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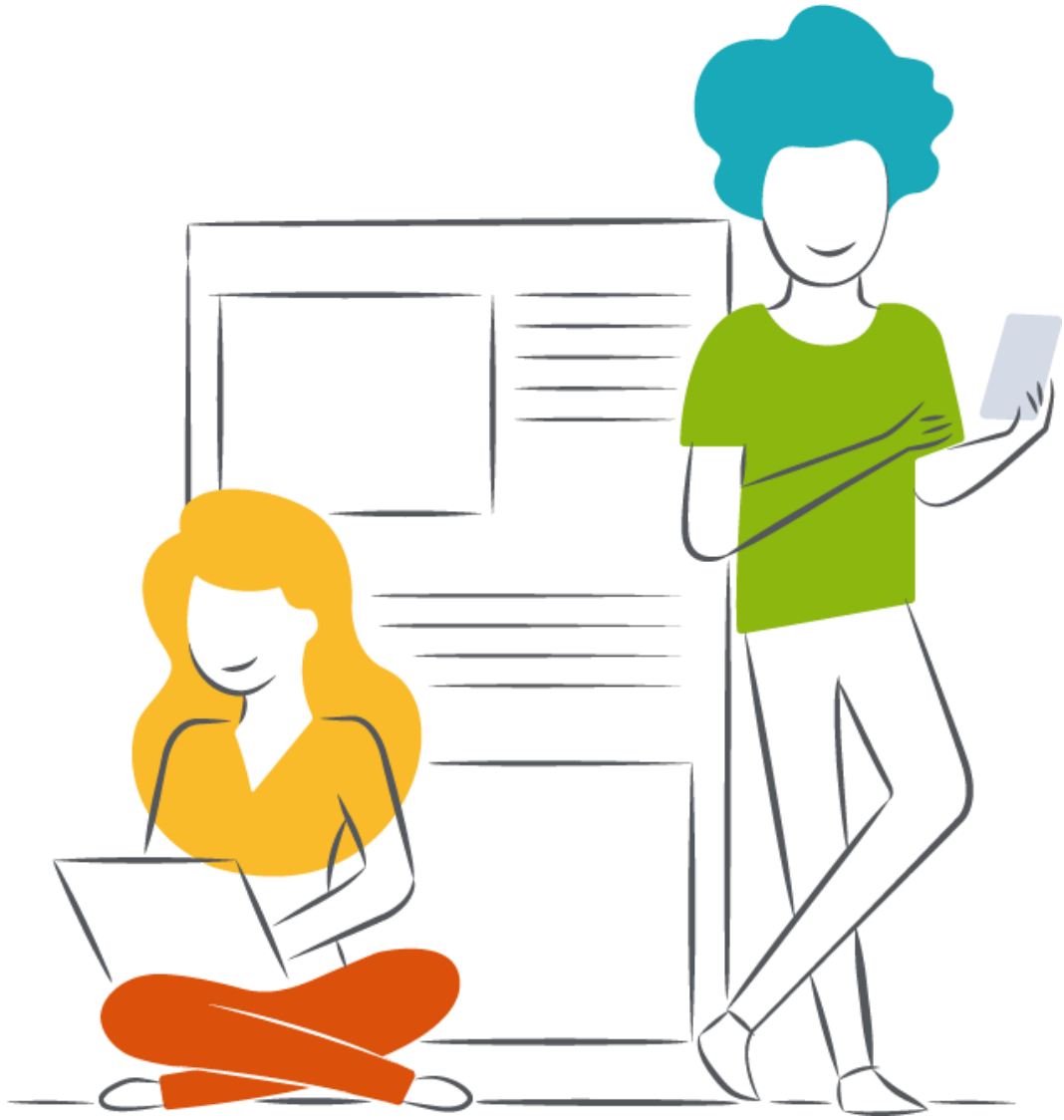
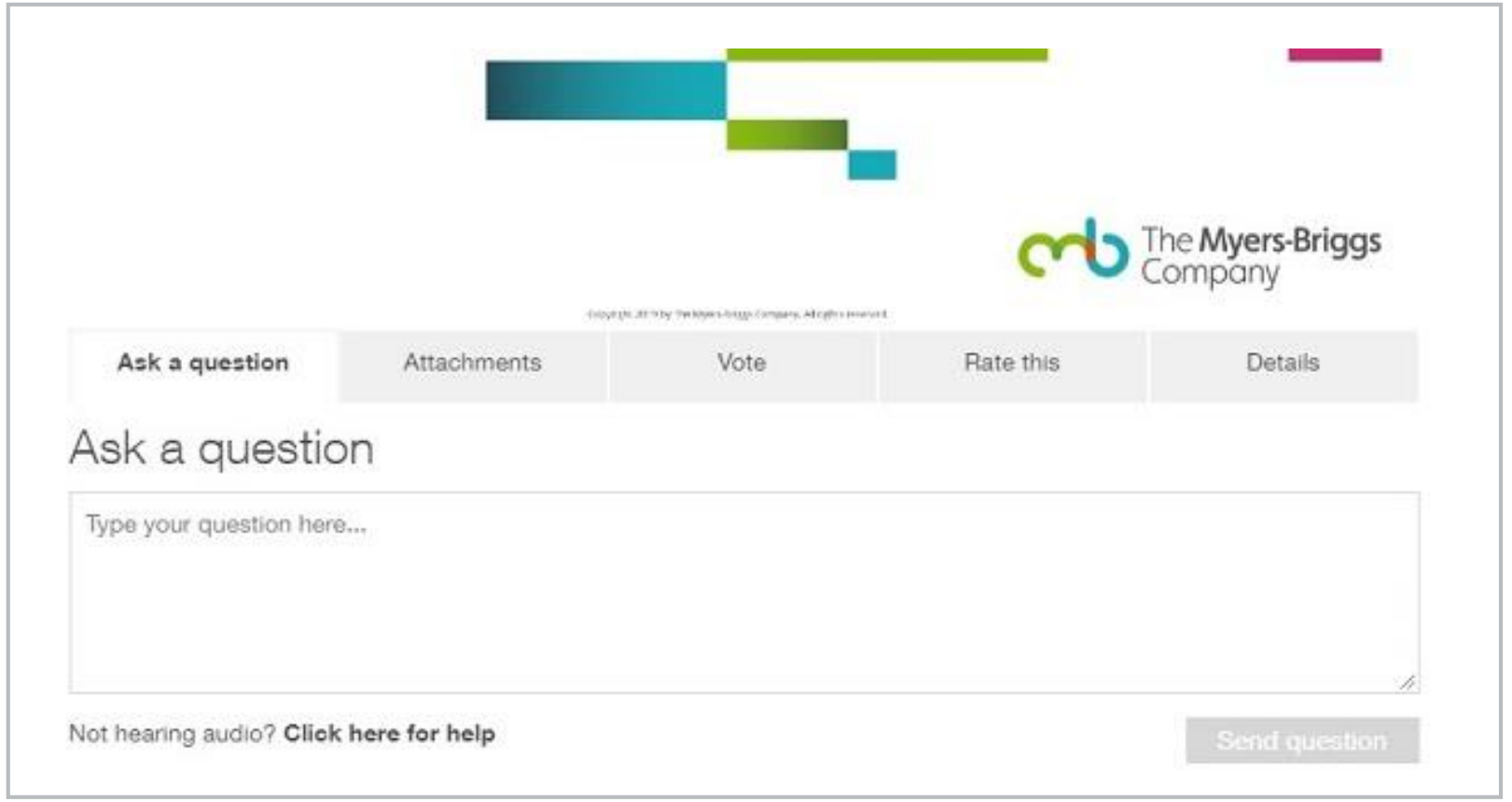
Virtual teams and the critical factor of **communication**



