

Building Trust and Social Capital Across Boundaries

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1. Find ways to make introductions among participants in advance.

Use asynchronous web meeting tools to begin the process of introductions. Have people share photographs and something about themselves. Call participants that you don't know. Instigate a buddy system and ask participants to call one another ahead of the meeting.

2. Recognize and minimize power differentials – perceived and real.

Make sure that no one has greater access to information or other kinds of power than anyone else. If some people work closer to the power base, take pains to contact the more distant members more often. Share power – structure the team and activities in such a way that power never lies with just one or two, but shifts over time.

3. Have a conversation about trust and the meeting ground rules the participants would value.

Not all cultures or people ascribe the same notions of trustworthiness. Don't assume that if everyone got to know each other, all would consider each other trustworthy. Engage team members in a discussion about trust. Consider an anonymous online brainstorm activity to open this conversation.

4. Work to build social capital with virtual teams.

Take the time to allow people to get to know each other in ways that are not entirely focused on team tasks. Set the tone by sharing something about yourself. Develop a scale of social capital that is meaningful to you and the team. Monitor how the team goes up and down on this scale.

5. Anticipate landmines and plan for them.

Determine whether topics or objectives are likely to cause contention or dissension. Talk with your client or team leader and other participants to anticipate critical issues or topics that may ignite or smolder. Use an anonymous brainstorming topic to ask participants to identify internal challenges that might affect their effectiveness as a virtual team.

6. Encourage communication outside of the virtual meeting.

Engage virtual team members in a discussion about communications. Generate ideas about how they would like to communicate between meetings

and how communication can assist them with their goals. Create team lists and contact sheets. Assign action items in pairs. Have team members take responsibility for talking between meetings.

7. Build trust as part of a real-time virtual meeting.

Set the tone of a meeting early on. Discuss the importance of trust with your team and objectives and agree to a set of ground rules around confidentiality, speaking the truth as you see it, speaking up rather than checking out, private off-line discussions if needed. Provide opportunities for participants to express their interests and concerns.

8. Recognize resistance and when it needs to be addressed.

Resistance may turn up in the form of lack of input, lack of progress, lack of participation, too many excuses, too many delays, missed deadlines or missed promises. Look and listen for similar cues from a face-to-face environment; name the resistance and let the group or individuals know what you observe. Provide time for it to be discussed and addressed.

9. Consider how cultural differences might affect group discussion

Vary the ways to provide input. Build in extra time or use anonymous brainstorming tools to draw out ideas and opinions from people who are more reticent. Ask team members how they participate most effectively.

10. Deal directly and promptly with untrustworthy behavior.

Name the behavior and how it affects you. Ask others in the group how they are feeling. Ask a person to rephrase or reconsider an action or comment. Listen to your tone of voice when giving feedback, take a breath and smile so that you can remain calm and objective.

11. Check in with team members and peers to see how you are doing.

Seek feedback from others and set this expectation early on. Let people know that you want to know what's working for them and what is not. Talk to people directly. Run an online survey or anonymous brainstorm at a scheduled check point. Revisit original team agreements and ground rules.