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Connecting and Engaging Teams in a Distributed Workforce

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Executive Summary

The economy today is going through a fundamental "reset"—the old rules don't apply anymore. We are seeing a virtual explosion of distributed/mobile/flexible work across all market segments, including large organizations, small businesses, and free agents/entrepreneurs. In fact, our research suggests that fully 15% of the U.S. workforce now spends one or more days a week outside a corporate facility, and we project that number to grow beyond 25% within five years.

Yet managing mobile workers and distributed teams can be an enormously difficult challenge. When your staff are working asynchronously and at great distances from each other, keeping them focused on their tasks and connected with each other and the larger organization often seems nearly impossible.

But connecting and engaging distributed teams is not Mission Impossible; it just requires some new tactics, new policies and guidelines, new technology tools, and updated HR management practices. It's not simple, but it is certainly doable; and the payoff in increased productivity and performance makes the effort well worthwhile.

In this brief white paper we will describe the economic "reset" that is changing the rules for creating value; discuss the rise of mobile work and distributed teams and the challenges they present to managers; and suggest a core set of guidelines for keeping the members of distributed teams in touch with each other, with their joint activity, and with the organization as a whole.

Context: The Economy Is Going Through a Fundamental "Reset"

The old rules don't apply anymore, and the new rules are still being invented.

The bottom line is this: The social institutions that were conceived and built to support industrial capitalism are broken. They are largely dysfunctional in today's knowledge-based economy. It's interesting that the first cracks in the system came in the financial sector, but the energy sector and its supporting international geopolitical system has also been under major strain for at least a decade. And we all know what's happened to manufacturing in North America.

Einstein said it best: "We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them." For 250 years humans in the developed world have been constructing a society to support an industrial mode of production. Schools, governments, military machines, health care systems, even cities and transportation—all are based on maximizing efficiency. The gods we have worshipped for the last 250 years are Bigger, Better, Faster, and above all *Predictable*.

But, what does this "reset" portend for the future of work? Is there a pony in here somewhere? We think there is. But only if society as a whole can switch to some very non-conventional thinking, as Einstein suggested.

First, let's admit that in this age of discontinuity, history isn't a very good predictor of the future. In fact, it may send exactly the *wrong* signals.

Where does that leave us? We can't rely on traditional economic models, or on "tried and true" principles of management and leadership. Value today comes less from owning or deploying physical assets (like raw materials or the factories that turn those materials into products). Even return on investment (ROI) is no longer a reliable, or even meaningful, way to measure success.

In the Information or Internet Age, you can often make more money in the long run by giving things away, or by rounding up a large base of followers who in turn spread the word about your ideas, your brain power, or your connections to yet more people. Your success depends on your ability to connect people with each other, to connect people with ideas, and to generate new ideas.

In other words, the coin of the realm in this new economy is being *connected*—which means having access to the information you need when you need it (even when you can't know in advance what you need to know, or when you'll need to know it).

But, again, what does this perspective have to do with the future of work, and in particular with how people work together (whether they *are* together or not)? That's really the focus of this white paper: How can you keep your team connected—both internally with itself and externally with the company and the larger environment—in a world where almost everyone you want to be connected to is mobile almost all the time?

We've written previously about the anywhere office and the growing desire, if not need, of most knowledge workers to be able to tune in and log on from anyplace at any time. But being connected technically is actually only a small part of the solution. We're going to speak here of two kinds of connections to two very different resources: using both personal relationships and technological tools to connect people to each other and to the information they are seeking.

Work Evolves

To appreciate just how significant this focus on information and connections is to the way we work today, we have to recognize just how dramatically the very nature of work itself has evolved over the past several centuries. As the economy progressed from the Agricultural Age to the Industrial Age to the Information Age, what people do, where they do it, and what "tools" they use to create value have all been transformed.

Today, a major portion of what we think of as "work" is information-based, not place-based, as it was on farms and in factories. And with the recent explosion of mobile technologies, the Internet, and connectivity, we can work anywhere and everywhere—and many knowledge workers do exactly that.

