



## PART TWO

# Building a Collaborative Culture

The four chapters addressing how to build a collaborative culture focus on the soft infrastructure of organizational and team culture. Although organizational culture has always had an impact on performance, its intelligent management has never been more critical than with virtual teams. The support, guidance, shaping, and identification that flow from the culture help focus the attention, effort, and expertise of the team's members more quickly and with more stability, especially when teams are dissolving and reforming rapidly.

Chapter Three focuses on people-centric virtual networks and the emotional bandwidth they depend on to enable members to feel connected and cared for. Where some managers may consider the social nature of virtual teamwork to be a handicap, in this chapter it is viewed as an opportunity and a tool to create an atmosphere of support and community. Use of a variety of methods to communicate support leads to the achievement of the team's performance goal.

The work of virtual teams is more complex and dynamic than that of traditional teams. Excellence takes more planning and support. It also depends on

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trust. In Chapter Four, the authors show that collaboration in a virtual team context requires trust, shared understanding, and constructive relationships among team members. As management control becomes more difficult in work situations, trust must be relied on to fill the gap so resources are used well to achieve objectives. The first rule of trust is for team members to keep the commitments and promises they make to each other. Then the foundation is in place for dealing with conflict and for effective collaboration.

Chapter Five focuses on a problem that affects all virtual teams: making sense of fragmented information flowing in from multiple sources. This is a key competence that virtual teams must master. Meetings are important milestones in the team dynamic, but the conversations that take place between meetings are even more important. An intentional approach to the design of conversations helps build the relationships among the team members. This chapter describes five methods for making those conversations effective: clarity, connection, candor, co-creation, and commitment.

This topic concludes with an example of methods for building trust in the virtual team in Chapter Six. Trust has three facets: contractual, communication, and competence. A tool designed to build and support trust in virtual teams is described. The authors build a strong case that the effectiveness of virtual collaboration is contingent not on technology but on the trust-based relationships that the technology supports.

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# The Three-Fold Path of Expanding Emotional Bandwidth in Virtual Teams

Trina Hoefling

**T**he *American Heritage Dictionary* defines *virtual* as “existing or resulting in essence or effect though not in actual fact, form, or name.” *Virtual reality* suggests a simulation that is so lifelike as to feel real but is not in fact real. *Virtual teaming* and *virtual work* can take on that same feeling of “essential closeness but not realness.” In fact, however, it *is* real. Virtual work is not a close approximation of work but a viable alternative way of working. It is not second best based on circumstances, and it is not compromise, mirage, or simulation. Neither is it overlay, replication, or poor substitute. Leaders and organizations need to begin thinking of virtual work as distributed work, not a compromised situation.

Increasingly organizations are challenged by employees, contractors, and clients to redefine work as deliverable results created through a process of relationship building among a host of stakeholders, both inside and outside the formal walls of the organization. A new sociology is being born using teams and

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virtual work as a way of organizing the workplace. Communities are creating and building on the Internet daily. The number of host sites that enable virtual communities on any interest to instant-message, chat, schedule, and store knowledge and communication streams expands daily. Many of us open our e-mail each day to several virtual community messages from people we talk to frequently but have never met. In cyberspace, romantic matches are made, friendships deepen, and knowledge is shared among strangers based on a simple request for help, all proving that the old-fashioned handshake networking strategy is alive and well in cyberspace.

Nevertheless, the overriding perception in most companies continues to be that a virtual team is a poor substitute for co-located work based on unfortunate circumstances. Many managers charged with implementing virtual teams attempt to have the group meet in person as much as possible and then make do with inferior communication strategies between what are sometimes referred to as “real meetings.” Group dynamics, ground rules, and meeting guidelines are rolled over to a virtual environment with little regard to the effectiveness of the fit. Not every dynamic, rule, or guideline needs to change in a virtual environment, nor should they. Yet some should. With collaborative software, huge opportunities to enhance group process are being missed because of people’s tendency to stick with the familiar.

