



# Leading High-Performing & Engaged Dispersed Teams

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# Agenda

- What is a Dispersed Team?
- Why Do Organizations Launch Distributed Work Programs / Dispersed Teams?
- What are Best Practices / Framework to Successfully Lead Dispersed Teams
  - Know Yourself as a Leader
  - Prepare for Dispersed Team Dynamics

# What is a Dispersed Team?

A team where not all members are regularly working together in the same location

Locations are all in one country or in multiple countries (includes off-shoring or near-shoring)

Team members are in numerous office locations or some or all are working from a home office

Also referred to as: remote workforce, distributed work program, virtual workers

This dynamic is becoming more and more prevalent, especially as resources are brought together to deliver projects

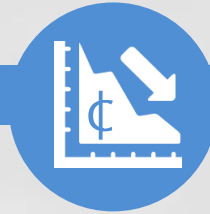
# Why Do Organizations Launch Distributed Work Programs / Dispersed Teams?



Globalization &  
Geographic  
Diversification



Talent Attraction &  
Retention



Cost / Expense  
Reduction



Environmental  
Impact Reduction



Business Continuity  
Enhancement



Employee Risk  
Mitigation

# Framework for Successfully Engaging and Leading Dispersed Teams



# Know Yourself – Core Characteristics

*Leaders who excel at leading virtual teams tend to have several core characteristics in common which drives their success.*

## They Are:

- **Trustworthy / Authentic** - they do what they say they will do; they are consistent in their leadership behaviors
- **Flexible** - they can respond quickly in a changing, unpredictable environment
- **Open to new challenges** as a leader

## They Possess:

- A willingness to be **available** to team members
- A willingness to **trust others** to do what they say they will do
- An ability to **plan** and **organize**

## They Are Able To:

- **Communicate clearly** verbally and in writing, and across various mediums (conference calls, face to face, etc.)
- **Set clear priorities** for their team and hold them accountable
- **Coach and influence** others

Most Important!!



*Leader Challenge: Rate yourself on the characteristics listed above. What areas need improvement?*

# Know Yourself - Leadership Shadow

Aligning leadership behaviors so leaders are consistently *authentic* which *builds trust* with teams

How I tell my organization's story

How I set context and frame issues

What I emphasize and repeat

The numbers I prioritize – what's non-negotiable

How I reward people, and for what

How I hold people accountable



My demeanor and behaviors

How I role-model

How I make decisions

The symbols I use to show what is important

What I give my time to

My routines and disciplines

What never gets cancelled; or always gets done first

# Know Yourself – What is Your Leadership Shadow?

How I tell the story of my organization

How I set context, frame issues

What I repeat, what words I use

Which numbers I measure / look at first, aka my non-negotiables

How I reward people and what I recognize as good work

How I hold people accountable

How I behave, especially in times of stress

How I role-model

How do I make decisions

What symbols I use to show what is important

What are my routines / standing meetings?

Which call/emails do I make/answer first?

Whom I choose to interact with

What never gets cancelled; or always gets done first



**Leader Exercise:** Complete your Leadership Shadow. Next step: share those areas where you want to focus with your team.



# Prepare for Remote Dynamics - Discussion

- Have you led a dispersed team or been a remote team member?
- What are some of the challenges you faced in either situation?



# Prepare for Remote Dynamics

## Leaders of dispersed teams face the following challenges:

- ❑ Keeping remote team members from becoming isolated and detached
- ❑ Measuring virtual employee productivity without regard to physical presence
- ❑ Keeping employees in the loop and the lines of communication open
- ❑ Coordinating meetings across various time zones
- ❑ Understanding and managing cultural and language differences
- ❑ Encouraging teamwork and interaction amongst team-members
- ❑ Handling conflict among dispersed team-members or addressing under-performance
- ❑ Finding ways to recognize and reward remote workers for their contributions to keep them engaged
- ❑ Tracking geopolitical factors – disasters, political & financial unrest
- ❑ If team members are employees, allowing the lack of face time to influence professional advancement opportunities



*The tools in the circles to the above right are intended to assist leaders as they address these common challenges. The following slides offer an expanded view.*

# Building a Remote Work Community

*A successful dispersed team leader must provide opportunities for remote workers to connect within the organization and interact as if they would be co-located.*



## Best Practices / Action Items to Building a Sense of Belonging

- ✓ **Establish routines** – Co-facilitate the “Remote Logistics” meetings for your team
- ✓ **Ensure connectivity** – Assign a buddy for each remote team member
- ✓ **Maintain social benefits of co-location** – Schedule social events
- ✓ **Understand cultural differences** – Conduct your own research and provide team members with opportunities to share cultural norms
- ✓ **Build relationships** – Offer opportunities for other interactions; share where team members could find information about what is happening outside the project team
- ✓ **Provide capability** – Ensure team has been trained in the use of web conferencing tools



*Have You Experienced This? A Conference Call in Real Life*

# Creating a Collaborative Environment

*When working in a dispersed team, establishing and maintaining communication is critical. Leaders need to ensure virtual employees are “in the loop” and feel part of the team.*

## Best Practices for Communicating Effectively:

- Accommodate communication preferences when possible.
- Don't forget to communicate informally as well.
- Choose the right medium for the message.
- Think critically about how your message may be understood.
- Be sensitive to language barriers and cultural norms related to communication.
- Remember that communication goes both ways.