Remember, however, that information-based work wasn't always so mobile or so geographically independent. When we first began working in corporate offices (lo those many years ago), we were anything but mobile. Our files were all paper-based, and we had to go to the office

because that's where those files were. More than that, that's where our fellow employees were; we spent just as much time in meetings as most of us do today, but all of those meetings were in conference rooms in the corporate office.

Today Most Knowledge Work Takes Place Outside Corporate Facilities.

The reality today is that a full *two-thirds* of knowledge work today is being done outside corporate facilities. That sounds like a strikingly large number, but we and others have conducted numerous surveys clearly demonstrating that work is already widely dispersed across many different kinds of locations.

We first identified this pattern in 2002, in a privately conducted survey of over 2,000 knowledge workers in a wide variety of jobs and industries for our *Future of Work* program sponsors. At that time the average knowledge worker was spending only 30% of his or her work time in a corporate facility. Survey participants reported that, on average, they were also spending 35% of their work time in home offices, and an additional 35% at a wide variety of places that were "in between" the corporate office and their personal residences—what we've now come to call "third places."

The most frequently used third places are local coffee shops, but mobile workers also frequent all the old familiar places too—libraries, hotel lobbies, airports, their cars, and even public parks. The defining characteristic of a viable third place today is WiFi accessibility. Many public places (by which we mean any facility or space that is available to anyone on a walk-in basis) offer WiFi for free, although there also many instances of "hot spots" that do require payment of an hourly or daily fee for online access.

The Mobile Work Experience

Whether someone spends most of their time inside corporate facilities or outside in other places, work has clearly become much more mobile. Our current demographic research shows that at present (in late 2009) over 25 million individuals in the United States work outside of a corporate facility at least one day a week. That's over 15% of the workforce. Our projections suggest that by 2015 that percentage will grow to over 26%.

That means that within about five years over 50 million knowledge workers will work in multiple locations over the course of a day or a week. What makes that important?

Simply put, over time less and less work is going to be done face-to-face. Not only will individuals move around more, but they will be interacting (either in real time or asynchronously) with colleagues, clients, and service providers who are "somewhere else." However, that doesn't mean that face-to-face interaction is going to disappear, or that it's somehow not important.

In fact, there is still a dominant belief in most organizations that physical presence has genuine value—that some kinds of meetings and conversations are still much more effective when everyone is in the same room. However, the research actually shows that virtual, or distributed,

teams spend almost as much time in full team face-to-face meetings as do teams in which all members are based in the same building.[1]

The most frequent objection we hear from managers concerned about the possible loss of shared knowledge and corporate culture when workgroups start operating more virtually is the fear of reduced accidental meetings at the coffee pot or in the hallways. They worry that distributed teams will suffer from a reduction in the serendipity that so often leads to important business breakthroughs—those unplanned, spontaneous conversations between people who don't interact normally in the course of doing their jobs, or who, when they do interact, are completely focused on the task at hand.

When team members are not co-located they typically have relatively independent personal lives and social support systems. Realistically, they just don't have as much in common. They go to different churches and synagogues; they participate in different local town events; their children attend different schools and participate in different sports programs. And they just don't bump into each other at the grocery store or on the commuter trains and buses.

How Do Effective Managers Overcome These Challenges?

Many of these concerns expressed by managers and members of dispersed teams are very real. Working in a distributed and/or mobile world is indeed more difficult than being in close proximity to other team members. However, it is clear that mobility and distributed teams are not going to disappear. Organizations today simply cannot afford to spend the money that would be needed to bring everyone together all the time. More importantly, limiting an organization to a local place where all the resources are co-located restricts the talent supply unnecessarily, and you can't be a viable global competitor without having a global presence.

Understanding a Team's Connectivity Requirements

The most important aspect of managing a distributed team and keeping its members connected is to understand their work patterns and to match both technology support and personal management practices to their particular needs.