## WHAT IS WORK, AND WHERE DOES IT HAPPEN?

The capabilities of technology change the way we think not only of basic work processes, but also of the way organizations and teams are built and managed. DSL, broadband cable, interactive and on-demand TV, intranets and extranets, virtual private networks, integrated supply chains, online communities, smart cards and devices, wireless devices integrated with the Internet: all expand what is possible. What also needs to expand along with the technical tools and toys, however, is the way people think about work itself. The first step in the path to greater emotional bandwidth is the acceptance of three mind shifts about work itself.

### Mind Shift 1: Work Is Becoming People-Centric, Not Place-Centric

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Optimal a place to perform basic functions: buy, sell, work, research, share information,  
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and communicate. Virtual work can draw talent quickly from different functions, locations, and organizations. The goal is to leverage intellectual capital and apply it as quickly as possible. This gives organizations the agility to increase speed, expand expertise, and access strategic alliances to meet customer demands better.

## **Mind Shift 2: Connecting Through Networks Is the Process of Work**

Organizations can distribute organizational learning faster through knowledge-sharing networks such as functional areas, professional associations, or client or product teams. Technically, global networking options proliferate. The Internet transforms how people find and communicate with one another. Two relationships matter: the relationship between people and the relationship between people and technology. The relationships between people are built and maintained face-to-face and across the wires. Work relationships are more accessible as geographical and technical boundaries fall. The second relationship, however, decides the limits. People and technology have relationships as well. As long as e-mail is second choice in all cases, work is accommodating unfortunate distance. What if, rather, e-mail connects to GroupWise, a crossplatform collaborative software product offering e-mail, calendaring, instant messaging, and document management? What if it also downloads automatically into team BlackBerries, so that team schedules, documents, and intelligence are immediately available to every team member without fail? This redefines work and how work gets done. E-mail is no longer a quick note-messaging service and courier; it is a vehicle for team scheduling, project management, time management, electronic administrative support, tracking critical success factors, and calendaring. It still couriers messages too. The BlackBerry is a phone, a GPS, a Gameboy, a camera, an MP3 player, and a remote e-mailing device.

Networks, human and electronic, have traditionally been valued as vehicles leading to a specific result, such as comparison shopping or online directories. It becomes fundamentally more powerful to think of networks as the process itself: how work gets done, teams get built, knowledge gets shared, and complexity gets managed. Today's organization is literally and figuratively built around the interconnection of virtual, human, and electronic networks with very high bandwidth, and not the workplace per se. In other words, the technical and emotional bandwidth among organization members fundamentally affects the quality of work being done.

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### Mind Shift 3: Commitment Beyond “Doing My Job”

Since the industrial age, organizational leaders and management consultants have been trying to recreate a sense of camaraderie through engaging employees’ commitment and connection to more than their job description. Without pursuing the effectiveness of these efforts, it is relevant to say that in an increasingly virtual work world, organization members are more geographically and physically isolated, not only from their team members but from their organizations and sometimes their customers. At the same time, many people require a greater sense of meaning and purpose from their work and seek belonging to something greater than themselves.

On a practical level, if distributed team members do not have a clear sense of commitment and how their work connects with the overall plan, individual efforts run a greater risk of being misaligned with the strategic priorities and organizational mission. Virtual work mutually demands individual and organizational commitment beyond a job description to ensure connection, purpose, meaning, and focus. The commitment has to come not just from the work itself, but also from the way the group members find, interact and depend on the team and each other. Individually and collectively, the virtual job is about outputs *and* relationship management, about process *and* a way of working.

Employees, even contractors, increasingly seek connection to the workplace community as part of their identity. Many workers today are knowledge workers, not producers on a mechanical assembly line. Labor’s contribution is primarily mental, not muscle. These same employees and contractors expect to have a voice in defining the quality of their work lives, a self-definition that goes beyond being merely resources to use or discard at will. Cross-functional teams are expected to practice boundary crossing. In order for this collection of individuals to begin functioning as a team, the barriers are, or need to be, dissolving between people and functions.

### EXPANDING EMOTIONAL BANDWIDTH

The electronic handshake moves people into connection. How much more powerful can collaboration be in a work team that is connected to one another personally as well as electronically? Just as productivity dramatically increases when an Internet user moves from dial-up to broadband, so does a virtual team’s productivity increase when the group has emotional as well as electronic connection.

