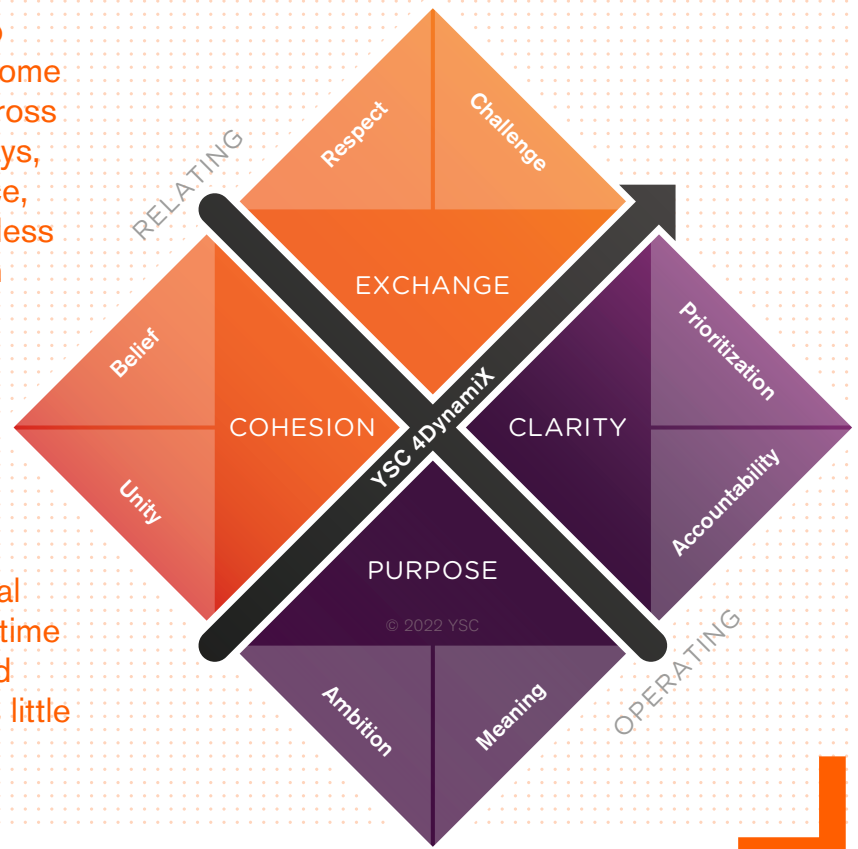




# HYBRID TEAMS: FOUR FUNDAMENTALS TO GET YOUR LEADERSHIP TEAM WORKING WELL WHEN TOGETHER AND APART

Love it or loathe it, hybrid working is here to stay but there isn't one version of Hybrid. Some teams are hybrid in their working rhythm across the week with a mix of office and remote days, other teams are now hybrid in their existence, only meeting in person periodically. Regardless of team rhythm, knowing that there are both benefits and challenges to remote working, many leaders are wondering how they can ensure their team is working effectively. This often drives a desire to get people back into the office, to rekindle a team spirit or reconnect their people with the culture. Being part of a team creates a sense of belonging and a linking of individual contribution to organizational purpose. In a time where we see significant churn of talent and burnout, investing time into your team takes little effort but has significant value.



If you are going to ask people to come back into the office and give up their home working comforts, you would be wise to ensure the time is well spent. Our research demonstrated that it's not who you have on the team that equates to team performance, but how people work together as a team. We discovered there are two fundamental factors that influence team effectiveness, their operating rhythms and processes (what they focus on) and their relationship dynamics (how they interact with each other). To break this down further, we discovered four fundamental drivers of team effectiveness. Leaders should consider these focal points, to inform when and how they bring their team together in person.

## > PURPOSE

Firstly, 'why' are you a team? For leadership teams who had to pivot their strategy, the reason for being a team may be less clear than it was pre-pandemic. If your team is working remotely most of the time, it's likely people are more focused on individual outputs, and potentially lost sight of the bigger picture that inspires them to work together. Your 'collective why' is usually informed by what your main stakeholders expect from you. Spending time revisiting 'why' you need to work together as a team may sound like a 'nice to have' – but the answer informs 'what' you should be working on when you do come together. This helps you to connect outputs which are individualistic in nature, perfect for remote working, to shared outcomes you are all striving for. Yes, discussion can happen remotely, but whether you are a team is an emotive question which benefits from 'in person' debate. When done well a clearly defined team purpose creates a shared, ambitious vision of success which feels meaningful and motivating.

