

# THE VIRTUAL LEADERSHIP PLAYBOOK

**34 TACTICS FOR SMART  
LEADERS AND TEAMS  
WHO WANT REMOTE  
WORKING TO WORK**

[fastlead.com/virtualleader](https://fastlead.com/virtualleader)

## The Fastlead Vleader Virtual Leadership Playbook

Review the full Vleader program at [remoteleader.com](http://remoteleader.com)

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# WHAT'S SO SPECIAL ABOUT VIRTUAL TEAMS?

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**Five years ago it became apparent to us at HFL that there was a significant emerging need, felt by leaders, their people and their organisations, for effective leadership skills aimed at teams that are wholly or partly virtual or remote.**

These team structures have unique needs and challenges that generic leadership principles do not fully address:

- Potential dilution of focus – particularly if a remote team member is located within other teams that are proximate and competing for their attention
- Challenges to a natural sense of belonging for those who are not co-located – a sense that geographical proximity might favour those team members at the same site as the team leader
- Missing the value arising from incidental and impromptu exchanges – the proverbial water-cooler conversations
- Remotely-based team members being less likely to receive timely and consistent professional development.

HFL researched this area and began shaping specific training resources for our clients. Then... out of the blue, the entire world found itself in an overnight lockdown where everyone – with the exception of a handful of essential workers whose work could not be carried out virtually – found themselves working from home offices.

The world had to figure out how to make virtual working, virtual teaming and virtual leadership a success. And this was more difficult than simply replacing face-to-face meetings with video sessions.

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## APPLYING NEW LEADERSHIP TACTICS

To validate and extend our earlier research, we ran a study in June 2020. The need for elevated and carefully planned virtual leadership skills didn't change during our research window, but was elevated by forced work-from-home (WFH) and became needed by many more leaders.

And into what we believe is a permanently changed future, smart virtual leadership is now a must have skillset for front line managers.

The results of our accumulated research is contained in the Virtual Leadership Playbook. It's a compilation of many ideas to enhance individual leaders' virtual leadership effectiveness. It's also underpinned by a curriculum for virtual leadership - based on five years' research by HFL and many other organisations globally.

This guide explains that to lead a virtual team you need to apply the established leadership principles, but use different tactics.

We know our tested approaches will help you lead effectively and maximise your team members' productivity and wellbeing.

*Alistair Gordon*

**HFL LEADERSHIP and EXPERTUNITY**

# HOW TO USE THIS PLAYBOOK: BE SELECTIVE!

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## What our recent research confirmed:

- Leading a virtual team requires different tactics – but the same leadership principles.
- Some team members are more productive working from home, while others struggle – but every one of your team needs to be carefully and individually treated.

## Here's how to use this Playbook:

- Since every situation is different, we've provided 34 leadership tactics for you to choose from.
- Involve your team members in deciding what tactics to try – and they'll be able to give you immediate feedback.

# THE FIVE CAPABILITIES OF ADVANCED VIRTUAL LEADERSHIP

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## Capability 1 FOCUS & PERFORMANCE



**Isolated people, whether working in remote offices or from home, can lose focus. The issue for leaders of virtual teams is that the resulting drop in performance isn't immediately evident – you can't monitor your team members' progress when you're not co-located.**

A Focus and Performance leadership regime deals with the issues before they embed as a problem:

- Continue to re-enforce team purpose, linked to the wider organisation's strategies you're your people understand the importance and meaning of their work.
- Ensure team members have enough information to make the right prioritisation calls – particularly if leaders aren't available to ask – so they can focus on the right deliverables for the right reasons.
- Shape a meeting mix that provides a steady, two-way flow of information, while not getting in the way of team members being able to do their work.
- Use regular 121 (one-to-one) meetings to deliver, and receive, feedback to build trust and a sense of achievement.

### **Things to avoid in this capability:**

- Excessive over-checking.
- Team members feeling they have inadequate guidance.
- Team members feeling overloaded with work and boundaries between work and home are being violated.

## Capability 2 CONNECTED LEADERSHIP



**Co-located teams have multiple opportunities, whether planned or not, to interact with colleagues – both on work projects and socially. They can also interact naturally with members of other teams. When working virtually, informal opportunities are lost, and individuals and teams become disconnected.**

A Connected Leadership strategy replicates dynamic workforce communications in a virtual world, between your team members, and between your team and others:

- Deploy advanced stakeholder engagement strategies to ensure the right amount of contact with the right people – a deliberate policy so no one is forgotten or under-invested in.
- Promoting collaborative working arrangements so team members continue to work together.
- Introduce creatively planned, incidental connection activities – to maintain a supportive culture, ask your people to contribute ideas for new types of social engagements while teams are working virtually.
- Assist the team in creating an ongoing social connection despite not being co-located.

### **Things to avoid in this capability:**

- Team members feeling isolated and disconnected, losing a sense of rapport with the rest of the team.
- Team members becoming disconnected from colleagues in other teams.
- A sense of fragmentation, that team members' work has devolved into individual task outputs, rather than a shared or collective effort.



## Capability 3 DEVELOPING VIRTUAL TEAMS



**High-performing teams have continuous learning at their core. Both formal and informal learning opportunities enhance systems, processes and products, that delight customers. Because so much of this was conducted face-to-face, bringing people together from different locations and departments, it's natural that the amount of time and energy spent on learning activities decreases significantly when teams go virtual.**

An effective Development agenda must continue while teams operate virtually:

- Deliver meaningful feedback – both positive and constructive – to an even greater extent while your team is operating under these changed conditions – you'll need to build a culture of courage to provide effective feedback over video.
- Provide meaningful, relevant individual and team recognition and reward for the virtual workplace.
- The learning culture in a virtual environment puts review and post-project processes into place that capture learnings, successes and failures.
- Deploy a range of virtual learning activities – coaching, mentoring, shadowing – that allow individuals to continue to learn new skills, gain knowledge and have new experiences which continue their career progression.

### **Things to avoid in this capability:**

- A suspension of development and learning activities and opportunities until things return to normal.
- Not recognising that team members will have to develop new skills to operate effectively in a new working environment and need support to do so.

## Capability 4: VIRTUAL TEAM CARE



**Until recently, those working remotely did so by choice. Today, many team members are forced to work from home because of the health crisis. And a number are not suited to virtual working – because of their role, personality, or living situation. This creates stresses and strains that are often difficult to detect.**

Today's effective leaders have a new and important role in caring for home-based team members:

- Develop new, regular and comprehensive systems that act as behaviour indicators for employee wellbeing – to check in on how your people really are.
- Leverage the power of 1:1 meetings, some with and some without agendas, to enable valuable two-way communication with individual team members.
- Be proactive in monitoring and helping team members manage the number of hours worked, and promote flexible working arrangements that suit the virtual environment.
- Role model your own physical and mental state.

### **Things to avoid in this capability:**

- Believing that because people say they are OK, they are. Check.
- Asking team members about their individual wellbeing with other team members present.
- Not doing a personal audit of how well we are doing as leaders.



## Capability 5: HIGH PERFORMANCE VIRTUAL COMMUNICATION

**Bring the above four capabilities together. The virtual workspace requires all team members and their smart leaders to explore appropriate, advanced communication techniques:**

- Getting the virtual meeting mix right – the right broadcast or narrowcast communication for the message, just enough contact and not too much.
- Use advanced techniques to run effective meetings in a virtual environment.
- Learn compelling narratives, storytelling that sustain team energy, commitment and results.
- Establish inter-team activities and connections to stop siloing.

**Things to avoid in this capability:**

- Too many team meetings and not enough 1:1 meetings.
- Too much focus on task, leaving relationships sidelined.
- One communication strategy for all team members.
- Communiqué (one-way) rather than two-way communication.

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## CHOOSE THE TACTICS THAT WORK FOR YOUR TEAM

**Now you need the tactics to help you achieve each of these objectives as a committed virtual leader. *Read on.***

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# FOCUS & PERFORMANCE TACTICS

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How do you unite your team  
around a common purpose?

<b>TACTIC 1 THE PURPOSE CONVERSATION</b> .....	14
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## TACTIC 1

# THE PURPOSE CONVERSATION

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## THE CHALLENGE

When team members are isolated, it's easier to forget the purpose of work and how it contributes to the greater picture.

## THE ANSWER

Purpose Conversations, where smart virtual leaders remind the team as a whole what it's trying to achieve and how success will be measured. While individuals need to be told how important their work is, what a difference it makes.

## CAPABILITY

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FOCUS & PERFORMANCE	✓
CONNECTED LEADERSHIP	
DEVELOPING VIRTUAL TEAMS	
VIRTUAL TEAM CARE	✓
HIGH PERFORMANCE VIRTUAL COMMUNICATION	✓



## WHAT TO DO

- Every team member must understand the meaning and importance of their work - and how that fits in with the rest of their team, the work of other teams and the organisation as a whole. Each person needs to be clear how they contribute to the difference the organisation is trying to make in the world – the organisation’s purpose.
- We’ve named this tactic as a conversation, one person at a time, because that is how it’s best executed – not as a PowerPoint presentation.
- Questions could be:
  - When was the last time I had this conversation with Sarah?
  - If I was to ask Sarah how her work directly connected to the value the organisation is trying to create, would she be able to tell me?
  - When was the last time I told Sarah how valuable her input is?