Short Emotional bandwidth is the personal and sustainable connection created among  
Optimal virtual team members who are working together for a common purpose toward a  
Long goal. It also reflects increased organizational commitment.

What makes an organization an entity that takes on a consciousness, a life of its own? It is a collective of the thinking and feeling that is held in common by its members, a co-creation. It is not, as is commonly believed, an entity that preexists and to which people merely contribute outputs. It is an organism, ever changing, based on the collective beliefs of its members, focused together on aligning with mission, vision, and goals. Members give the organization life, and more life is given by committed organizational members.

Whether colocated or distributed, organization members are more committed to an organization when they see how they contribute to the mission. Commitment can be hard enough to create in a colocated workplace. The virtual environment appears to run the risk of increased disconnection and isolation, and it may—if the organization’s leaders do not shift toward a more holistic, systemic view of individual members’ relationships to the collective whole. The community—the collective itself—takes on power, precedence, and focus; it is not a corporate machine that uses people and financial resources to achieve goals. The strength of this connection to the workplace and team is measured by emotional bandwidth. The more people know and feel connected to one another (that is, the wider the emotional bandwidth), the greater the commitment to the work is.

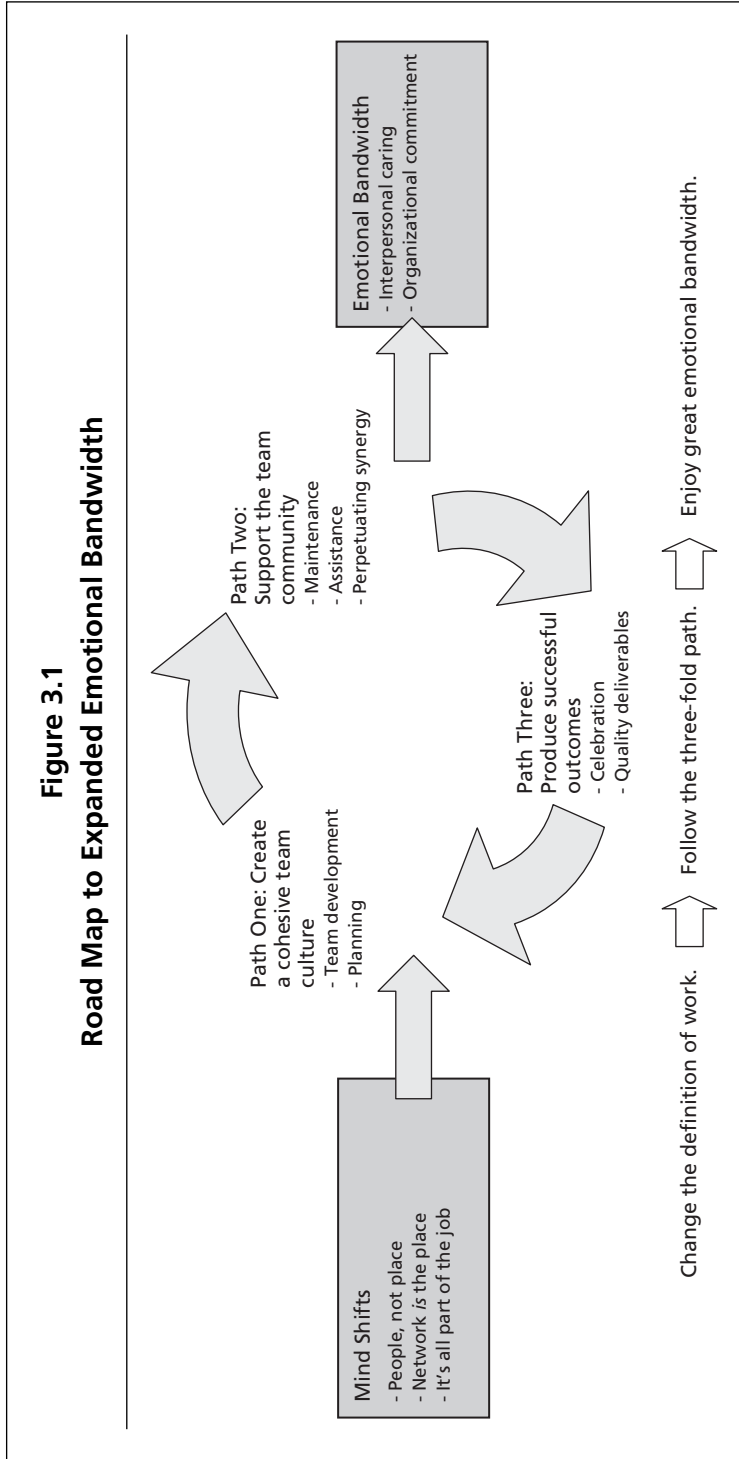
Workplace community building has been viewed by most as an organizational ideal, but it does not need to be a utopian dream. If the interaction among people is the actual process of work, it is the promise of virtual teams to redefine interaction, which makes boundary crossing and network development truly powerful. Virtual teams are part of larger virtual organizations and are deeply embedded within the larger whole. Rather than creating more distance, virtual teams make expanded emotional bandwidth possible by using relationship rather than geography as the connecting point.

