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Developing team trust:
Leader insights for virtual settings

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"Can you hear me?"

"I think you may be muted."

"My connection is unstable."

Utterances such as these have increasingly replaced friendly office greetings of, "Good morning!" and "How are you?" As COVID-19 moved workplaces online, employees had to adapt to electronic means of communication, including emailing, chatting, and meeting on platforms such as Zoom, Skype, Slack, and Microsoft Teams. Indeed, the mechanisms through which projects are conducted and products are delivered have changed drastically. Regardless of these shifting contexts, organizations must continue to develop and maintain effective processes and performance. Many employees have struggled to integrate into virtual environments, particularly when it comes to developing interpersonal rapport and professional relationships. One of the most pronounced changes in the workplace can be seen in trust—the bedrock upon which all relationships are built.

WHAT IS TRUST?

Trust exists at multiple levels, not only between two individuals but also within larger groups of people. In this piece, we refer to trust as a dynamic, shared state that emerges within work teams. Teams are groups that work interdependently toward a mutual goal. In order to operate optimally, members of a team must feel trust for and between one another. Specifically, they should believe that their colleagues are reliable and share similar goals and values. Managers can turn to team sciences to better understand and develop trust. Researchers have traditionally divided trust into two buckets. *Cognitive trust* involves reliability and dependability in the performance of tasks. This type of trust is built over time, when a team member demonstrates that they are consistent in completing a particular job; we can think of it as a logical calculation, based on our observations of another person. Conversely, *affective trust* refers to interpersonal dynamics, including that of familiarity and co-identification. It is more personal and often emotionally charged. When we feel like someone understands us and has our best interests at heart, we usually believe that they will act in ways that protect, support, and develop us.

Notably, regardless of whether it is cognitive or affective, trust is subjective. It is not an objective quality of a person or group. Instead, trust is based on our perceptions of the individual and context, whether or not we consciously realize it. When we are deciding to trust someone, we observe the situation, evaluate how trustworthy a person is, and make decisions based on these judgments. As a result, cognitive and affective trust have consequences for team performance and well-being.

When a team has trust, we can observe both direct and downstream effects. Team members who trust one another can better communicate and coordinate behaviors, given their openness, familiarity, and reliability. Interpersonally, trust also enhances morale, engagement, and willingness to cooperate, both at the individual and group level. These processes in turn enhance the overall group's ability to perform tasks effectively. We can see examples of these everywhere we look. The best sports teams have athletes who depend on one another and work harmoniously. In American football, the quarterback must trust that the

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running back will be there to receive a pass. The workplace is no different. Colleagues must be able to rely on one another. Therefore, organizational leaders have a vested interest in generating trust within their teams.

THE VIRTUAL CONTEXT AND ITS IMPACT ON TRUST

Virtual work contexts have changed how work is performed and trust develops within teams. First, remote work has changed the quality and quantity of casual and formal interactions. Second, it has shifted the balance of job demands (given that employees may need to learn new technologies) and resources (such as social support). Third, workplaces have increasingly transitioned to relatively novel methods of communication. Altogether, virtual environments have inevitably transformed the ways that teams operate and, ergo, develop trust.

Trust typically develops over time, through repeated positive interactions. Minor interactions, facilitated by physical proximity, can often accelerate this process. For example, the "water cooler gossip" that occurs in break rooms is often an unplanned but impactful way to gather colleagues and create affective bonds. In an in-person office setting, coworkers can stop by one another's spaces to socialize informally and develop rapport. These opportunities for informal engagement are lost when you remove the physical environment. If left unchecked, a lack of interaction can lead to isolation and various undesirable effects: impacting trust, accelerating burnout, impairing senses of belongingness, et cetera. In response to this, some organizations have intentionally created alternative avenues for interaction. For example, some workplaces have instituted virtual happy hours and coffee chats to help fill in potential gaps in socialization. Although these are not a perfect substitute for casual in-person interactions, these remote events can help recreate a sense of community. Moreover, some employees may feel that they focus better when they are able to compartmentalize time spent in workflow versus socializing. Indeed, the limited access to casual communication can both hinder and help.

The virtual work context not only changes the quantity of interaction, but also the quality of engagement. When a team is geographically dispersed, the number of modes of communication is limited. In written communication, such as email, emotional nuances are often lost. Think of times where a misunderstanding arose because someone intended humor or sarcasm, but the message was not interpreted accordingly (or vice versa). Indeed, text-based modes do not allow team members to interact as fully as before. Even live, synchronous video conferencing cannot completely approximate the act of speaking in person. When remote, individuals are not able to use non-verbal cues, like physical proximity and body language, to communicate interpersonal closeness. The simple act of sitting next to someone in a conference room can provide positive feelings and reassurance during a tense meeting — but that is not possible in a Zoom room. Moreover, technology itself can create issues; for example, slow connections can result in poor video streaming and stilted communication. Conflict-prone and highly technical interactions can become unpleasant when static and noise literally enter the picture. A reliance on smoothly performing technology can backfire, with real consequences for workplace relationships. Because interactions can feel less "organic" in these facilitated formats, individuals may not be as able to build trust (particularly of an affective nature) as easily as before.

