

**DO WE HEAR EACH OTHER? INTERPRETIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS  
OF LEADERSHIP COMMUNICATION IN TODAY'S MULTIGENERATIONAL  
WORKPLACE**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Research on the virtualization of the workplace has grown rapidly in recent years yet few studies have extracted the feelings that leaders and members experience during these natural changes. Consequently, there is a lack of understanding of the behaviors that leaders exhibit that affect the attitudes of the team. The goal of our study was to identify specific leadership behaviors, that in the context of today's multigenerational and virtual setting, are most important to members of a team. We conducted interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) of firsthand experiences with employees that work in these settings, and through rigorous coding of established IPA standards, we reveal that what rises above all is effective leadership communication. Because today's multigenerational workplace is increasingly virtual, leaders have become responsible for driving team performance in new ways, and as such, our research offers valuable insights for managers when making decisions about the dynamics of team cohesion.

## INTRODUCTION

### **Today's Workplace is Increasingly Virtual and Multigenerational**

The workplace is commonly virtual, hastened in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, and consists of a wide range of ages. Some work suggests that there are broad generational differences in work values, styles, and comfort with technology (Houck 2011). As such, leaders must effectively manage generational diversity in new virtual ways. Our work contributes to a growing body of knowledge about functional leadership in a multigenerational, virtual workplace by identifying salient issues for its members, as well as aspects of virtual leadership that are perceived to be effective or ineffective.

Prior to the pandemic, a Global Workplace Analytics study (Global Workplace Analytics, 2020) of 2,865 employees found that only 19% of the respondents wanted to continue working from home full time in the future if they were already working virtually. The transition to virtual work is not easy for everyone (Newman & Ford, 2020) and it has necessitated a greater reliance on technology-mediated communication. For example, face-to-face meetings have been replaced by new communication technologies. This transition accentuates intergenerational differences among team members. Research suggests that preferences for different communication technologies vary across generations. Houck (2011) showed that baby boomers prefer phone calls or in-person interactions over virtual ones. Blain (2008) is quoted as describing millennials as being "immersed in technology." Additional work suggests that intergenerational conflict may result from differences in values, behavioral styles, and identity-based issues (Urick, et al., 2017).

These studies, among many others that concentrate on the make-up of today's workplace, largely concentrate on descriptive statistics in order to produce quantifiable learnings. We believe it is also necessary to understand what matters to the employee in their own words, especially

considering the rapidly changing state of technology. As such, the goal of our study was to conduct a qualitative investigation, obtaining rich data from members of multigenerational, virtual teams in order to elicit their stories and experiences in this setting of interest to us.

### **Successful Leadership in Today's Workplace**

Leadership has been studied extensively. Because research shows that the spread of workers' ages is the widest ever, and because teams consisting of multiple generations means there would be variation in workplace perceptions, it is important for this study to understand the drivers of effective leadership for multigenerational virtual teams from the perspective of the subordinate. As Tomek (2011) requested, we are answering the call for more research.

We adopt the functional perspective on leadership, which focuses on ways that leaders fulfill team needs. Existing taxonomies outline the functions that leaders fulfill (Morgeson et al., 2010). Building on those, Bell et al. (2023) updated the taxonomy to reflect the needs of virtual leaders and teams. While all the traditional leadership functions are thought to remain important, Bell et al. (2023) proposed that three specific functions would be particularly important in virtual contexts: encouraging self-management, establishing expectations and goals, and supporting the social climate. In addition, and especially important to the focus of our study is the extension that Bell et al. in 2023 because it includes an additional function - facilitate the use of technology – which is extremely common in a virtual workplace. This was attributed (in part) to the results from Maruyama et al. (2009), which highlighted that the implementation of virtual work environments in companies has improved attitudinal, behavioral, and work-related outcomes. Combined with the post-pandemic shift to virtuality, the relevance of this study is very important. For a complete table

of these leadership functions, please refer to Appendix B - Theoretical Grounding with *a Priori* Codes.