The virtual manager’s work is to see the network as the workplace, to work with other organizational members who also work there to connect people interpersonally and organizationally, lead the team to success, and watch as emotional bandwidth widens with full attention to quality.

This chapter is a road map for expanded emotional bandwidth, enabling every organizational member to share responsibility in building highly committed virtual teams and producing successful outcomes (Figure 3.1). The reader will travel the threefold path for creating and maintaining systems, protocols, and processes that support expanded emotional bandwidth in distributed teams without geographical or functional limitations. Virtual teaming bypasses silos while systemically

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**Figure 3.1**  
**Road Map to Expanded Emotional Bandwidth**





supporting access and commitment to organizational membership that is more than merely functional responsibility.

## **THE TAO OF VIRTUAL TEAM FUNCTIONING: THE THREE-FOLD PATH**

When every virtual team member and leader commit to sharing responsibility for fulfilling three fundamental responsibilities, virtual teams can create and maintain a smooth pathway.

### **Path One: Create a Cohesive Team Culture**

The work of team managers is to engage people in their work, their projects, and their teams through collaboration. Collaboration is about more than good communication. Communication is only the medium by which conversations occur. Virtual groups sometimes fail to become synergistic teams because they do not recognize the deep truth that most work gets done through relationship, not task. The first of the three-fold path is to create a cohesive team culture through relationship building and establishing agreed-on ways of working together.

Teamwork is fundamentally social. Virtual team members need special care. Despite becoming more commonplace, despite distributed employees being more accepted, despite organizations' strategic commitments to becoming truly global internally as well as externally, working as part of a team that one seldom sees can feel isolating.

Cohesion is critical to team functioning in colocated *and* virtual environments. Although the technology that supports virtual teams gets most of the attention, it is really the change in the nature of teams, not the use of technology, that creates new connection opportunities for team leaders and members. Simple team discussions should occur early in the team formation to determine communication infrastructure, protocols, and process flow. Decisions should be revisited as often as needed to ensure continual emotional bandwidth. When the electronic network goes down, work is interrupted. When the emotional bandwidth is strained, work is also interrupted. Planning and preventive maintenance are small investments if work flows easily among people.

A virtual team has more difficulty seeing itself as a whole that is moving together toward a common goal. The communication infrastructure and ground rules help, but it is also important to help each member know every part of this

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whole team so that everyone sees how individual actions contribute to forward movement and how individuals contribute to the collective.

**Team Atmosphere** Establishing infrastructure does not mean that strict rules and regulations must be created and stringently enforced, but it is important to decide as a group what kind of atmosphere the team wants to create and sustain. They can place priority on being personally supportive or work focused only. They can prioritize deep dialogue or not. They can be fast moving or reflective, risk taking or conservative. They can exchange e-mail jokes or ban them. The nature of the team mission will drive some preferences, but the individuals on the team have a lot to say about the atmosphere itself.