Importantly, firms can streamline their technological services to prevent hiccups in communication. However, COVID-19 accelerated the transition to virtual work such that many organizations were caught off-guard. When organizations were forced to turn on a dime, from in-person to remote work, they also experienced a wave of social and cultural challenges. Many employees were tasked with new responsibilities, including training and learning new technologies while maintaining overall performance. At the same time, access to social support (e.g., leaders, peers, and administrators) also changed in substantial ways. In some cases, these increased job demands and decreased resources resulted in stressed workforces. In other cases, the shift to online environments has forced organizations to reevaluate their processes and become creative in structuring work. Indeed, scholars, media sources, and workers have begun to document the unpredictable effects of remote work.

As a note, developing team trust in virtual settings is always critical, including outside of pandemics. The recent global crisis has simply brought to light the unprecedented, and perhaps underestimated, consequences of the entirely remote workplace. Given that COVID-19 has significantly changed the way that we live and work, it would be remiss to discuss virtual team trust without contextualizing it in this strong situation. Therefore, although the insights and best practices in this article are widely applicable, we do draw upon current circumstances (at the time of publication). Not only does this allow us to provide examples of virtual work and life, but it also gives us a snapshot of how virtual team trust has and is evolving at this pivotal time.

Given these virtual environments and their unique challenges, it is more important than ever that organizations understand how to bridge gaps and ensure cohesive and high-performing teams. As previously mentioned, many intact teams have now been dispersed without adequate time to prepare and shift into remote formats. Not only will trust be critical to the performance of these teams, but it can also yield impact in several other domains. In a world in which virtual work has been normalized, it is important for individuals to feel connected to communities, including their organizational workplaces. Ensuring positive group dynamics, such as team trust, can ensure the well-being of employees and result in more engaged workforces long-term.

THE CURRENT ARTICLE

This piece highlights ways that leaders can foster trust within virtual teams, through both affective and cognitive avenues. To this end, we draw from both research and practice to identify and synthesize a number of important findings on virtual team trust. Additionally, we use the experiences of two subject matter experts (SMEs) to help contextualize these findings: an executive from a Fortune 500 Company and a physician leader (with an MD and MBA) at a major

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academic medical institution. As people leaders with cumulative decades of managerial experience, both SMEs have facilitated teams through rapid, transitionary periods in their organization, during which work moved from an in-person to entirely virtual formats. We have transcribed select, verbatim quotes from interviews with them, conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic in late 2019. Altogether, their experiences can be used as "miniature case studies," illustrating our takeaways with real-life examples. Altogether, we have distilled their practical experiences, as well as evidence-based academic insights, into eight meaningful practices, summarized in Table 1. Below, we discuss each individual leader lesson, as organized into the categories of cognitive and affective trust. Each insight begins with illustrative quotes by the SMEs, before diving into the team science that supports each practice.

COGNITIVE TRUST

Cognitive trust is based on predictability and competence. In teams with high cognitive trust, team members can depend and rely on their colleagues. Although time and dependability are the primary ingredients of cognitive trust, team leaders can also amplify and accelerate the development of cognitive trust through several avenues, such as: outlining shared goals, benefits, and risks; setting boundaries and team norms; monitoring engagement; and identifying clear roles.

Outline Shared Goals, Benefits, and Risks

> *Fortune 500 Executive*: The weekly calls that we have are helpful for outlining what we got done and how that ties into the broader strategic goals of the department and the overall company. At the beginning of the pandemic, I used to write these emails that covered everything we got done during the week—but that fell off pretty quickly because it was just exhausting. Now, [we have] weekly calls where we highlight what's going on, how it impacts the company going forward, and the tasks for the week ahead.
> *Physician Leader*: I try to always set the expectations early on about what we're trying to do and how we're going to measure our success.

As mentioned previously, one of the defining characteristics of a team is a common goal. Therefore, leaders must make sure that everyone is "on the same page," in order to ensure unity of efforts. A shared mental model is the mutual organization of knowledge across team members that allows for collective responses to an environment. Within teams that have a shared mental model, members equally understand the organization's goals and the role each person plays in achieving them.

The development of trust can depend enormously on a team leader's ability to unite all members under a common banner. Depending on the organization and project, a goal can involve discrete "bottom line" metrics or benefits, such as financial gains or successful project performance. Such tangible benefits can directly influence employees (e.g., job stability, bonuses) and therefore motivate performance. Conversely, leaders can also set overarching, unifying values and ambitions for the team, including health and safety improvements, creative output, innovation, and/or humanitarian or prosocial needs.