We've made extensive use over many years of a simple but profound framework for categorizing interactions that was first introduced by Robert Johansen of the Institute for the Future in 1991.[2] It basically sorts human interaction into four distinctive buckets:

1. Same Time/Same Place
2. Same Time/Different Place
3. Different Time/Same Place
4. Different Time/Different Place

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1   Griffith, T.L., Mannix, E.A., & Neale, M.A. (2003). Conflict and virtual teams. In C.B. Gibson and S.G. Cohen (Eds.), *Virtual teams that work.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003. pp 335-352.

2   Johansen, R., *Leading Business Teams: How Teams Can Use Technology and Group Process Tools to Enhance Performance*, Addison-Wesley, Reading, MA. 1991. See also http://www.iftf.org

These two dimensions of time and place create a very useful matrix, as shown in Figure One, below. This depiction also includes sample technology tools that are appropriate for each mode of communication.

The first thing for a manager of a distributed team to do is to assess the team's working patterns and determine which tools it needs to get its core job done and to maximize the amount of meaningful communication among team members.

Figure One: Communication Across Time and Place

	Same	Different
Same	Conference rooms, flip charts, white boards	Audio, video, and web conferencing
Different	Flip charts Post-It notes, etc.	email, blogs, wiki's, social networking, collaborative workspaces

Time

Place

Interestingly, we have seen some evidence that being co-located doesn't always make team members feel closer to each other. At SCAN Health Plan, an organization we've worked with for several years, we were moderately surprised to discover that when the members of a co-located departmental team were moved into a part-time work-at-home situation they actually reported feeling *closer* to their fellow employees than when they were all in the same building.

That's a very counter-intuitive result. But one team member described her perspective this way:

> When we're all together in one place, I'm reluctant to interrupt anyone. They are all sitting in their cubicles with their backs to the door, their heads down, and they are often using headsets to speak with clients and other people by phone. But when we're all working from home, I just pick up the phone to call them, or send

> *an email or instant message. It actually feels easier to connect with them now than it did before.*[3]

Employee Engagement

One of the most powerful ways to determine the effectiveness of any management practice or style is to track employee engagement, a factor that has proven to be a highly important determinant of organizational productivity and performance. And for our purposes there are two critical questions. First, how does working in a distributed team affect the team members' engagement? And, second, what can a manager of a distributed team do to maintain or strengthen the engagement of its members?

Why Is Employee Engagement So Important?

Put simply, engagement is the link between management intentions and needs, on the one hand, and organizational performance, on the other.

There is growing evidence—and widespread recognition as well—that engagement does in fact drive business results. Engaged employees not only support management's goals and objectives, they work harder to achieve them. As we noted earlier, leadership is motivating followers to want what you want. When their goals are consistent with the organization's they spend more time—and put forth much more effort—focusing on doing the work they see as contributing to those goals and objectives.

One CEO several years ago posed the essential question about leadership of a distributed workforce:

> *How do I know that our 5,000 employees spread out all over the globe are focused minute by minute on doing the things that I need them to be doing? How do **they** know in the moment that they are making the decisions and taking the actions we want them to?*

But it's not enough to simply rely on the belief that employee engagement produces appropriate and effective employee behavior. There is actually plenty of hard data backing up the concept.