Interact with us



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Our mission is...

...to inspire everyone to lead more successful and fulfilling lives

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Being better

We care about the way we do business.

As a Certified B Corp, we're part of a growing global movement which is changing the way business operates.

We want to consider our impact on our **workers, customers, suppliers, community** and the **environment**.

We're using business as a force for good.

Certified B Corporation

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Our world-leading assessments

MBTI®	understand **personality** types
FIRO®	improve interpersonal **relations**
TKI®	resolve **conflict**
CPI™	inspire **leadership**
Strong	give **career** advice to adults
VitaNavis®	give **career and education** advice to students

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Your presenter – Dr. Rachel Cubas-Wilkinson

- Senior Consultant, The Myers-Briggs Company (US office)
- Specializes in planning, strategy and learning for people and organizations globally
- Doctoral degree in Transformative Leadership and Change
- MSc Organizational Leadership
- Graduate specialization in Adult Learning Methods, Curriculum, and Instruction.
- BSc Organizational Management
  - Concentrations on Organizational Behavior and Human Resource Management
- Certified in the MBTI® Step I & II, CPI 260®, FIRO-B® and FIRO Business®, Hogan Assessments

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The virtual world is everywhere, anywhere.

Transfer money to Dad

Re-set central heating times

Find recipe to use up sour cream

Sarah's birthday present (?!)

Learn how to fix my leaky tap

Buy a desk

Call Dave

Draft management proposal

Develop 3 new virtual workshops for teams

Lecture on mindfulness

New episode of *Better Call Saul*

Hunt down toilet paper

Find a date

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4 in 10 American workers
spend at least some of their time
working remote

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The Changing Space and Place of Work

- US-based technology giant launches *flexible work timing/work from home program*
- 80,000 employees globally.
- New flex work option extended to 80% of employees, who are free to work from anywhere.
- Cisco has saved $196 million in year-on-year real estate costs, while garnering $294 million through building sales. Total savings of $490 million.
- At the same time, ***employee satisfaction has increased dramatically.***

Source: Business Standard report, 2019

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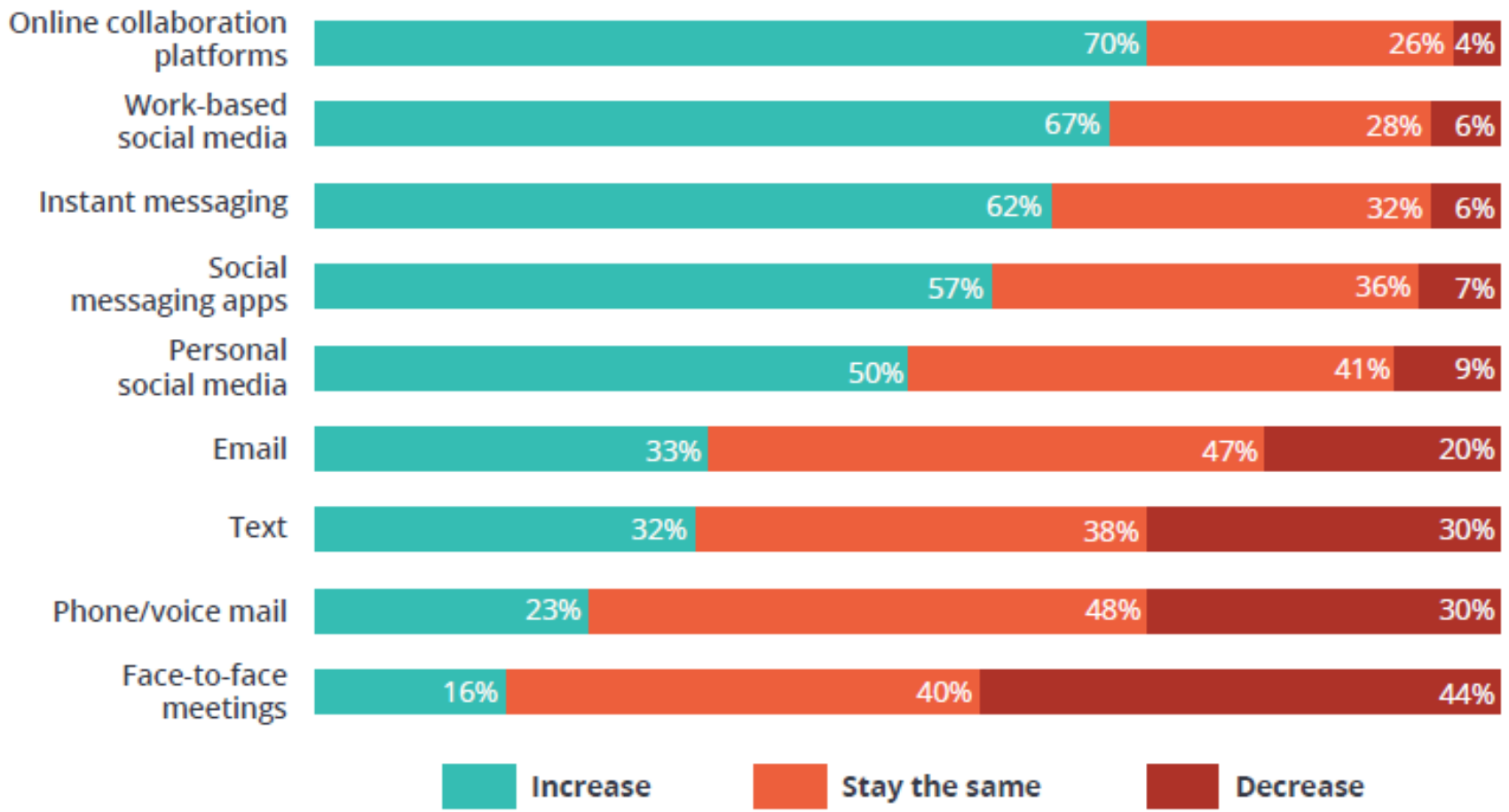
Figure 1. Expected use of communications channels in the next three to five years



