

A TRUST CHANGERS HIGH-PERFORMANCE
VIRTUAL TEAM DISCUSSION GUIDE

HOW *people* 
UNDERMINE
ONLINE CULTURE

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WHAT ARE *people* ON YOUR TEAM SAYING

If your team is struggling to make the most of collaborative tools, start listening to what people are saying. Do you hear things like . . .

"Things are fine the way they are. We don't need to change anything."

"Where are we keeping the project files now? It's always changing."

"We are constantly buying new tools, then we never use them. How will this be any different?"

"I post stuff, but nobody responds. Should I even bother?"

"Keeping my stuff online feels like a waste of time. Nobody else needs it."

THESE DOUBTS ARE NORMAL

- Nobody likes wasting time, struggling to make things work, or constantly switching tools.
- Team culture can feel like a political minefield, even without your thoughts and ideas recorded on a shared platform for everyone to see.
- Speaking in a meeting can be intimidating, even when you aren't being recorded on video for other team members to catch up later.

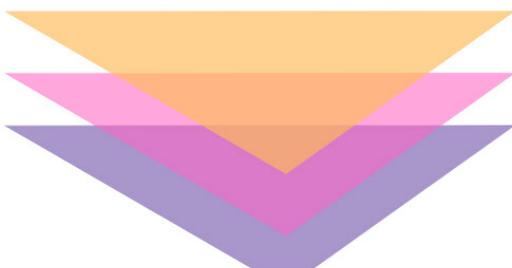
While collaborative-technology resistance is usually due to uncertainty about how jobs will be affected, assumptions often cause people to overlook the impact of personal stories.



With people, the only thing it's safe to assume is that you should never assume anything.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Discuss the following scenarios with your team. Each includes a few questions to help everyone start thinking about how personal stories can cause people to undermine online culture.



Doubt Creeps In

People doubt themselves, they doubt other people, or they doubt the technology, so they hesitate to participate. One person's hesitation undermines trust for many others.

Let's imagine a typical scenario.

Amber is going to present her team's ideas to a group of several managers. Two people are working from home, so the meeting will take place online, using a videoconferencing app.

She's a top performer, but like many people, she doesn't like to present. Her mind is racing. Here are some of her worries . . .

- I hate presenting. My voice always shakes.
- Sometimes people ask questions that I don't have answers for.
- I hope my slide deck looks nice enough. I wonder if I spelled everything correctly? I can't believe I couldn't find a less pixilated logo.
- What will I look like on camera?
- How does this app start? What if the video doesn't work, or what if I can't share my screen?
- If everybody doesn't show up on time, when should I begin?
- What if the microphone appears to be working, but other people can't hear me? What if I can't hear them?
- If one person is having technical issues and everyone else is waiting, how long do I wait before starting?
- How will I manage all of this. OMG, why couldn't this have been in person? Presenting online is too much!

When people are stressed about using collaborative technologies, they inevitably share their thoughts with others.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Can you relate to Amber's experience?

What are some things she could do to ease her fears?

How might Amber feel if one team member is saying "let's all get comfortable with this new application" while another is quietly cursing the tool to anyone who will listen?

What are the odds that everyone will opt in and make the most of videoconferencing when mixed messages are spread throughout the team?

*Bonus Conversation:
What's the impact
of hearing these
kinds of doubts
from leadership?*

Procrastination Stalls Progress

People don't make time to learn and use new tools. One person's procrastination undermines trust for many others.

Imagine the following case.

Dave has been asked to move documentation about his job into a new Intranet. Currently, the content lives on his computer.

If he were to win the lottery and never show up again, the information would be locked in his files. Someone would have to figure out everything about his job.

Over a period of months, Dave is asked about his progress during one-on-one meetings with his manager, Dave has said . . .

- I haven't had time to move things.
- I don't know where to put things. (He's been shown twice.)
- I am still thinking about how to organize my content.
- I don't want people to see my content until it's ready.
- I think it's easier to upload the Word documents, so I am not pasting the copy into the pages. (Dave isn't using the tool correctly. If he uploads Word documents, the content will not be searchable.)

At this point, months have passed, and Dave's manager is just relieved to have any copies of Dave's work online.

Dave's colleagues have also noticed that he isn't moving content into the system. Several people have used this as an excuse not to use the system themselves.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Why should people bother using a system, if everyone is not doing it?

Could clearer expectations or a required 1-hour training have helped Dave jump in sooner?

What are the impacts to team culture?

If one person is opting out, what are the odds that other people will also opt out?



*Bonus Conversation:
What's the impact of
this kind of behavior
from leadership?*

Avoidance Reduces Uptake

People don't log in to virtual-presence apps, so they appear unavailable. One person's choice to opt out undermines trust for many others.

One last story.

Chuck never logs into the organization's chat system. He believes that by coming into work every day, he is available to everyone who matters.

