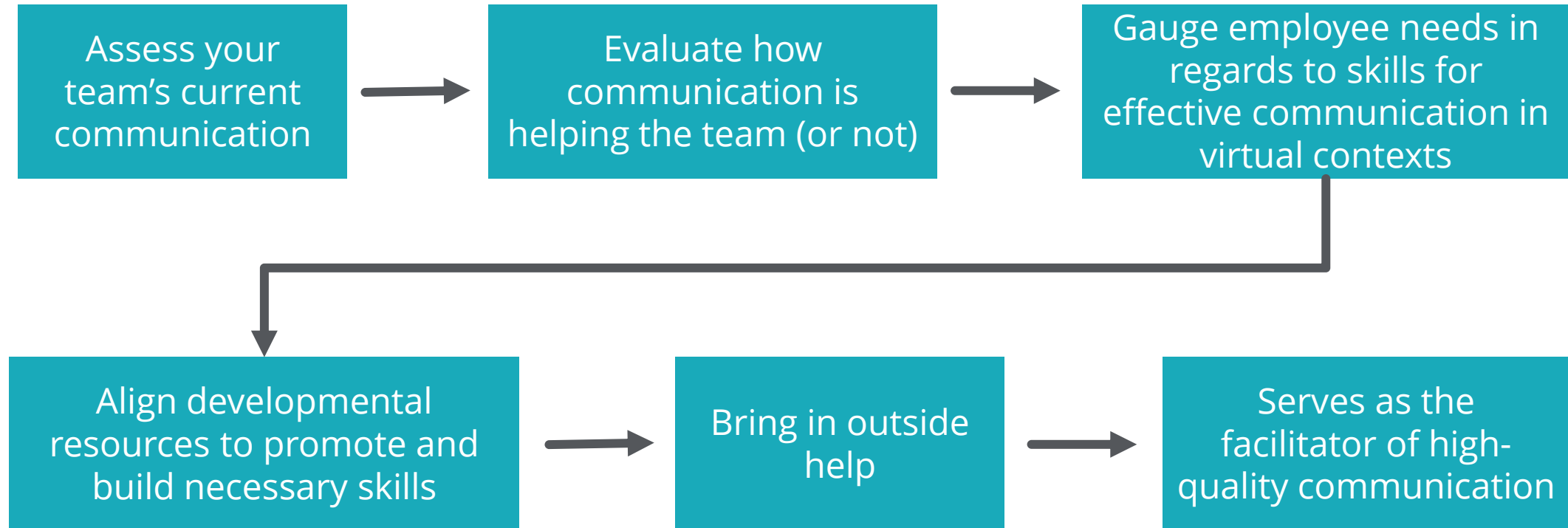
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Thoughts and Takeaways

- Please consider and type in the chat:

1 "Working Well" Strategy that helps me in driving effective communication on virtual teams

1 "New" Strategy I will implement to help me in driving effective communication on virtual teams

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Thank you