Although individuals can have their own idiosyncratic drives, leaders can reduce discrepancies by intentionally highlighting commonalities and hearing out their members' concerns. The Fortune 500 SME described their method of outlining goals and achieving unity in teams by hosting weekly calls and highlighting happenings within the company. By emphasizing potential impact and clear tasking going forward, leaders can help create a sense of shared goals. Emphasizing these mutually-desired outcomes can powerfully motivate all individuals within the team, and therefore fuel group performance as a whole.

On the flip side of the coin, as the team pursues its goals, it can also face significant challenges and risks. Such potential negative consequences could include financial losses, delays, errors, or failures. Leaders can unite their employees by recognizing these difficulties as universal struggles and encouraging open communicationat both team and individual levels. Furthermore, team managers can also be honest about their vulnerabilities throughout the performance episode, thereby breeding feelings of authenticity and inclusiveness. This will emphasize the interdependence of team leaders and members, strengthening positive relationships and trust.

Set Boundaries and Team Norms

> *Fortune 500 Executive*: The norms [include] weekly calls and managing daily tasks [via] emails . . . [You can] just assign tasks to people via email, with a very clear deadline on when you want to see something. A lot of times, we'll email the entire team and ask, "Is everyone signed off on this?" or "Can everyone review this thing?" Then, everyone has to reply to the email. For a very major project, we'll have an entire department call, where the leaders of the projects highlight their team's accomplishments and everything they've done.
> *Physician Leader*: Our meetings are almost always on either Zoom or Microsoft Teams. We have weekly data check meetings with the whole team, where we check the data to make sure [it] is accurate. I have monthly reports that I send to my higher-ups. I have one-on-one meetings [with team members], three times a year, to review the progress of the projects.

With so many employees working from home, it can be difficult for individuals and organizations to make sense of, establish, and maintain healthy boundaries. In-person workplaces often have atmospheres with implicit norms built in. The presence and visibility of other individuals and work events can help create routines and shared expectations. In the absence of these contextual clues, work teams can struggle to develop shared mental models. In response, our SMEs used regular meetings and close communication to create structure. Additionally, the literature suggests other key considerations in boundaries and team norms.

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Table 1 Recommendations

Trust type	Practice	Recommendations
Cognitive	Outline shared goals, benefits, and risks.	• Host regular check-ins, highlighting short-term and long-term achievements and goals. • Create team values that transcend conventional performance metrics. • Acknowledge everyone's personal investment in outcomes, including shared stakes and risks.
	Set clear boundaries and team norms.	• Respect individual accessibility and availability by providing flexibility with regards to scheduling and technological requirements. • Provide newcomers with both formal and informal mechanisms of learning team culture (e.g., explicit norm clarification; virtual coffee chats). • Collaboratively set expectations.
	Monitor engagement.	• Intentionally attend to and manage one's own and others' emotions. • Avoid overloading team members with unnecessary meetings and tasks, which can result in work burnout or "Zoom fatigue." • Assess engagement in adaptable, alternating, and non-obtrusive ways, including through casual check-ins, surveys, and naturalistic means (e.g., frequency and quickness of communication).
	Identify and maintain clear roles among members.	• When assigning team roles, consider individual circumstances that can make individuals more or less suitable for certain tasks. • Clearly define roles and communicate expectations. • Remain open to quickly changing tasking, depending on situational factors that may arise.
Affective	Develop an inclusive community through psychological safety.	• Emphasize the similarities between the circumstances affecting the organization, team leaders, and members,. • Praise achievements and provide feedback, framing individual wins as shared team victories. • Take advantage of technology to informally touch base with individuals and encourage low-stakes exchange of ideas and information.
	Foster a sense of commitment to central bodies.	• Emphasize the organization's and leaders' investment in team members' personal and professional progress, highlighting mutual interests and values. • Provide access to useful resources, including technological support, equipment, and work-life services. • Utilize empowering leadership behaviors, such as providing employees with increased levels of autonomy and developmental support.
	Connect meaningfully outside of the work context.	• Express interest and care in what team members are currently experiencing in their lives outside of work. • Hold socially-distanced or virtual get-togethers, including happy hour and coffee breaks social events over video-conferencing technology. • Create opportunities for individuals to optionally and casually share personal milestones, such as before meetings.
	Encourage collaboration to help create contingencies.	• Communicate empathy and encourage backup behavior, such that team members can identify colleagues who are overwhelmed and provide support accordingly. • Ensure that all individuals are kept in the loop on various tasks within the team, in order to maximize members' abilities to assist one another. • Create a system of redundancies, i.e. "second in commands" are clear and prepared if and when an individual team member becomes unavailable.