## BENEFITS

- A central motivation for most team members is knowing that their work matters. In a WFH situation, with so many complications and difficulties, they can easily lose sight of this.
- The Purpose Conversation inspires, and inspired team members are high performance workers.
- Having your appreciation – a crucial benefit of team care - will reduce feelings of discouragement and worthlessness.
- A smart leader is always looking to hire and grow self-motivated team members. The Purpose Conversation helps build this capability.
- Team members who really understand the ‘why’ of their work are less likely to get discouraged and feel worthless – a crucial benefit of team care.

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**ALSO SEE** #4: *The Prioritisation Conversation* #14: *The Autonomy Conversation*

## TACTIC 2

# THE RIGHT MEETING MIX

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## THE CHALLENGE

Overcoming meeting overload. Research suggests managers are overusing team meetings and under-investing in 121s.

## THE ANSWER

The Right Meeting Mix is leveraging a combination of meeting types - at the right frequency to maintain strong connection and information flow - while leaving time for team members to get work done.

## CAPABILITY

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FOCUS & PERFORMANCE	✓
CONNECTED LEADERSHIP	✓
DEVELOPING VIRTUAL TEAMS	
VIRTUAL TEAM CARE	
HIGH PERFORMANCE VIRTUAL COMMUNICATION	✓





## WHAT TO DO

- Meeting options:
  - Team huddles – informal catch-ups at the beginning or end of the day, for everyone to check in, share news, socialise, connect – but they are short and sharp 15 to 20 minutes
  - Whole of team work-in-progress, structured meetings
  - Project meetings, covering streams of work, progress, that are very task focused with strict agendas
  - Meetings without agendas (*see #26*) are valuable in creating non-structured information flows – too few managers are investing in this type of meeting
  - 121 meetings between the leader and the team member (*see #3*)
  - Social events.
- The skill is to match purpose with meeting type, and without filling every day with meetings.
- Smart managers will be checking in with their teams, adapting the mix and introducing new ideas as required.

## BENEFITS

- Getting the mix right means that the right work is done by the right people at the right time, and that they have enough time to do this work.
- Shorter, on-point meetings, combined with no agenda gatherings, mean formal and informal communication channels are always open.

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**HOT TIP** Do you have to be in all of these meetings? Are you building team independence? Delegating the running of some of these meetings might save you time and build the capability of your team.

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**ALSO SEE** *#26: Meetings without Agendas #3: Regular 121s*

# TACTIC 3

## REGULAR 121s

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### THE CHALLENGE

Different people have different experiences working virtually. While recent surveys, including ours, suggest that 50 per cent of team members say they are more productive working virtually, one in five say they are really struggling.

### THE ANSWER

Regular 121s allow you to check with team members to see how they're coping and to customise your leadership strategy for each person.

### CAPABILITY

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FOCUS & PERFORMANCE	✓
CONNECTED LEADERSHIP	✓
DEVELOPING VIRTUAL TEAMS	
VIRTUAL TEAM CARE	✓
HIGH PERFORMANCE VIRTUAL COMMUNICATION	✓



## WHAT TO DO

- Make time for quick 121 meetings with each of your direct reports. Important: lock them in and keep to the schedule.
- Frequency of meetings will vary depending on how comfortable your people are working virtually. Anxious and stressed team members need more 121s than those who are more relaxed.
- Important: Don't be judgemental. This isn't about whether an employee is a good worker or not, it's about which environments they perform better in. It's also about how long it takes individuals to become used to change.
- Don't make 121s all about task – at least one third of the meeting should be taken up with social and care. Develop a set of questions that help you check in diplomatically, without it sounding like the Spanish Inquisition.
- Questions could be:
  - Task: How are you progressing with Project X
  - Social: How is your workload – are you getting through it ok?
  - Social: How are you maintaining contact with the rest of the team – do you take time for social catch-ups?
  - Task: What challenges are you facing work wise?
  - Social: What challenges are you facing working from home?

## BENEFITS

- Regular 121s build trust and demonstrate a duty of care. Your team members feel individually recognised and considered.
- Scheduled 121s mean everyone is guaranteed quality time with you, and they know when their opportunities to catch up with their leader are.
- In team catch-ups some members may fear exposing any stress or difficulties they are having. Regular 121s get past this issue.

**ALSO SEE** #8: *Team 121s* #26: *Meetings Without Agendas*

## TACTIC 4

# THE PRIORITISATION CONVERSATION

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## THE CHALLENGE

Most team members have too much to do within the hours they are expected to work. With isolation, it's harder to see how busy team members are, if they're being overloaded from multiple sources. This stress destroys trust, motivation and productivity.

## THE ANSWER

Prioritisation Conversations make it clear to your team members how they should prioritise their work amid competing requests for their time and effort. And that you support those choices.

## CAPABILITY

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FOCUS & PERFORMANCE	✓
CONNECTED LEADERSHIP	
DEVELOPING VIRTUAL TEAMS	
VIRTUAL TEAM CARE	✓
HIGH PERFORMANCE VIRTUAL COMMUNICATION	✓



## WHAT TO DO

- One of the great challenges is to help team members prioritise their work – when so much is important or urgent, or both. Because they can't pop their head around your door to ask, this becomes a greater challenge for team members.
- Smart virtual leaders regularly check in with team members for the Prioritisation Conversation
- You'll explore the volumes of work and where it's coming from – often, of course, it's from you – and the order it should be dealt with.
- Check they understand how to organise their working weeks and how they use their diaries and other workflow tools.
- Smart virtual leaders also help develop decision making rules so team members can resolve clashes in priorities themselves.

## BENEFITS

- Time management and knowing how to prioritise work is a skill. And even harder to do when working in isolation. By showing you want to know and want to help, you are building trust and reducing stress.
- The other advantage of regular Prioritisation Conversations is that you can influence what is done, in what order, and can quickly help team members adapt to new circumstances.

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**ALSO SEE** #24: *Create Limits on Work Hours* #12: *The Autonomy Conversation*

## TACTIC 5

# MANDATES AND PRIORITIES

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## THE CHALLENGE

Working from home or virtually in another office, it's hard for you to see what your team members are working on and which areas of their role they are prioritising. If team member priorities aren't aligned with what you want, there'll be a significant impact on individual and team performance.

## THE ANSWER

Individual Mandates are single page documents which outline the main responsibilities of each team member and how they are measured. They form the basis of regular performance catch-ups.

## CAPABILITY

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FOCUS & PERFORMANCE	
CONNECTED LEADERSHIP	✓
DEVELOPING VIRTUAL TEAMS	
VIRTUAL TEAM CARE	✓
HIGH PERFORMANCE VIRTUAL COMMUNICATION	✓



## WHAT TO DO

- Create your own mandate, download the *HFL template* or make a hybrid. The mandate might vary depending on role and industry.
- Mandates are about outcomes and measures, and how much time team members work on each task.
- The key elements are:
  - Strategic Alignment – how does this role help our organisation execute strategy?
  - Responsibilities – four or five key responsibilities described in a carefully crafted single sentence. Each has a percentage of time allocated to it.
  - Key Performance Indicators – aligned to the responsibilities and how each of these will be measured?
  - Corporate Values – each employee is asked how, in their role, they'll live the key values of your organisation.
  - Development Plan – three or four major initiatives to be selected for the personal growth plan.
  - Big picture contribution statements – what will success today look like and what will success tomorrow look like.

## BENEFITS

- We love Mandates because they are a person's job on a page. If you need more than one page it suggests a workload problem!
- They're dynamic – just like the modern working environment. Priorities and roles change so quickly and you don't want to be stuck with cumbersome position descriptions that have to be signed off by someone else.
- They provide clarity and guidance for team members on what matters most and how to manage their time.

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**HOT TIP** Individuals need to own their own Mandate. Having finalised the template, complete one for yourself first, and show the team yours. Once they've populated their own, discuss amendments with them.

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**ALSO SEE** #16: *V-Coaching* #20: *Virtual Mentoring*

# TACTIC 6

## RESOURCE AGREEMENTS

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### THE CHALLENGE

Modern organisations often dictate that individuals are members of several teams. This creates clashes in work priorities.

### THE ANSWER

Resource Agreements are arrangements agreed between multiple team leaders about how they will share individual resources, allowing individual team members to know how much time they should allocate to each team.

### CAPABILITY

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FOCUS & PERFORMANCE	✓
CONNECTED LEADERSHIP	
DEVELOPING VIRTUAL TEAMS	
VIRTUAL TEAM CARE	✓
HIGH PERFORMANCE VIRTUAL COMMUNICATION	✓





## WHAT TO DO

- Be proactive about managing resource clashes, particularly when team members are working remotely. Issues that aren't resolved get worse.
- Intelligent, fair conversations are needed between team leaders about how an individual is to be shared. Ideally, the team member would be present to provide their view and also share how time is currently being allocated.
- Questions could be:
  - What is the current split between the teams – are we all on the same page?
  - What special skills does the team member have that mean they must be the one to complete the work – or can it be delegated?
  - What opportunities are there for the team member to build capability in others so the workload can be shared?
  - What mechanisms are there for the team member to bring clashes to the surface, and without guidance? How should the team member resolve the issues?
  - If we can't agree, then who is the proper authority to resolve the issue?

## BENEFITS

- Like most things, disquiet and anxiety about workloads has a greater negative impact on those working remotely. By addressing the issue openly, it's possible to surface difficulties and give team members clarity.
- The new economic environment is changing organisational priorities. These types of conversations help provide current clarity.

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**ALSO SEE** #5: *Mandates and Priorities* #24: *Create Limits on Working Hours*

# TACTIC 7

## MEETING FREE ZONES

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### THE CHALLENGE

After an initial reduction, the number of meetings for teams and between individuals, have increased. Many people are struggling to find the time to get work done.