One of the early—and still the most compelling—examples of how employee engagement and motivation can affect a company's bottom line was reported in the *Harvard Business Review* several years ago. In the early 1990s, when Sears was making its last (and ultimately final) comeback, Tony Rucci, vice president of Human Resources at Sears at the time, co-authored a powerful article that described the "Service-Profit Chain" at Sears.[4]
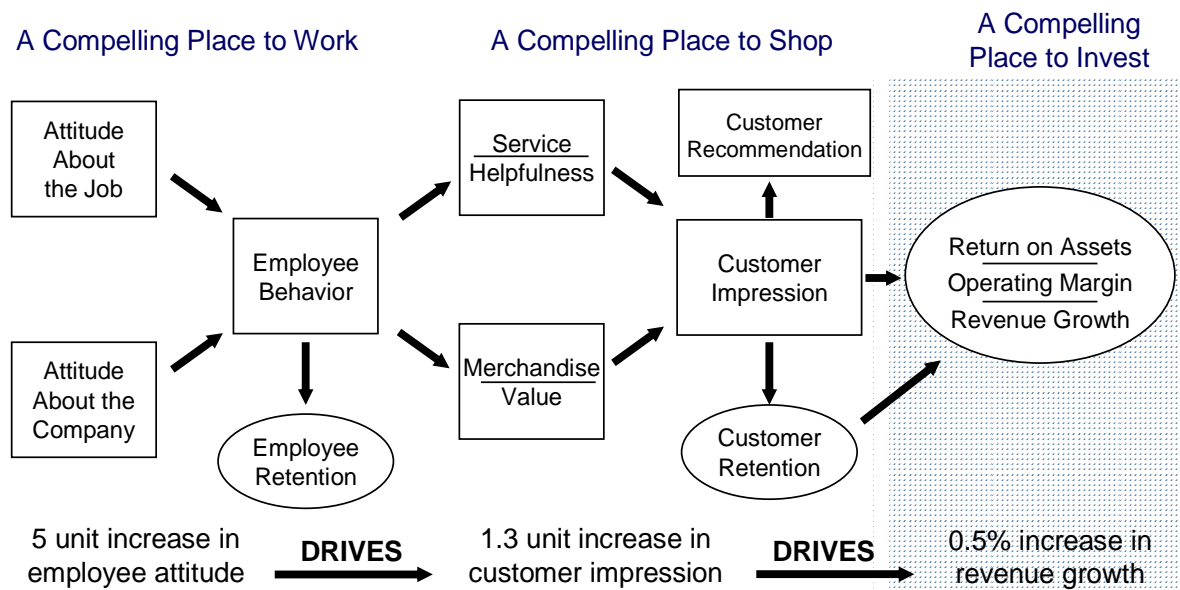
In short, the company was able to prove statistically that stores with more highly motivated employees experienced higher levels of customer satisfaction and repeat purchasing, which in

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[3] For the full story of this organization's move to a distributed work environment, see Chapter Five ("The Office: A New Look at an Old Friend") of *Cut It Out! Save for Today, Build for Tomorrow*, by Shad Arnold *et al*, published by the IFMA Foundation, Houston, Texas, September, 2009.

[4] Anthony J Rucci, Steven P. Kirn, and Richard T. Quinn, "The Employee-Customer-Profit Chain at Sears," *Harvard Business Review*, Jan-Feb 1998.

turn clearly produced higher operating margins, faster revenue growth, and a higher return on assets (see Figure Two for a graphic view of this service-profit chain of causality).

Figure Two: The Service-Profit Chain at Sears

A Compelling Place to Work   A Compelling Place to Shop   A Compelling Place to Invest

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Attitude                                        Service          Customer
About                                           Helpfulness      Recommendation
the Job                                                                                Return on Assets
                        Employee                                 Customer             Operating Margin
                        Behavior                                 Impression           Revenue Growth
Attitude                                        Merchandise
About the                                       Value
Company                 Employee                                 Customer
                        Retention                                Retention
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5 unit increase in   **DRIVES**   1.3 unit increase in   **DRIVES**   0.5% increase in
employee attitude   customer impression   revenue growth

Note that because Sears at that time had over 2,000 retail stores with virtually identical business models, Rucci and his colleagues were able to demonstrate distinct causality in this chain; the relationships are not simple correlations, but rather direct causations (e.g., more of "A" definitely produces more of "B"—more positive employee attitudes lead directly to more positive customer impression, which leads directly to revenue growth).

We recognize that the Sears stores are retail operations; the sales clerks' jobs are significantly different from those of most modern-day office (and non-office) workers. However, we are convinced the same causal chain exists in most white-collar jobs today.

It is also important to recognize that many of the factors affecting engagement are highly subjective. What matters is not what management practices are *intended* to achieve; rather it is *how they are perceived by employees*. Engagement is a measure of how employees *feel* about their company and their managers. And feelings are, by definition, valid. ("Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.")