Teams must practice strong communication. Team leaders should consider explicitly stating norms, including expectations regarding the use of technology (e.g., audio and video features of communication software). For newcomers, in particular, clarifying nuances such as level of formality (e.g., use of titles) can help relieve anxiety. Additionally, newcomers can be provided with the opportunity for informal meetings, in order to mimic organic socialization in an organization. One such method is through assigning senior personnel to check in with incoming team members over virtual coffee chats. Indeed, there are often aspects of the workplace that are learned through in-person observation and interaction. In the absence of such learning, it is helpful to identify these customs and develop guidelines to situate virtual teams.

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Accordingly, it is imperative to formalize procedures for casual workplace interactions. For example, virtual teams may often be unaware of unpleasant feelings between members, given the lack of in-person and non-verbal communication. As a result, there should be mechanisms in place to help identify and address conflicts or grievances. On the other side of the coin, progress can and should be identified in order to amplify team wins and boost morale, as stated by the Physician Leader SME.

One particularly helpful practice is the systematization of feedback, as mentioned by the SMEs. The provision of information on one's performance can help team members adapt their methods appropriately. Regularly checking in can also boost receptivity, as potential critiques are de-emphasized given the frequency of overall feedback. Indeed, criticism may be perceived more constructively when it is part of an ongoing system of process improvement. Importantly, any potential negative feedback should also be accompanied by concrete suggestions for resolution. For example, team leaders may want to consider creating contracts or agreements that clearly outline the desired outcome. If this course is pursued, managers should do their best to give agency to stakeholders. All members of the team should be able to participate in the identification of goals, such that it is shared and fosters commitment. These measures can help reduce ambiguity, strengthen the team's shared mental model, and alleviate individual anxieties.

Monitor Engagement

> *Fortune 500 Executive*: You can tell when [a team member is not engaged] — when they just don't speak up in group calls and they take a while to respond to emails. People who are engaged and contributing are promoted and rewarded.
> *Physician Leader*: I can determine engagement by looking at the data. If we aren't achieving our goals, I look back and see what we aren't doing effectively. I think the hardest part for me is that I have the responsibility of overseeing a lot of committees. I don't have any ability to fire people or demote them or take them off projects, so I have to motivate them positively.

Teams should expect frequent communication from leaders, whether it is related to an ongoing project, a prospective virtual social gathering, or an individualized check-in. Leaders must focus on monitoring trust and growth, promoting psychological safety (which we will discuss later in this article), and assessing teamwork. In order to optimize team performance, leaders should responsively and positively motivate employees to engage with the organization. This includes managing both one's own emotions and those of others. Indeed, these behaviors, under the umbrella of team emotional intelligence, have been shown to predict cognitive trust. Being aware of one's own emotions and managing others' have also been shown to improve affective trust.

However, leaders should balance monitoring practices with a wariness of "Zoom fatigue," which occurs when workers are overwhelmed by the volume of time spent in virtual meetings. Recent research has shown that, as time spent on Zoom (and other video-conferencing platforms) during the day increases, collaborative ability decreases. From the early morning check-in to the evening happy hour, employees in the virtual setting may become exhausted. For example, individuals may emotionally "perform" during meetings, in order to combat the awkwardness that fills the void once satisfied by tacit social cues and physical interaction. Moreover, given that cameras allow one's appearance to be constantly monitored, individuals may feel pressure to visually express themselves appropriately and constantly. This differs from real-life settings, wherein meeting participants typically attend to limited visual referents (e.g., a slide show or an individual speaker) at a time, rather than a checkerboard of faces in a virtual meeting room. In practice, it can be difficult to disengage from these virtual meeting requirements. Negative contact effects can then occur when an employee does not choose to interact with a colleague or supervisor and/or feels threatened by the frequency or time of contact.

Some team leaders may oversee multiple project teams and thus attend to the interpersonal, personal, and professional needs of many employees. One can judge individual engagement by assessing each of these levels. The Fortune 500 SME used several metrics, observing how often each employee spoke during group calls and taking note of e-mail response time. More formally, survey data collection is a valuable tool to monitor engagement and followers' trust in leaders and colleagues. Managers can evaluate engagement in quick and efficient ways through technology, such as Slack and other project management platforms. Using low-effort, momentary evaluations, leaders can properly meet one-on-one when a red flag pops up, rather than laboriously touching base with every single person (which can waste time and energy when unneeded). With continuous assessment, employee enthusiasm and participation in virtual meetings can indicate overall engagement and attachment to the organization.

It is important to note that some of these electronic monitoring strategies can be double-edged swords; they, in and of themselves, may produce fatigue within team members if overused. Additionally, excessive electronic performance managing can undermine employee motivation and perceptions in unanticipated and negative ways. For example, employees who are micromanaged may feel like their privacy is being invaded and that their autonomy is being challenged. When managers rely too much on electronic performance management, this may communicate the message that employees cannot be trusted to work hard without close monitoring. Indeed, it must be emphasized that balance and adaptability are key ingredients to a successfulvirtual work force.

