The (new) Art of Virtual Collaboration

Leigh Thompson

Jay Gerber Professor of Dispute Resolution & Organizations
Professor of Management & Organizations
Director of Kellogg Team and Group Research Center
Professor of Psychology, Weinberg College of Arts & Sciences (Courtesy)
Negotiating the Sweet Spot:
The Art of Leaving Nothing on the Table

KELLOGG SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT
MAY | 2020
LEIGH THOMPSON
Workplace, Personal, & Virtual Collaborations

What do we know?

- **Business**: Managers often fail to reach win-win solutions
  - over 80% of corporate executives and CEOs leave money on the table
  - 40% people fail to realize when they are in complete agreement with someone

- **Personal Life**: Married couples reach less rewarding outcomes
  - Married couples: worse outcomes & quit sooner than ad hoc couples
  - Newlyweds: lower aspirations & lower joint gains vs. complete strangers
  - Friends: avoid “negotiation” and settle for less than complete strangers

- **Virtual Collaboration**:
  - Greater likelihood of impasse
  - Fewer win-win outcomes
  - Less trust: online groups trust less and lose trust during interaction
  - More negative confrontational behavior
  - Less moral behavior
What is the Sweet Spot?
Measuring the Sweet Spot

- **Siblings-and-Orange:**
  - **Satisficing**: split-down-the-middle; settle, compromise, premature agreement, even-steven
  - **Optimizing**: peel vs. juice; leverage all potential in relationships

- **Not just about money!**
  - Relationships: chores, leisure time
  - Business: work responsibilities, credit
Why do People miss the Sweet Spot?

- Not a motivational issue!

- **Fixed-Pie perception:**
  - Faulty belief that other’s interests are directly opposed to our own
  - Confirmatory information-processing

- Leads to:
  - Premature concessions
  - Relational accommodation
  - Take-one-for-the-team
  - Don’t rock-the-boat
## Why We Need Sweet Spot *Hacks*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationships</th>
<th>Workplace</th>
<th>Virtual Life</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Couples</td>
<td>Colleagues</td>
<td>Video</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>Co-workers</td>
<td>Phone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>Bosses</td>
<td>Text-Chat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Subordinates</td>
<td>Email</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Couples
- Parents
- Friends
- Community
- Colleagues
- Co-workers
- Bosses
- Subordinates
- Video
- Phone
- Text-Chat
- Email
Virtual Collaboration

- **Covid 19 crisis:**
  - Most significant over-night organizational restructure most businesses ever faced
  - No playbook!

- **Observations:**
  - Strategies / best practices that worked in traditional face-to-face interactions may not work in Virtual interactions

- Each of us has done our own “experiment” in past stay-at-home weeks with virtual communication…
## Virtual Collaboration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. <em>Task focused</em>: get down to business</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. <em>Goal focus</em>: belief in common goal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. <em>Weak-get-Strong effect</em>: reduced status differences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Persuasion and Influence: substance &gt; style</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Equalization of participation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Less inhibition (<em>fierce conversations</em>)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Less conformity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Buffer zone: Provides “buffer” when collaborations extremely contentious</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Buys time when someone is in power-down position in business negotiation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. “Zoom Fatigue”: cognitive, affective &amp; motivational depletion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. “ODE”: more aggressive, confrontational behavior</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. <em>Irony poisoning</em>: lose ability to understand nuance, humor, sarcasm vs. sincerity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Greater risk-taking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Less trust and rapport</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Conflict: more relationship conflict &amp; conflict escalation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. More misunderstandings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Less efficient (<em>increased time to make decisions, but not increased volume info exchange</em>)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. <em>Information suppression</em>: less communication/lower frequency communication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Enhancing Virtual Collaborations: **6 Hacks**

1. “Watch your Hyde”
2. Virtual handshake & “Structured Fun”
3. Managing personality & participation
4. Proactive conflict management
5. Positive constraints
Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde: This is your brain on virtual teams

- People behave differently when not face to face
- Why? Lack of real-time, immediate visual feedback changes brain signals
- Leads to impulsive behavior and lack of restraint

“Online Disinhibition Effect”: [ODE] people act out more frequently or intensely than they would in person
  - Harsh feedback: people deliver harsher feedback virtually (e.g. performance reviews)
  - Threats: more on email than face-to-face or phone
  - Interpretation: positive messages viewed as neutral; neutral perceived as negative
  - Ethical standards: teams who interact online more likely to cheat than when face to face
  - Lying: online lied 90%; written note lied 60%; even when knew partners would definitely be informed of lie