n = 11,070

Source: Deloitte *Global Human Capital Trends* survey, 2018.

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The Changing Space and Place of Work

Increased personal flexibility in the job market to work within a desired job or industry, from anywhere.

For the Individual

Increased use and reliance on remote workers and virtual teams to achieve results.

For Organizations

Global move towards virtual work conditions and collaboration, even in fully co-located and on-site teams.

For the Global Workforce

= ***The New Normal***

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The Changing Space and Place of Work

COVID-19

DO THE FIVE

Help stop coronavirus

1 **HANDS** Wash them often
2 **ELBOW** Cough into it
3 **FACE** Don't touch it
4 **SPACE** Keep safe distance
5 **HOME** Stay if you can

The "New" New Normal

Source: World Health Organization, 2020

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The Changing Space and Place of Work

?

- ***How are you experiencing the "new normal" personally?***
- ***Has the Space and Place of Work changed for you as a result of the "New" New Normal?***

The Human Side of Virtual Work

- If sudden, unexpected change is introduced, we can experience:
  - Loss of daily routines
  - Loss of physical connection and presence
  - Sense of change coming at a sudden and quick pace
  - Uncertainty
  - Disorientation
  - Stress
  - Concerns about the continuity of life as usual
  - Concerns for wellbeing (neglect of wellbeing)

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“How do we successfully navigate team communication in a virtual environment?”

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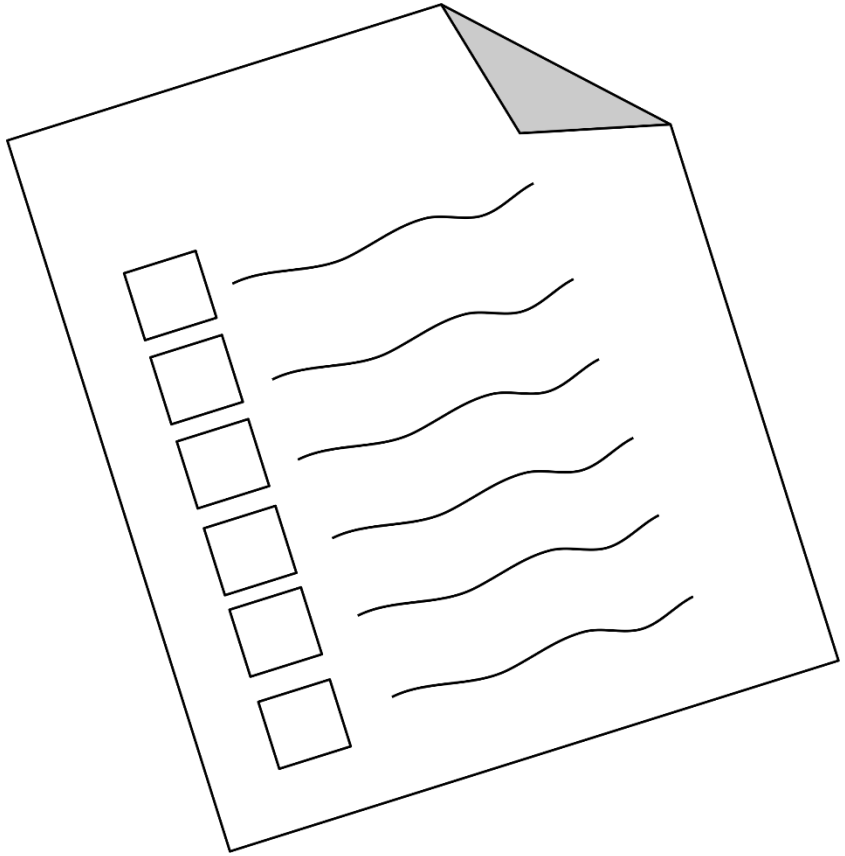
Poll

- **Would you say that your virtual team(s) are communicating effectively?”**

Please enter your response to the poll.



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Effective Team Building Blocks / Derailers

Mission

- Goals and purpose for the organization and team
- Shared understanding of mission
- Employees have the ability to connect their work to the mission

Defined Roles

- What roles are represented on the team
- Task Distribution
- Equality of workload
- Bandwidth and resourcing

Organizational Support

- Employees have the resources they need to do their work
- Clear organizational processes
- Removal of bottlenecks
- Consistent Managerial support, accountability

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Navigating Team Work in a Virtual Environment

The Organization's responsibility in responding to (increasing) virtuality and the use of remote teams:

1

Provide the Tech & Tools employees will need to be successful

2

Appoint a capable virtual leader

3

Maintain connection to Emotional, Social, and Workplace needs of the employees

?

Consider Privately:
How would you say your organization is doing on these 3 essential responsibilities? OR What plans are in place to get there (especially in response to sudden change)?

Source: Pauleen, D.; Dulebohn, J. and Hoch, J.