Throughout this paper, we suggest a number of methods that increase virtual interaction among team members. However, although consistent group and individual check-ins are a useful tool for leaders to monitor organizational progress, team projects, and employee engagement, they must be also be mindful of virtual work burn-out. Leadership can use several techniques to ensure that they strike an appropriate balance between too much and too little communication. First, managers can directly ask their members about their desired level of autonomy and plan meetings or engagements accordingly. Leaders should also be aware that

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one's preferences may shift over time, and be cognizant if and when employees are approaching their bandwidth. Second, leadership should consider their relationships with subordinates before implementing any particular system. They should "read the room" and only use strategies to the extent that they are genuinely helpful to their employees. After all, context is key with any organizational change practice. Third, team leaders should carefully consider the frequency and extent to which they employ different monitoring strategies. Team leaders can proactively manage meeting fatigue by alternating methods of communication, e.g., substituting a meeting with an email or having a "camera break" period during the workday. By granting followers the time and conditions they need in order to be successful, engagement, trust, and productivity is more likely to see gains. As you continue reading this article, please bear in mind the caveat: one should pick and choose the most maximally effective methods of engagement for their specific organization and teams.

Identify and Maintain Clear Roles Among Members

> *Fortune 500 Executive*: I work in an environment with a very clear hierarchy that is extremely defined. This makes it obvious which responsibility and task each person is assigned . . . It's based on seniority and where they are in the hierarchy.
> *Physician Leader*: I first ask [my team members about] what things they're comfortable with, to try to figure out what their abilities are. I oversee everything tightly in the beginning, and then with less oversight as they prove themselves to be capable. In new, shifting, or existing project teams, a leader who establishes expectations and outlines success up front will improve process gains: team coordination, cooperation, and communication. To this end, leaders can and should establish and maintain the roles that make up the team dynamic. They can use several pieces of information to aid in the assignment of roles.

Leaders should acknowledge and respect the diversity inherent in remote working. Individuals may be performing work in a number of different settings, and may experience limited accessibility as a result. Indeed, team members can operate from a variety of time zones, at-home cultures, work-life obligations, and under other circumstances. For example, employees may not be available at all times of the regular workday or may only be capable of working via certain modalities (e.g., email, video-conferencing, or working independently). Organizations should therefore understand that idiosyncratic backgrounds can influence the availability and work attitudes of individuals.

In order to respect individual circumstances, organizations can implement a number of concrete practices. For example, several organizations have banned the mandatory use of videos during meetings, given that individuals may not want to expose their home situations on camera. Indeed, it is important to recognize that people's transitions to working from home are all unique and continually negotiated as their work processes and preferences evolve. Another potential way to accommodate team members is to record audio or video and/or take meeting minutes, such that those who are unable to join at particular times may stay in the loop with important information. By considering these outside factors (e.g., family needs, household distractions, and desires for privacy), leaders can clarify and respond to their team's capacity to effectively complete tasks.

In addition to being cognizant of individual circumstances, managers can also make explicit expectations among team members. Continuing to be productive under current conditions can be a challenge. Therefore, the leader must make sure that their team members do not overwork themselves, which is negatively linked to productivity. By clearly defining team member roles and responsibilities, leaders can communicate expectations to individual employees and ensure that labor is equitably and reasonably distributed. Conversely, one-on-one meetings can ensure roles and their impact on the group are clearly understood.

Importantly, these role assignments should not be static. Given the turbulent conditions of today's workplace, team member work-life circumstances may in the blink of an eye. As a result, team leaders should encourage their members to aid one another and change responsibilities in order to bolster the entire team. We will continue to build on this theme throughout this article. Contingent on team member preferences, frequent oversight of project progress can reinforce role identity and fit. This can, in turn, help develop the predictability of behavior that underlies cognitive trust.

AFFECTIVE TRUST

Whereas cognitive trust pertains to beliefs regarding the competence and dependability of one's team members, affective trust pertains to team member beliefs regarding the interpersonal care and emotional bonds felt between team members. Of the two types of team trust, affective trust may be the more difficult to cultivate in virtual formats. Because this domain relies heavily on interpersonal bonds, lack of in-person communication can hamper the organic development of camaraderie. However, team leaders can enact several methods to optimize members' affective trust in one another. Below, we elaborate on four key approaches to gaining affective trust in a team: developing inclusive communities; fostering a sense of commitment; connecting meaningfully outside of work; and encouraging collaboration.