Chat Q: How can you manage your “Mr. Hyde”?
The Value of a Virtual Handshake

Challenge:
- **Virtual Distance**: feeling of separation caused by lack of FtF communication

Possible Solution:
- **Virtual Handshake**: attempt to humanize group members

Study:
- Managers negotiated with member of in-group vs. out-group
- Some exchanged non-business, personal information prior to negotiation (*schmooze*)

Results:
- Schmoozing dramatically increases agreement
- Schmoozing profound economic & social impact when building new relationship

---

“Structured Fun”

- **“All work and no play”**: increases fatigue, distrust, misunderstanding in virtual teams
- **Hack**: short, fun interactions
- **Lessons from “improv”**
  - Engagement (“virtual red ball”)
  - Cue-ing (“croissant”)
  - Beats & Transitions (set-twist-fix)
  - Object work (sharing the environment)
  - Embarrassing story

**Chat Q: How can you make virtual meetings fun?**
Managing Personality & Participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Virtual Brainstorming</th>
<th>Virtual Brainwriting</th>
<th>Virtual Speed-Storming</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Simultaneous verbal generation of ideas in a group</td>
<td>Simultaneous generation of written ideas by individuals in a group</td>
<td>Pair-wise brainstorming in a round-robin fashion with explicit purpose, time limits and one-on-one encounters</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chat Question: “How do you ensure all diverse voices are heard in a virtual setting, especially without the benefit of having pre-established relationships?”
Be Proactive about Conflict (not reactive)

- Conflict is necessary for high performance virtual teamwork

- However, not all conflict is productive
  - Relationship conflict: personality clashes
  - Task conflict: disagreements about work

- Create forum for healthy task conflict in your virtual team:
  - Develop “virtual team charter”
  - Leaders: “normalize” conflict
  - Practice debating low-stakes topic before tackling big kahuna
  - If necessary, recruit a “debate coach”
  - Separate “understanding” from “agreement”
  - Establish “boxing rings” and “campfires”
Rules of the Virtual Road

“Positive Constraints”

- **Research**: groups that have more structure are more effective

- **Virtual teams need to establish VTC**: Virtual Team Charter
  - Goal
  - Norms
  - Rules of engagement
  - Team membership

- **Best practices**:
  - First meeting sets tone…
  - “Nothing but good news & updates delivered via email…”
  - No multi-tasking
  - Use camera
  - Email boundaries

**Chat Q**: What’s your favorite virtual teams norm?
Camera-Shy?
Your Picture is worth 1000 words

- If you’re having a bad-hair day, and turn off your camera:
  - You are hindering virtual collaboration

- If you don’t feel ready for camera, at very least, post a picture!

- Thumbnail picture study:
  - 96% with photo reached agreement; vs. 78% no photo
  - Photo: netted > $1.68M
Mirror, Mirror on the Wall…

- **Zoom Fatigue**: too many zoom meetings creates fatigue!
- What about old-fashioned conference calls?
- We lose nonverbals!
- **Hack**: put a mirror on your desk
- **Why?**
  - People who communicate in front of a mirror more self-critical and ethical in their communication than those without mirror
- **Facial feedback theory**
  - When people frown they feel more angry; when people smile, they feel happier
  - **Take-away**: regulate felt and expressed emotion via facial awareness
P-Charisma ≠ E-Charisma

- Informal poll of sales people and engineers:
  - Sales people: strongly prefer face-to-face
  - Engineers: prefer other means

- Study: one investigation accurately predicts which executives win business competition solely on basis of nonverbal social signals (tone, gesticulation, body position)

- P-charisma: voice, gesture, stature, mannerisms, paralinguistics, gender, age, mirroring

- E-charisma: much more influenced by content, ideas, parsimony, language-matching
## What’s Next?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Live Virtual Executive Programs</th>
<th>Self-Paced Video courses</th>
<th>Book Shelf</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leading High Impact Teams</td>
<td>Negotiation 101</td>
<td>Negotiating the Sweet Spot: The Art of Leaving Nothing on the Table</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Performance Negotiation skills</td>
<td>Teamwork 101</td>
<td>Creative Conspiracy: The New Rules of Breakthrough Collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constructive Collaboration</td>
<td>Virtual Collaboration</td>
<td>Stop Spending, Start Managing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Negotiating in a Virtual World</td>
<td>The Truth about Negotiation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>