### THE ANSWER

Meeting Free Zones are not new but the need for them is even more relevant today. Having parts of the day or week marked out creates unbroken periods of time for you and your team members to work effectively.

### CAPABILITY

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FOCUS & PERFORMANCE	✓
CONNECTED LEADERSHIP	
DEVELOPING VIRTUAL TEAMS	
VIRTUAL TEAM CARE	✓
HIGH PERFORMANCE VIRTUAL COMMUNICATION	



## WHAT TO DO

- Start the conversation with your team –
  - Would a meeting free zone work for us?
  - What would the benefits be – for each individual?
  - Would everyone need to operate in the MFZ?
  - If we implemented it, how should we manage it?
  - How short or long should it be, and when? Do we need multiple times a week?
  - How do we diplomatically communicate our MTZ to other teams?
  - How do we deal with colleagues breaking the MTZ?

## BENEFITS

- Meeting Free Zones have a triple impact:
  - They drive productivity by allowing team members to complete work without interruptions
  - That work is often of higher quality
  - MFZs contribute to individual team member wellbeing as crossing items off the to do list is highly satisfying and helps them see they're making progress.
- With MFZs you'll hear more of "I got a huge amount done this week!" rather than "I didn't get done what I wanted to, I'm not sure where the week's gone!"

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**HOT TIP** Regardless of the tactics smart leaders may deploy for their own team – create an unbreakable meeting free slot each week for yourself. You'll use this time to consider priorities, plan, and catch up on your own tasks. Or have that free air to do a quadrant 2 piece of work – that's important but not urgent but makes a huge difference long term. Once you see how it's working for you, you may encourage your team to do create their own MFZ quiet time.

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**ALSO SEE** #23: *Enable Flexible Working Hours* #4: *The Prioritisation Conversation*



# CONNECTED LEADERSHIP TACTICS

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How do you ask your team to take responsibility for remaining connected to each other, and to other teams?

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<b>TACTIC 14</b> MAKE SOCIAL A TEAM CHALLENGE .....	42

# TACTIC 8

## TEAM 121s

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### THE CHALLENGE

With your people working from home, or their shifts/days in the office not coinciding, team members might lose contact with each other.

### THE ANSWER

Team 121s see individuals make time to independently contact each other, without any agenda – virtual coffees if you like.

### CAPABILITY

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FOCUS & PERFORMANCE	✓
CONNECTED LEADERSHIP	✓
DEVELOPING VIRTUAL TEAMS	
VIRTUAL TEAM CARE	✓
HIGH PERFORMANCE VIRTUAL COMMUNICATION	✓



## WHAT TO DO

- Everyone is busy, but it's vital each team member maintains - or builds in the case of new team members - good work and social interaction with other team members.
- Give permission for team members to spend time - within work hours - catching up. They need to feel comfortable that you see this contact as building team spirit and connections, that's helping motivation and performance - not wasting time.
- You may also mandate fortnightly calls between team members who don't have much direct contact. Team members that working very closely together might not need Team 121 catch ups as they happen naturally.
- Take the lead with your own one-on-ones. Demonstrate the task/social mix and use questions that help other team members know what sort of relaxed but conversation generating questions to ask.

## BENEFITS

- Team 121s build team spirit, stop hub and spoke leadership, and gives everyone someone different to talk to than you!
- Team 121s help replace the incidental conversations that get lost when teams are working virtually.

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**HOT TIP** These don't have to be Zoom calls. They could be virtual walks - get people out of the house and into the air. Combination tactics working!

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**ALSO SEE** #25: Walking Meetings #3: Regular 121s #Key Concepts: Hub and Spoke Virtual Teams

# TACTIC 9

## 30 SECOND SOCIALS

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### THE CHALLENGE

Due to the broad reaching impacts of the current situation, many organisations are under increased financial and operational stress. Teams are being asked to work in unchartered waters, urgently, and often with reduced resources. As a result, team leaders are having to focus on task, task, task. There's limited time, or no bandwidth, to build any social content into meetings.

### THE ANSWER

30 Second Socials are what the best virtual leaders start meetings with, particularly if the people on the call don't work together every day.

### CAPABILITY

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FOCUS & PERFORMANCE	
CONNECTED LEADERSHIP	✓
DEVELOPING VIRTUAL TEAMS	
VIRTUAL TEAM CARE	✓
HIGH PERFORMANCE VIRTUAL COMMUNICATION	✓





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## WHAT TO DO

- You can make 30-SS activities formal or informal. They might simply be questions that you introduce the meetings with. Or you may choose to add the 30-SS to the agenda so that team members are prepared to contribute. This is particularly important if you have shy, introverted team members who don't like surprise questions.
- Important: Do not do 30-SS every time as it will become tiresome and repetitive.
  - What's made you laugh today?
  - Best things you've watched/read recently?
  - How is it where you are today (weather, news, events, special activities etc)?
  - What have you been working on today?
  - How was your evening?
  - What interesting things has happened since we were all last on a call together?

## BENEFITS

- This tactic maintains or builds team cohesion. It's important for both the leader and team members - or members of other teams invited to be on the meeting - to get a more rounded picture of who team mates are.
- The questions are more about the person and their current situation. There's a clear message that you're interested in them beyond simply the task being discussed.
- The answers help team leaders see how team members are mentally and workload wise - there may be reason to follow up with a 121 call to any individual who's sounding negative, down or stressed.

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**HOT TIP** The 'social' doesn't mean it's not work related - it's really an advanced way of checking in to see how your team members are.

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**ALSO SEE** #14: *Make Social A Team Challenge* #11: *Spontaneous Connections*

# TACTIC 10

## COLLABORATIVE WORKING

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### THE CHALLENGE

The virtual office reduces visibility into what people are working on and who they are working with. It can unbalance relationships and workloads, and impact on team and inter-team cohesion.

### THE ANSWER

Collaborative Working is a tactic that gives team members the tools to work together, regardless of WFH or distance.

### CAPABILITY

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FOCUS & PERFORMANCE	✓
CONNECTED LEADERSHIP	✓
DEVELOPING VIRTUAL TEAMS	✓
VIRTUAL TEAM CARE	
HIGH PERFORMANCE VIRTUAL COMMUNICATION	✓



## WHAT TO DO

- Map the activities individual team members are working on, and who they are working with. Where do team members rely on the work of others, and is that being managed effectively?
- Look for gaps, where particular team members are not interacting with others in their cohort and it would be beneficial for them to do so.
- Consider projects or work streams where they could work collaboratively.
- Assign responsibilities to encourage collaboration and collective effort.
- Team members to operate autonomously - within agreed limits - on some tasks and projects.
- Consider inter-team collaboration, and the impact of virtual working has had on the way in which teams work together? Do new arrangements need to be developed?

## BENEFITS

- Every team member works with every other at some stage each week or month. Everyone understands who depends on their work and why.
- Builds confidence, capability and sense of growth and trust.
- By undertaking a regular check, you can ensure workloads are distributed evenly.

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**ALSO SEE** #8: *Team 121s* #33: *Cross team Catch-Ups* #34: *Leader Loops*

# TACTIC 11

## SPONTANEOUS CONNECTIONS

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### THE CHALLENGE

In a virtual workplace, the spontaneous in-office connections – the famous ‘water cooler’ conversations – can be lost. These incidental connections are important sources of information.

### THE ANSWER

Smart virtual leaders need to re-create what once happened naturally in a more deliberate way. The new Spontaneous Connections are calls, emails, chats, texts to your individual team members that are entirely unexpected – that are short, sharp and fun.

### CAPABILITY

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FOCUS & PERFORMANCE	
CONNECTED LEADERSHIP	✓
DEVELOPING VIRTUAL TEAMS	
VIRTUAL TEAM CARE	✓
HIGH PERFORMANCE VIRTUAL COMMUNICATION	✓



## WHAT TO DO

- While these Connections are carefully planned, as a vital communication stream, they must appear spontaneous. But never miss a birthday!
- Make a list of your team members and keep a tally of any real catch ups you have with them each week.
- Spontaneously Connect with everyone evenly - and not be seen to play favourites.
- Keep a note of what you chatted about so you can caringly follow up and not repeat questions. The aim is to leave your team member feeling positive.
- Mix up your means of communication to keep the natural feel of the catch ups. Make a call for 3 minutes to someone in between meetings. Send a private chat asking how they are.
- Questions might be:
  - How's things? Anything exciting going on?
  - How did that meeting go? Piece or work got?
  - How are the kids/pets?

## BENEFITS

- Because there is no agenda, and the conversation is really open, there's a more natural, honest information flow.
- People like knowing you are thinking about them.
- People like their day being broken up by unexpected short chats.
- It's a *relationship* connection not a *task* connection.

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**ALSO SEE** #2: *The Right Meeting Mix* #22: *Learn to See Through Screens*

## TACTIC 12

# THE AUTONOMY CONVERSATION

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## THE CHALLENGE

The data shows that introverts are loving virtual working. They're reporting less anxiety and higher productivity. The problem is that they may be using the new workplace to withdraw from team interaction. This negatively impacts on team cohesion, collaboration and performance.

## THE ANSWER

Autonomy Conversations remind all parties about levels of independence, decision rights and levels of initiative settings. Importantly they also set expected levels of team interaction and reporting.

