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Trust

For a team to work together effectively, its members need to trust one another.

Past Studies

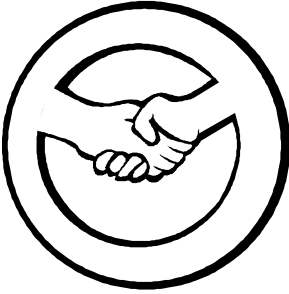
Past studies of traditional teams have shown that trust evolves in three stages:

Deterrence-based trust: Team members do what they say they will do simply because they fear they'll be punished if they don't.

Knowledge-based trust: As members become more and more familiar with one another, they come to know their teammates well enough to predict their behavior with confidence.

Identification-based trust: Trust is built on empathy and shared values; members are able to put themselves in their teammates place.

Although research has found evidence of all three types of trust in virtual teams, this three-stage development pattern is not evident. Rather, in a virtual environment, trust in virtual teams and team members tends to be established - or not - right at the outset; first interactions of team members are crucial. Initial electronic messages appear to set the tone for how members will relate throughout an entire project.



Highest Levels of Trust

Virtual teams with the highest levels of trust tend to share three traits:

- They began their interactions with a series of social messages (introducing themselves and providing some personal background) before focusing on the work at hand. This series of interactions is sometimes called “electronic courtship” and appears to be particularly important in establishing knowledge-based trust.
- Clear roles are defined for each team member. Assigning each member a particular task enabled all of them to identify with one another, forging a foundation for identification-based trust.
- Team members consistently displayed eagerness, enthusiasm, and an intense *proactive* action orientation in all of their messages. It was found that one pessimist has the potential to undermine the entire team.

In addition, high trust teams:

- display a task vs. procedural orientation; communication is task-oriented but still empathic
- rotate leaders; alternate members “rise to the occasion”
- discuss and clarify team goals
- engage in time management and project management activities
- give substantial feedback oriented toward improving the content of another’s work
- engage in frequent interaction, notifying members of their whereabouts and absences

“Instant” trust must be built immediately within parallel, project, action, and networked teams.

Instant Trust

Studies have shown that all cultures report that there are three factors in building “instant” trust.

1. Perform competently
 - reputation for performance and results
 - follow through
 - obtaining necessary resources
2. Act with integrity (alignment of actions and stated values)
 - alignment of actions and stated values
 - standing behind the team and all its members
 - maintaining consistent and balanced communication
3. Display concern for the well-being of others
 - transitioning people on and off the team so that their careers are affected positively
 - the leader and other team members helping one another
 - to find next assignments

While all cultures consistently report these three attributes, keep in mind the various cultures display, interpret, and/or prioritize these attributes differently.

Additional strategies to create an atmosphere of trust

It was already stated that trust in virtual teams is built differently and more swiftly than in traditional teams. With that in mind, the following are additional ways to build an atmosphere of trust in a virtual team.

TIP

Trust is only built through a relationship. Some leaders at American Express have reported a shift in role definition, with a greater focus on relationship building.

Their experience is that the most effective contact time, other than face-to-face, is by phone.

- Build the self-esteem of team members by showing respect for their opinions.
- Help team members focus on the problem rather than blaming each other.
- Serve as a role model by demonstrating constructive behavior (maintain constructive relationships, take initiative to make things better, lead by example).
- Familiarize self and team with why trust is important.
- Take the time, up front, to allow your team members to get to know you and each other. (Take time to be a team.)
- If possible, meet face-to-face early in the development of your team. Miscommunication and conflicting expectations often arise from the lack of face-to-face contact time among team members. Face-to-face meetings will allow team members to develop relationships and trust much more quickly.
- Set up weekly 1/2hour 1:1 sessions with yourself and your team members. This will allow them to get to know you (and you them). Help team members understand the mission of the team and allow them to voice their concerns in an open manner.
- DWYSYWD. Do what you say you will do. One of the quickest and most effective ways to build trust is to follow through on your commitments. Team members are more likely to trust one another if they feel team members are competent.
- Stand behind your team and your team members. Do not make disparaging remarks about the team's performance in public. If you receive negative information about a team member, be sure to investigate it thoroughly before acting upon it.
- Try to give each team member the opportunity to contribute. Don't rely more heavily on those team members who happen to be in your location.
- It is imperative in a virtual environment that organizations establish a clear policy regarding communications privacy and then strictly adhere to it.

Team Motivation

Virtual team members have shown increased capability and motivation to do the work when there is a high amount of “social capital” built. Social capital results from a series of pleasant interactions between team members.

Three things necessary to develop an ample supply of social capital:

- **Trust:** Seemingly irrelevant, unrelated-to-work conversations among employees make working relationships more effective and act as a “trust accelerator”.
- **Reciprocity:** Giving will *eventually* result in receiving.
- **Dense Social Networks:** Team members are well connected, healthy, and economically stable.



