



Working in a Virtual Team

Using Technology for
Communication &
Collaboration

Virtual Teams and Remote Working

- A virtual team is a group of people working across time and space and organisational boundaries using technology to communicate and collaborate.
- As such, virtual teams allow organisations to bring together people with the best expertise, regardless of where they live.
- Virtual teams can consist of professionals who work from home full-time or part-time, others who take part in mobile work (coming to a fixed office but working outside this space for part of the week), or people who work at a remote location.

During COVID-19 lockdown

- The COVID-19 pandemic has had a major impact on remote working.
- Entire organisations across the world are now suddenly required to work remotely from home for an indefinite period of time.
- This unprecedented global event has made it more important than ever to face the challenges that come with being a part of a virtual team.



Challenges for Virtual Teams

- When you cannot see your colleagues face-to-face, and you do not have the social interactions that build relationships and rapport, it can be difficult to establish trust.
- If it is not managed correctly, this lack of trust can undermine everything that the team is trying to achieve.
- Another major challenge is communication, especially when a remote team includes members from different countries and cultures.
- It can also be harder to pick up the visual cues (such as body language and facial expressions) that make communication flow easily, even when you are using video.
- Finally, it can be more difficult to voice your opinion in a virtual team, and it can be harder to resolve team conflict.
- Lack of resources/ equipment, data/ WIFI and network coverage also impacts.

Working Effectively in a Virtual Team

Fortunately, there are many tools and strategies that you can use to work successfully in a virtual team and tackle these challenges head-on.



Communicating in a Virtual Team

- Effective communication is important within a virtual team.
- Open, honest communication not only helps to avoid misunderstandings, but also increases effectiveness.
- To find out how well you communicate, and to get tips on how to improve your weaker areas.
- Use the 7Cs of Communication as a checklist to make sure that your video calls, emails, presentations, and instant messages are as clear, courteous and timely as possible.



Communicating in a Virtual Team

- Try to listen actively when someone else is speaking, and never attempt to multitask.
- Give the other person your full attention – this is a sign of respect, and you will understand them better, too.
- Before the meeting starts, make sure everyone can hear and see well enough.
- Encourage everyone to speak at some point and to ask for clarification if they miss something.
- Without visual cues, it is more likely people will speak over each other – be patient and try to recognise that no one is at fault when this happens.

Relationship Building in Virtual Teams

- When you work in a virtual team, it's important to make an extra effort with relationships.
- An important part of establishing relationships with teammates is building and maintaining trust.
- Trust evolves differently in virtual teams. In an office setting, colleagues build relationships and trust through social interaction and collaborative work.
- Researchers call this interpersonal trust.
- However, in a virtual team, colleagues build trust through reliability, consistency, and responsiveness – this is called ability-based, or task-based trust.



Relationship Building in Virtual Teams



- To build trust, start by keeping your word.
- If you agree on a deadline, or you make a promise to call a teammate, follow it up.
- When you demonstrate your integrity and work ethic, your team members will learn that they can rely on you.

A photograph of a person wearing a brown, textured sweater, sitting at a wooden desk and working on a laptop. The person's hands are visible, typing on the keyboard. The image is framed within a large, light-colored oval shape. The background of the slide features red and white abstract shapes.

Coping With Isolation in Remote Teams

How to cope with isolation

- When you're part of a virtual team it's normal to experience feelings of isolation.
- You might also feel as if your organisation has "forgotten" you if you often work remotely.
- Make an effort to engage and socialise with others outside of work, if you can.
- If you are experiencing these feelings, take steps to combat them .



Coping strategies

- Asking for help from your colleague or mentor, or supervisor
- Use virtual resources – stay informed
- Use exercise/ dance/ healing music
- Start a new hobby or reconnect with an old hobby that you enjoyed.
- Cleaning/ gardening/ Enjoying nature
- Reading motivational stories/ movies
- Relaxation techniques- colouring in, breathing exercises, mindfulness
- Make use of counselling support within your institution, if not you can also make use other counselling services (see resources)

Conclusion

- Virtual teams are increasingly common. Although this form of work can be productive and efficient, it may also present challenges
- Communication barriers, feelings of isolation, and a lack of rapport are all common in virtual teams.
- You can work successfully within a virtual team by communicating clearly and honestly with your colleagues. Keep your promises, and respond promptly to their requests or needs.
- Connect with colleagues through social media and other remote working teams. If you feel isolated, try to make time to socialize with your team on videoconferencing platforms, or meet with friends if possible

References

- <https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/working-virtual-team.htm>
- <https://www.managementstudyguide.com/virtual-teams>

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

Save on your phone to save a life

- 24-hour HIGHER HEALTH Post school education and training helpline: Toll-free call 0800 36 36 36 or SMS 43336
- Gender based Violence toll free number: 0800428428;
- South African Depression & Anxiety Group (SADAG) : 0800 567 567;
- 24 hour helpline: 0800 456 789 OR SMS 31393/32312(available 7 days per week);
- Lifeline: 0861 322 322;
- Corona virus (COVID-19) 24-hour hotline: 080 002 9999
- COVID-19 connect (WhatsApp): 060 012 3456
- Suicide crisis line: 080 056 7567
- Lifeline: 086 132 2322
- Domestic violence helpline: 080 015 0150
- Childline: 080 005 5555

EVALUATION FORM

- Use this link to evaluate this resource: <https://bit.ly/32EbjvH>

Got some questions? Wanting to share your insights?

- We are available by email:
<https://www.unisa.ac.za/sites/myunisa/default/Learner-support-&-regions/Counselling-and-career-development/Contact-us>

Thank you

Developed by:

Yamkela Notikana

Trainee Career Guidance Practitioner

Counselling & Career Development

Unisa Mthatha

Define tomorrow.

UNISA | 
university
of south africa