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### Final Question

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What are the dynamics of remote teams and how we build aligned cultural values and engagement?

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### Introduction

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As companies have continued to discover and implement new technology, virtual teams have emerged and evolved over time. Remote teams provide a great deal of value to some employees and can be a selling point while attracting talent, but it is vital to also ensure the value of remote teams to organizations themselves. Following the Coronavirus pandemic, the value of building strong remote teams has never been more evident as some employees are hesitant to return to the office.

Successful teams provide a stable level of psychological safety and trust, which are difficult to foster virtually. The focus of this research is primarily creating and maintaining a sense of psychological safety in a remote environment and exploring how it has been done successfully thus far.

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### Psychological Safety and Trust in Remote Teams

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The two most common forms of remote teams are fully remote, where all workers are working virtually and hybrid, where some workers are working remotely while some are in person. Regardless of the type of team leaders are building, creating a sense of belonging and purpose is key, and these two types of teams require different strategies. If not managed correctly, hybrid teams are especially at risk of becoming divided and providing favorable work-related outcomes such as salary increases and professional promotions to those who are physically present.

If a team is operating in a hybrid model, virtual workers are at a disadvantage because it is harder to build trust via remote methods. It is also harder to realize when psychological trust has eroded, and workers are more hesitant to take risks. In a fully remote team, all members are incentivized to go the extra mile to build trust because each person is equally impacted by their remote status. Nonverbal communication can convey more than 90% of feelings and attitudes, and those who are working remotely while their counterparts work in person are apt to feel particularly vulnerable and exposed.

When any or all members of a team are remote, expectation setting must be extremely clear to compensate for the lack of clarity that is typically inherent with nonverbal communication that no longer exists. This norm must be set during the onboarding process and reinforced constantly so there will be a willingness to be vulnerable when uncertainty arises, and take reward-producing risks.

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### Best practices

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As organizations and teams transition to hybrid or full remote work, companies must adapt their cultural and engagement mechanisms to the new work dynamics to preserve a differentiated and competitive talent management strategy. The following best practices are guidelines to engrain cultural values, engagement, and psychological safety in remote teams:

**Day-to-day companionship** – Embed corporate values, organizational cultural traits, team connectivity, and motivation practices in individual contributors and managers’ day-to-day.

- Leverage technology to develop periodic nudges to activate behaviors among employees (e.g., schedule a 1:1 with your skip-level manager/directs, visit the corporate learning management system (LMS) and register for a skill-building training, participate in team-led or cross-functional events, watch a recent leader’s interview, etc.).
- Reframe managers’ 1:1s with directs. Empower these conversations to go beyond business goals and tasks by adding to the agenda skill-building guidance, career growth discussions, prospective exciting new projects, etc. Equip managers with the skills and tools to lead these powerful 1:1 and team conversations that will infuse engagement and trust among the employees.
- Expand the connectivity of employees beyond functions and immediate teams by encouraging periodic skip-level conversations and cross-functional mentorship programs for early career, mid-career, and senior leadership.
- Increase participation in virtual meetings through conversational turn-taking, polls, breakout rooms, and seeding one or two volunteers to ignite comfort and participation in the virtual room.

**Open communication forums** – Align cultural traits, information and best practices sharing, and business priorities through two asynchronous forum styles:

- Quarterly corporate-wide conferences that include an interview segment with a different senior leader on how they practice one or more corporate values in their day-to-day. These vulnerable conversations will serve as a behavioral north star for all employees. Additionally, an ask-me-anything (AMA) section encourages empowerment among employees while illustrating trust and transparency within the organization. Record these conferences so all employees can access the content at various times.
- Informal communication platforms (e.g., Slack, Microsoft Teams, Chime, etc.) where employees can create various channels and share knowledge, best practices, and ask broad questions.

**Listen to the employees’ voice and track progress** – Listen actively and request your employees’ ideas and concerns. Through sample size surveys or periodic nudges, collect employees’ feedback and bring their value-add ideas to life. Additionally, set distinct and quantifiable tracking systems to assess initiatives, and identify gaps and focus areas.

### Conclusion

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It is feasible for organizations to continue fostering trust, psychological safety, and cultural values and behaviors among employees in remote work settings. By balancing day-to-day nudges, reframing meetings and participation, and conducting periodic tracking, companies will be able to seamlessly transition to a remote environment with a thriving culture and engaging employees.

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### References

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