***Virtual leadership and multigenerational dynamics.*** By the turn of the twentieth century, the workplace was already radically transforming. As Dittman (2005) identified, there has never been a time in history with a greater spread of age differences. Studies show that these influence the perceptions of the work environment, both for leaders and subordinates (Shore et al., 2003). Research also suggests that generational differences between leaders and followers can affect leader-subordinate perceptions of one another (Shore et al., 2003) and they lower positive responses from all generations (Williams et al., 2007). As such, multigenerational teams may offer unique challenges (as well as opportunities) for leaders.

## METHODS

### **Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)**

This research was conducted using IPA methodology. This prioritizes purposive sampling, which entails extracting rich data from a deliberately small sample of individuals who have experienced the phenomenon of interest, and in this case, virtual multigenerational team leadership. These participants must be willing to share detailed stories and perspectives on their experiences. Phenomenology is the foundation of IPA as it is the study of lived experiences. IPA researchers, often working in collaboration, analyze responses to questions (such as semi-structured interviews or questionnaires) and use coding techniques to identify emerging common themes across respondents, ultimately seeking rich, experiential statements, that collectively across all respondents demonstrate a shared experience or perspective. IPA research typically involves one-on-one interviews and written transcripts (Smith et al., 2009).

## Theoretical Grounding

There is grounding of this study with *a priori* codes. We use those proposed by Bell et al. (2023) and Morgenson et al. (2010), from which the former were an extension, and both describe qualities of effective leadership and are illustrated in Tables 2 and 3, respectively. A team of five Doctor of Business Administration students and one Professor worked together on coding interview transcriptions using Quirkos<sup>TM</sup> software. The most frequent themes were extracted and showed that leadership communication that fosters unity across the team, while simultaneously being respectful of generational differences, rose to the surface as one applicable to all respondents.

## Sample

Consistent with purposive sampling, we sought a small number of individuals who had personally experienced instances of virtual leaders as relevant to multigenerational teams. Our sample consisted of ten U.S. adults (age 25+) who work full-time and who are a member of a multigenerational team with a virtual leader. The sample was 50% men and 50% women; 70% white and 30% black. Additional demographic information is presented in Appendix B – Sample Demographic Characteristics.

Recruiting was done through a variety of social channel advertisements (such as word-of-mouth, social media posts, and flyers) by the researchers. These messages specified that we were seeking to interview members of virtual, multigenerational teams. When individuals responded to the advertisement, they were directed to a Qualtrics survey to complete a screening process to ensure that they met the purposive sampling requirements. The qualifying requirements for participation included:

- Must be at least 25 years old;

- Work in the United States;
- Be employed full-time (at least 35 hours per week);
- Have a leader that is virtual (at least 50% of the time, on average);
- Be a member of a team whose ages are not homogenous.

This study received IRB approval, and APA ethical guidelines were followed. Participation in the study was voluntary and consent was provided at the recruitment and interview stage. No compensation was offered to any participant. Confidentiality was protected by only storing information on secured servers with access granted only to team members, and all names were changed to add levels of confidentiality. Interview recordings were deleted upon completion of this project.

### **Interview and Analytic Procedure**

Interviews were semi-structured and were conducted electronically, utilizing Microsoft Teams or Zoom, lasting between thirty minutes and one hour. Recordings were cleaned, transcribed, and safely secured. Confidentiality was protected by assigning pseudonyms to all the participants and redacting identifying information, such as company, boss, or co-workers' names. The complete interview guide for reference can be found in Appendix 1.

Although IPA approaches are traditionally purely inductive, we wished to link our work to the extensive body of existing literature on leadership and virtual leadership. As such, we used a modified analytic procedure that was founded on IPA and that also incorporated *a priori* codes from the research literature. The *a priori* codes were established and defined prior to collecting data.

