

WELCOME

Working Virtually Tips, Experiences, Suggestions and Discussion



TMS AMERICAS

Virtual Work

We are focusing on the scenario where people work with others, typically on some kind of team, and the members of that team are geographically separate on a regular or continual basis.

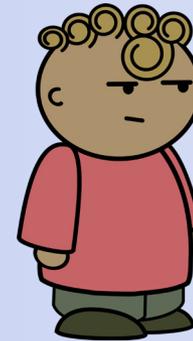
We are not looking at technical issues, such as equipment or data and/or document availability.



Virtual Work

Challenges individuals face (often in this order of occurrence):

- Structure and Boundaries
- Communication
- Isolation
- Role or Work Clarity
- Self Management and Accountability
- Visibility
- Interpersonal Issues



Challenges teams face (often in this order of occurrence):

- Communication
- Alignment
- Engagement
- Innovation
- Trust
- Leadership



Virtual Work - Individual



Structure and Boundaries – The challenge:

The things that tend to keep you organized disappear or change radically.

Structure and Boundaries – things to consider:

- Do the same things you normally do to get ready for work. Perhaps even getting in your car and driving around the block!
- Create a work 'to do' list but don't initially make it too big.
- Create a non work to do list!
- Have some stable place to work, preferably one that you do not have to pack up at the end of the day.
- Try and keep to a start and end time for work and move towards more flexibility over time.
- Others will push your boundaries; push back!
- Over time you will create a new structure and boundaries for your work but there is a good chance the '9 – 5' routine will always create some stress.



Virtual Work - Individual



Communication – The challenge:

Patterns of communication are completely disrupted

Communication – things to consider:

- Implement some platform for virtual communication such as Yammer, Teams etc. as fast as possible.
- On that platform make space for non work or random communication.
- Play, but do not expect everyone to ‘play’ the same way you do.
- For your synchronous communication (web meetings, conference calls) have an agenda to begin with and be clear with participation expectations.
- Expect to be misunderstood and expect to work together to resolve misunderstandings.
- Be conscious of your informal, non team interactions.
- Don’t expect the boss to solve the ‘communication’ issue!



Virtual Work - Individual



Isolation – The challenge:

Being alone is one thing, being alone in work is another

Isolation – things to consider:

- If you are lonely, do something to interact with others, even if they're not on your team and push to ensure this is ok during work hours.
- If you are not lonely don't let others make you feel guilty about it!
- Use the virtual communication platform informally, even if it feels sort of weird.
- Meet face to face with your team every chance you get and make space for lots of non work communication.
- For some, people interaction is vital to the way they do work, for others not so much. Help those that need it and be understanding of those that don't.
- Force yourself to leave your virtual office once in a while.



Virtual Work - Individual



Role or Work Clarity – The challenge:

Your work changes and no one told you

Role or Work Clarity – things to consider:

- If you have any sense that what you are doing needs changing, ask the boss right away and/or check in with others.
- Expect more duplication of effort and don't easily blame people for that.
- Don't treat your job description as what you actually need to do.
- If you are unsure what you are doing makes sense, ask dumb questions of anyone that can help clarify things
- Really own your part in the performance management system.



Virtual Work - Individual



Self Management and Accountability – The challenge:
The boss' power is severely compromised

Self Management and Accountability – things to consider:

- Pretend, then believe, then act as the boss... of your own job.
- Present solutions to problems, rather than the problem itself.
- Don't expect anyone else to solve your problems, or even know you have them!
- If you need it, push hard for face time with the boss. They may not realize it is needed.
- Really own your part in the performance management system.



Virtual Work - Individual



Visibility – The challenge:
You are now mostly invisible

Visibility – things to consider:

- You need to let people know what you are doing; use the virtual communication platform.
- Even if it feels awkward, find ways to let your boss know you are adding strategic value.
- Promote yourself and make sure you promote others as well!
- Put your good ideas out there, make your thinking visible and ask for feedback.
- If people are not recognizing your value, promote that value rather than waiting for someone to notice.
- Ask for development opportunities if you need/want them.
- Drive your own career path.



Virtual Work - Individual



Interpersonal Issues – The challenge:
No one else knows, or cares

Interpersonal Issues – things to consider:

- Is the interpersonal issue affecting work or not? If it is, then it is best focused on as a performance issue.
- Don't let the issue play out on the virtual communication platform, even if the other person does.
- Realize no one else knows how bad it is and that no one else can really solve the issue.
- Make sure the work stuff is fixed before focusing on the interpersonal stuff.
- The other person may not realize the issue is important to you. Tell them one to one.
- If you involve the boss... Well think hard before doing that!



Virtual Work - Teams



Communication – The challenge:

Patterns of communication are completely disrupted

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- Play, but do not expect everyone to ‘play’ the same way you do.
- For your synchronous communication (web meetings, conference calls) have an agenda to begin with and be clear with participation expectations.
- Expect to be misunderstood and expect to work together to resolve misunderstandings.
- Be conscious of your informal, non team interactions.
- Don’t expect the boss to solve the ‘communication’ issue!



Virtual Work - Teams



Alignment – The challenge:

People makes sense of the team in very different ways

Alignment – things to consider:

- Be conscious of your informal, non team interactions. [See this blog post](#)
- Check on shared understanding of decisions at the end of every synchronous interaction.
- Consider lack of alignment as a chance for innovation.
- Sometimes the boss needs to impose alignment.
- Talk more about team purpose, vision and roles.
- Don't expect the 'systems' of the organization to create alignment.



Virtual Work - Teams



Engagement – The challenge:

The individual is more important than the collective

Engagement – things to consider:

- Make sure time is set aside to talk about what is important to you with your boss
- Have some fun with your team, even if it's all virtual. Share play lists, brag about your kids, share pictures.
- Redefine engagement. [See this blog post](#)
- Talk to non team people about how cool your team is.
- Personally choose to be engaged.
- Be conscious of the fact that working virtually can create a lot more flexibility for you.



Virtual Work - Teams



Innovation – The challenge:

Patterns of interaction do not support innovative thinking

Innovation – things to consider:

- In your virtual team meetings, hold meetings that focus on nothing other than idea creation.
- Have pairs of people talk prior to a virtual team meeting on innovation and bring their ideas to the meeting.
- If you have the technology to brainstorm virtually, use it.
- Negative brainstorming actually works quite well on virtual teams!
- In some cases assigning someone to innovate works well.
- Ask people to synthesize their perspectives on ideas after a virtual team meeting and post to a shared space or bring back to the next meeting.



Virtual Work - Teams



Trust – The challenge:
It's all about the work

Trust – things to consider:

- There are 2 kinds of trust at work; task and interpersonal. Virtual teams are built on task trust far more than co-located teams. Really work on delivering what is expected, both individually and as a team.
- Interpersonal trust requires a lot of informal interactions over time. It will take extra effort to do that on a virtual team.
- Task trust is easier to rebuild, if compromised. Just deliver on the next few tasks!
- You will likely never have the levels of trust on a virtual team as a co-located one and that's ok.



Virtual Work - Teams



Leadership – The challenge:

Lack of proximity changes traditional leadership

Leadership – things to consider:

- Redefine leadership as a process rather than a ‘thing’ owned by someone with hierarchical power.
- Just give up on command and control leadership; it only works if proximity is close! On virtual teams the end point of this type of leadership is always, always too late to produce anything of value.
- Consider yourself a leader!
- Reject almost all perspectives on mainstream leadership. They will be obsolete sooner than we may think.