Develop an Inclusive Community Through Psychological Safety

> *Fortune 500 Executive*: [When there is a conflict between people,] I will never escalate any problem or issue that [a person] may have without telling them, "You may want to bring this situation up with the person you have an issue with." If they tell me they have an issue with another person, I don't immediately go to that individual. What I'll tell my team is, "I think you should go talk to that

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person and have a conversation with them. Then, if that fails, come back to me and I'll approach that person."
Physician Leader: We've had [difficult] discussions a lot virtually and in person, so I don't think these issues are new. I have a pretty good rapport with my team . . . [Specific to virtual setting,] when I get a report and it's finally finished, I will email the [person's] boss saying, 'Hey, I just want to thank you for having this employee doing this for me They did an awesome job.' Then, whenever I ask them for reports or help in the future, they're always willing to help.

A vital step in building affective trust in teams is developing an inclusive community through psychological safety. Psychological safety refers to the comfort level a team member feels when sharing their perspective. To be in psychologically safe environment, an individual should feel that they will not face interpersonal repercussions for having a divergent perspective or opinion. These beliefs can be impacted by both team and team leader characteristics. Each member of the team should feel comfortable with working and sharing ideas with one another. However, this can be difficult to establish in the absence of in-person interaction.

In order to develop psychological safety, team leaders must emphasize the shared identity and purpose that they have with their team members. In other words, leaders should place focus on the similarities between what they and their team members are currently going through. Past research has shown that high-quality relationships between leaders and followers are often the result of sharing values and goals. In turn, these bonds positively influence perceptions of psychological safety. In today's virtual environments, leaders can emphasize the mutual challenges of working remotely, in addition to other events occurring globally. This develops psychological safety by fostering an atmosphere of inclusion and interconnectedness.

Moreover, regularly praising achievements, including notifying higher-ups of team members' accomplishments, can foster inclusive and positive virtual work environments. The physician leader SME encouraged desired, future work behaviors by providing positive feedback when an employee performed well. Spotlighting employees can help break down barriers between team members. Importantly, such recognition should not only focus on individual task outcomes, given that this sole emphasis can come at the expense of group-level well-being. Rather, these victories should be celebrated as a team win, tying individual performance to the team product or functioning.

In addition to giving verbal encouragement, managers also provide structural psychological safety by setting clear, measurable expectations (as discussed previously). These behaviors can help team members see their team leader as approachable and appreciative, and their team as a supportive space. This can in turn reduce potentially detrimental power dynamics and thereby enhance psychological safety.

Although the virtual work environment has made certain aspects of interacting with our team members more difficult, it has also facilitated other convenient forms of communication. For example, talking one-on-one with a team member over a videoconferencing platform like Zoom or Skype may be more feasible than finding a time to talk with them one-on-one in a busy office setting. This has important implications for developing psychological safety in teams. Indeed, low-stakes exchanges of ideas and information can build a foundation for future discussions when more is potentially at risk. Teams will be most psychologically safe when each member of the team is comfortable sharing information with every other member of the team. With this in mind, scheduling times for individual team members to get to know one another on a deeper level (e.g., through one-on-one conversations) can provide teams with unique opportunities to increase psychological safety. This could be especially helpful for newcomers in the team who cannot rely on meeting members of their team in person during the pandemic. Overall, leaders can draw from a number of strategies to continue building positive team cultures, even with geographically dispersed members.

Foster a Sense of Commitment to Organizational Relationships

Fortune 500 Executive: I have weekly calls with everyone from the team in which we go around and talk about: the work that's been done over the past week; the work to be done over the next week; and interesting things that people have seen or have done, at any point, that they want to discuss and raise as part of the group. Even if people aren't volunteering, I'll go to a specific person and I'll ask them questions about what they've been doing—calls that they've been on and presentations that they've listened to—just to draw them into the conversation.
Physician Leader: I think the best ways to keep people connected is to try to keep the communication open.

Fostering a sense of commitment to central bodies, such as organizational leadership and the organization itself, is highly important for developing affective trust within a team. The SMEs both discussed how leaders can use communication in order to help establish these crucial connections. Managers can use regular check-ins to create mutual accountability and interests and recognize achievements and rewards. For example, team leaders should emphasize the organization's, as well as their own, investment in team members' personal and professional progress. In the aforementioned quote, the Fortune 500 executive was able to regularly check in with their team members through weekly conferences. Consistently checking in with team members to discuss progress related to work can be an effective way to keep the goals and progress of the team in the minds of all team members as they remain physically distanced from the organization. A leader that tends to their followers' well-being, their team's productivity, and shared mental model will foster a dynamic of growth and trust. This can then help develop an effective transition from face-to-face to virtual operation.

Beyond simply communicating a message of interdependence, organizations can also provide employees with access to useful resources. For example, many roles may require instrumental support and/or specific equipment in order to work effectively. Organizations can make concerted efforts

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to ensure that their team members are provided with necessary technology (e.g., an equipment purchase or loaning system), as well as proper scaffolding for appropriate adoption. If possible, leaders should also develop services that can aid in work-life balance, such as affordable childcare or family leave policies. These tools, in addition to being particularly impactful during pandemic circumstances, also concretely communicate the organizational investment in employee well-being. As a result, team members may feel increased loyalty to their leaders and company.