The analyses were performed following the seven steps of IPA procedure that Smith, et. al. (2022) outlined. First, the interviewer conducts a series of iterative reviews of the transcript to become extremely familiar with it. Exploratory notes are added to the transcript as a form of “memoing” so that the interviewee’s initial thoughts and reactions are captured vividly. Then, researchers work collaboratively to code transcripts, verifying and re-verifying themes in responses. In doing so, *a priori* code sets are used, which are constructs developed through prior published research, to inductively code concepts from the interview that may emerge. Disagreements among researchers are resolved via discussions. Using the codes, common themes within each transcript are captured, and these became the participant's *personal experiential themes* (PETs). After PETs are identified, named, and consolidated for each participant, authors meet to identify commonalities and breadth of experiences across the full set of participants. Via consensus, shared phenomenological experiences that occurred for at least 50% of participants were deemed *group experiential themes* (GETs) and address the research question about virtual leadership for multigenerational teams.

## RESULTS

Communication is perceived effective when it provides a sense of unity across members of different generations. The results of this research illuminate the importance of communication in multigenerational, virtual teams. Specifically, this is the communication by the direct leader in ways that create unification among the multigenerational team members while demonstrating respect for generational differences. Data are presented in a Theme-Sub Theme fashion, such that each table’s header is a substantial theme, the GET. Sub themes are an articulation of the GET into



a more specific context and is followed by notable quotations by selected participants. Refer to Appendix D – Theme Sub-Theme Results for complete tables of results.

*Ensures everyone understands what is being communicated is GET 1* (Table 4). Leaders must perform a number of functions to be effective communicators. We see in Table 4 that the centrality of communication is ensuring that everyone understands, no matter the age or location. Specific manifestations of this theme included things like the use of jargon and the selection of the format of team meetings. These components were identified as necessary for effective communication.

The use of jargon in communications creates challenges in a multigenerational environment. New entrants to the workforce may not have been exposed, through their education, to expression or terms that have historically been used in the business environment, and older workers may not be familiar to the expressions or terms that their younger counterparts may use. As Payton stated:

*“So, I’m a millennial. I’ve heard, like, “right up the flagpole,” “30,000-foot view” multiple times over. I’ve noticed that my Gen. Z counterparts, this is something that’s new to them.”*

It is the leader’s responsibility to make clear statements. Instead of saying to a subordinate “I will run that up the flagpole”, they should be saying “I will take that to management”. Nearly all participants in the study mentioned that there is a need for clearness in the messages received, and in another study 58% of participants thought that jargon was detrimental to business communication (Anamaria-Mirabela & Monica-Ariana, 2014).

The selection of the format of team meetings was also identified as an important aspect of effective communication. Establishing guidelines for how the team meets virtually can provide needed structure to the team. Formal meetings may require the camera on, proper attire, and an appropriate background location where informal meetings may have fewer criteria. Leaders need to ensure that formal topics are communicated in formal meetings to ensure that everyone understands the importance of what is being communicated. Illustrating this, John said:

*“... I know when we started having video meetings regularly there were some that would insist on everybody has to have their camera on just to make more of an actual meeting. And, you know, remind people that they're working with other people instead of just tuning out phone calls on meetings.”*

***Ensures everyone continually feels part of the team is GET 2*** (Table 5). The need for everyone to continually feel that they are part of the team is an important responsibility that the multigenerational team leader must emphasize. When team members are in the same physical office together, these “water cooler” talks provide a variety of benefits to a team. Whether it is an opportunity to discuss projects in an informal environment, discuss what is going on in the organization, or just an opportunity to get to know someone, these informal chats can provide value to the team. With the increasing trend of virtual workplaces, the loss of “water cooler” talk has had an impact on how a leader’s communication is perceived. Also, these informal discussions help disseminate information through the team that may not have been properly communicated by the leader. However, it is important to realize that many new entrants to the workforce never experience these “water cooler” conversations. Their version would likely involve some social media or texting approach. However, the leader chooses, having these more informal interchanges among team members is important. As Lucas stated:

*“I think one thing that goes well for virtual leadership with our team is having what we would call a “water cooler” call every morning.”*

Another aspect is ensuring that everyone on the team feels part of the team and has the leader's support. Consider Cassidy's remarks regarding communication in the form of listening, or simply being present when needed:

*“Sometimes she'll shadow me in meetings. Especially if it's slated to be high conflict. And one of the things I really appreciate is she'll stay in the background. But she's listening. I know she's listening, because when I've said something important and I got ignored, she came right back. And she's like, “No, I don't think you understand.”*

***Ensures experience is respected and knowledge is exchanged is GET 3*** (Table 6). Members of multigenerational virtual teams stated that it is important that the leader of the team fosters an environment where the experience and knowledge of all members is respected by all members and shared throughout the team. Ensuring that the accumulated knowledge of tenured team members is shared with the less experienced team members, and the technological skills that many new entrants to the workforce need to be shared with the older team members. There are challenges to this sharing. Karnya remarked on the importance to communications of being present to share:

*“I think that some of the younger ones don't necessarily know how to assist a customer. As to where, if they were, if we were in person versus virtual, they would be able to hear and see how we interact. But then, whenever you're in a virtual, we can only go by comments*

*that they might make in a meeting, or when we see in a chat, and then that way we can kind of give feedback,”*

Another way that a leader can show respect to the members of the team is to allow the team members to focus on how they work, and what they are most comfortable with, and demonstrate trust in what they have to say. Jon said:

*“I guess the biggest thing is the way that they look at issues because I'm kind of from the old school and I'm a very deep diver, so I really like them. I really like to get into the nitty gritty and the boss I have is younger of course and he always, he always is saying don't get in the weeds. So, he tends to be at a higher level. And I think that the younger, the younger generation leaders tend not to want to get into the weeds. They just want to kind of hit it at a high level and think that's good enough.”*

## DISCUSSION

This study shows that potential misunderstandings among multigenerational team members real and they are salient. Participants often told stories about the need for leaders to monitor slang or jargon. Their stories highlighted the notion that “business speak” changes over time, and phrases that may be familiar to some may confuse others. Similarly, those who regularly engage with social media and contemporary trends may employ slang phrases that others do not understand. Particularly in virtual settings, where media communication richness may be lower, leaders may need to explicitly and intentionally check in to calibrate shared interpretation of such phrases. The request to have cameras on during virtual meetings may relate to a need for higher communication richness such that if there is confusion, it can be gleaned from facial expressions.

Some leaders were able to leverage generational diversity as a strength and capitalize upon the unique composition of the team. Although role modeling and mentoring may be more difficult in lower-richness communication formats, some teams were able to identify ways to effectively mentor, such as shadowing phone calls or examining chat transcripts and providing feedback.

It is clear that generational differences have the potential to create conflict among team members and as more individuals shift to virtual work arrangements there is a need for more research on how team leaders can effectively manage multigenerational members in virtual ways. We are answering calls for deeper understanding and shining a light for managers on what matters most to their employees. Though, we are not distinguishing between teams that are homogeneously distributed by age and an empirical study contrasting performance between these and multigenerational teams would be insightful to discerning how to fill vacant positions or consider role transfers. This is not to encourage solely considering age when determining team makeup, but instead understanding the impact of multigenerational differences on teams. As we lay out, communication across the different generations can be challenging. Style, words, and the way information is presented can influence how it is understood. A study into methods of communicating with multigenerational virtual teams could also provide guidance for improving the transfer of knowledge or task management. Our work adds to the growing body of knowledge on effectively managing today's teams.

This work supplements extant scholarly research and it provides insights that managers can use based on their unique workplace situations. Academics may use the richness of this IPA study to embolden deductive, theoretical testing. Practitioners may use these insights to communicate with their team members more effectively.

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## APPENDIX A – INTERVIEW GUIDE

### Intro and Consent

*Greet the participants and thank them again for their time. Maybe engage in a few minutes “small talk” to establish the relationship. State that before the interview begins, you’d like to review some information about the project and confidentiality with them.*

Review informed consent information. Ensure they definitely understand that:

- Participation is voluntary and they may stop at any time.
- I will record the interview now; it will be stored on a secure, password-protected and UMSL-approved place and will be deleted after the study is published.
- We will use quotes from the interview when we write up and present the results of the study, but names and company names will be replaced with fake names to protect your privacy.