A literal team room or space seems to hold the energy of the group, forming a sort of container, just as a glass holds water or a pocket holds personal effects. Virtual teams can experience a sort of energy leak, like the glass having a leak, if sacred virtual space is not created and nurtured. Energy cannot be at full throttle all the time, or the team would burn out. If the ebb and flow is not managed, the risk of a virtual environment is too much dissipation, resulting in lagging commitment or focus.

**Learning and Information Sharing** Learning occurs to a large degree through conversation. A person hanging around talking online or off-line is not a distraction; it is instead the work of collaboration. If it is not happening, the virtual manager's job is to stir things up, getting tongues wagging and fingers smoking on the keyboards. The manager must build relationships as well as schedule meetings. Most team members ask for help and make appropriate demands from one another when they know each other, and that freedom to ask and expect is necessary for highly effective work teams. Different tools and forums are best suited for different outcomes, so match tools, forums, people, and goals effectively. Time will not be wasted, people will be well supported, and work will get done.

**Self-Image and Team Identity** As a team leader, think about what kind of mood to set for the team. What metaphors and symbols guide how people interact with one another? How will they think about their team purpose? A team is primarily social, and team members use that social relationship to get the work done. Managers must support relationships, not just production. The team's self-image should be a reflection of relationship as much as output. For example, a well-oiled machine

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conveys a different essence than a more organic koi pond or a spun web does. Help the team define itself through metaphor or analogy, and continue to work with that metaphor by using phrases and references that remind the team of how they see themselves.

**Personalities and Habits** The team manager should talk about what styles, behaviors, and technical tools will support creating the desired atmosphere. What does interaction look like? What role, if any, will power and politics play in this team and between this team and the larger organization? How public does the team want to make its accomplishments? How involved will stakeholders be?

There is no right answer as long as the focus is on individual and team well-being as well as team purpose. Whether this is a short-term project team or an ongoing team, there need to be routinized, scheduled time and negotiated agreements, whether virtual or face-to-face, for the team to come together to strengthen and deepen the team's commitment.

**Practical Tools** Watercooler talk—those casual conversations that spontaneously occur in offices—disappears in a virtual environment. This is the kind of talking that is often a critical success factor for team synergy, and it must be encouraged virtually. Simple mechanisms might include intranet team home pages, instant messaging, open and ongoing chatrooms, electronic bulletin boards, and virtual and face-to-face team meetings. Post pictures of team members at work stations or as screen savers. Create metaphors to anchor the work, the team's connection to one another, and value drivers. The team leader should attend vigilantly to the team's need to be connected to one another through both the work and the relationships.

Regardless of the tools, what matters most is to remember that the team exists, even when it is not electronically or personally connected. Team members hold the space with the group between connections, ensuring that the sacred space continues even when people are not talking every day.

**Team Development and Planning Process** A team development process is a highly effective way to get a virtual team started right. If possible, bring the team together in person, especially if team members do not know each other or are unfamiliar with virtual teaming. If that is not possible, plan and get acquainted virtually through listservs, chatrooms, and virtual conferences. With a team of

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virtual veterans, let the team decide the setting. Include support functions and key stakeholders as appropriate to build relationships. Build clarity about project expectations, communication infrastructure, and work flow.

Develop as few or many group process guidelines as the team and organization require, and commit to using them. Define common language, methodologies, and processes. Make sure all team members understand them. Decide how decisions will be made and conflicts resolved. Identify criteria for both project decisions and team process needs. Create and commit to the way the team will inform and involve one another and its stakeholders. Aim for fair division of team caretaking labor. Agree also on not only what, when, and how information will be shared, but also on how team members will respond. Share responsibility for getting the team back on track if virtuality gets in the way. Meet support functions and people, and link with them as often as needed. Make all in-person meetings strategic and relational rather than strictly informational.

The agenda template in Exhibit 3.1 can be used as is. Many guidelines may be standardized by the organization, or at least templated, simplifying the team development process. (A Sample Team Development Process Checklist is included on the [www.wiley.com/go/virtualteamshandbook](http://www.wiley.com/go/virtualteamshandbook) Web site.) Each team manager can customize the complete checklist to fit the team's needs.