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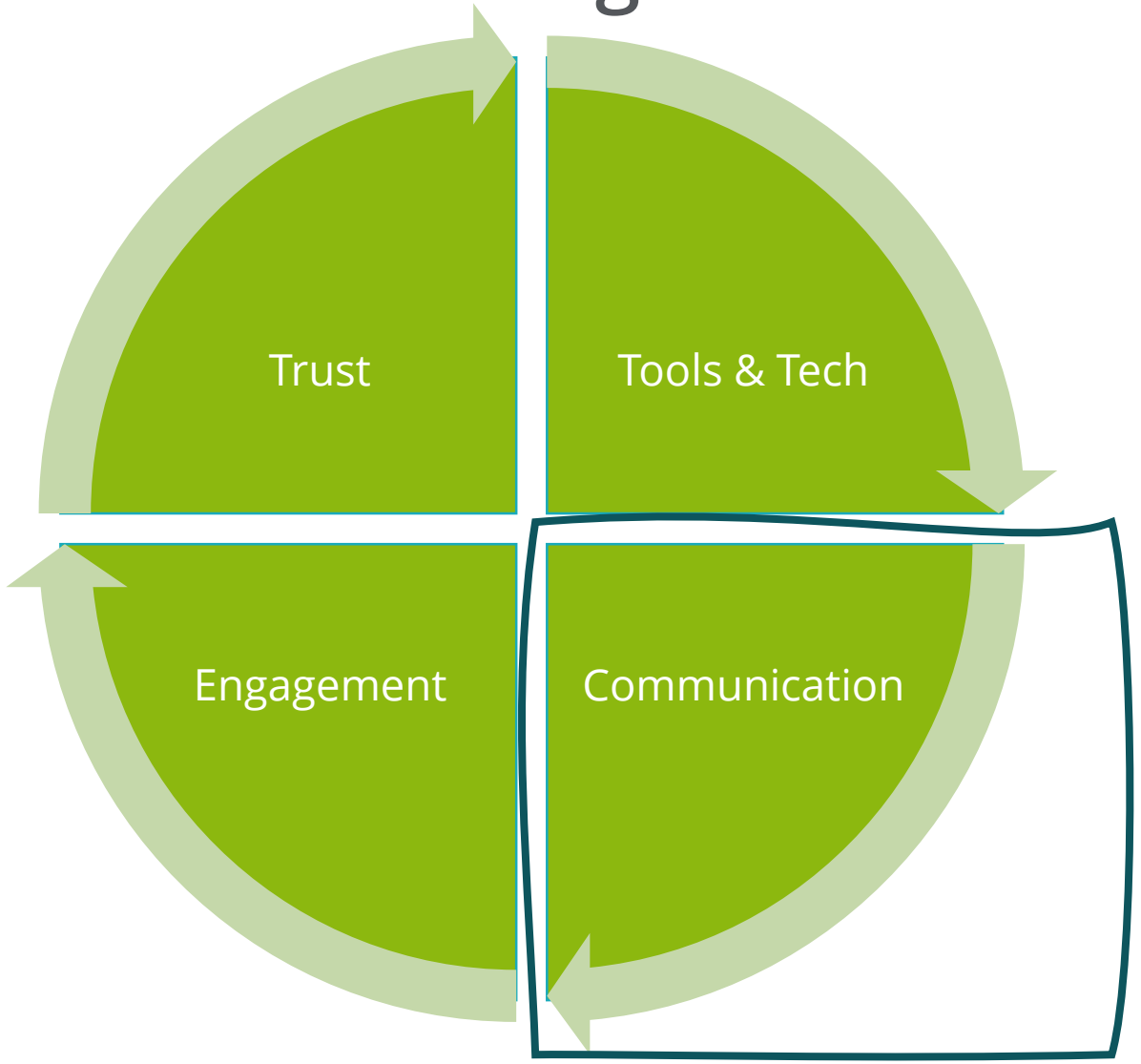
Effective Virtual Team Building Blocks / Derailers



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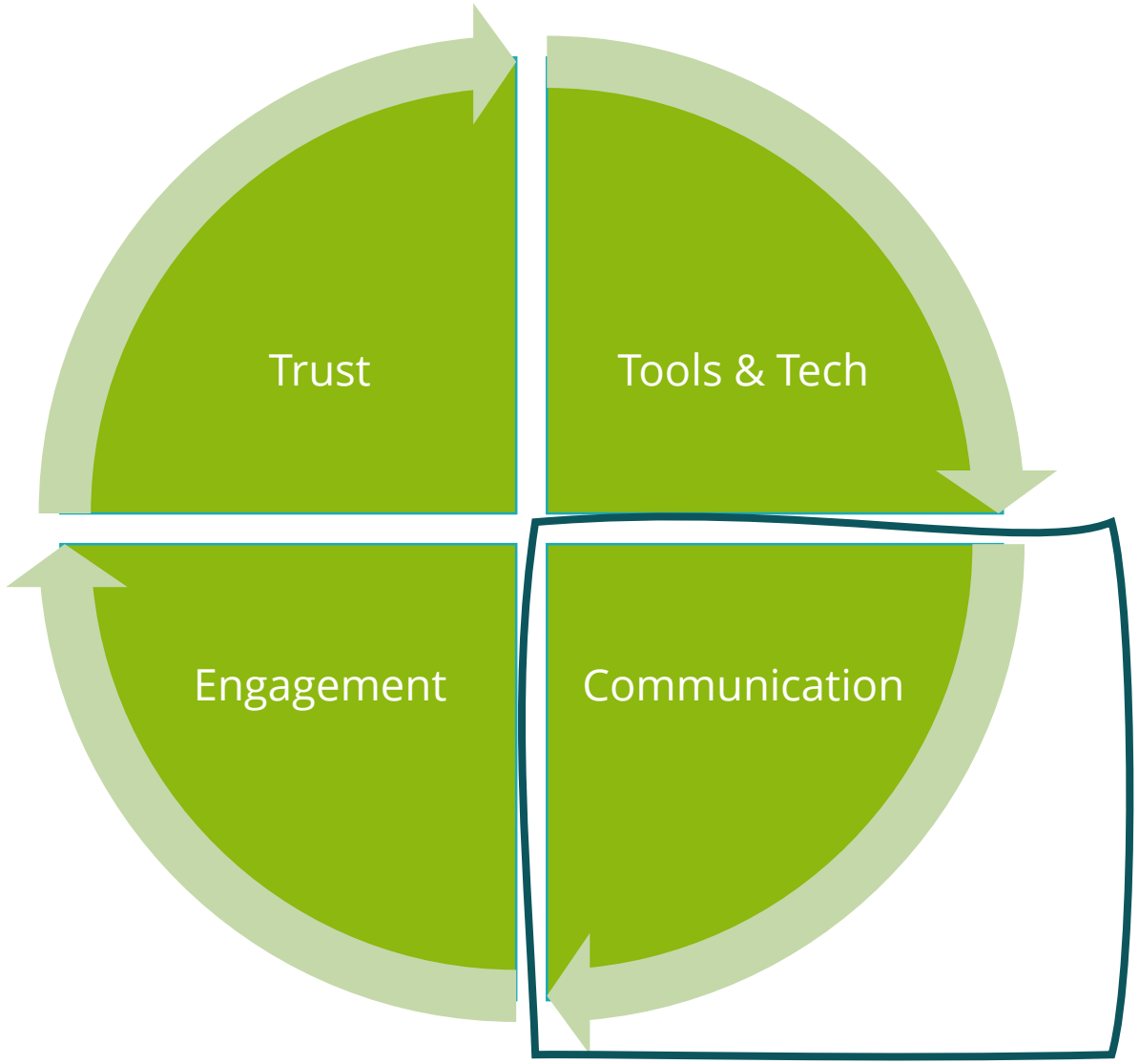
Today's Objectives