Building a Virtual Team

Steps to building a virtual team:

- Identify team sponsors, stakeholders, and champions.
- Develop a team charter (purpose, mission, and goals); create a team identity; create an atmosphere of trust.
- Select and assess members based upon the skill/competency list (see the HR tab); hold a team orientation session.
- Create an infrastructure based upon the virtual team type (technology, processes, work flow, status mechanisms, documentation, corporate memory).
- Make the work experience rewarding and enjoyable for team members on a personal level.

Strategies to Optimize Team Performance

1. Make the whole visible to everyone.
 - Create a team collage;
 - distribute a map showing where everyone is located;
 - create a graphic with the name of each member sitting around a table.
2. Provide a “line of sight” (connectedness to the organization).
 - Create a “journal” style minutes with photos;
 - acknowledge missing members during meetings;
 - provide electronic chat rooms or “hang outs” so that water cooler discussions aren’t lost;
 - give “widgets” with team mission or slogan (e.g. mousepad, mug, etc.).
3. Catalyze rich (“over dinner”) conversations.
 - Hold conference calls where no administrative topics are allowed;
 - rotate responsibility among team members to facilitate discussion on non-routine topics;
 - invite experts to engage with the team.
4. Amplify energy.
 - Find ways to spotlight individuals or parts of the team where something interesting is happening;
 - develop a team norm of sending “hot news” bulletins to the team (and a norm to respond);
 - create ways to celebrate accomplishments with the whole team.
5. Create tracks and footprints in physical space (create artifacts).
 - Create a sign or team inbox visible to everyone;
 - circulate team output with team specific headings and formatting;
 - design a logo.

Virtual Teams: A New Model of Team Development

Most of us are familiar with Tuckman's model of team development which incorporates the stages of forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning. Virtual teams require a new model that accounts for the complexities of their work environments. The following model, adapted from J. McGrath, addresses both task performance and social dynamics arguing that both work together to create the team experience.

Task Dynamics

Social Dynamics

Stage	Description	Task Activities	Description	Social Activities
1	Inception	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Select goals <input type="checkbox"/> Generate preliminary plans <input type="checkbox"/> Generate ideas 	Interaction / Inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Ensure team member inclusion <input type="checkbox"/> Ensure opportunity for participation <input type="checkbox"/> Define initial roles
2	Problem-Solving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Select technical problems to be resolved <input type="checkbox"/> Solve problems with correct, known answers <input type="checkbox"/> Solve ambiguous problems 	Position status / role definition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Address status of team members <input type="checkbox"/> Clarify and refine roles and expertise
3	Conflict resolution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Resolve conflicts about different points of view <input type="checkbox"/> Resolve conflicts stemming from different interests 	Power / resource allocation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Address power differences between team members <input type="checkbox"/> Address interpersonal relationships <input type="checkbox"/> Address how different solutions affect power allocation to different functions, regions, and/or countries
4	Execution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Perform tasks <input type="checkbox"/> Address organizational barriers to performance 	Interaction Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Ensure equal participation <input type="checkbox"/> Ensure effective interaction and communication

Virtual Team Dynamics

Three factors that affect virtual team dynamics:

1. **Time** (especially in parallel, project, and action teams): Most teams undergo major transitions about halfway through their life cycle no matter how much time they're allotted for their task or how many times they've met. Just prior to the transition to the execution stage, teams typically experience conflict, role confusion, changing alliances, and debate about technical approaches or solutions to problems. Then, during the transition, old approaches and viewpoints are cast aside and new ones take their places; the team rapidly progresses to the execution stage. Four events that signal the transition to execution:
 - Abandonment of much of the team's early work, including plans and agendas;
 - a feeling of urgency to finish on time;
 - renewed contact between the team and its organizational environment, most often the sponsor or a member of senior management; and
 - specific new agreements on the ultimate direction the team should take.

2. **Environmental Influences:** This includes three variables:
 - How embedded or rooted the team is in the organization as demonstrated by the team's activities being supported by the organization's structure, processes, communication channels, management, and reward structure.
 - The more complex the team's task, the greater the chance of conflict and disagreement about roles, approaches to problems, and definition of outcomes. Repeatable and simple tasks equate to less time spent in activities such as conflict resolution, role definition, and authority relationships in the group.
 - Electronic communication and collaboration technology can affect both task and social dynamics positively and negatively.

3. **Team composition:** This includes three variables:
 - Cultural differences: cultural dimensions that appear to have the greatest potential to affect virtual team dynamics are *individualism-collectivism* (independent vs. participatory orientation), *power distance* (team members from different levels in the organization), and *uncertainty avoidance* (high vs. low structure/definition).
 - Differences in functional background: cross-functional teams experience more disagreement regarding team process, priority, etc.
 - Team size.

Need information regarding **Team Dysfunction** and possible **Interventions?** Turn to the OD Tools Tab...