### **Path Two: Support the Team Community**

The energy is built, the space is set, and now the team needs to keep the fires burning. Team support comes in many forms. Although it is sometimes created spontaneously based on need, much team support can be anticipated and planned. Minimally the following types of support matter to every team.

**Celebrations** When two team members have their heads together and hit a “Eureka!” moment, they need to run virtually to the whole group and share the excitement. And they need to do this immediately, not later. When a team member receives a special award, find ways to feature her or him in a video clip or e-mail press release. Develop a habit of posting fun and exciting news to a team bulletin board or team Web page. Celebrate accomplishments together as a team, even when members are dispersed. And celebrate again when everyone comes together. No team can be too spirited, whether virtual or colocated. Do a virtual jig. Send e-cards. Send songs. Have fun. Meet face-to-face, and take a team picture.

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### Exhibit 3.1

## Session Agenda Template

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1. Getting Acquainted
2. Team Charter, Vision, Values
3. Team and Project Planning [Project planning is the time for establishing project goals, identifying resources, setting milestone and deliverable deadlines, as well as delineating roles, responsibilities, and authority. This is the time to decide how to share and embed learning, operating norms, and self-evaluation.]
4. Team Process Planning [Process planning is the time for determining how to ensure that the team functions effectively as a collective.]
5. Communication Infrastructure [Who needs to communicate with whom about what, how often, through what means, and who else needs to be informed?]
6. Membership and Maintenance [Plan for new member orientation over time, reports and updating, document sharing, and so on.]

Post pictures and personal biographies to the team home page. Post a map with everyone's locations. All of these habits expand emotional bandwidth.

**Touching Base** Frequent check-ins should be the norm. Simple conversation among individuals is how much work gets done. As a committed team member and leader, keep the conversations going. Much of Path Two is sustained informally in addition to the negotiated protocols and communication infrastructure.

**Trusting Actions** In virtual teams, team members are expected to trust one another and become interdependent, sometimes sight unseen. Trust is given to another based on the professional reputation and integrity of the team members. When it is tentatively given, it is not guaranteed to continue. Trust is tentative until experience proves it is deserved. Research shows that virtual teams that

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maintain high trust produce higher-quality work. Social communication is interwoven throughout task-based interactions to build and maintain confidence in the relationship.

Integrity can be simply defined as doing what one says one will and following through on commitments or renegotiating with enough lead time when a deadline will be missed. Consistent reliability is the greatest trust builder, and actions speak much louder than words when it comes to work trust.

**Creating Stories Together** In a virtual environment, taking extra time to give everyone a sense of place and to reconnect when the team comes together is critical to maintain emotional bandwidth. Culture is a product of shared stories, norms, shared rituals, repeated interactions, and shared experiences. Provide opportunities to create shared history together beyond the team development process—both face-to-face and electronically.

**Helping Out** Support is more than trust and interpersonal connection. Practical helping hands are extended virtually. Who has not had a day when everything seems to go wrong? The project is off-track and behind schedule, the children are sick, the customer is cranky, no one mentioned that casual day this week was actually a client-on-premises-wear-your-business-best day, and the network has gone down twice. These are the days when teammates become friends, when the extra support or cup of coffee is highly appreciated. How does that day change in a virtual home office? Network is still down, so no e-mail whining allowed. Kids are running temperatures and cannot be in school, so they are whining in the next room. Clothing does not matter, but the client is still cranky, making it difficult to juggle with sick children.

These are the days when the strength of the team's emotional bandwidth is tested. Decide together before the need arises how to relieve uncontrollable difficulties. It may be difficult for people to call a team member they barely know and ask for help. Is it acceptable to call a colleague and simply blow some steam? Discuss ahead of time and implement team-created protocols for inevitable challenges like technical issues and dependent-care surprises.

A connected team supports one another. Assuming professional integrity, it is not only acceptable, it should be expected that occasionally the team has to flex and help out. Part of maintaining emotional bandwidth is taking the time, before

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a crisis, to develop relationships, to get to know one another, to identify together what attending to the well-being of one another looks like.