## CAPABILITY

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FOCUS & PERFORMANCE	✓
CONNECTED LEADERSHIP	✓
DEVELOPING VIRTUAL TEAMS	
VIRTUAL TEAM CARE	
HIGH PERFORMANCE VIRTUAL COMMUNICATION	✓



## WHAT TO DO

- The Autonomy Conversation sets the rules.
- Important: Of all team members, those who love their autonomy are most sensitive to, and are easily discouraged by, what they perceive as micro-management. You may feel you are checking in out of care. They see it as a lack of trust.
- Issues to be discussed might include:
  - Why autonomy is countenanced, but also why maintaining team connection is important.
  - Which team catch-ups can be missed, and which are mandatory to attend.
  - Decisions team members can make without reference to you as the leader, which need to be communicated, which ones you want to be consulted on, and which decisions are only yours to make.
  - Implications for team members who step outside these agreed guidelines – and how you'll reduce the amount of autonomy they're currently enjoying.
- These employees might benefit most from mandated Team 121s (*see #8*) with key colleagues.

## BENEFITS

- Time spent agreeing Autonomy will save you much time and trouble downstream.
- Everyone has team members who love virtually working and can be extraordinarily productive. They appear low maintenance, and a joy to have on our teams in these new working circumstances. But too much autonomy and these team members begin to disappear from the team. Collaboration and communication suffer, and before long you have stresses and strains between team members you don't want. Ensuring the rules are clear means there's no need to micro-manage.
- There's clarity as to what will happen to those who don't comply.

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**ALSO SEE** #4: *The Prioritisation Conversation* #1: *The Purpose Conversation*

# TACTIC 13

## VIRTUAL COFFEE RUNS

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### THE CHALLENGE

Popping out to pick up a coffee with a colleague has become a social ritual. Virtual working means this informal but important connection is lost. Or is it?

### THE ANSWER

As a creative leader you'll maintain team and inter-team connections with Virtual Coffee Runs that are both fun and effective. But like most incidental connections, in the virtual world these can't be left to chance.

### CAPABILITY

---

FOCUS & PERFORMANCE	
CONNECTED LEADERSHIP	✓
DEVELOPING VIRTUAL TEAMS	
VIRTUAL TEAM CARE	✓
HIGH PERFORMANCE VIRTUAL COMMUNICATION	





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## WHAT TO DO

- You provide the encouragement and permission for VCRs.
- Team members need to be reminded to catch up in some way. You may need to help them plan for these in the initial weeks until the new routines are embedded.
- You can lead the way by demonstrating your own ‘go for a quick coffee’ efforts with individuals on your team – or your stories of VCRs with those up the line from you. Once the pattern is established, more team members will engage in bi-lateral connections.

## BENEFITS

- By encouraging these virtual get togethers, smart leaders promote bi-lateral communication between their team members.
- You’ll have them up, out of their chairs and to the nearby coffee shop, or at least enjoying a few minutes outside.
- These 10 minutes of relaxation matter.
- Whether the discussions are personal or about work, they do so much for your team members’ wellbeing.

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**ALSO SEE** [#25: Walking Meetings](#) [#14: Making Social a Team Responsibility](#)

## TACTIC 14

# MAKE SOCIAL A TEAM CHALLENGE

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## THE CHALLENGE

One of the most difficult aspects of team life to replicate in a virtual workplace is the valuable social interaction. The leadership challenge is made harder by the reality that some team members are relieved by the reduced social activity.

## THE ANSWER

By making social activity a team challenge and responsibility, your people will have events that bring them together, rather than what you think they might like.

## CAPABILITY

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FOCUS & PERFORMANCE	
CONNECTED LEADERSHIP	✓
DEVELOPING VIRTUAL TEAMS	
VIRTUAL TEAM CARE	✓
HIGH PERFORMANCE VIRTUAL COMMUNICATION	✓



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## WHAT TO DO

- Before you raise the subject with your team, establish what budget might be available and what organisational rules must be followed so you can guide planning.
- Agree with the team that social should happen regularly, and it's up to the team to organise.
- From our research, we know teams can be very creative and inclusive in the activities they devise.
- Where any team members aren't participating, check-in with them individually.
- Always be part of the fun yourself.

## BENEFITS

- Our research shows that the creativity required to organise social events in a virtual environment is one of the benefits of the new workplace – the old standard of going out for a drink is being replaced by a wider variety and more inclusive schedule of activities.
- Being able to relax together builds understanding that flows on to a more positive and collaborative work scene.

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**HOT TIP** In planning events, the team needs to take into account the different home environments people have and what constraints that may bring.

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**ALSO SEE** #9: 30 Second Socials #21: Share the responsibility For Meetings



# DEVELOPING VIRTUAL TEAM TACTICS

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How do you ensure your team feel recognised and developed so they don't fall prey to anxiety or stress?

<b>TACTIC 15</b> FEEDBACK FEVER .....	46
<b>TACTIC 16</b> VIRTUAL COACHING .....	48
<b>TACTIC 17</b> PERSONAL GROWTH PLANS .....	50
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<b>TACTIC 21</b> SHARE RESPONSIBILITIES FOR MEETINGS .....	58

# TACTIC 15

## FEEDBACK FEVER

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### THE CHALLENGE

For virtual workers, when submitting work, they're operating in a feedback free zone – they can't see the reaction of stakeholders or from you as their leader.

### THE ANSWER

Feedback Fever is a tactic which reminds you as a leader that however much feedback you were giving your team members before – and typically not enough! – you need to double it in the virtual workplace. Timely, positive reactions and constructive criticisms are need as work is delivered.

### CAPABILITY

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FOCUS & PERFORMANCE	✓
CONNECTED LEADERSHIP	
DEVELOPING VIRTUAL TEAMS	
VIRTUAL TEAM CARE	✓
HIGH PERFORMANCE VIRTUAL COMMUNICATION	✓



## WHAT TO DO

- Always supply genuine, appropriate, immediate feedback. Try to do so every day.
- The easiest feedback to give is positive feedback - but remember to be specific about why the work was great.
- The hardest feedback is constructive criticism. There's a temptation to put this off until you're face-to-face. But in the virtual world that's a difficulty and delay only prolongs the agony.
- Have your team members do the heavy lifting following any constructive criticism. They are to document the feedback, capture what they will be doing differently in the future, and send it to you. They need to own that feedback and the response.
- Choosing which technique to use for feedback is important – for constructive feedback, a video conference will allow you to see the reaction of your team member and help manage the conversation.

## BENEFITS

- Everyone needs feedback. Even very short, positive responses work wonders – give them something upbeat to report to partners or flatmates.
- Constructive criticism is key to your team members advancing their skills, performance and careers. Any time you put it off, you're letting them down. Every time you help make positive changes, you're moving them towards their personal and professional objectives. And it will give you a kick too!
- Having them capture the feedback and actions helps them embed the advice and commit to it. And it helps you see whether they have fully understood your issues.

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**HOT TIP** The smart leaders we work with keep a journal of feedback, so nothing is forgotten and details can be used in 121 follow ups with team members.

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**ALSO SEE** #16: *V-Coaching* #17: *Personal Growth Plans*

# TACTIC 16

## VIRTUAL COACHING

---

### THE CHALLENGE

There is a danger in virtual working that the priority for learning and professional growth is dropped.

### THE ANSWER

Virtual Coaching commits smart leaders to building capability in others by helping them think through their work, options and tactics – and to come up with the answer themselves.

### CAPABILITY

---

FOCUS & PERFORMANCE	✓
CONNECTED LEADERSHIP	
DEVELOPING VIRTUAL TEAMS	✓
VIRTUAL TEAM CARE	
HIGH PERFORMANCE VIRTUAL COMMUNICATION	





## WHAT TO DO

- Virtual -coaching is not limited to 30- or 60-minute formal sit downs. It's any form of opportunity that builds team member's skills and knowledge, and helps them learn from their experiences.
- Virtual coaching requires you, as an effective leader, to be ready at any moment to ask team members:
  - What they learned from a particular task, call or project meeting
  - To reflect aloud how, having completed a task, they might improve on it next time
  - To reflect on a mistake, what went wrong and why - and how to avoid that situation in the future
  - To explain their selection of a solution to a problem - what other options did they consider?
- Virtual coaching helps build independence not dependence across your team. The more you assist your team members to reflect and consider better solutions, the more competent they become. Virtual coaching is about taking time to save time.

## BENEFITS

- Virtual coaching is an easy to deploy tactic and effective way to ensure team members are continuing to developing their skills and knowledge in the virtual workplace.
- Most team members are keen to learn new skills that build their confidence and create a sense of moving forward.
- By committing to continuous learning, leaders are making a strong statement to each team member - that their aspirations, their careers are important and progressing.
- Team members who are growing are more satisfied and you reduce staff churn.

**ALSO SEE** #20: *Virtual Mentoring* #17: *Personal Growth Plans*

## TACTIC 17

# PERSONAL GROWTH PLANS

---

## THE CHALLENGE

Many virtual leaders wait until they are co-located with their team members, or budget is available to bring everyone together, to undertake professional development. But commitment to PD is more important than ever in the evolving virtual workplace.

## THE ANSWER

By helping your team members shape and execute Personal Growth Plans, you're providing concrete support for your people through unpredictable times, changing role responsibilities, and structuring a commitment to continuous learning.

## CAPABILITY

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FOCUS & PERFORMANCE	✓
CONNECTED LEADERSHIP	
DEVELOPING VIRTUAL TEAMS	✓
VIRTUAL TEAM CARE	✓
HIGH PERFORMANCE VIRTUAL COMMUNICATION	



## WHAT TO DO

- The best leaders commit all team members to Personal Growth Plans (PGPs) - and to deliver on them.
- These PGPs are live documents:
  - To ensure team members are constantly improving their knowledge and extending their experiences
  - They are referred to regularly at 121 check-ins
  - Keep an eye on when a team member's PGP may need to be completely re-drawn because of changed circumstances and make the time to assist them.
- Seek opportunities to help team members build their skills and value – what opportunities does this new environment offer to keep your team members learning?
- Model the right behaviour – you must have a PGP and refer to it with your team – this needs to be authentic and transparent as you share what's been difficult and where you've made wins.
- Focus your team members on continuing to build their skills and value to the organisation or market place.

