Virtual Authenticity

What is virtual authenticity?

Virtual Authenticity is the ability to be genuine and build trustworthy, impactful connections at a distance and online.
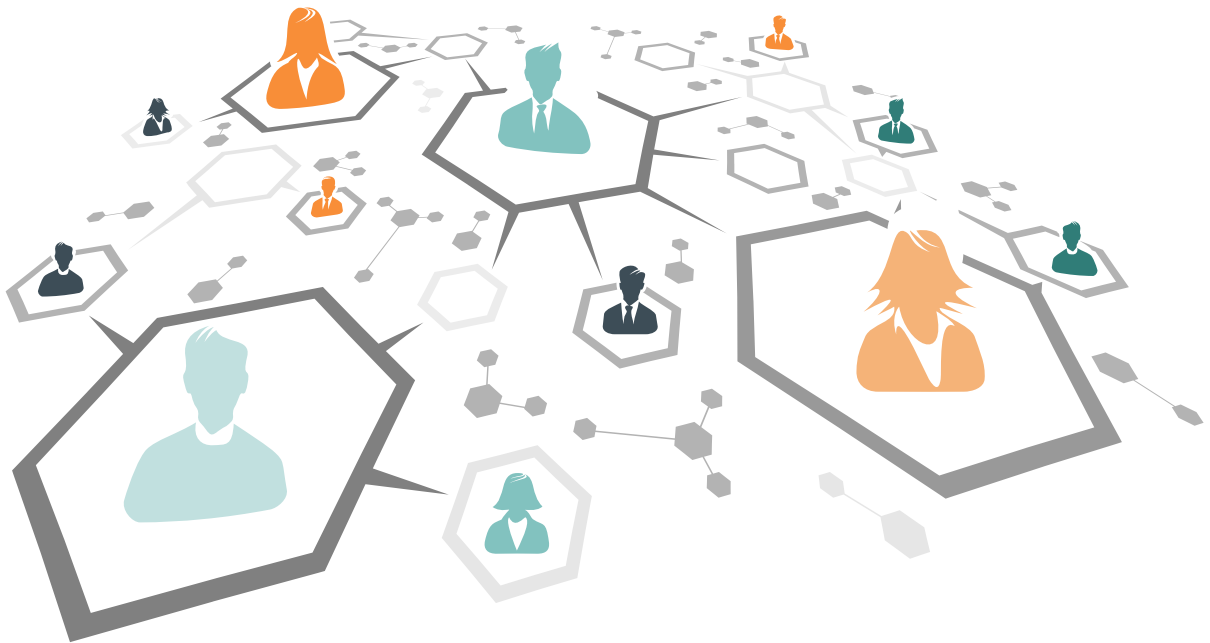
Why does it matter?

Digital technologies have changed relationships forever. What started to shift slowly as we adopted email and later text messaging, expanded during lockdown. From the boardroom to holiday parties, doctor's visits to memorial services, activities and relationships were reimagined online.

How to achieve virtual authenticity?

You do it by proactively cultivating the agility, capacity, and optionality to connect with people across diverse settings, even online.

Does virtual authenticity work?

Virtual relationships are different but can be effective and fulfilling. It takes attention, intention, and shifting how we engage with each other to build strong virtual relationships.
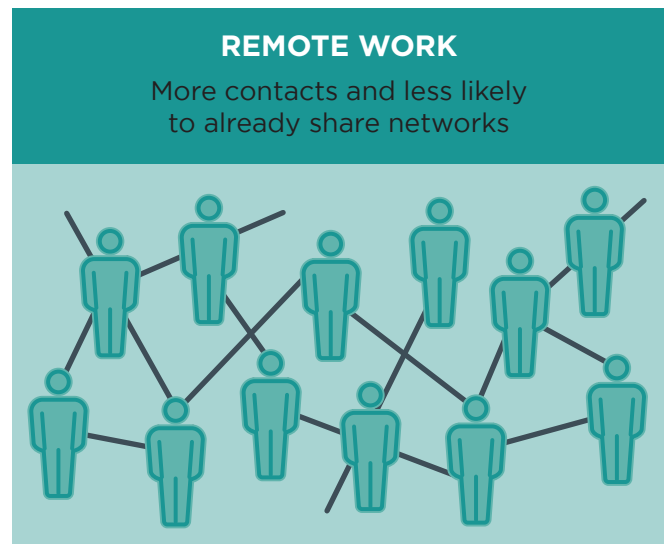
The Benefits and Drawbacks of Virtual Collaborations

BENEFITS

Enable organizations to recruit top talent from any location and build teams with the expertise needed to tackle increasingly complex projects.