**Negotiating Style Differences** Personal work habits must also be negotiated. Some people like to be more fully informed, while others prefer to have information on a need-to-know basis. It gets more complicated when one person's need-to-know looks fundamentally different from another's. The potential negative results of not getting clear with one another about interpersonal needs and preferences are violating inclusion and exclusion issues and boundaries and undermining trust.

Jack, for example, comes from a highly bureaucratic corporation where he learned to copy ten people on every correspondence, load every version of a document to the intranet, keep hard copies of every memo that crosses his desk, and ask his manager for "permission" about many things. Jill, Jack's teammate, grew up professionally in a fast-growth, entrepreneurial environment where everyone learned to act now and fix later. Both Jill and Jack are highly dedicated, competent, and creative. Jack's modus operandi feels to Jill like information obesity (too much to bother with) and reeks of self-protection. Jill's modus operandi is that unless her actions have an immediate or direct impact on a teammate's work, she will provide an update at the team's weekly conference call—in executive briefing fashion, very high level. Jack likes documentation and tracking; Jill prefers oral reports with work production serving as the tracking device.

If both Jack and Jill continue to operate in their preferred ways without discussing with one another or the team, personal liking, trust, and respect will suffer. Jill will begin to think of Jack as a verbose and defensive bureaucrat or offensive braggart. Jack will begin to think of Jill as a prima donna or loose cannon, needing to be watched closely because few controls are in place. Loyalty and commitment to one another cannot automatically happen in this relationship. Jill may even feel her boundaries are being violated when Jack constantly asks to be kept in the loop.

Let's complicate the story even further. Jill works closely with Nell because their responsibilities are closely aligned and interdependent. Their work and their relationship are more fluidly interactive, so Jill naturally keeps Nell more fully informed. Now Jack feels even more excluded. What begins as simple style differences and habits may develop into a perception of power and political game

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playing and intentional exclusion, and soon the focus of work becomes the interpersonal dynamics rather than the project or the customer. Place this in a virtual environment, and Jack very likely may drop out, going unnoticed for too long. In fact, if Jack does overdo the e-mail communications, his communication dearth may feel like relief rather than be noticed as an early warning sign of team dysfunction.

**Preventing Problems** Most of us know that liking, loyalty, commitment, and willingness to participate with a group are desirable but not automatic. In order to avoid strained relationships like Jack and Jill's, decisions should be consensually made regarding:

- Who needs to participate in what decisions, actions, and commitments.
- Who needs to be included, informed, and asked about what.
- What participation with this team looks like. Does it mean daily telephone contact with every team member? Does it include a sacred commitment to meet with the team in person monthly?
- How much information sharing is too much or not enough.
- What agreements are made as a collective about pushing information and posting information
- When someone is struggling, what help looks like for this group. What is appropriate to ask, to offer, to leave private?

In other words, what does full support look like for this team? The rightness of the answers depends on organizational culture and norms to some degree, but more important, the interpersonal needs and preferences of the team members themselves. Discussions up front can go a long way to support team members and maintain emotional bandwidth.

**Virtual Team Maintenance** A successful team development planning process will serve the team well, but is not in itself enough. As frequently as seems appropriate, the team should review the norms and agreements, the systems, processes, and protocols, adjusting to fit the team and project needs better. As groupware tools are introduced, technical and user problems are common. Ask the team where the information exchange is working well or not, what technical challenges

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are common to many or all, and what additional training or support is needed. Frequently revisit the communication infrastructure and its use, effectiveness, and any modifications or recommitments needed.

**Perpetuating Team Synergy** Synergy is more easily created by being together in the same place at the same time. It happens virtually, but in a different way. The team has to build it in if it matters to them. This may include virtual high-fives, conference calls, groupware, a more active use of e-mail and other electronic communication. If geographically possible, encourage scheduling lunches with team members that are informal and celebratory, or joining the same gym. Schedule more social time than normally would occur in a colocated environment.