## BENEFITS

- We're seeing that virtual working offers opportunities to accelerate learning, not just keep up.
- The team members who learn most quickly, and who are most committed to learning, are often your most valuable colleagues.
- Focusing on the continued learning of your team ensures they don't feel their careers have stalled, and avoids them beginning to think about new opportunities.

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**ALSO SEE** #5: *Mandates and Priorities* #16: *Virtual Coaching* #20: *Virtual Mentoring*

# TACTIC 18

## SHARE THE LOAD

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### THE CHALLENGE

How evenly is work and project leadership shared across your team? Is there any difference in access to opportunities for those WFH or in a different time zone? Are those more closely co-located to you being given carriage of key work streams?

### THE ANSWER

Load Sharing removes the polarity of your team. Team members should be considered on their capabilities, not where they are located or how and when they are working. Opportunities and responsibilities need to be shared fairly.

### CAPABILITY

---

FOCUS & PERFORMANCE	
CONNECTED LEADERSHIP	✓
DEVELOPING VIRTUAL TEAMS	✓
VIRTUAL TEAM CARE	
HIGH PERFORMANCE VIRTUAL COMMUNICATION	



## WHAT TO DO

- Workload is one of the most difficult things to manage with a virtual team:
  - The usual signs of overload and stress aren't immediately visible
  - It's harder to see those wanting to contribute more
  - Is someone being overlooked because they're time zone is three hours behind and it might cause problems?
- If you're concerned about the capability of some team members to run initiatives, then use shadowing ([see #19](#)) as a first step to getting this team dynamic working.
- Questions to ask yourself:
  - Does everyone have equal opportunity to be on, or lead, team initiatives?
  - Am I unfairly favouring some team members over others, and if I am, why am I doing so?
  - What opportunities are there for different combinations of team members to work together?
  - What initiatives provide ideal personal growth opportunities for my team members?

## BENEFITS

- You maintain a more cohesive team – those working remotely feel as included and important as those nearer the leader.
- From our research conducted on virtual teams, the most common complaint from 'separates' was that they regularly missed out on being involved in interesting projects because they were out of sight and out of mind. While the 'proximates' felt they got burdened with all the initiatives, and the separates got away with working under less pressure. Sharing the load resolves both of these problems.

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**ALSO SEE** [#28: Stakeholder Mapping](#) [#4: The Prioritisation Conversion](#)

# TACTIC 19

## SHADOWING

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### THE CHALLENGE

Building team member capability can seem harder with virtual colleagues, as opposed to those in a physical working environment. Many team leaders delay development activities until ‘things return to normal’. This negatively impacts the team members’ motivation, career progression and connection to your leadership.

### THE ANSWER

Shadowing is a technique that allows smart leaders to build capability by having team members join activities others are undertaking.

### CAPABILITY

---

FOCUS & PERFORMANCE	
CONNECTED LEADERSHIP	
DEVELOPING VIRTUAL TEAMS	✓
VIRTUAL TEAM CARE	✓
HIGH PERFORMANCE VIRTUAL COMMUNICATION	



## WHAT TO DO

- Be clear about what skills, experiences and knowledge you need – and your team member wants – to develop.
- Look for activities you or other experienced team members are carrying out – that would fulfil the learning requirements.
- Agree with all parties the rules of shadowing – see “*KEY CONCEPTS THE RULES of SHADOWING*”.
- Shadowing has to have a deliberate result. It’s about guiding and learning – the team member must be:
  - Held accountable for documenting what they’ve learned
  - Understand that they will be expected and trusted to undertake the task in the near future.

## BENEFITS

- Shadowing builds strong connections as team members learn from one another which.
- Team members who are able to operate autonomously within agreed limits and projects, enjoy confidence, capability and a sense of growth.
- Individuals who are always learning, tend to stay as valuable members of the team

**ALSO SEE** #20: *Virtual Mentoring* #17: *Personal Growth Plans*

# TACTIC 20

## VIRTUAL MENTORING

---

### THE CHALLENGE

Organisations are struggling to find connections between teams and departments during virtual working. Crucial across-organisation collaboration and information flows are reduced.

### THE ANSWER

Virtual Mentoring leverages video conferencing to build powerful, broad connections and individual professional growth.

### CAPABILITY

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FOCUS & PERFORMANCE	
CONNECTED LEADERSHIP	✓
DEVELOPING VIRTUAL TEAMS	✓
VIRTUAL TEAM CARE	✓
HIGH PERFORMANCE VIRTUAL COMMUNICATION	





## WHAT TO DO

- At a time when it's so important for leaders to ensure career and professional development continues for all team members, virtual mentoring is very appealing and a great option.
- Identify team members who would benefit from additional development.
- Identify parts of the organisation that your whole team would benefit from knowing more about, and vice versa.
- Explore with Organisational Development / HR whether systems are in place for formal mentoring engagements, or whether to proceed by suggesting informal arrangements. If you are sufficiently senior you might wish to offer your time to mentor.

## BENEFITS

- Mentoring brings different parts of the organisation together, increasing senior executives' exposure to the wonderful talent further down the structure, and accelerates the development of that young talent.
- Virtual Mentoring is easier - you're able to better match the mentor to the talent because there are no limitations created by location and sessions take less time because there's no travel.

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**ALSO SEE** [#5: Mandates and Priorities](#) [#33: Cross Team Catch-Ups](#)

## TACTIC 21

# SHARE RESPONSIBILITIES FOR MEETINGS

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## THE CHALLENGE

A multitude of virtual meetings are being called to not only replace normal physical sessions but all the incidental, worklife social contact. This adds pressure on you as a leader if you have to organise and run them all.

## THE ANSWER

Responsibility Sharing for team meetings reduces stress on you, and builds skills and responsibility across the team.

## CAPABILITY

---

FOCUS & PERFORMANCE	✓
CONNECTED LEADERSHIP	
DEVELOPING VIRTUAL TEAMS	✓
VIRTUAL TEAM CARE	
HIGH PERFORMANCE VIRTUAL COMMUNICATION	✓



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## WHAT TO DO

- Make a policy to share responsibility for organising, chairing and reporting on meetings.
- Start by rotating the chair of easy to run huddles, and transfer responsibilities from there.
- Distance and character are not inhibitors. Share responsibilities evenly, including the most introverted, through to those in the toughest time zone.
- Do you need to be at every meeting? Well run meetings with appropriate reporting should allow you to leave your team to it.

## BENEFITS

- With someone else running a meeting, you're free to really listen and carefully observe your team.
- Sharing responsibilities builds skillsets and helps team members understand how to interact in meetings more efficiently, saving time and improving relationships.
- It builds collective responsibility and a sharing culture on the team
- Everyone has the chance to be in charge and see things from a different perspective.

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**HOT TIP** Successful, efficient meetings are about great facilitation. Run a session for the whole team on setting agendas, chairing techniques and meeting reporting. These are skills every team member can use across their careers.

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**ALSO SEE** [#32: Virtual team Management](#) [#10: Collaborative Working](#)



# VIRTUAL TEAM CARE TACTICS

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How do you stay alert to danger signs around team wellbeing?

<b>TACTIC 22</b> LEARN TO SEE THROUGH SCREENS .....	62
<b>TACTIC 23</b> ENABLE FLEXIBLE WORK HOURS .....	64
<b>TACTIC 24</b> CREATE LIMITS ON WORK HOURS .....	66
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<b>TACTIC 27</b> POST CALL CHECK-INS .....	72

## TACTIC 22

# LEARN TO SEE THROUGH SCREENS

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## THE CHALLENGE

Many of the usual signs and symbols leaders depend on to understand the workload, mood and effectiveness of team members are not available in a virtual workspace. It's more difficult to monitor effort, hours, concentration or general happiness.

## THE ANSWER

By learning to see through screens leaders can understand how individual team members are coping with their virtual working, through the lenses of productivity and wellbeing.

## CAPABILITY

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FOCUS & PERFORMANCE	✓
CONNECTED LEADERSHIP	
DEVELOPING VIRTUAL TEAMS	
VIRTUAL TEAM CARE	✓
HIGH PERFORMANCE VIRTUAL COMMUNICATION	



## WHAT TO DO

- With elevated observation skills when on video conference calls, look carefully at the attitude and demeanour of your individual team members. Are they connecting and energetic, or quiet and distracted?
- While involving all team members equally in calls, take special note of those who are quiet or appear uninterested.
- Use individual check-ins to ask direct questions about wellbeing.
- Rather than just asking whether your team members are OK, ask more deeply about:
  - What aspects of working virtually they are finding enjoyable, and which they're struggling with
  - Their level of connection with other team members – are they staying in touch?
  - How they are managing the work/life balance.

## BENEFITS

- The research data suggests that while three quarters of office workers are enjoying working some of the time virtually, one quarter of employees are struggling. Statistically, in a team of eight, two are likely to be in this category. If everyone else is upbeat, those struggling are unlikely to speak up.
- Your heightened awareness and care will build team connections and trust – as well as helping restore positive energy to those who are struggling.

**ALSO SEE** #27: *Post Call Check-ins* #3: *Regular 121s*

## TACTIC 23

# ENABLE FLEXIBLE WORK HOURS

---

## THE CHALLENGE

The virtual workplace is creating workplace and personal stress for many team members. Juggling the work/life balance is particularly under pressure.

