Strategizing Flex Work

Connecting with your Team

People managers play a critical role in ensuring their teams are connected and team members feel included. This guide helps managers build trust and foster inclusion on their teams to drive better team cooperation and communication.

The potential for employees to feel detached from their work increases during remote work, therefore it is more critical than ever to foster connection and inclusion on your team. Ultimately, this means employees feel comfortable sharing vulnerabilities and bringing their full selves to work, even if work looks different than it did before.

When managers are able to successfully drive inclusion and create this safe environment on their teams, both managers and employees benefit.

For example, employees able to bring their whole selves to work are 42% less likely to leave their jobs within a year, and teams following an inclusive process make decisions two times faster in half as many meetings.

To connect with flex teams, managers should focus on establishing norms around two key objectives for their teams: building trust and fostering inclusion.

Building Trust
In-person environments come with more opportunities to naturally build trust during informal interactions; for remote teams, these opportunities don't necessarily exist, so managers must be even more intentional.

Employees at high-trust organizations experience 100% more energy when working, 50% better productivity and 76% higher engagement than employees at low-trust organizations. Managers can build trust around their management of the team by being transparent and sharing information openly as much as possible. This will make employees feel they are in the loop and not caught off guard if unexpected information arises.

Managers can also build trust by recognizing the team's accomplishments and abilities. This builds trust by demonstrating awareness of individual talents on the team and showing that the manager values the team's contributions.

**Tips to help you build mutual trust on your teams:**

- Make your actions as transparent as possible... share information proactively with the team. Gather team members' input prior to making decisions that impact them.
- Be accessible and responsive... remote managers should make clear the best ways for employees to reach them. Managers should prioritize assisting with employees' needs when requests arise.
- Create team profiles... have team members create profiles of their personal interests, hobbies, skills, strengths, development areas and areas of expertise.
- Maintain confidentiality of team operations... agree on norms for what information can be shared outside the team.
- Be proactive in assessing progress... proactively ask employees whether they are facing any challenges or barriers. Ask if employees need any extra support.
- Recognize the team... recognize specific successes and talents during team meetings. Promote recognition of team members outside the team.

Fostering Inclusion

Employees need a safe environment to work effectively — one where each member of the team feels comfortable taking interpersonal risks. To create an inclusive team that can weather disruption, start by diligently reinforcing the expectation that teammates be open to new information and feel respected, particularly during uncomfortable conversations or moments of conflict. Below are tips to help you help team members feel respected:

- Explain the team's mission and goals... reiterate the common mission and/or goals the team is working toward and articulate the unique value each team member brings to the success of that mission.
- Maintain confidentiality of team conversations... agree on norms for what can be shared outside the team at the start of the conversation and maintain confidentiality when sharing themes or perspectives.
- Create opportunities for team members to share their perspectives... acknowledge the limitations of decision making based on your perspective alone and frame the team's work as an opportunity to make better decisions and learn from new perspectives.
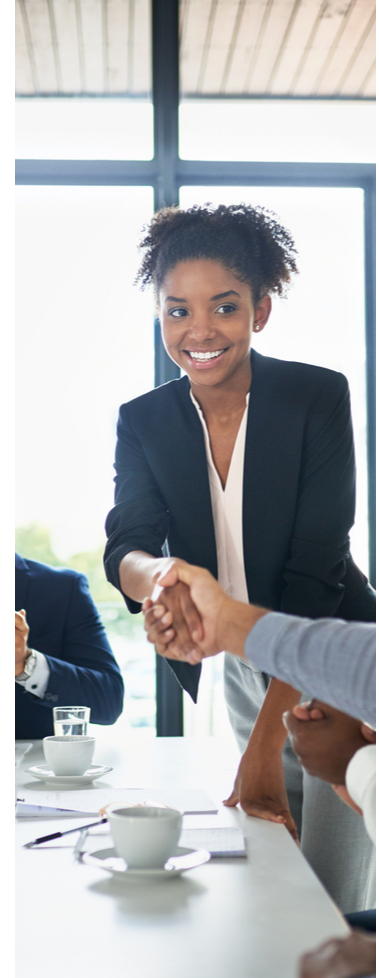
- Actively listen and model curiosity... do not check email or text messages while other team members are talking and ask clarifying and rephrasing questions to ensure you understand what each team member is saying.
- Avoid assumptions... ensure your statements and responses to the statements of others are not based on assumptions and help team members avoid making assumptive statements as well. Ask clarifying questions as needed.
- Be proactive in managing expectations...identify areas of potential disconnect such as deadlines, resource constraints, competing agendas and conflicting perspectives. Articulate those disconnects and clarify which take precedent for the purpose of that particular meeting.
- Engage detractors early and often... identify team members who are uncertain of the value of inclusion or reject the idea that inclusion leads to better performance. Ensure that their perspective is acknowledged and respected and that they respect and consider the perspectives of others.
- Encourage the team... start each meeting with recognition of specific team successes that come as a result of acting inclusively with each other and promote recognition of the team's collective contributions from stakeholders outside the team.

With flex work, managers may find it difficult to make necessary connections throughout their teams. We recommend building trust and fostering inclusion to drive better team cooperation and communication.