*If they are amenable to participating, start the recording, and obtain verbal consent on the record.*

### Main Interview Prompts

*Note: when [focal group] appears, substitute Agile Team, Multi-National Team, or Multi-Generational Team.*

1. In our study we are interested in understanding the workplace experiences of people who are on [focal group] teams and who also have virtual leaders. To start with, can you describe what you feel are some of the general challenges that [focal type teams] sometimes experience?



2. We're also very interested in virtual leadership. And in this case, we're referring to your direct supervisor or boss who is over your virtual team. Can you tell us a story or two about times when things were going especially well in terms of virtual leadership for the team?
3. Conversely, can you tell us a story or two about times when things maybe *didn't* go so well in terms of virtual leadership for the team?
4. Would you please tell us about a time when you felt like having a virtual boss for the team was very *different* from having an in-person boss for the team?
5. Conversely, would you please tell us about a time when you felt like having a virtual boss for the team was NOT so different from having an in-person boss for the team?
6. Is there anything else about virtual leadership that's on your mind?

*Next, we have some short, hopefully easy questions that we are asking to better understand the context of your previous answers.*

*So, for these questions, we are asking about the situation you were in when you were working with the team and virtual leader you described before.*

1. What was the industry?
2. What percentage of the time did/do you, yourself, work remotely in an average week?
3. Was/is your distribution of remote vs. in-person time something you can choose, or did the organization dictate that?
4. Can you describe the basic team situation in terms of where the different team members are/were located?

5. How closely did/do you need to work with the other members of the team to get your job done?
6. How large a part of your workload is/was your work with this team? (For example, some people might work full time with their team and other people might split their time among multiple projects or teams.)

Note: if contextual questions still remain after all the previous questions have been answered, additional questions may be asked clarifying the nature of the Agile, multi-national, or multi-generational context.

*Next, we have some standard demographic questions. Some of these might seem a little obvious or awkward for us to ask, but we try not to make any assumptions so we would like to hear the answers directly from you. So, we will go ahead and ask you...*

1. How would you describe your race?
2. And how would you describe your gender?

*Thank them again for participating in the study and invite them to follow up with you if they have any questions or thoughts later. Tell them also that at some point in the future, you might get back in touch with them with any short follow up questions or to ask for their input on the draft of the paper.*

**Final Goodbye and Sign-Off**

*Example probing, clarification, and follow-up questions to elicit rich data (to be used as needed).*

- [Silence] or [nod]
- “Can you describe it to me? What happened?”
- “How did you experience it?”
- “Go on...”
- “Could you say something more about that?”
- “Can you give a more detailed description of what happened?”
- [Repeat significant words of the answer, such as an unusual term or a metaphor]
- “Do you have further examples of this?”
- “How was your emotional reaction to that?”
- “How did you respond?”
- “Is it correct that you felt...?”

**APPENDIX B – SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS****TABLE 1**

**The ten respondents work full-time in majority virtual positions on teams that are comprised of multigenerational members**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Team Size</b>	<b>% of Interactions that are Virtual</b>	<b>Position Tenure (months)</b>
Payton	Male	White	31-34	11 to 15	75+	12+
Lucas	Male	Black	31-34	20+	75+	12+
Cassidy	Female	White	31-34	6 to 10	75+	6 to 12
Ann	Female	White	35-40	3 to 5	75+	12+
Matthew	Male	Black	35-40	6 to 10	75+	6 to 12
Andrea	Female	White	41-44	6 to 10	75+	3 to 6
John	Male	White	41-44	6 to 10	75+	12+
Jean	Female	White	45-50	20+	75+	12+
Karyna	Female	Black	61+	11 to 15	75+	12+
John	Male	White	61+	6 to 10	50-75	12+

## APPENDIX C – THEORETICAL GROUNDING WITH *A PRIORI* CODES

**TABLE 2**

**The essential leadership functions – *a priori* codes – that are especially important in remote teams, as proposed by Bell et al. (2023)**

ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT IN REMOTE TEAMS	
Code	Definition
Encourage Self-Management	“...leadership behaviors that encourage followers to contribute to the leadership process.” (p. 342)
Establish Expectations and Goals	“Leaders provide followers with a clear purpose and definition” (p. 343)
Support the Social Climate	“a relationship-oriented function encompassing leadership behaviors that facilitate positive interpersonal interactions with and between followers” (p. 344)
Facilitate the Use of Technology	“...focuses on helping followers to apply technology in ways that improve their virtual interactions with each other and with the leader.” (p. 345)

**TABLE 3**

**The *a priori* codes proposed by Morgenson et al. (2010) on essential leadership functions that are equally important in remote teams**

EQUALLY IMPORTANT IN REMOTE TEAMS	
Code	Definition
Compose the Team	“...selecting a cohort of individuals who will be successful in accomplishing the team task outlined by the organization and then ensuring that the mix of individuals is appropriate over time.” (p. 12)
Structure and Plan	“...determining or assisting in determining how work will be accomplished (e.g., method), who will do which aspects of the work (e.g., role clarification), and when the work will be done (e.g., timing, scheduling, workflow).” (p. 15)
Train & Develop Team	“...may involve directly providing targeted training to the team through instruction or demonstration, followed by ongoing coaching. This leadership function also entails encouraging team members to use educational resources...” (p. 16)
Sensemaking	“As a team leadership function, sensemaking involves identifying essential environmental events, interpreting these events given the team’s performance situation, and communicating this interpretation to the team.” (p. 18)
Provide Feedback	Providing information that “enables the team to effectively assess its past and current performance and then adapt as needed to ensure future success.” (p. 18)

Monitor Team	"...examining the team's processes, performance, and the external team context...progress toward task completion, the resources available to the team, the team's external environment, and team member performance." (p. 20)
Manage Team Boundaries	"...managing relationships between the team and the larger organizational context by communicating and coordinating with key constituents or units outside of the team and by buffering the team from external forces and events..." (p. 20)
Challenge Team	"...challenging teams with regard to their task performance and confronting the team's assumptions, methods, and processes in an effort to find the best ways of accomplishing the team's work." (p. 21)
Perform Team Task	"...taking a more active role in the team's work by participating, intervening, or otherwise performing some of the team's work." (p. 22)
Solve Problems	"...diagnose and solve any problems that keep teams from realizing their potential." (p. 23)
Provide Resources	"...obtaining and providing informational, financial materials, and personnel resources." (p. 24)

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## APPENDIX D – THEME SUB-THEM RESULTS

TABLE 4

**The most frequent theme showed that effective leaders make sure all members receive and understand messages**

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**GET 1: Ensures everyone understands what is being communicated.**

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**Makes sure everyone is up-to-date.**

*“Currently I work for Bob who is a virtual leader in our entire team is virtual. We are spread out all over and he is a very, very good virtual leader. He is very, very much keeping people abreast of things that might be happening or changes that might be underway.” - Andrea*

*“And the fact that we can have that 15 and 20 min call every morning, it kind of helps us level set. We can ask each other questions before we start our day, or we can get updates from the Manager that it comes down from leadership. Always. And then, knowing you don't feel like you're missing out because you're not in the office. So, I think you know, the leaders that go over well are the ones that kind of keep the same high frequency touch points that you would get inside of the office.” - Lucas*

**Explains information in terms that are common among the team and limits jargon.**

*“...we have people that are 18 to 81. It's that we need to meet people where they are ... So, you're talking about very different crowds in your associate populations. So, meet them where they are. ... So, let's consider that when we're talking about HR, business data, market data recent, you know, that any kind of data source we have and the kind of information we share. And I think our team did a fairly good job of trying to do that.” - Payton*

*“I would say that there are a mix of phrases. The way someone speaks or tries to convey information. Corporate jargon changes over time. A lot of assumptions are built in that. People know something or may not know something, just because, you know, that was the content or the commentary when they were coming up to the organization.” – Payton*