DRAWBACKS

It can be harder to build the rapport and trust needed to foster productive collaborations. In addition, misunderstandings are more likely to arise and differences (e.g., different networks, cultures, etc.) are more likely to structure one's workplace relationships.

ON-SITE WORK
Fewer contacts and more likely to share networks

REMOTE WORK
More contacts and less likely to already share networks

ON-SITE TEAMS		REMOTE TEAMS
Fewer connections with more in common	**Connections and Familiarity**	More connections with less in common
Share geography (so more likely to also share existing networks and to have friends or former coworkers in common)	**Overlapping Networks**	Fewer overlapping networks, friends, etc.
Many opportunities to connect outside formal meetings (e.g., on the elevator, in the lunch room, afterwork, etc.) and ongoing casual sharing	**Opportuntunities to Connect Outside of Work/Casual Sharing**	Few or no opportunities to connect outside formal meetings; as a result, less likelihood that casual sharing will occur (e.g., conversations on the elevator or in the lunchroom about what you did on the weekend)
More likely to enjoy listening to the same music or podcasts, watching the same shows, cheering the same teams, etc.	**Commonground**	Harder to find commonalities
More likely to share the same langauge and culture	**Language and Culture**	Less likely to share the same language and culture

Principles that Impact Collaborations

Collaborations are the result of complex and interconnected social dynamics. How we perceive ourselves in relation to the world at large influences our choices, behaviors, and beliefs. Likewise, our behaviors and self-perception tend to be influenced by how we are perceived by others. Understanding these dynamics is essential to building effective collaborations.

Principle 1: **Familiarity breeds likeness**

We like people who feel familiar or like us. At a distance, it can be hard to cultivate enough data to establish familiarity.

Principle 2: **Go slow to go fast**

When time is limited, it is challenging to build deep and meaningful relationships. It can be hard to determine where to start and what to share, or even to find time to do so. Even online, take time to chat before you jump in to formal meetings or carve out time to informally connect with colleagues outside formal meetings. Rapport is one gateway.

Principle 3: **Invest in trust building**

Building trust is more difficult online. Intentionally invest in cultivating trust by sharing of yourself and cultivating the foundations of trust: character, communication, and competence.

How to Build Genuine Relationships Remotely

Creating connections remotely requires intention and attention. It isn't easy but it is possible.

The first step is to be ready and willing to share about yourself, even if it feels counter-intuitive at a distance.

Step 1:
- Notice differences (in-person vs virtual).
- Map where you are.
- What is currently happening in the relationship?
- Where and how are you already engaging?

Step 2:
- Be Intentional in creating relationship.
- Map where you want to be.
- Build rapport.
- Foster trust by sharing of oneself in a way that intentionally builds familiarity while enhancing trust of character, competence, and communication.

Step 3:
- Learn to read the virtual room.
- Recognize and nurture intersections and interactions.

How to Cultivate Virtual Authenticity

Self ⇨ **Others** ⇨ **Aligning to Lead** ⇨ **Sustaining Excellence**

Step 1: Build Self-Awareness

Do a personal audit:

- Who are you?
- How do you want your virtual collaborators to experience you and and come to know you?
  - If familiarity breeds likeness, what contextual information can you share about yourself?
- What would be helpful to them?
  - Reflecting on past authentic collaborations, what helps you feel more genuine?
- What would be interesting to them?

Step 2: Bring Social Awareness

Be Curious about the Other

- What don't you know about your remote collaborators?
- What would you like to know that might help you collaborate better?
- Why does it matter?

Be Curious about the Situation

- What is hidden?
- What is building or eroding trust?
- What are you comfortable sharing?
- What would you like to know about your virtual team members?
- If familiarity breeds likeness, what might you have in common?

Step 3: Activate and Integrate

Individual Authenticity: CONNECT WITH SELF

What does it mean to know and share yourself?

1. Know success criteria, values, beliefs
2. Recognize strengths and weaknesses
3. Leverage your gifts to have the greatest impact
4. Be congruent and aligned with yourself and your actions
5. Demonstrate agility

Interpersonal Authenticity: CONNECT WITH OTHERS

What does it mean to engage with/relate to people you see on a regular basis?

1. Relate with rapport
2. Build trust
3. Develop multiple ways to communicate effectively
4. Set others up for success to build alignement
5. Take time to hang out, have fun, and celebrate individual and shared wins

Virtual Authenticity: CONNECT WITH ANYONE

What does it mean to engage with/relate to people you only engage with at a distance?

1. Embrace successful strategies (repeat whatever has helped you build authentic relationships online in the past)
2. Proactively invest in forging stronger collaborations
3. Continually grow and learn to expand your capacity to build connections with anyone located anywhere
4. Live your passion wherever and whenever to attract others who share your passions