Objectives

1. **Examine the most crucial team elements which support high-quality communication.**
2. **Consider personal and organizational strategies that can impact and improve the effectiveness of virtual teams.**

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Virtual Teams and Effective Communication

SETTING NORMS, EXPECTATIONS, AND PREDICTABILITY

MEDIATING DISTANCE & MAINTAINING CONNECTION

AVOIDING THE TRUST TRAP

Setting Norms, Expectations, and Predictability

- Especially in times of sudden change such as moving to a virtual team unexpectedly, your team members may simply be wondering:

What am I to be doing right now?

What is my focus?

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Setting Norms, Expectations, and Predictability

- Historically, on-site work environments have provided ***Structure*** and ***Focus*** through physical and tangible means.
  - Structure- *There's a place and time I come to in order to do work.*
  - Focus- *My on-site desk, cubicle, work areas, and meetings invite me to focus on work tasks.*

- In a virtual environment, it is often up to the employee to create their own structure and focus. This can be ***daunting***, especially for new remote workers.
  - How do I work now? Will I have what I need to do my work? Are others doing something I am not doing?
  - Can lead to uncertainty, loss of productivity, loss of employee engagement.

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Setting Norms, Expectations, and Predictability

Results of Setting Norms, Expectations, and Predictability

- Guides continuity of communication necessary to complete work tasks and remain productive

- Creates continuity of environment conducive to working and collaborating

- Uncertainty
- Misunderstandings
- Angst
- Frustrations with co-worker interdependencies
- Peer Trust

- Guides engagement with work tasks, productivity, and pace of work

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Setting Norms, Expectations, and Predictability

Norms

- **Moving online or toward virtual work requires rethinking the ways the team needs to work together and setting the form / format for how this will occur virtually.**
  - When will we meet?
  - How will we discuss and resolve problems and come to decisions?
  - What tools will we use to communicate?

Expectations

- **Guiding team members on what is expected of them will reduce disorientation, disengagement, and loss of productivity.**
  - When will we be “online”? Response times and availability. Timezones.
  - Peer-to-peer interdependence and accountability
  - When do I solve problems independently or escalate / ask for help?
  - Employee development / skills building on communicating effectively

Predictability

- **Team Members need to hear from leaders about what is going on organizationally**
  - Cascading & consistent communication, reinforcing priorities, providing support
  - Manager models communication standards and expectations
  - Setting the tone and predictability for communication

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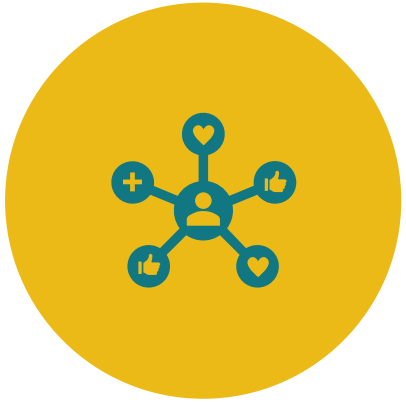
Assess your organization's current state

SETTING NORMS, EXPECTATIONS, AND PREDICTABILITY

- Doing Well
- Needs Improvement
- In Progress

MEDIATING DISTANCE & MAINTAINING CONNECTION

- Doing Well
- Needs Improvement
- In Progress



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Virtual Teams and Effective Communication

SETTING NORMS, EXPECTATIONS, AND PREDICTABILITY

MEDIATING DISTANCE & MAINTAINING CONNECTION

AVOIDING THE TRUST TRAP

Mediating Distance / Maintaining Connection

- Effective communication is more than transactional interactions. It transcends the transactional into genuine collaboration.
- It is achieved through meaningful exchanges between people:
  - *sharing ideas, taking risks, having respect for one another, appreciating differences in each other's styles and motivations.*
- Transparency and awareness of team members, one to each other as well as to the organization forms "**shared context**" (common ground) and can promote reaching beyond transactions into **relationship forming**.
- In virtual environments, teams become susceptible to "**virtual distance",** making it harder to create and maintain "shared context" with peers and the organization.

Source: Karen Sobel-Lojeski, Harvard Business Review, 2015

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Mediating Distance / Maintaining Connection

Causes of Virtual Distance

It's often assumed that the usual suspects are to blame: *physical separation or time zone gaps*.

However, this is not the case.

Virtual Distance

Physical Distance	Operational Distance	Affinity Distance
• Geographic Dispersion (What we think about most)	• How we go about getting things done	• Degree of relational and human connection

Source: Karen Sobel-Lojeski, Harvard Business Review, 2015

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The Costs of Virtual Distance

- Innovative behaviors fall by over **90%**
- Trust declines by over **80%**
- Cooperative and helping behaviors go down by over **80%**
- Role and goal clarity decline by **75%**
- Project success drops by over **50%**
- Organizational commitment and satisfaction decline by more than **50%**

Source: Karen Sobel-Lojeski, Harvard Business Review, 2015

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Mediating Distance / Maintaining Connection

- Look for ways to build transparency in team communication
- Connect team members to each other and to the organization, forming “shared context”
  - Increase social connections
  - Regularly showcase team member contributions
  - Promote teamwork and sense of community
  - Humanize team members
  - Build team member self-awareness, awareness of others, and appreciation of differences

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Considering the optimal frequency of communication for your virtual team

Special Circumstances:

- Newly-formed Teams
- High Uncertainty / Disruption (within or impacting the Org)
- Organizational Change (New Products, Services, Roles, Responsibilities)
- New Remote Work Conditions
- High levels of team diversity
- Organizational Barriers (slow or impede task completion, collaboration, decision-making, who does what, bottlenecking)

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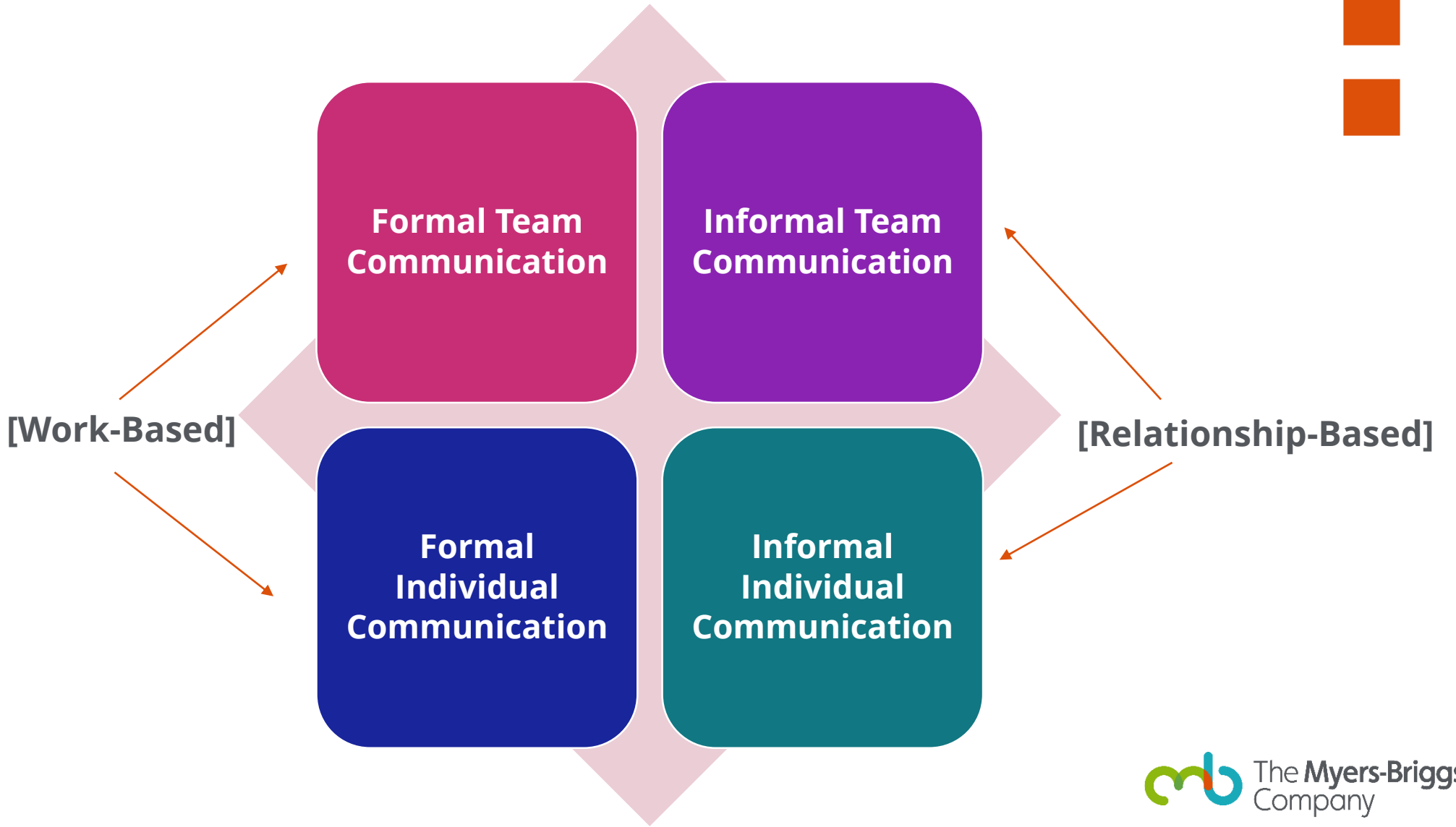
Tips

Fostering work and relational communication



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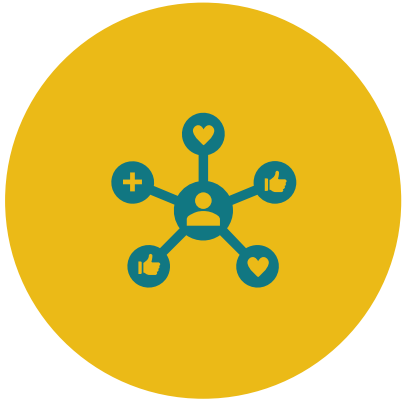

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Virtual Teams and Effective Communication

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AVOIDING THE TRUST TRAP

Avoiding the Trust Trap

High quality communication in virtual teams is linked to *interpersonal trust*, which is in turn linked to **individual and team performance and productivity.**

Employee to manager trust	Employee to employee trust

High-quality communication in teams provides:

reassurance that others are attending to the task at hand	increases member **trust in the team and feelings of cohesiveness, supporting strong working relationships.**

All the recommendations we've looked so far, are designed to develop ***high-quality communication***, which is linked to important gains and results.