*So, I'm a millennial. I've heard, like, “right up the flagpole,” “30,000 foot view” multiple times over. I've noticed that my Gen. Z counterparts, this is something that's new to them, right? Just like the corporate jargon I kind of remember from friends who are older than me. ... and even a little bit older, like saying “soup to nuts,” right? Or “cradle to grave” type of phrasing. Those certain things don't resonate with the younger audience as much as I think some of our cohort might recognize. So, I think that's where I've seen some gaps is just... Not offensive phrasing at all, but just some of those things you kind of take for granted, like, “Oh, you understand what I mean?” And it's like, “No. Can you explain that?” – Payton*

**Ensures that they are available for team members for questions.**

*“I think the biggest thing is you have to be open to communicating for virtual leadership. I know some colleagues who have a manager that they barely talk to, and I couldn't ... run weigh adjacent teams, and I could never imagine being successful if I didn't have a steady flow of communication with my manager. Not hand holding, but she CCs on emails, ... We have*

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*regular touch ins. I have a question. She IMs me back when she's available, ... That is something that is so important.” - Cassidy*

*“It's that quick question that you want to ask, but you don't want to make a big formal meeting and you don't want to take 30 minutes. So, there are different groups that we have set up. I have my peers and myself. My boss has himself and the three individuals who report to him, so depending on what's happening, you could kind of go to that different group and ask that quick question. I think that's important.” - Jean*

**Defines the format of team meetings.**

*“Yeah, I don't know if quality of decision making per se, but I know when we started having video meetings regularly there were some that would insist on everybody has to have their camera on just to make more of an actual meeting. And, you know, remind people that they're working with other people instead of just tuning out phone calls on meetings, which was something that could happen a lot. So, I do think the video aspect helps, uh, kind of bridge the gap and make it more like you're still working with other people directly.” - John*

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**TABLE 5**

**The second theme entailed the leader's actions and communication bringing about a sense of unity on the team**

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**GET 2: Ensures everyone continually feels part of the team.**

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**Makes sure everyone is aligned.**

*“So, I've had 2 managers, 2 different companies. ... But a lot of his focus was on driving. “We need to drive a culture shift. That culture shift is making sure that data is more accessible, more secure, more accurate, more precise in more real time ... And if that's gonna make us, you know, the bad guys along the way, we have to drive that shift.” And he was right. It made us the bad guys. Because we were the HR data team, the HR analytics team.” - Payton.*

**Encourages relationship building.**

*“There's a little bit more concentrated effort in a virtual team to make sure that those relationships are solid on, but it's just a different effort when you're on site in an office every day, making sure that those relationships are just as solid in a slightly different way. Things are not as immediate in a virtual team. Instead of walking into my boss's office to ask a question and get an answer, it is a phone call or an email.” – Andrea*

*“I think one thing that goes well for virtual leadership with our team is having what we would call a “water cooler” call every morning.” – Lucas*

*“I will tell you virtually umm I've been really lucky to have a good leader who has driven. [Jean paused for 3 seconds and continued] Uh. Staying connected even while we're virtual, so [my boss] actually engaged in what we call an engagement committee. [Jean began to smile] And so it's like we call it [Jean used air quotes] “the fun committee”.” – Jean*

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*"I said they do a really good job of going through the tools that we use to reward you for jobs well done. And I think they do because when you're in person it's very easy to hear people say something, be it in a team meeting or whatever. But I think in virtual, you get to just go in and look at the chats and use the tools that are available for you to use. I don't seem to think there has been a big difference." - Karyna*

**Provides support when needed.**

*"Yeah, I don't know. Just whenever I have... Sometimes she'll shadow me in meetings. Especially if it's slated to be high conflict. And one of the things I really appreciate is she'll stay in the background. But she's listening. I know she's listening, because when I've said something important and I got ignored, she came right back. And she's like, "No, I don't think you understand. This is 8 million, 9 million, whatever. It's a really big issue." So, I think that's another example of when you're not in the same room it can be harder to have that. That 1, 2 punch, that dynamic support." – Cassidy*