It does no good to argue that employees *should* feel trusted, listened to, or valued because of particular management policies and practices. Either they do or they don't. And whatever those feelings are, they in turn drive most of your employees' behaviors.

How Can Managers Enhance the Engagement of Distributed Employees?

There is no simple answer to this fundamental question, but we can offer several specific suggestions.

First, as we have noted elsewhere,[5] managing distributed employees and remote/virtual teams calls for many of the same basic principles and practices that any good manager employs on a daily basis:

> *To be successful, managers of distributed workers must master major and often unrecognized new behaviors and skills. There are four specific things that managers of distributed teams must do to ensure success:*
>
> 1. *Use highly participative approaches to establishing distributed work environments.*
> 2. *Define and publish formal policies and procedures for distributed work.*
> 3. *Establish explicit, tangible performance measures.*
> 4. *Develop formal agreements about regular interaction.*

We'll expand each of these four principles briefly.

Use Highly Participative Approaches in Distributed Work Environments

Here is the most basic principle for leading effective organizational change: People who are involved in decisions affecting their work are much more likely to go along with them. This idea doesn't mean that a manager has to get 100% buy-in before issuing directions or taking actions; just being asked about their views will go a long way towards satisfying most people, even if in the end their manager doesn't agree. It's primarily a matter of valuing staff ideas and acknowledging their individual situations.

Managers of distributed employees must reach out proactively to ensure that their ideas and directives are not only understood but ultimately accepted by their staff. Even though it may seem like extra work, this effort will help bind team members to their manager and to each other—and it's surprising how often the team members will make constructive, insightful suggestions that actually improve the team's performance.

Define and Publish Formal Policies and Procedures for Distributed Work

We have seen far too many organizations that seem to think implementing a distributed work program is simply a matter of telling employees they are "now free to move about the country."[6]

As soon as you allow employees to work remotely you are opening a can of worms, including legal issues, financial disputes, and potential misunderstandings. Legally, when an employee who is working at home trips over a rug and breaks an arm, is he or she eligible for workers' compensation? Who will pay for the home office furnishings, the telephone that is being used for work, or the Internet connection? And when is the employee expected to be accessible to other employees and management?

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[5]   Jim Ware and Charlie Grantham, "Which skills and competencies will be most critical for leaders as the workplace continues to evolve?" *Leadership in Action*, Center for Creative Leadership, January/February 2005.

[6]   Apologies to Southwest Airlines; that was just too good a phrase to ignore.

It takes time to work through these kinds of policies, but it pays enormous dividends when an organization has dozens or hundreds of employees working outside corporate facilities on a regular basis. And the legal issues can be complex and expensive to resolve if they haven't been anticipated.

It is also critically important for organizations and their managers to treat employees consistently—in all matters, of course, but particularly as they move into flexible work programs. Nothing will stir up employee anger or legal action more quickly than the discovery that they are receiving different levels of financial support for equipping their home offices. [7]

These practices are particularly critical for non-exempt employees who are allowed to work away from the office; there are numerous state and federal employment laws that apply to non-exempt (i.e., hourly) employees.[8]

Establish Explicit, Tangible Performance Measures

This is the single most important thing you can do to keep distributed team members aligned with company goals and each other. Formal performance and productivity measures serve several important functions:

♦ They establish clear guidelines and common expectations about how each distributed employee will be measured and rewarded.
♦ They help team members stay narrowly focused on their assigned tasks.
♦ They help create an atmosphere of accountability in both directions and all across the organization.
♦ They provide senior management with clear evidence of how cost-effective (or not) the distributed work arrangements are.
♦ They help shift the dominant management culture away from managing time spent on tasks to the results produced.

The most common objection that middle managers have to mobility programs is the complaint, "How can I manage them if I can't see them?" That belief reflects what we consider an incomplete and inappropriate concept of management.

"Managing by walking around," which was a common rule of thumb in the 1980's and 90's, has some common-sense appeal in that it encourages managers to be visible and to interact regularly with their subordinates. In that context, however, "interact" always meant face-to-face communication (though it also often included peering, uninvited, over an employee's shoulder to scrutinize his or her work).