**The Rolling Present: Entry and Reentry** A benefit of virtual work is removing geography as a limitation for team membership, although the challenge remains in how to bring new or renewing members of a formed team up to speed quickly, especially if the team is moving at a fast pace. Virtual teams do have a distinct advantage: much work is done asynchronously and groupware provides a history that can be sorted by time, topic, and other threads. Nevertheless, the sheer volume can be overwhelming. The team manager needs to help enrolling team members sort through the history for fast assimilation. These questions can guide late-joining team members:

- What reference documents, history, strategic planning documents, progress reports, and deliverables do joining team members need to review?
- Who do joining team members need to talk to, and about what?
- Who will serve as orientation coach and mentor?
- How will new team members learn the operating norms of the team?
- How will new team members be introduced to the existing team?

The informal aspect of entry is more social. Minimally, virtual conferencing and other orientation strategies are necessary to introduce new team members to the group and the group's culture, metaphors, routines, norms, infrastructure, and etiquette. Maintaining a team Web page or electronic yearbook that includes social aspects are increasingly used tools to maintain team relationships electronically and allow asynchronous orientation. They can never, however, fully replace

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the rich human energy that comes with live conversation. Virtual work does not mean face-to-face disappears.

### **Path Three: Produce Successful Outcomes**

While team maintenance and support matter, mission accomplishment is still the goal, and all else serves this purpose. The trust developed within any team is fragile, and even more so in a virtual team if it is not reinforced by performance that can be seen. Milestones and joint achievements provide the fuel to stay focused on mission accomplishment and the oil to lubricate trust.

Success begins with a clear and shared purpose, a vision of how that purpose will look when accomplished, and identified outcomes to accomplish that purpose. An effective team achieves concrete, complete results.

In order to accomplish the mission in a virtual environment, more structure and planning are required. Emergency gatherings and on-the-fly planning are exhilarating and can be done virtually, but only as the exception rather than the rule. They cannot be the standard operating norm because chaos and frustration will result, and virtual team members will see through the exhilaration to the disorganization lying beneath the surface.

If everybody starts with the same vision and work plan, then virtual team members are more inclined to progress collectively. If there is not an agreed-on plan or a clear structure for communication and feedback, it is easy for virtual members to work hard but get four degrees to the left of where the team originally meant to go. If it goes undetected, people are getting more off-track without knowing it. Nothing is more frustrating than working hard only to discover that rework is required because the focus was slightly off. Everyone needs to take an active role in making sure that everyone remains aligned to purpose.

Paradoxically less structure is also required. Command-and-control management models do not work in a distributed work team environment. Managers cannot possibly micromanage in a virtual environment without slowing team production. Frequently managers new to the virtual environment ask for more reports in more detail than they would when colocated. This attempt to stay fully informed is understandable, but production slows when too much emphasis is placed on structuring reports instead of milestones and outcomes. Emotional bandwidth and a production plan, not controlling oversight, should drive accountability.

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As a team, discuss and decide together:

- What does task accomplishment look like?
- How real are deadlines?
- How does the group want to individually and collectively approach problem solving, and decision making?
- What authority levels need definition?
- Who has what project responsibility?

## FINAL THOUGHTS

Consistent and integrated processes, delivery systems, and communication infrastructure yield great results for virtual teams. A commitment to follow the three-fold path smoothes the journey and engages team members' minds and hearts. Rough spots will be recognized and remedied with little disturbance to the overall efficiency and functioning of the virtual team. Following the pathways provided in this chapter increases any virtual team's chance of being the winning team every time.

## REMINDERS

- In organizational environments built on electronic networks, work is becoming people-centric, not place-centric; connecting through networks is the process of work; and commitment goes beyond "doing my job."
- Emotional bandwidth is the personal and sustainable connection and caring created among virtual team members.
- Path One is to create a cohesive team culture. It encompasses relationship building and establishing agreed-on ways of working together. It is fundamentally social. A highly effective way to get a virtual team started is the team development process.
- Path Two is to support the team community. This support, which can be anticipated and planned, encompasses celebrations, check-ins, trust building, story creating, helping others, negotiating differences, and preventing problems.

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- Path Three is to produce successful outcomes. Here, mission accomplishment is the goal, and all else serves this purpose. An effective team achieves concrete, complete results.
- The three-fold path engages team members' minds and hearts.

### RELATED ITEM ON THE WEB



- [Sample Team Development Process Checklist](#)

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