## **LEADING FROM A DISTANCE: MODIFYING CULTURE**

### The Virtual Distance Model

Having a great culture empowers teams, fosters collaboration, and enhances employee engagement. The Virtual Distance\* model will help translate your existing culture into one that thrives online.

Virtual Distance is the perceived isolation and disconnection of members on a team that rely on electronic communications—a sense of emotional and psychological detachment that builds up over time when people become over-reliant on technology to mediate their relationships.

There are three categories of Virtual Distance that impact teams from least to most:

### **How Virtual Distance Affects Remote Teams**

#### **Physical Distance**

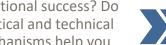
Geographic separation of team members. This is usually the smallest challenge for teams facing Virtual Distance, but can still lead to barriers in communication and collaboration.

#### **Operational Distance**

How do the processes your team uses contribute to your operational success? Do logistical and technical mechanisms help you collaborate, or create friction? How do you use these tools as a way to create team context and agility?

### **Affinity Distance**

This factor ties most strongly to the culture of a team. It is the real difference between great teams and those that don't work as well. Affinity is the connection you feel towards your teammates - whether you know each other as people, trust each other, and feel like part of the same team with shared common goals.



Strategies for addressing Physical and Operational Distances fall under setting expectations for your team and communicating effectively. Please see resources for those two topics at olod.arizona.edu/content/lfad

## What Does Increased Affinity Distance Look Like?

- Increased feelings of isolation
- Lack of engagement and productivity
- Up to a 90% drop in innovation effectiveness; 80% plunge in trust, 80% in satisfaction, and a 60% decline in finishing projects on time.
- Decrease in role and goal clarity, morale, and work satisfaction levels

- Increased conflict or tension
- Loss of trust
- Inability to maintain a collaborative environment
- Differences in workstyles are not leveraged
- People become 'virtual objects'; compassion and human connection are lost

<sup>\*</sup>Adapted from the work of Karen Sobel Lojeski, Ph.D., Virtual Distance International (VDI)





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# **Leadership Tips for Decreasing Affinity Distance**

- **Focus on Diversity and Inclusion.** Consider pairing people with dissimilar approaches to encourage different types of collaboration. Amplify the varying perspectives, voices, and abilities on your team. Create an environment in which everyone can contribute and be heard.
- **Recognize and Reward** team members for their contributions to the success of the team. Highlight how each person adds to the team. Consider who exemplifies various parts of your team's values.
- Create Shared Context. Spell out the big picture for team members and bring the importance of their roles to the forefront. Team members need to know why their work matters and how it aligns with the rest of the teams' efforts.
- **Develop a Culture of Openness** with your Direct Reports. Make your team feel seen and heard check in regularly to keep engagement levels high. Foster transparency, openness, and team identity. Provide continual feedback on both accomplishments and areas that need adjustments.
- Promote a Culture of Learning. Acknowledge missteps, demonstrate curiosity, and stay open to alternative
  possibilities.
- " u O " O Team Checklist for Building Trust

"A culture is strong when people work with each other, for each other.

A culture is weak when people work against each other, for themselves."

--Simon Sinek

# **Team Checklist for Building Trust**

☐ Say what you really mean
☐ Fulfill your promises
☐ Seek to understand others with curiosity
☐ Model the behavior you desire
☐ Empower others and create accountability
☐ Demonstrate vulnerability
☐ Speak up for those who are not present
☐ Take responsibility for mistakes/failures
☐ Get to know your team members as individuals