## THE ANSWER

For team members operating from home, the introduction of more flexible work arrangements can be very motivating.

## CAPABILITY

---

FOCUS & PERFORMANCE	✓
CONNECTED LEADERSHIP	✓
DEVELOPING VIRTUAL TEAMS	
VIRTUAL TEAM CARE	✓
HIGH PERFORMANCE VIRTUAL COMMUNICATION	





## WHAT TO DO

- During this intense virtual working period much is being asked of team members - to be flexible and adapt to the new working arrangements. It's only fair that leaders – and organisations – similarly adapt their thinking and rules.
- Maintaining team productivity and wellbeing during this period requires partnership. Flexibility about hours is a key component of this two-way street.
- Be very explicit about working arrangements and flexible hours. Everything should be done by agreement, with clear understanding on both sides.
- This doesn't mean team members need to ask permission every time they vary their hours. It means there is an understanding that during working hours, at times, they will do home duties, and during home hours they will occasionally do paid work.
- Arrangements could be:
  - We need you to be available at specific times of the day - for meetings and workflow - but when you work, the rest of your hours is up to you, as long as you maintain a sensible daily average.
  - We agree that you can take mid-afternoons off to pick up children and spend quality time, and then return to work later that day.
  - We will arrange work based on deadlines for work completion, and as long as that work

is completed on time, when you do the hours is up to you.

- We have regular catch-ups with the team, and these will be organised to suit the whole team not just when convenient for the leader.

## BENEFITS

- By explicitly enabling flexible work hours, you're helping team members with their work and home life.
- Your flexibility will support your team members and their productivity by acknowledging complications such as:
  - Both partners, and potentially others, working from home
  - Childcare arrangements
  - The wide variation in home circumstances with the working environment being spacious or very limited, and with or without high speed, reliable internet.

---

**HOT TIP** Treat your team members like the adults they are. Start with trust. The data in recent surveys suggests the vast majority of team members have behaved brilliantly during forced virtual work – doing more hours not less than expected of them.

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**ALSO SEE** #23: *Create Limits on Work Hours* #12: *The Autonomy Conversation*

## TACTIC 24

# CREATE LIMITS ON WORK HOURS

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## THE CHALLENGE

With many team members working from home, the distinction between work and home life is blurring. Home life can be interrupted by work and vice versa.

## THE ANSWER

Work Hour Limits are an important aspect of team member wellbeing.

## CAPABILITY

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FOCUS & PERFORMANCE	✓
CONNECTED LEADERSHIP	
DEVELOPING VIRTUAL TEAMS	
VIRTUAL TEAM CARE	✓
HIGH PERFORMANCE VIRTUAL COMMUNICATION	✓



## WHAT TO DO

- Consideration of hours worked is an excellent demonstration of your duty of care as a team leader.
- Be explicit about the hours team members are expected to work – and very clear they are not expected to work longer than this.
- Give your team members the explicit permission to call it out if they feel their workload is overpowering them.
- Check in regularly with team members about how many hours they are actually working.
- Use time in lieu where employees have worked over and above required hours – these extra half days here and there are hugely motivational for team members.
- Manage your own behaviour so you are not sending the wrong signals:
  - Use delay delivery on emails you complete during the evening so they arrive in work hours
  - Consider when you call and text your team members – are they collecting children, is it their scheduled afternoon off?
  - Clearly communicate when you expect a response to emails, calls and texts.

## BENEFITS

- Burn-out is an increasing problem for those forced to work virtually, particularly from home with its many competing responsibilities. Flexibility in hours is good for your team members and the organisation.
- It's a myth that hours worked equates to productivity. By ensuring your people complete their tasks within agreed times you'll overcome the late night, sub-standard activity that needs to be re-worked and demoralises team members.

---

**ALSO SEE** [#23: Enable Flexible Work Hours](#) [#4: The Prioritisation Conversation](#)

## TACTIC 25

# WALKING MEETINGS

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## THE CHALLENGE

The very activity of 'going to work' gets workers away from their computer screens, physically moving and exercising. Even operating from an office means doing regular walking during the day. This healthy activity is lost when working virtually from home.

## THE ANSWER

Walking Meetings, while not a new idea, is a great way to combine physical exercise and important communication.

## CAPABILITY

---

FOCUS & PERFORMANCE	✓
CONNECTED LEADERSHIP	✓
DEVELOPING VIRTUAL TEAMS	
VIRTUAL TEAM CARE	✓
HIGH PERFORMANCE VIRTUAL COMMUNICATION	



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## WHAT TO DO

- Not every contact needs to be a video-conference. Mix it up with phone calls to break the day. And turn these conversations into a walk around the block which achieves two things at once – communication and exercise.
- Choose meetings that are 121s – it's much easier from a communication point of view.
- Arrange times that work for your team members – these might well vary. Team members may be able to talk to you and walk the dog. Be careful you don't impose yourself on their private relaxation time.
- Encourage team members to have contact between themselves this way too.
- Alert your people to be aware of discussions with confidential or personal content when speaking outdoors.

## BENEFITS

- Anything that gets team members out of a small room locked to a computer is a good thing, and walking meetings provide multiple benefits.
- Team members who are looking after their health reduce sick and stress leave.
- Introducing the Walking Meetings concept is showing proper duty of care to your team members.
- Talking with them on their health regimes is another topic for planned and spontaneous social contact.

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**ALSO SEE** #11: *Spontaneous Connections* #26: *Meetings Without Agendas*

## TACTIC 26

# MEETINGS WITHOUT AGENDAS

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## THE CHALLENGE

When operating virtually, teams can lose opportunities for incidental interactions. These water cooler chats informally reveal information crucial to personal connections and work problem solving – information that doesn't arise during agenda-driven meetings.

## THE ANSWER

Meetings Without Agendas allow either team members, or team members and their leader, to have free ranging conversations. While planned, rather than spontaneous, MWAs can replicate incidental connections and are essential in a virtual world.

## CAPABILITY

---

FOCUS & PERFORMANCE	
CONNECTED LEADERSHIP	✓
DEVELOPING VIRTUAL TEAMS	
VIRTUAL TEAM CARE	✓
HIGH PERFORMANCE VIRTUAL COMMUNICATION	✓



## WHAT TO DO

- Embed MWAs - for informal catch-ups and news sharing - as part of the operating rhythm of your team.
- Explain their value to your team – it's an essential use of time to maintain connections and morale:
  - It's important to schedule MWAs evenly across your team.
  - 15 minutes is all that's needed. Give your MWAs a name – something relaxed rather than operational.
  - You may need to work more deliberately to convince the introverts on your team to open up.
  - Incidental catch-ups are particularly helpful across teams. Research shows connections between individuals from different teams are being lost. MWAs can help break down any silos being created in the virtual workplace.
  - MWAs are vital when introducing new members of the team.

## BENEFITS

- Incidental information flow is important – it often keeps one part of the team up to date on what another part of the team is doing – particularly if they are working on different project streams.
- Social interaction between members is what makes the team. But many are frustrated by meeting time being taken up with chat. These deliberately informal catch-ups are the appropriate time and place to talk about movies and the new puppy.

---

**ALSO SEE** #2: *The Right Meeting Mix* #25: *Walking Meetings*

# TACTIC 27

## POST CALL CHECK-INS

---

### THE CHALLENGE

In real world meetings it isn't always possible to know how someone is reacting to the outcome of a particular decision – or it's inappropriate to talk at that time. But issues can be covered in the walk down the corridor or immediately afterwards in your office. Video conferences make the reading of body language difficult, and team member unhappiness may be invisible to you.

### THE ANSWER

Post Call Check-ins help clear any disagreement about decisions or outcomes, and be acted upon.

### CAPABILITY

---

FOCUS & PERFORMANCE	✓
CONNECTED LEADERSHIP	✓
DEVELOPING VIRTUAL TEAMS	
VIRTUAL TEAM CARE	✓
HIGH PERFORMANCE VIRTUAL COMMUNICATION	✓





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## WHAT TO DO

- Effective leaders look to all avenues to ensure everyone is heard in the decision-making processes - and that all concerns are aired in an open and timely way. Without real world connections and access to body language, virtually operating teams require even greater vigilance.
- If you suspect a team member or stakeholder is not fully committed to a decision - or you didn't hear them say so - then a post call check-in is a sensible idea. This is particularly important if that person is to make a vital contribution to the execution of a plan.
- Introverted or more junior team members may have very plausible objections that they only feel comfortable expressing 121. As an effective leader you'll open the way for them to be properly heard during decision making.

## BENEFITS

- The post meeting 121 call gives team members - or stakeholders - the opportunity to calm your fears or raise misgivings.
- Leaders of effective virtual teams encourage challenges to any decision or policy their team members aren't comfortable with. The benefits of such an open, transparent process are huge - its means energy isn't wasted, errors are reduced, and you aren't dealing with disgruntled team members. And you have the full commitment of the team to the new direction.

---

**HOT TIP** Teams that deliberately ask the question “what could go wrong with this path?” provide a safe space to draw out objections, make better decisions and deliver better risk management as a consequence.

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**ALSO SEE** #2: *The Right Meeting Mix* #11: *Spontaneous Connections*



# HIGH PERFORMANCE VIRTUAL COMMUNICATION TACTICS

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What does it mean for you to be a high-performance virtual communicator?

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# TACTIC 28

## STAKEHOLDER MAPPING

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### THE CHALLENGE

In a crisis, longer term priorities are parked – focus is on immediate survival. Now, as the ‘new normal’ emerges, time and energy needs to be used more strategically.

