Virtual Teams and the Critical Role of Effective Communication

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Principal Organizational Development Consultant
The Myers-Briggs Company

Please post your questions throughout our session. We will answer these during and following the webinar.
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
Our mission as the Myers-Briggs Company

“To inspire everyone to lead more successful and fulfilling lives.”
The virtual world is everywhere, anywhere.
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
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

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

Human Capital trends show a Global Move Towards Virtual Work

n = 11,070
The Changing Space and Place of Work

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

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

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

The New Normal
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” Normal

Source: World Health Organization, 2020
• 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
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.
Effective Virtual Team Building Blocks / Derailers

- Trust
- Tools & Tech
- Engagement
- Communication
Poll

Would you say that your virtual team(s) are communicating effectively?”

Please enter your response to the poll.
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.
Virtual Teams and Effective Communication

- Setting Norms, Expectations, and Predictability
- Mediating Distance & Maintaining Connection
- Avoiding the Trust Trap
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.
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
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
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
  - Needs Improvement
  - In Progress
Virtual Teams and Effective Communication

- Setting Norms, Expectations, and Predictability
- Mediating Distance & Maintaining Connection
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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.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical Distance</th>
<th>Operational Distance</th>
<th>Affinity Distance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Geographic Dispersion (What we think about most)</td>
<td>How we go about getting things done</td>
<td>Degree of relational and human connection</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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%**

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
Considering the optimal frequency 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

[Work-Based]

Formal Team Communication

Formal Individual Communication

[Relationship-Based]

Informal Team Communication

Informal Individual Communication
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
- Needs Improvement
- In Progress
Virtual Teams and Effective Communication

- Setting Norms, Expectations, and Predictability
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- Avoiding the Trust Trap
Avoiding the Trust Trap

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employee to manager trust</th>
<th>Employee to employee trust</th>
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</thead>
</table>

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.

Avoiding the Trust Trap

Hesitant in their input
Unwilling to show their real motives or share information
Hold back knowledge
Take advantage of each other

Lack of Trust?

R

\[ ? \rightarrow ? \rightarrow ? \rightarrow ? \]

Avoiding the Trust Trap

Low Quality Communication → Task-Process Breakdown, Turnover, Silos, Disengagement

Higher Productivity & Morale → High Quality Communication
Assess your organization’s current state

SETTING NORMS, EXPECTATIONS, AND PREDICTABILITY
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Assess your organization’s current state

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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

themyersbriggs.com/govirtual
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
Thank you