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1. *Learn the fine art of remote team bonding*

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Learn the fine art of remote team bonding

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Body

India, Oct. 27 -- With an increasing amount of work being done virtually, leaders are feeling the brunt of the lack of connection with their teams in the form of loss of productivity, sudden resignations, or emotional meltdowns among team members working **_remotely_**. While working **_remotely_**, it is not easy to be aware of interpersonal conflicts brewing or why a member who usually is silent seems agitated. Research shows that virtual working means working alone at odd hours; being "on" for longer and spread-out time; and shorter duration of members overlapping even virtually. Are there ways in which leaders can manage virtual working better?

Building trust contributes significantly to the success of teams and is also one of the most challenging emotions to build offline or online. Team members need to trust others to be predictably competent to do their part of their work, and trust the interpersonal actions and intentions of each other. Some of the actions that leaders can take are highlighting evidence of the trustworthy behaviour of team members proactively, signalling trustworthiness by sharing information, or delivering on the promises made about major and minor things to team members. For example, if at the start of the meeting, you told a member you would share the number of a dentist you liked, sharing the number at the end of the call signals trustworthiness.

Most leaders and team members working **_remotely_** complain that they do not often know what is happening in the lives of the team members. One leader shared, "In the in-person mode you could tell from the body language if something was up. In virtual meetings, it is difficult to sense the feelings of the team members. Ritualistically sharing before a meeting, how are you, seems like a waste of time or even invades the privacy of the team members." In face-to-face meetings, you only ask "if something was up question" if there is a cue. It would help the leader to raise the issue and ask the group what might be a way to solve this issue of connections with each other on the team.

Calling a separate meeting just to discuss this issue will signal the importance of the issue. Another technique is to simulate virtually the open door by leaders and team members. Pinging someone to ask for time to talk can be sometimes daunting especially when asking for an appointment for seemingly trivial doubts or questions. Leaders also need to manage their emotions around the non-availability of members when called unscheduled. For example, is it expected that **_remote_** workers will only be focused on work and be available all the time? It helps leaders to move away from the mindset of monitoring and micromanaging in virtual work.

Just like all teams have norms of working together, it would be best for leaders to lead in developing digital norms of working in virtual teams. These norms may include: Can questions be typed on chat, what to do if my raised hand is ignored, to what extent emojis may be used and so on. It is a common occurrence that team members intend to be fully present but a few minutes later they find themselves on a steep slippery slope of inattention. Twenty minutes later they may find themselves hopelessly clued out of the meeting.

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Digital norms that allow the member to say, I am sorry I was not paying attention, may help the team to get the best out of all members present. Also, norms around the display of self-image can be helpful. It helps to accept that we all are a little narcissistic and can sometimes not take our eyes off ourselves. Talking about some of these issues humanises and universalises them and allows us to get past the barriers to connecting with the work and each other.

Leaders can also use data on the productivity of teams and the quality of output of the team to make decisions on allocating and mandating for the times and tasks that overlap among teams. One such analysis showed that over a quarter of the tasks were negatively affected when the teams worked together, a third of the tasks were not impacted by whether the team was together or not, and 41% of the tasks were better performed when the team overlapped virtually. Such detailed unbiased analysis can help in decisions about the cadence of overlapping and individual work of team members.

In sum, leaders and team members will be best able to build trust virtually through constant communication about how work needs to be organised, discuss openly difficulties faced, and speak about new shared norms and behaviours.

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