In order to cultivate a strong sense of commitment within teams, leaders will have to utilize empowering leader behaviors. Empowering leadership occurs when leaders provide employees with increased levels of autonomy and developmental support. Past research has shown that this style of management is positively linked with increased affective organizational commitment among followers. Providing team members with more independence and professional developmental opportunities during uncertain times will signal to the team members that their leaders in the organization are invested in them. This could, in turn, produce a reciprocal effect by fostering a sense of commitment in followers towards their organization, its leaders, and members.

Connect Meaningfully Outside of the Work Context

> *Fortune 500 Executive*: I think [discussing work-life matters is] dependent on each individual person. Some people are just all business, and I respect that. If they don't want to share what's going on in their personal lives, that's fine with me. It's not my business to be asking them to violate their own privacy or tell me things about their personal lives. Some people like talking about their personal lives and think it's enjoyable. You have to judge each individual person and then respond accordingly. On the group calls, I'll ask an opening statement: "Is anyone doing anything interesting this weekend?" Some people will immediately answer and give a very long detailed response; other people will have a one-word answer. Based on those group calls, I can then figure out who wants to talk about their own personal life and open up a little bit more — and who does not. In one-on-one conversations with some people, I just keep it all business; [with] other people, I ask more about what else is going on with them.
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> *Physician Leader*: In our organization, for our monthly meetings, people submit pictures of them doing stuff during COVID. [The pictures] get compiled and, then, during the meeting, [the hosts] show those as part of the talk. I think those types of things are important, especially when people have babies and stuff like that, to keep everyone connected.

It is crucial that team leaders find the time to connect meaningfully with their team members outside of the work context during these challenging times. As workers and their families are continuously impacted by the outside world (e.g., the pandemic, economic and financial challenges, caregiving demands, etc.), team members can struggle to allocate cognitive and emotional resources to their work and nonwork lives simultaneously. Thus, team leaders should be supportive of followers as they manage non-work-related aspects of life. A good way to do this could be by expressing interest and actively caring about what team members are currently experiencing in their nonwork lives. For example, organizations can hold socially distanced get-togethers, such as virtual happy hours over videoconferencing technology.

Team leaders may also have to come up with creative methods that suit the needs of the individuals within their team. Our Physician Leader SME gave one such example of making connections with team members, using work time to discuss non-work events. Specifically, the SME described a process whereby team members shared personal mementos and milestones. Methods such as these create space for team members to share information about their extra-work lives, which could be an impactful way for team members to feel appreciated on a personal level within the team.

Encourage Collaboration to Help Create Contingencies

> *Fortune 500 Executive*: The prior model, before I took over as manager, was to have everyone be completely siloed for their tasks. There was no cross-pollination or crossover between the individual tasks. I've tried to encourage, and even ask, people to do a task that they normally don't do — just so everyone in the group has experience and knows how to do each other's tasks, even if they're not the one primarily responsible for it. [Specific to the virtual setting,] since the entire team isn't sitting there facing each other, if I ask someone to do something, I send them the email and then I [CC, or carbon copy, and include in the email] everyone else. Even if the other people aren't working on that task or the project, they're aware that that other person is doing that. It creates this total information awareness, where, even if you're not asked to do something, you're aware that someone else is asked to do it.
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> *Physician Leader*: We always have built in redundancies for coverage. For example, I'm on service (i.e., on call at the hospital) right now. I have two backups (team members) in case I get sick, and in case the person behind me gets sick. With COVID, we've had to do triple backups now.

To build affective trust within teams, it is important that team members understand when and how to help each other. Leaders should encourage environments wherein individuals are aware of ongoing situations in and across their workgroups. This cross-departmental collaboration can be particularly helpful when caught in a bind — e.g., when someone needs help at a high-stakes moment. Backup behavior exists when team members provide assistance to colleagues who are unable to complete all of the tasks assigned to them. That is, effective backup behaviors occur when team members are able to accurately anticipate when and how their teammates will need their help. Structured

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interdependence between members and teams within an organization can optimize the ability to engage in backup behaviors.

Across the team, it is crucial to have a shared understanding of team members' work and life events that could be detrimental to their capacity to work (e.g., if a family member is severely ill). In today's world, managers must be significantly more empathetic, given that everyone is facing unprecedented and unpredictable situations (e.g., homeschooling children full time, being away from close family members for extended period of times, and dealing with anxiety due to major sociopolitical and global events). Setting aside time for team members to discuss events in their life that could potentially interrupt work-related progress could provide teams with some insurance in the form of being more readily equipped to perform backup behaviors when needed. This takeaway reflects the earlier lesson on connecting meaningfully on work-life matters.