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[7]   See "The Office: A New Look at an Old Friend" by Charles Grantham and James Ware, Chapter Five of *Cut It Out! Save for Today, Build for Tomorrow,* IFMA Foundation, Houston, Texas, 2009, for an extensive discussion of how to prepare for a mobility program.

[8]   For more information about this challenge, and the results of a survey of current management practice, see "Flexible Work Arrangements for Nonexempt Employees," prepared by Work Design Collaborative for World at Work, 2009.

But clearly that kind of interaction just can't happen in a distributed environment. It's absolutely essential to replace such close-in monitoring of employees' *actions* with a focus on their *performance*—the results they produce.

We like to remind our clients that when they were in college their professors usually didn't say anything about when to read the homework assignment or where to write the term paper—just turn it in at noon on Friday. That's what we mean by performance management: It's the results that count, not how you produce them.

Develop Formal Agreements about Regular Interaction

One of the inevitable consequences of working in a distributed team is that members just don't see each other or their managers as often as they do when they are co-located. Yet we all know that more frequent interactions generally lead to higher levels of trust and greater comfort with other team members.

But with distributed teams frequent face-to-face interaction just isn't feasible. So managers of distributed teams must focus on two critical tactics for generating cohesion within the team. First, **be sure to schedule Web conferences on a regular basis**—even more often than you think is needed.

Second, **meet face-to-face when it matters most.** As we have worked with project teams, we've found the Drexler-Sibbet process model of team performance to be extremely useful (see Figure Two). And for distributed teams it is particularly useful as a guide to when those face-to-face meetings can be especially productive.

Figure Two: The Drexler-Sibbet Model of Team Performance[9]
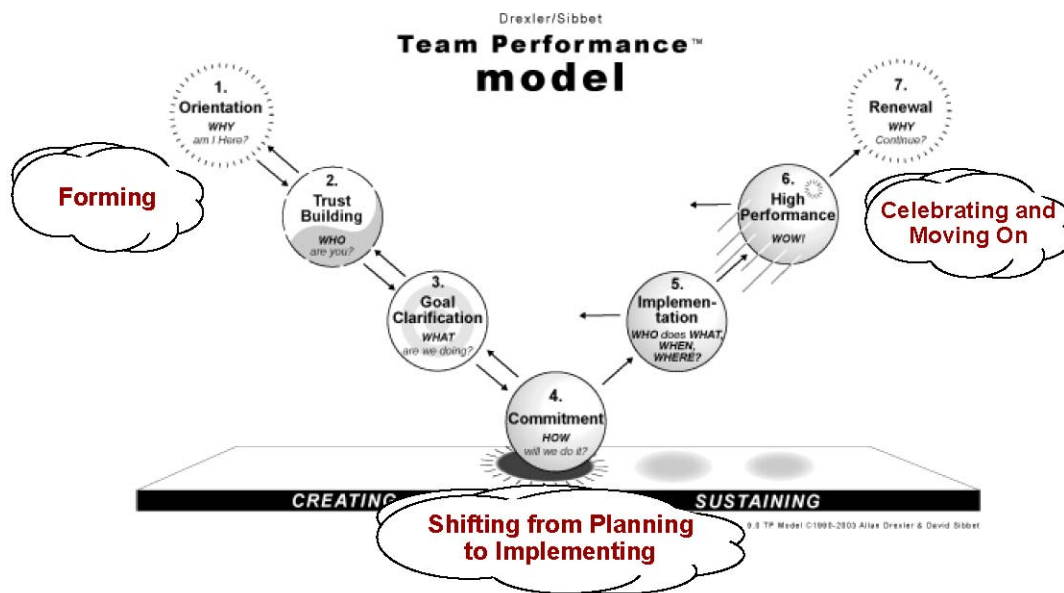
We have superimposed on the team performance process model three specific points at which we believe face-to-face meetings are particularly critical:

1. Forming

At the beginning of any team's life there are many issues to be dealt with: clarifying the team's purpose; sorting out who the team members and what roles they will play; helping team members learn each other's unique skills and understand their individual constraints as well as their personal goals; sorting out the work schedule and project timeline; and reviewing the scope of the assignment (what range of ideas can be pursued, what's off limits, and so on).