**Creates an inclusive work environment.**

*"But like, you know, I think the younger generation of people tend to be a little bit more mobile and not just sit at their desk all the time. So, when we're on camera, that sometimes comes through. Like my first boss, he was always sitting on his couch, like always, and just much more kind of relaxed and laid back, I guess. And just, you know, he was very efficient and effective at his job. Like he was a great leader, but it just that part of it wasn't important to him. So, he was just like, work wherever, 'cause I'd be like, oh, I've got to go to school. So, I'm going to go there and I'm going to work from the hotel, and I'd like, tell him all the things I am going to do. He's like, I don't care, just do your job. You can be on the beach. You can be, you know, in Alaska, I don't care. Yeah, just get together." – Anne*

**Empowers everyone to do their job.**

*"While they understand they were all in different time zones, everyone's doing their own thing. There's not a there's not a micromanagement piece of it. And we know that when we need them, how we can get in contact with them, they're responsive, but I also think they also empower us to make decisions like something you know, if you need to. If you need an answer on something pretty quickly or you need to make a decision, they trust that we will make at least the right decision. But they're always available, so I think just empowering us to do our job, work with managers, work with employees, external individuals." – Matthew*

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**TABLE 6**

**The third theme reveals the importance of knowledge and exchange between different generations**

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**GET 3: Ensures experience is respected and knowledge is exchanged.**

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**Our multigenerational virtual leader ensures experience is respected and knowledge is exchanged between members of the team.**

**Creates the environment where acquired knowledge can be passed on to others.**

*“Yeah, it's actually kind of funny you asked that, because I just had a conversation with some colleagues on Thursday, and we were discussing negative work experiences. As women in mostly male dominated industries, and essentially trusting your instinct when you don't feel like something is appropriate. And I was talking to 2 ladies, you know, one's probably 10 to 15 years older than me, but the other one's probably close to 20 to 30 years older than me, so just talking with these women, and I had another woman with me who's more of my peer, and we're just talking about their experiences, and, you know, they've been in the industry for a lot longer, and, you know, they were sharing with me things that they had learned kind of the hard way, basically through their own negative experiences. So, basically, the good thing is that they can pass on their wisdom, you know. I do very much respect that, respect their experience.” – Cassidy*

*“I think that some of the younger ones don't necessarily know how to assist a customer. As to where, if they were, if we were in person versus virtual, they would be able to hear and see how we interact. But then, whenever you're in a virtual, we can only go by comments that they might make in a meeting, or when we see in a chat, and then that way we can kind of give feedback. As to where the difference is, and where they missed the mark.” - Karyna*

*“I think Gen-Z in particular has done a good job articulating this about wanting to be in the office for in person training, in-person interaction. We've seen that in human capital trend surveys from Deloitte and other sources. That's what our junior pipeline wants to see. And junior talent is also going to emulate what they see. If they don't see senior leaders out and about or in the office, but being told you to return to work, or if they don't see senior leaders, you know, doing something that they're being asked to do, there's a gap, right? Like, you're gonna think there's a logical misstep. There's, you know, cognitive dissonance, whatever... something's off.” – Payton*

**Understands that there are generational differences and leverages the skills of all.**

*“You know, we were all at home by ourselves, but she was super proud of that. And so, she posted on our social instant message. Just a quick hey, I'm so proud...proud mom moment and made this so I think it's important to be very cognizant in staying connected while you're virtual. And then a layer on top of that would be having multigenerational individuals that you have those individuals represented in decision-making. [Jean smiled] Because your different generations think differently and need different things and stay engaged and empowered and involved. And so, you don't want someone like myself who doesn't represent*

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*all the generations planning things because I don't represent everybody. So, it's important to have kind of representation and a check in with a different generations.” – Jean*

*“I guess the biggest thing is the way that they look at issues because I'm kind of from the old school and I'm a very deep diver, so I really like them. I really like to get into the nitty gritty and the boss I have is younger of course and he always, he always is saying don't get in the weeds. So, he tends to be at a higher level. And I think that the younger, the younger generation leaders tend not to want to get into the weeds. They just want to kind of hit it at a high level and think that's good enough. Whereas I've been for a long time a weed guy if you will. So, I think that's the big difference.” - Jon*

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