### THE ANSWER

Stakeholder Mapping is an advanced leadership tool that enables you, as a smart leader, to spend the right amount of time, with the right stakeholders, for the right reasons.

### CAPABILITY

---

FOCUS & PERFORMANCE	✓
CONNECTED LEADERSHIP	✓
DEVELOPING VIRTUAL TEAMS	
VIRTUAL TEAM CARE	✓
HIGH PERFORMANCE VIRTUAL COMMUNICATION	✓



## WHAT TO DO

- Read up on how to build stakeholder maps and use them as a planning tool to identify critical priorities. The resources on the HFL website are at [expertunity.global](https://www.expertunity.global)
- Take a broad view of your stakeholder map – beyond your team members and immediate manager, think about all of those you used to interact with before virtual working arrived.

---

**HOT TIP** A valuable stakeholder map will capture between 60 and 100 colleagues.

---

- Priorities will almost certainly have changed during the move to virtual working and new economic environment – plan how to reconnect with and energise relationships with the right people.
- Work proactively with your own manager to shape new priorities and Key Performance Indicators – and then cascade these to your team members as appropriate.
- Assess your ‘ups’ and ‘downs’. Questions might be:
  - Who did you used to connect with and how frequently are you doing so now? Is that OK, or does it need adjusting?
  - Are there completely new stakeholders who are now important to you and your team – what investment in time and connection do you need to make?

## BENEFITS

- Surveys are showing that during virtual working connection with:
  - Immediate teams and managers has risen
  - Other teams and removed stakeholders has significantly decreased which is not sustainable long term.
- Mapping ensures you identify all stakeholders and apply appropriate levels of contact.
- The crisis has led to large changes in organisational workforces – colleagues have left or been reassigned. Again, a reassessment of your stakeholder map will set you up for current and future needs.
- While there are new constraints to work with, there are now also new possibilities. The smartest leaders and teams will explore and leverage these to their advantage.

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**ALSO SEE** #3: *Cross team Catch-Ups* #30: *Leverage the Diamond*

## TACTIC 29

# TRIPLE CHANNEL COMMS

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## THE CHALLENGE

Under virtual work arrangements - without the clues from co-working - leaders need to operate more deliberately to see whether team members understand decisions and allocated tasks.

## THE ANSWER

Triple Channel Communications provide the mix of contact to ensure no information or instructions slip through a crack.

## CAPABILITY

---

FOCUS & PERFORMANCE	✓
CONNECTED LEADERSHIP	✓
DEVELOPING VIRTUAL TEAMS	
VIRTUAL TEAM CARE	
HIGH PERFORMANCE VIRTUAL COMMUNICATION	✓



## WHAT TO DO

- When planning presentations, experts suggest you tell them what you are going to tell them, tell them, and then tell them what you just told them. This remains great advice. The idea, in a virtual world, is to use multiple channels and tactics to ensure everyone is clear on what has been communicated.
- Smart leaders deploy:
  - Delivering the communication verbally, AND
  - Sending a following email confirming the details and asking if there are any questions, AND
  - Texting shy or quiet team members asking for feedback and questions, AND
  - ...in special circumstances, asking team members with key responsibilities to feedback via email what they understand their role and responsibilities are - so you know they have the whole story.
- Clearly, you wouldn't go to this much trouble in every case, but the concept of double checking in a virtual environment is important for major activities and tasks, or smaller tasks that are mission critical or have other activities depending on them.
- Time poor leaders should delegate some or most of this communicating to trusted team members.

## BENEFITS

- As most leaders are all too painfully aware, no matter how carefully you communicate, things can be misread – or missed. The virtual workplace makes this even more likely. TCCs – as time consuming as sometimes they can be – ensure understanding is correct at the outset.
- Save time and energy fixing misunderstandings or coping with missed deadlines.

---

**ALSO SEE** #15: *Feedback Fever* #5: *Mandates and Priorities*

# TACTIC 30

## LEVERAGE THE DIAMOND

---

### THE CHALLENGE

Working across a matrix organisation is hard enough when face-to-face meetings are available to you. It's even tougher when teams are working virtually. Leaders need to explore new tactics to build collaborative connection.

### THE ANSWER

Leveraging diamond shaped communication is one of the most empowering tactics for building cross-team connection. Bow-tie communication is leader-to-leader. Diamond Communication is team member-to-team member on different teams.

### CAPABILITY

---

FOCUS & PERFORMANCE	
CONNECTED LEADERSHIP	✓
DEVELOPING VIRTUAL TEAMS	
VIRTUAL TEAM CARE	✓
HIGH PERFORMANCE VIRTUAL COMMUNICATION	✓





## WHAT TO DO

---

**HOT TIP** You don't have to do all the communication yourself. Better by far is to entrust your own team members to build communication channels and productive engagement with other teams.

---

- Spread communication responsibility, while monitoring that it is happening. Ask team members to report on conversations with the teams they have been allocated.
- Help those allocated with the responsibility to understand the purpose of the cross-team communication and how both teams should benefit.
- Practice the sorts of questions and interactions you want your team members to have with members of other teams.
- What specific information does each team need to collaborate effectively?
  - What are your team's priority tasks and how might our team help you achieve them?
  - Where is your team under most pressure, and how does what we do with your team impact that?
  - Here are our most important priorities – how can your team help us achieve them?
  - What communication or collaboration barriers are getting in the way of our teams working brilliantly together?

## BENEFITS

- Many surveys are showing cross-team connection is the aspect of communication that has suffered most with the move to virtual working arrangements. Teams are focused inward but the balance can be restored with Diamond Communication.
- By sharing the responsibility for inter-team connection, leaders build confidence and capability.
- The Diamond approach of team-to-team is a far more effective way of working in a matrix organisation than the old school bow-tie approach where only the leaders of teams communicate with each other.

---

**ALSO SEE** #33: *Cross-Team Check-Ups* #10: *Collaborative Working*

## TACTIC 31

# DISPUTE RESOLUTION PROTOCOLS

---

## THE CHALLENGE

Virtual working arrangements make resolving disputes more difficult – pressures on your team are new and different, and you aren't able to bring them together, face-to-face in the same room, to sort things out. Plus, disputes are less visible – as a leader, you aren't seeing them play out in the office.

## THE ANSWER

Dispute Resolution Protocols help teams fix issues efficiently and effectively.

## CAPABILITY

---

FOCUS & PERFORMANCE	✓
CONNECTED LEADERSHIP	✓
DEVELOPING VIRTUAL TEAMS	✓
VIRTUAL TEAM CARE	✓
HIGH PERFORMANCE VIRTUAL COMMUNICATION	✓



## WHAT TO DO

- The most important thing a leader can do to build a positive culture around resolving disputes is to bring the team into its creation. This should happen at a clear time when there is no current dispute to sway objective discussion. The structure should start with a look at what approaches have worked and not worked in the past.
- Another key skill for your team members to learn is to quickly spot when they are in dispute. This way your resolution procedures can be brought into play before the problem festers into something more personal or distracting for the team.
- Elements of an effective dispute resolution regime:
  - Treat arguments as disputes quickly – move to your resolution protocols as soon as an issue is flagged
  - Ensure team members are ‘playing the ball not the person’ – they must challenge decisions or policies, not the person behind them. Suggest they start sentences impersonally – that idea..., that strategy... – rather than with you... or your...
  - Help them become comfortable having robust but respectful discussions.
  - Encourage them to look at the issue from the other perspective – understanding why X believes Y is a critical stage in resolving disputes

- Don’t settle for weak compromises. Team members need to focus on the ideal outcome for the customer, team, organisation – and then focus on options that meet these objectives.

## BENEFITS

- A measure of great teams is how adept they are at resolving disputes.
- The DRPs you encourage your team to put in place will ensure their energy and focus remain positive rather than destructive.
- As a great team, they want to be the best they can be. Natural tensions will arise, ideas and policies will be challenged – including yours. But your team will know how to play the ball.

---

**HOT TIP** Document your team’s Dispute Resolution Protocols. Everyone has the same reference point and tools to solve their own issues.

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**ALSO SEE** #10: Collaborative Working #6: Resource Agreements

## TACTIC 32

# VIRTUAL MEETING MANAGEMENT

---

## THE CHALLENGE

Many more meetings are being called to maintain connections in the virtual workplace. Meeting overload has become a problem. The need for meetings to be very efficiently run has never been more important.

## THE ANSWER

Virtual Meeting Management is a critical success factor for leaders looking to secure meaningful connections and high productivity.

## CAPABILITY

---

FOCUS & PERFORMANCE	✓
CONNECTED LEADERSHIP	✓
DEVELOPING VIRTUAL TEAMS	
VIRTUAL TEAM CARE	
HIGH PERFORMANCE VIRTUAL COMMUNICATION	✓



## WHAT TO DO

- Driving meeting efficiency comes from a range of tactics – initially deployed by you but then shared and mastered by your team.
- Clear focus for the meeting – what is its purpose and scope, and who needs to attend.
- Attendees – not everyone needs to be if they have no input and can work from the circulated agenda and minutes.
- The agenda must match that purpose and scope – and the meeting not deviate from it. Tangential discussions arising should be scheduled for another time, with appropriate attendees.
- The circulation of the agenda prior to the meeting needs to give attendees time to prepare and read any circulated materials.
- Respect for colleagues and their time - meeting start times shouldn't be held up waiting for late arrivals or reading of pre-circulated information.
- Clear rules for virtual meetings re use of camera, mute, chat and virtual whiteboards. Having these set will also help keep meetings on time.
- Whether it's you or one of the team chairing a meeting, it's vital every attendee is invited in turn – irrespective of how senior or quiet they are – to contribute their input.
- Create breaks in the virtual meeting for discussion to make up for the loss of real world signals through comment and body language.
- Recording meaningful minutes:

- Use the agenda as the basis for the minutes
- Record as the meeting progresses so they can be circulated - with actions - via email immediately after the meeting
- Rotate the responsibility for the task across every team member.