These are complex issues that are most effectively dealt with in an intense team meeting that simply *must* be handled in a common setting (Same Time/Same Place).

2. Shifting from Planning to Implementing

It may not be as essential for the team to meet face-to-face as it shifts from planning (brainstorming, exploring options, experimenting with solutions) to actual implementation—but we believe a formal gathering at this point is very appropriate, and can pay strong dividends.

For one thing, it's a time for a mini-celebration, as reaching this point means the team has designed, and agreed on, a solution to its challenge; it's achieved its design goal. For another, a face-to-face meeting at this point in the process is a good way to confirm the solution, polish it, and then sort through the barriers to successful implementation (which can often be severe to the point of causing all kinds of stress

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9   See http://www.grove.com/site/ourwk_gm_tp.html for details.

and internal conflict among the team members). Again, this task is usually complex enough—and important enough—to justify bringing the team members together.

3. **Celebrating and Moving On**

    All too often, both team managers and individual members are on the next thing almost before the team is formally "decommissioned." The press for productivity these days is so severe that taking any time at all for a celebration when the work is done is usually seen as an extravagance.

    Yet, especially for high-performing teams, there is usually a serious "let-down" when the work is over. A product development team has to turn over the design and the marketing ideas to the sales and production groups. A sales team that has finished a campaign over quota has to regroup, take a deep breath, and face up to the next year's or the next quarter's targets.

    Those are emotional, as well as task-oriented, shifts, and if you don't allow team members to take that deep breath together, reflect on their accomplishments, and gather their energy for their next assignment, you risk alienating or burning out some of your best performers.

Finally, as a manager of a distributed team, be very clear about your expectations for these team meetings, whether they are "real" or virtual. You can't restate the team's purpose and goals often enough.

The Glue That Holds a Team Together

All of this is well and good. However, the real basis for team interaction (whether it is face-to-face or virtual) has more to do with the members' respective roles, their personal relationships, and the social network that is formed by the interactions among those roles. Social roles and relationships are stuff that doesn't show up on the organization charts, but that everyone carries around with them.

One of the tools we have found most helpful in sorting out those roles is "value network analysis." This approach, pioneered by Verna Allee and her colleagues, focuses on what roles people play in their networks and then on what kinds of tools and settings enable them to perform effectively in those roles.[10]

One of the major findings of this work is that given a certain role (i.e., Problem Solver, Consultant, Leader), different types of technology are best used to support that role's activities. For example (believe it or not), Problem Solvers tend to rely on paper-based technologies such as fax machines and printers. They also tend to have larger social networks but don't interact as frequently with each member as do others.

In contrast, Consultants have smaller networks and tend to interact more frequently. They also are more image-based, relaying on display technologies and graphical interfaces. Blackberries probably don't work as well with them as with others.

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[10]   Verna Allee *et al*, *The Future of Knowledge: Increasing Prosperity through Value Networks*, Butterworth-Heinemann, Burlington, Massachusetts, 2003.

And Leaders fall somewhere in the middle in terms of their network structures and interaction patterns. They need immediacy—a constant flow of information and high bandwidth. The details of these studies are fascinating; they have significant implications for the design and deployment of technologies, which can then foster more effective team interaction.[11]

The point here is that supporting mobile workers is much more complicated than giving everyone the same tool set and the same work environment and then turning them loose. The interactions between task, person, role, technology, and place are incredibly complex. All these factors must be considered simultaneously; there just aren't any simple answers.

Additional Tactics for Strengthening Team Connectivity

You may also want to consider using one or more of the published self-assessment instruments for helping team members get to know their own strengths and preferences as well as those of their colleagues. Probably the most well-known of these diagnostic tools is the Myers-Briggs® interpersonal style inventory,[12] but there are many others that are just as good and may be more useful in a particular situation.[13]

Several cautions are in order, however. First, it is absolutely imperative that you employ a certified expert to help administer, interpret, and communicate the kind of personal information that these tools provide. Psychological assessment is not something for amateurs or untrained people to take on by themselves.