Source: Chang, Journal of Total Quality Management & Business Excellence, 2014

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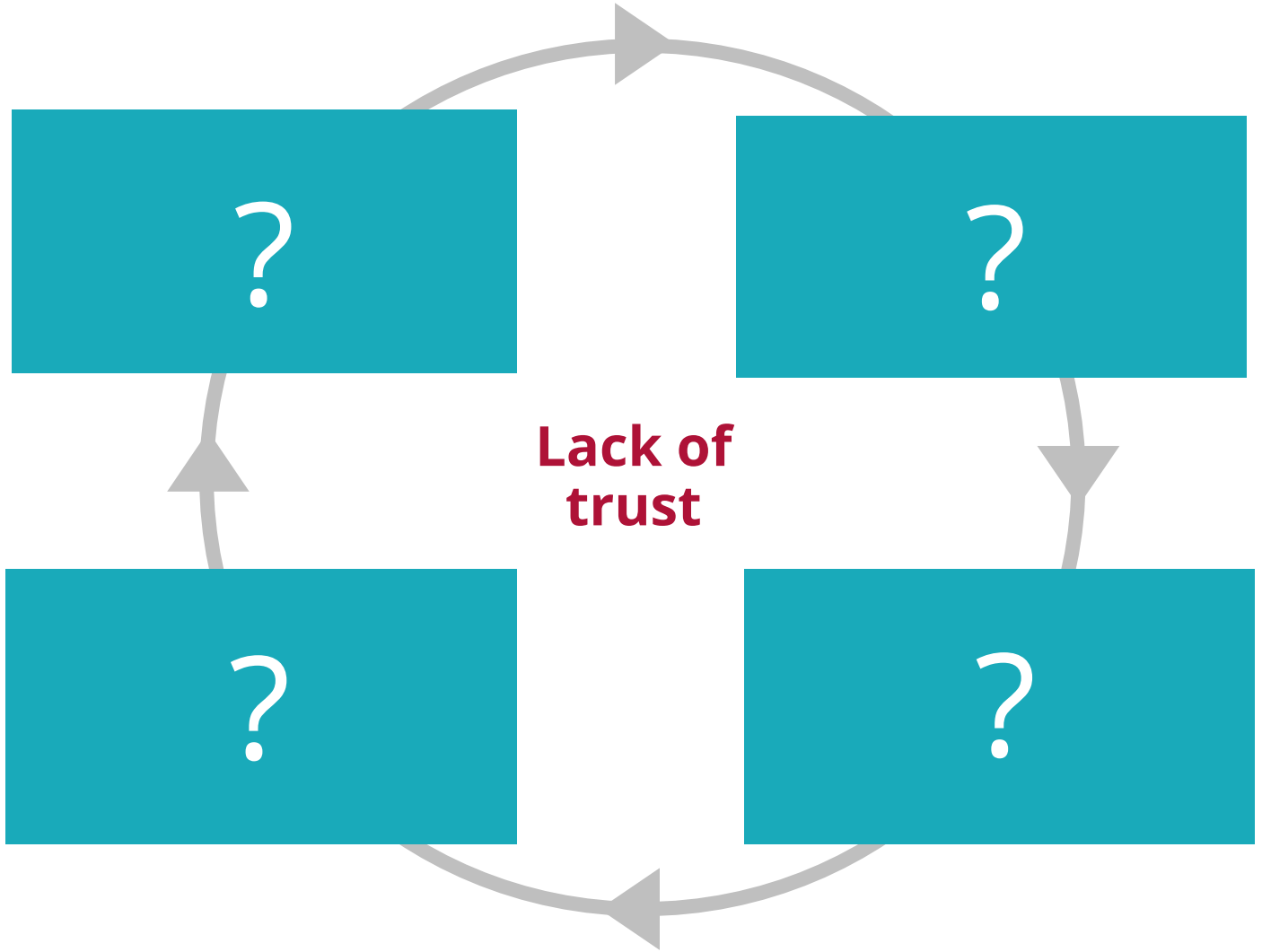
Avoiding the trust trap



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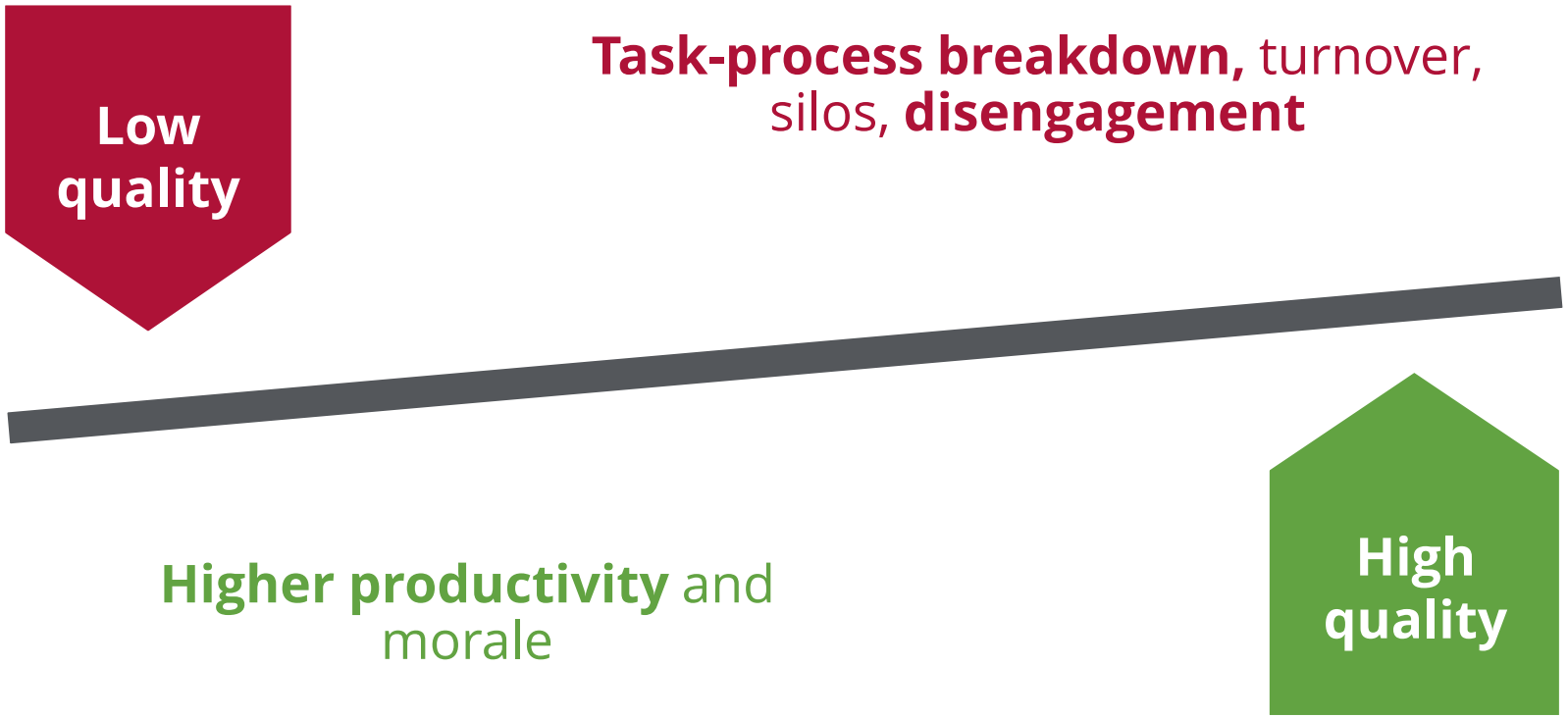
The criticality of communication