In addition to having discussions around major life events with team members, team leaders can use less time-consuming methods to promote a shared understanding. Keeping people in the loop ensures that backup behaviors can be employed when necessary. For example, the Fortune 500 executive described a process in which they CC all members of the team on emails related to tasking within the team, even though that tasking might be directed at just one individual team member. Creating this "total information awareness" gives teams the best chance at using backup behavior to effectively respond to emergency situations (i.e., when a team member is unable to complete their work).

However, if this strategy is deployed without thought, it can backfire and result in total information overload. Managers should consider a number of factors when they decide if and when to loop in other members of a time. Key questions include: How often are team members in contact with one another? If they are already collaborating closely, there may not be a need to CC the entire team on emails. Are there specific people or tasks crucial to the success of the task? If so, that would be more motivation to create a "paper trail" that others may follow if needed. Is the work at hand project-based, with a finite timeline, or is the team working with one another indefinitely? The former situation may require additional layers of communication given the idiosyncrasies of the situation. Conversely, if a team is used to working regularly together, the forwarding of emails could overwhelm everyone's inboxes. Indeed, one of the most important tasks of a leader is to understand and balance communication so that it is neither too much nor too little.

Not only is information-sharing useful in promoting backup behavior, but policies can also be formally implemented to support engagement. The physician leader SME discussed a process of redundancies, wherein a chain of command is established for contingency situations. Although these systems are necessary in clinical contexts, where patient care is implicated, they can also be useful across other work environments. If a team member falls sick (which has become more likely in a pandemic context), it is helpful to clearly and quickly identify the second-in-command. Not only does this help the coordination process, but it can also aid in the preparation of the back-up individual, such that little is lost in the transition. Indeed, in remote settings, it can be even more difficult to swiftly and effectively change, replace, or support team members' roles. Team leaders should thus consider establishing these procedures, particularly in these tumultuous and virtual times.

CONCLUSION

The impact of virtual work on professional relationships cannot be understated, particularly in terms of our engagement with remote collaboration. With limited access to vocal and nonverbal cues from colleagues, supervisors, and informal interactions, an employee's productivity, sense of inclusion, and trust in and connectedness to the organization can change drastically. At stake for all workers are their mental well-being, sense of job security, and ability to maintain a healthy work-life balance—and that is without considering external impacts like COVID-19 and consequent financial struggles. Team trust can help buffer against many of these challenges, but it must first be developed with intention and acumen by their leaders.

Drawing upon both research and subject matter expertise, we have been able to identify several important factors for virtual team trust. Though these practices may feel overwhelming when presented all at once, it is possible to implement them in a smart and strategic way. Indeed, many of these techniques can and should be implemented slowly and over time; maintenance is as critical as initial execution. It is also important to remember that their effects do not occur in silos. These practices are synergistic. For example, improving cognitive trust can likely also help foster affective trust and vice-versa. Finally, trust itself is fluid. It is cyclical in that, as we enhance cognitive and affective trust, we will also improve our commitment to these practices and engagement. Adopting this process-oriented, growth mindset can help lessen the burden on leaders and allow them to enable their work constructively.

As previously mentioned, leaders should choose methods on a case-by-case and staggered basis, as to not overwhelm overburdened team members. In light of this, managers may consider using strategic interventions to develop, evaluate, and troubleshoot interpersonal relationships within their teams. For example, teamwork skills training (e.g., team-building exercises conducted virtually) can help create rapport among members. Such programs can also help leaders assess team members' performance in terms of collaboration, rather than from taskwork alone. These practices can also help identify interpersonal issues.

Leaders may also consider choosing a strategy and adjusting it to taste. For example, a leader can orient their check-ins to: address conflict, follow-up on major life events, take additional measures to help new employees build trust within groups, or engage in other measure suitable to the organization and employee's goals. Continuous assessment can also allow team leaders to provide regular and constructive feedback, while utilizing manageable goals and recognition of achievement. The particulars of these methods (including, range, frequency, and method) should be carefully tailored to the needs of the team, so as not to inundate employees. Nonetheless, curated communication not only strengthens the bond between the leader and their subordinates, but also

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improves employee commitment, emphasizes accountability, and fosters growth.

Overall, trust has always been the foundation of interpersonal interaction; this has not changed in the era of video calls and emails. However, the nature of its development and maintenance has evolved significantly—and remains unpredictable even to this moment. Key questions include: Given the rapid geographic dispersal of intact teams, will subgroups remain? Will isolation de-individualize coworkers? Will cognitive trust vs. affective trust have different trajectories over time? Indeed, these issues can and certainly will be explored and managed by leaders as we move forward in uncertain times. One undeniable truth is that the nature of remote work has fundamentally changed the way that colleagues build relationships and engage with one another. Against this backdrop, leaders can implement practices to ensure that their teams continue to build meaningful bonds and thereby conduct impactful work.

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