Second, any use of psychological tests or assessments should always be made completely voluntary; anyone who feels coerced into participating in these kinds of exercises would be completely justified in filing a complaint with management. Finally, even when people have agreed to participate, each individual must be able to choose whether to disclose personal information to the other team members.

And here's another suggestion you may not have thought about at all: Whenever possible, construct teams and subgroups with an even number of members. When any group has an odd number of members there is a distinct possibility of a "tyranny of the majority" as a way to resolve conflict. With an even number of members a group is much more likely to work through conflicts more substantively since a 50/50 split creates nothing but a hung jury and resolves nothing.

Finally, the most important thing a manager of a distributed team can do is become a role model of empathy and caring. Demonstrate your active concern for team members and their well-being on a consistent and ongoing basis.

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[11]   C. Venezia, V. Allee, and O. Schwabe, "Designing productive spaces for mobile workers: role insights from network analysis," *Information Knowledge Systems Management*, 7, 2008, pp. 61-75.

[12]   More correctly, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, or MBTI®, which is now owned and offered by CPP, Inc, of Minneapolis, Minnesota. See https://www.cpp.com/products/mbti/index.aspx.

[13]   We have found real value in the Test of Attentional and Interpersonal Style Inventory, or TAIS®, developed by Robert Nideffer and colleagues. The TAIS inventory is more complex than the MBTI®, and provides more information about individual workstyles in team settings.

Executive Perspectives

Up to now we have been addressing direct, first-level managers of distributed teams. Executives who have managers of distributed teams reporting to them can also do much to support the development of well-connected, engaged, and high-performing teams.

Executives establish the management context and define the principles and policies that guide first-line managers. The first and foremost task of organizational leaders is to measure and reward those first-line managers on the basis of their team's capabilities.

Note that what we are recommending is not just rewarding actual *performance*, but also rewarding managers for the *capability* they develop in their teams. If managers know that factors like employee engagement and team members' skills (not just their performance) are also important, they'll act to increase their teams' capacity for performance; and, naturally, higher capacity in combination with clear measures of performance goals leads almost universally to higher actual performance.

It can also be useful to encourage teams to develop their own identities. Team caps and tee shirts with their names and a logo go a long way towards helping individuals feel part of something important—and part of the company that supports them as well. Even corny names and mascots help to bond team members with each other.

We worked with one company several years ago that fully endorsed such efforts by a critical IT enterprise system replacement team, and then realized one day that all the IT staff not on that team were feeling ignored, left out, and uneasy about their future once the new system was implemented. So the Chief Information Officer announced a name and a mascot for the core staff that was supporting the old, soon-to-be-replaced system, gave them hats and shirts, and held a big rally party for them. That gesture had a major impact on the department's morale, motivation, and productivity. Yet it was both simple and inexpensive.

Finally, we encourage executives to consider deploying one or more of the new online collaboration and social networking technologies (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Citrix® GoToMeeting®, etc.) as a way to help employees connect with each other and to the rest of the world in a simple, natural way. Collaborative technologies are critical tools that cost very little to deploy while at the same time demonstrating the organization's commitment to facilitating teamwork among distributed employees.

Summary

For managers of distributed teams our message is clear but simple: Make the invisible visible for team members—be proactive in reaching out and paying attention to the personal/social side of your employees.

View your job as being both the creator and the hub of a distributed team network. Provide your staff with the technology they need to connect easily with each other and with the information they need to be productive.

And above all, serve as a role model for your staff and for other managers of distributed teams. A distributed team is most effective when all its members are focused equally on both their formal tasks and their personal relationships. When you have done your job well—by reaching

out to others, paying attention to your staff's interpersonal needs, employing online collaboration tools to connect everyone with everyone else, and focusing on day-to-day collaboration to achieve the team's goals—that kind of behavior will simply become a part of everyone's DNA. And it will be at the core of the organization's culture and value system.