---

**HOT TIP** Successful, efficient meetings are about great facilitation. Run a session for the whole team on setting agendas, chairing techniques and meeting reporting. These are skills every team member can use across their careers.

---

## BENEFITS

- Your team will love every effort you introduce to make meetings more efficient and effective.
- And in the new virtual working arrangements, identifying and solving the contribution issues of video conferencing has never been so important.
- Because you're taking time to ensure only those essential to the purpose and scope of the meeting are in attendance, you'll secure team productivity gains and the appreciation of individuals.
- Now you've established on-time, scoped meetings, you don't need to allocate so much time for them.
- Short and sharp meetings – 45 minutes instead of an hour, 20 minutes instead of half an hour – creating time and space for actual work to be done.

---

**ALSO SEE** #2: *The Right Meeting Mix* #26: *Meetings Without Agendas*

# TACTIC 33

## CROSS-TEAM CATCH-UPS

---

### THE CHALLENGE

In the move to virtual working the connection between teams in the organisation has deteriorated. Siloed thinking and behaviour have increased.

### THE ANSWER

Cross-Team Catch-Ups that are deliberately and consistently planned will help restore collaboration and connection.

### CAPABILITY

---

FOCUS & PERFORMANCE	✓
CONNECTED LEADERSHIP	✓
DEVELOPING VIRTUAL TEAMS	
VIRTUAL TEAM CARE	
HIGH PERFORMANCE VIRTUAL COMMUNICATION	✓



## WHAT TO DO

- Identify the groups your team used to regularly connect with and assess current levels of communication.
- Consider which inter-team relationships need the most urgent attention and would produce the best return on effort.
- Cross-team communication doesn't have to be live via phone or video connection. Choose the most appropriate mode for each information sharing, the best way of staying in regular touch.
- Options could be:
  - Sharing minutes of meetings with other teams where dependencies on their work are noted
  - Sharing performance data with each other so teams can see how others are faring, and where they can contribute
  - Cross-team projects where teams take a collaborative approach to problem solving or getting work done, rather than operating as separate teams
- Operating as diamond (#25) rather than bow-ties enables you to share the load and develops connections and capabilities for your team members.

## BENEFITS

- No team is an island, and the ability to work collaboratively with other teams that are also working virtually has become a key success factor. Teams need to actively consider how they previously communicated and collaborated, and what new ways of working need to be introduced to enhance collaborative results.
- Leveraging cross-team, cross-geography, cross-divisional relationships is a common characteristic of high performing organisations.
- Building these relationships provides an outstanding opportunity for individual team members to grow and take on more responsibility.
- Being prepared to share the connection load relieves you of the effort and time more effectively used by your team.

**ALSO SEE** #25: *Leverage the Diamond* #8: *team 121s*

# TACTIC 34

## LEADER LOOPS

---

### THE CHALLENGE

Leaders need support too. Your focus on the wellbeing of your team members shouldn't see your own welfare neglected. Being a leader, in a virtual workplace, may be isolating you even more than your team members.

### THE ANSWER

Leader Loops allow you to connect with others around the organisation, to share experiences, tactics and ideas in these extremely taxing times.

### CAPABILITY

---

FOCUS & PERFORMANCE	✓
CONNECTED LEADERSHIP	✓
DEVELOPING VIRTUAL TEAMS	✓
VIRTUAL TEAM CARE	✓
HIGH PERFORMANCE VIRTUAL COMMUNICATION	✓





## WHAT TO DO

- Reach out to other leaders in your organisation who are in your situation.
- Use this exercise to not only deliberately protect your wellbeing but also to connect with people in other parts of the organisation you wouldn't otherwise have a chance to get to know.
- Be creative in who could be interesting to share experiences with.
- Be positive in your approach, have benefits for them as well as you in reaching out:
  - I'm trying lots of new tactics to motivate my newly virtual team – I'd like to share but also learn from you
  - How are you coping with the new circumstances – perhaps a problem shared is a problem solved?
  - How has the new workplace arrangements impacted your team, and I'll share how they have impacted ours?

## BENEFITS

- In the same way as airlines tell you to fit your oxygen mask first, Leader Loops provide a way for you to start with you in terms of wellbeing.
- Leaders Loops are both informational and a way to get issues off your mind.
- Someone, somewhere in your organisation will have a great idea for surviving and thriving in virtual workplaces. These Leader Loops help hone and spread those ideas.

---

**HOT TIP** Make these catch-ups informal and outside the usual line of control – so they can be as much about how everyone is getting on personally as about task.

---

---

**ALSO SEE** #5: Mandates and Priorities #28: Stakeholder Mapping

## KEY CONCEPTS

# THE RULES OF SHADOWING

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**When a developing team member is joining a meeting or activity where they are shadowing – being involved as an observer and watching what is going on – there are important success factors to communicate.**

- Preparing the learner – The team member being developed needs to know that the shadowing has to have results, that they’ll be asked their observations, things that made the meeting or project work, and how the group solved problems.
- Asking questions – The ability to ask questions during shadowing should be agreed as part of the learner’s preparation: “Are we comfortable with Sarah asking questions during the meeting?”
- Introductions – People shadowing should always be introduced to other participants in the meetings or projects. The purpose for them being there should be transparent: “We’re hoping Sarah will be able to assist us in these types of projects soon, so we are involving her in a range of meetings to give her exposure to how we go about them”.
- Shadow session debriefs – Allocate time after the shadowing events to allow Sarah to ask questions and make observations. The leader should ask Sarah to make a list of questions for this session.
- Over time, the team member may be asked to undertake small parts of the activity, with the team leader or senior team member shadowing the learner and providing feedback.
- The virtual world has actually made shadowing easier to execute – now anyone can join any meeting, rather than having to be physically be in the room. This gives team leaders a greater ability to deploy shadowing to a wider number of individuals and ensure the continuing professional growth of their team.

## KEY CONCEPTS

# HUB AND SPOKE VIRTUAL TEAMS

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- Imagine the wheel of a bicycle with its outside rim, a hub at its centre and spokes reaching out from the hub to the rim. The best virtual teams operate like a bicycle wheel. Multi-faceted communications and work generate backwards and forwards along the spokes between the team leader at the hub and team members - as well as between individuals around the rim.
- In under-developed virtual teams, there is a danger that all communication and work start to be only hub and spoke movements. If team members stop communicating independently with each other, team spirit and effectiveness can be very limited.



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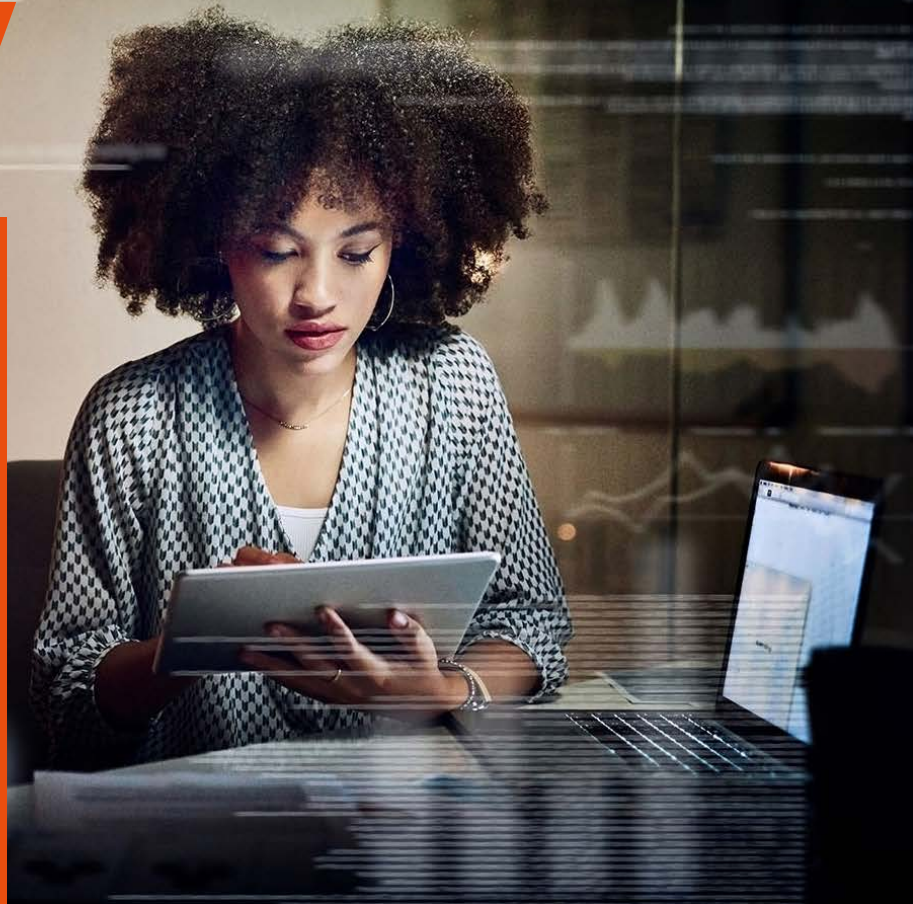
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