His boss is considering flex-work options for the team. Several people are excited, but Chuck doesn't plan to change how he works. People have heard Chuck say things like . . .

- If someone wants to get in touch, they can come to my office or call me.
- I don't have time for more interruptions. Email is bad enough.

In a recent directors' meeting, where Chuck was presenting his work, someone took a quick poll of who is using chat. Fewer than 1/3 of the directors raised their hands.

When chuck was asked why he doesn't use chat, he said . . .

- I like when people stop by. It's easier to get to the bottom of things quickly.

Chuck's stance seemed harmless enough, but his boss was disappointed. She would like to make a case for flex work for people who are interested, but that's only possible if everyone agrees to be on chat and attend meetings via videoconferencing when someone isn't in the office.

Chuck's repetitive comments about not wanting to use chat are disconcerting. Also, since he admitted his preference not to use chat in the director's meeting, it'll be harder to convince leadership that flex work is a good idea.

Most people don't set out to undermine each other, but the smallest, seemingly innocuous interactions can have rippling effects.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Should Chuck be required to start using chat?

If so, why?

How would you approach the subject with Chuck?

*Bonus Conversation:
What's the impact
of leadership opting
out of virtual-
presence apps, like
chat?*

People **ARE COMPLICATED...**

AMBER'S STORY

In Amber's case, she's motivated to produce excellent work, but she just gets nervous before presenting. Add the complication of videoconferencing, and it's bound to feel like too much.

A little training and practice with the videoconferencing tool would go a long way to help her feel comfortable.

DAVE'S STORY

Dave is a little more complicated. He wants to do well at work, but he's older than most of the staff, and people sometimes say things that cause him to feel pressured to retire.

He's also afraid people will post judgmental or rude comments on his pages. Dave knows that posting his documentation in the intranet should be okay, but the uncertainty he feels about his job causes him to hoard information.

Forthright discussions to help Dave understand how he will benefit could help him adjust to a more open environment.

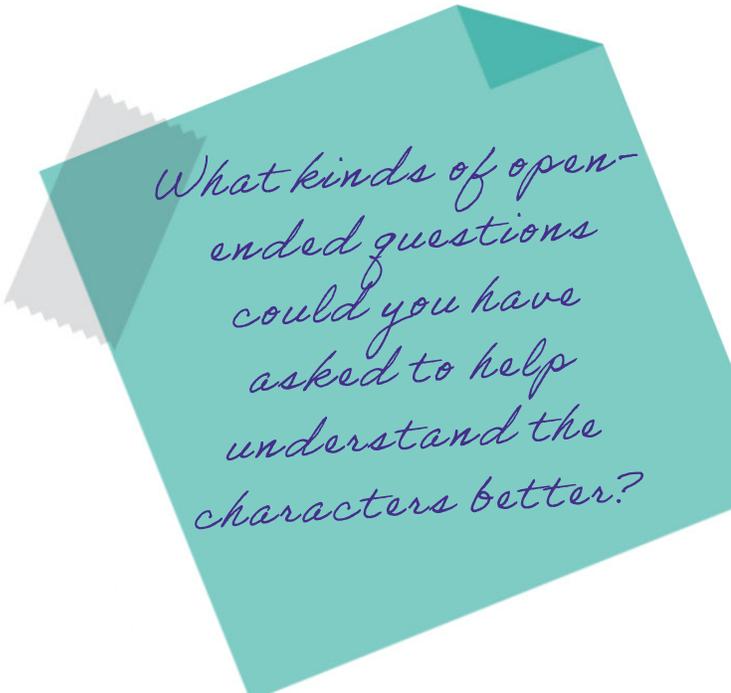
CHUCK'S STORY

The real reason for Chuck's resistance is a combination of two things. First, Chuck got the impression that everyone would have to work from home several days per week, if the proposed flex-work plan were approved.

Second, Chuck's boss doesn't know he is going through a divorce. Rather than tell his boss that working at home isn't realistic for him, Chuck is hoping that if he drags his feet, his boss will drop the flex-work idea.

Since more than half of the directors are also not using chat, Chuck is encouraged that it won't be forced onto him.

Ironically, all Chuck needs to do is say "my home isn't a good place to work" without mentioning the divorce, and his boss would reassure him that working from home is not a requirement.



What kinds of open-ended questions could you have asked to help understand the characters better?

People are often their own worst enemies, because they resist talking openly about their questions and concerns.





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Trust Changers was inspired in 2010, when after 5 years of exemplary service at Cornell University, in Ithaca New York, I negotiated a contract to work from home—in Honolulu, Hawaii.

In order to feel confident working 100% online, I made it my mission to develop processes, skills, and behaviors that ensured my colleagues always would trust I could seamlessly work with them, regardless of whether I was in the same office or on a tiny island—6,000 miles away.

Now, I am on a mission to share those skills and help people use Internet technologies to improve their lives at work and at home.

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