### Team Opportunity: Ask yourselves, why are you a team?

When you are next together in person, spend time looking at your team from other perspectives. What outcomes are your stakeholders expecting from you – where can you all have an impact? Then consider how individual roles contribute to the collective outcomes and opportunity to have an impact. If you can't answer why you need to work together as a team, then you either no longer need to be a team, or you've lost sight of the role your team plays for your shareholders or investors, your customers, your people and your communities.

## > CLARITY

Planning and prioritizing are not often high on people's wish list when it comes to spending time together. And yet, high levels of remote work can result in duplication, time spent on distracting yet low-value activity or over-investment in pet projects. When solely working remotely, shared and individual accountabilities can become murky. Using physical space to map out strategic planning and priorities is more efficient and provides quicker cut through to accountabilities. Corridor conversations in the office previously reinforced who was doing what, and often gave people a sense of shared momentum. Time together in person can be used to refocus people on 'what' we are all committed to delivering and 'who' has accountability for different strategic priorities. In our experience, top teams often operate under many assumptions when it comes to accountabilities. Leadership teams that created good hybrid rhythms note that the quality of live dialogue when planning in person helps to land points quickly and distil priorities.

### Team Opportunity: Re-creating Corridor Conversations.

When next together rotate people quickly through different pairings to recreate short, focused conversations to update each other on where they are placing their leadership focus, where they would value help from their peers or their respective teams. Ask them to look and listen for interconnections across the updates – themes across different parts of the business and functions. The physical movement in an activity such as this enhances the energy and personal connection to what could be an otherwise tedious update.



**“A united team believes in their shared potential and impact in the world.”**

## > COHESION

Members of high performing teams feel a strong connection with their team's identity and so are motivated for the collective success of the team as well as believing in the team's capability to succeed. Whilst geographically dispersed teams might state that it is possible to create a team identity, the opportunity to spend time together in person creates deeper, more personal connections to individuals and experiences of 'being a team'. There is a primal human need to feel seen and valued which is more fulfilled in person. Teams who have invested time together comment on the difference it makes to the quality and quantity of remote interactions afterwards. Positive relationships within a team at all levels of leadership, increase the ability to call on each other for creative input, problem solving or emotional support.



**“Spending time together creates deeper foundations for remote working; it increases understanding of the interconnected roles and accountabilities needed to execute against the team's strategy.”**

### Team Opportunity: Create a shared history.

“Remember when...” Humans are social creatures, and we all love a good story or a moment to reminisce. Talking about our past or recalling funny incidents brings back positive emotions and reconnects people. It is easy to associate team meals, bonding activities or offsites as solely for fun, but these are the experiences which give teams a shared history. Executives can assume they no longer require this sort of connection, but senior leaders have the same human needs.

## > EXCHANGE

Digital distance can give us a reason to avoid difficult issues with colleagues. Moreover, difficulties can be discussed in the room in quite a different way than in a virtual forum. There is more 'human' data on hand through nonverbal language, which makes it easier for us to read and adjust our approach. The ability to have productive conversations that have the right balance of respect and challenge, ensures that tensions – be it people or task related – are worked through rather than avoided. Removing tensions increases focus and momentum on what matters most. Working remotely also decreases the amount of meaningful positive interactions we have with each other. You may have heard of the concept of 'relational credit' or as John Gottman describes it an 'emotional bank account'. Our ability to build and maintain relationships that are strong enough to work through difficult times is enhanced through short but meaningful positive exchanges. Examples of these are showing gratitude, keeping commitments, having a laugh together, giving people your full attention or being straight with what's on your mind. Many of these types of interactions are increased when we are interacting in person, and the 'experience' of those interactions is heightened. Teams, that have a 'bank' of positive interactions are more able to surface tensions.

### Team Opportunity: Bring your Virtual Elephant into the room.

Consider whether there are 'elephants in the virtual room' or controversial issues which are being avoided when you meet remotely. These are best tackled when you are together in person, provided you create an opportunity for people to connect personally and approach the issue with curiosity.

## IN SUMMARY

Teams are a source of professional and personal growth, creativity, problem-solving, support and resilience. Whether your team is in person once a week, or once a year, thinking about these four elements of team effectiveness should help you to plan the time that you do have together to get the greatest value for the team and for individuals. If you get it right, your team will want to come together – for both the human connection and for the team's success.