### Action Items for Effective Communications & Engagement

- ✓ Schedule regular 1:1 meetings
- ✓ Schedule weekly team meetings
- ✓ Review and implement other engagement opportunities (see Appendix)
- ✓ Identify a vehicle for your team to stay connected outside of meetings you coordinate
- ✓ Ensure employees are on distribution lists of the nearest office so they can stay connected, or attend special events
- ✓ Attempt to make meetings interactive



**Leader Review:** *What are some countries where team members have worked or are from? What have you learned about those cultures and languages?*

# Leading Your Dispersed Team

*When leaders do not interact with team members on a daily basis, they can sometimes go in the wrong direction. Set the groundwork for success with the following practices.*

## Best Practices for Establishing Expectations:

- Share vision / goals for the team.
- Establish SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Time-bound) performance objectives for each team member.
- Share communication expectations.
- Set clear policies and guidelines.
- Create guidelines for issue resolution.
- Establish productivity ground rules.
- Set-up a check-in policy.
- Ask about team member's own expectations.



### Set & Discuss Expectations with Each Remote Worker

- ✓ Objectives will be established regularly and tracked for progress
- ✓ Productivity will be measured by met deadlines and quality of work
- ✓ Conflicts will be discussed directly with the person



**Leader Caution:** *Though focus should be primarily on outcomes, be careful not to miss other important clues to engagement. See [video example](#).*

# Developing into an Engaged, High-Performing Dispersed Team

*By knowing yourself and preparing for virtual team dynamics, leaders will build trust, improve the engagement of virtual team members, and maximize their potential to develop into a high-performing team, regardless of location.*

## High-Performing Teams

- ✓ Clear and well-defined goals and priorities
- ✓ Clear understanding of roles and duties
- ✓ Trust and competence
- ✓ Willingness to let team goals override individual goals
- ✓ Achievement of stretch goals
- ✓ Cooperation, not competition
- ✓ Deal with conflict effectively
- ✓ Listen to varying points of view
- ✓ Open and frequent communication



## Low-Performing Teams

- ✗ Cliques or subgroups that do not get along
- ✗ Unequal distribution of resources
- ✗ Uneven participation levels
- ✗ Processes that are rigid or otherwise dysfunctional
- ✗ A lack of creative problem solving
- ✗ Low levels of communication or miscommunication
- ✗ A tendency to avoid conflict
- ✗ A domineering personality
- ✗ Goals not consistently achieved



**Leader Challenge:** Compare your team to the lists above. Is your team engaged and high-performing? What areas could use improvement?



# Appendix

- Engagement Opportunities
- Addressing an Underperforming Virtual Team Member

# Engagement Opportunities

Type	Description	Purpose / Benefit
<b>Regular One-on-One Meetings</b>	Uninterrupted one-on-one private sessions with direct reports can be used to review progress and status, discuss performance results on goals, provide feedback and cover action plans.	Provide the highest level of engagement between you and your direct reports
<b>Weekly Huddles/Team Meetings</b>	Meetings with entire team to cover goals, progress, risks/ issues, procedural, departmental or company updates that apply to entire team and to answer questions. Also periodically to have guests where someone from another dept. shares relevant updates.	Allows leader to share the same message to multiple team members and get their collective feedback or answer their questions.
<b>Skip-level meetings (for larger projects)</b>	Forums used by leaders to engage, employ and learn from project team members in larger projects that may report to someone else on the project or within a work stream. Though in project management, not all people typically “report” for performance evaluation purposes to a project manager, most are ultimately accountable to them for project deliverables.	Gives an opportunity to directly engage those team members for first-hand information about the project that would otherwise be filtered through their own leader on the project.
<b>Brown Bag Meetings</b>	Meetings typically held over lunch and provide an opportunity to focus on a specific topic allowing team members to share and learn about areas of expertise within the team. Nature of meetings is more informal and attendance is considered optional.	Improve interaction, knowledge and opportunity for development within the team. Also builds engagement through individuals being able to share areas of expertise.
<b>Virtual Management by Walking Around</b>	Management technique to set aside time during the day to connect information with team members. Ensure amount of time spent with all team members in this fashion is generally the same. Does not have to happen every day, just regularly..	Engage employees informally as a way to build rapport, listen to suggestions and complaints and get a sense of how things are going outside of more formal meetings.



# Addressing an Underperforming Virtual Team Member

*When leaders aren't interacting with team members in person, it can be tough to spot signs of trouble. Most problems can be avoided or resolved by stepping in early. The key is to remain alert for warning signs.*

## Be on alert for these red flags and take action early:

- Doesn't respond to communications in a timely manner
- Doesn't meet deadlines
- Doesn't submit required reports and status updates
- Prioritizes the wrong projects
- Has too many excuses for not attending meetings or getting the work done
- Is difficult to reach or frequently reschedules
- Displays unprofessional conduct and poor judgment, such as having inappropriate background noises during meetings

## When you notice any of the warning signs, follow a five-step process:

- Describe the situation to the team member in objective, neutral terms
- Explain the effect the situation is having on the team
- Develop a solution, ideally with the team member's input, and outline specific action items
- Gain buy-in and commitment from the team member to follow through
- Set up regular check-ins to evaluate the team member's progress. If the problematic behavior continues, follow your organization's usual disciplinary protocol, whether employee or contractor