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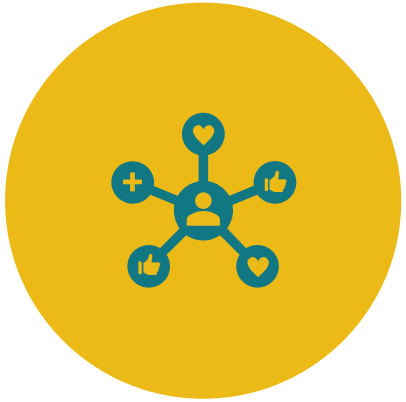

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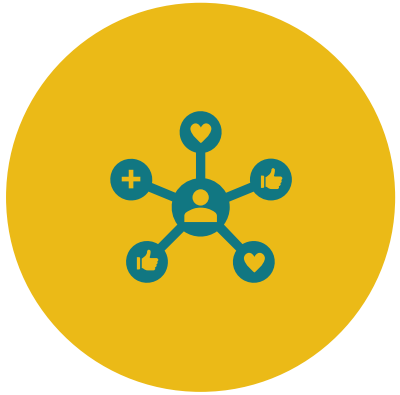

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Final Considerations & Takeaways

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Tips for managers and leaders

- Assess your teams' **current communication**
- Evaluate how communication is **helping the team (or not)**
- Gauge employee needs regarding **skills for effective communication** in virtual contexts
- Align **developmental resources** to promote and build necessary skills
- Bring in **outside help**
- Serve as a **facilitator** of high-quality team communication

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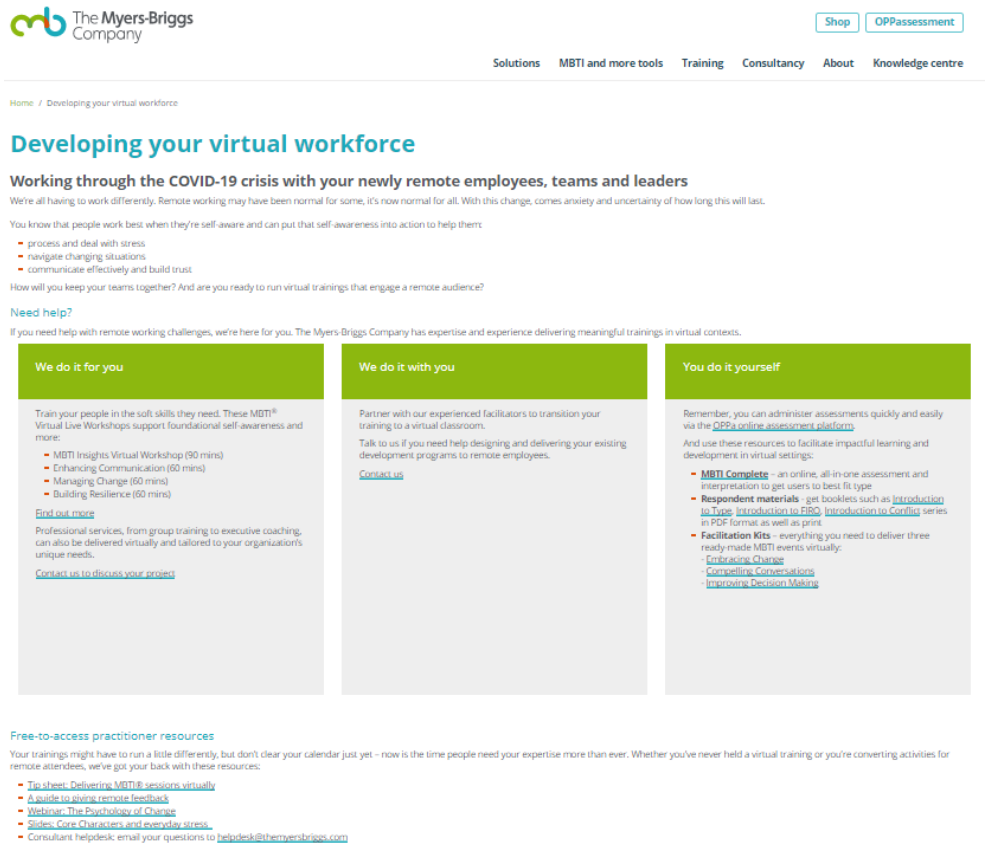
NEW - Remote working resources page

https://eu.themyersbriggs.com/en/remoteworking

- Regularly updated
- Free resources
  - Tip sheets
  - Recommended webinar links
  - Guide to giving remote feedback
  - Slide deck on stress reactions
- Expert facilitator-led virtual workshops
- Product recommendations
- …and more



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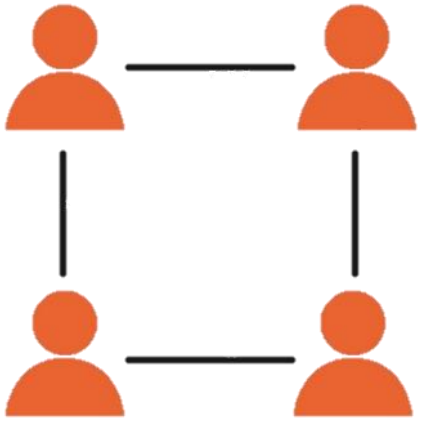
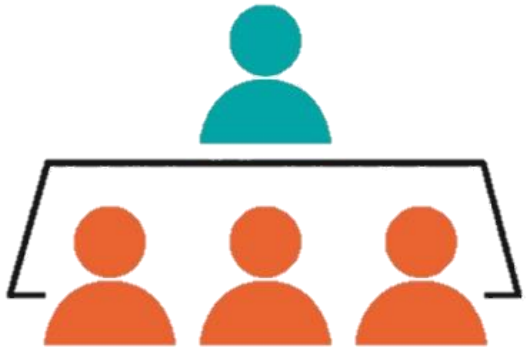
Your partner to build trust



Consultancy services



Practitioner training

MBTI products & materials

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Any questions?

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Thank you!

Good luck
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