PASSING THE BATON

How to communicate and collaborate in hybrid teams

Passing The Baton

Asynchronous Communication in Hybrid Teams

In **Work From Anywhere** we dive into the 5 Levels of Remote Work and other important elements to Matthew Mullenweg's personal approach to remote work. Throughout **this episode** of the Making Sense podcast, Mullenweg explores asynchronous communication and how it requires an obsession with 'handing over the baton'. That is how are we passing on the work that I've done to others in a way that's clear, seamless and most relevant.

You may believe that the best way to complete handovers or transitions in a project is with another person at the same time. If this wasn't an option...

- How might you ensure that all the information is shared clearly?
- How could you convey emotions or the 'human elements' that we all pick up in body language if it wasn't done in person?
- How could you craft a process where the other person picks up the 'baton' and dives into the work seamlessly?

The processes you've always used, the ones you might be holding onto too tightly, may be worth exchanging for processes that suit a team that communicates asynchronously.

Let's explore some of the approaches you can implement to 'pass the baton' more effectively in your hybrid team.

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Clarifying your communication mediums.

One of the most important steps for ensuring ease of communication amongst your hybrid team is clarifying your communication mediums. You might have a whole suite of applications, messaging platforms and project management tools at your disposal at any one time. If you're using a few for messaging, especially as an asynchronous team, you might find that messages start getting missed which can lead to a few awkward situations and tough conversations down the line.

To combat the future pain of missed messages and unclear project timelines, we'd recommend considering the SOCS framework. Take into account what communication medium you are using for what purpose. Consider these four types of communication.

SOCS stands for:
- Social
- Operational
- Conversational
- Speed

These are the four types of communication avenues you'll need to lead, manage and support your team while working remotely. Match the medium to the purpose of the communication. It's likely that you're already using these pieces of software to some degree, but with a slight shift in the way you're using them you'll see a big difference within your organisation.

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S.O.C.S

Social

Our teams may be working remotely, but that doesn't mean that we should drop the ball with social connection. Now more than ever our people need social interaction and connection with their teammates to build rapport and strengthen their sense of belonging. It's crucial for long-term, sustained motivation and it's something we're incredibly passionate about at Pragmatic Thinking. The social element of the SOCS framework refers to a tool that your team will use for virtual social gatherings. Most likely, the social element of your Virtual Leadership toolkit will be a video conferencing software like Zoom. You'll use your social software of choice for team meetings, company-wide meetings and internal comms.

Operational

Now for the operational side of things. Here you'll need to ensure that the piece of software you use for project and task management is adopted, utilised and ultimately, is effective in helping your team keep track of what they've got going on. Ideally, the piece of software should allow for comments on projects and tasks to be made so that task-centric conversations can take place in one virtual space. For our operational system, we use Monday.com.

Conversational

The third element of the SOCS framework is conversational. You'll need to designate a place where your team can have casual conversations back-and-forth like they would if they were all in the office together. This includes team-centric conversations, company-wide conversations and one-to-one interactions. For many organisations the chosen conversational tool is Slack, however, Microsoft Teams is another great option.

Speed

So, you've got roughly three pieces of software under your belt now. Your team is using them, they're working well, but there's something missing. How do you cut through the noise when there's something urgent or something important that needs to be shared? That's where the speed element of this framework swoops in to save the day. For many organisations the best option for this is a quick text message. Everyone has their phone on them within easy reach and are more likely to see a text come up than a Slack message, especially if they've got Slack notifications muted or are in the middle of a task.
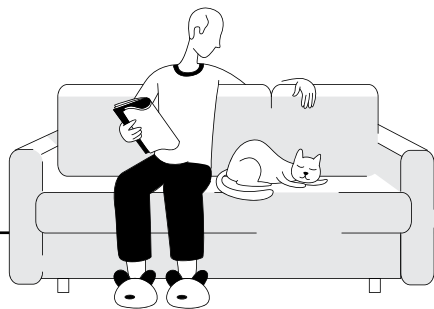
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Summarise, summarise, summarise.

If you've got a whole bunch of conversations taking place on your chosen operational and conversational channels, well done. Your team is engaged and actively using the tools you've laid out to create an environment that supports high performance in a hybrid workplace. Now, if you've got team members working part time or have people separated by time zones, you'll really need to start obsessing over this element of passing the baton for long-term success. It's called summarising; we all know how to do it, but it's a simple change in thinking that can drastically alter the resulting culture and connection within your hybrid team.

After long threaded discussions in your operational and conversational channels, or after big brainstorming sessions that only a portion of the team can attend, make a point to create a final update or message summarising the key points of the discussion. This should be a clear, well-written message with dot points to allow anyone to quickly understand the discussion that took place and refer to the key points in the future.
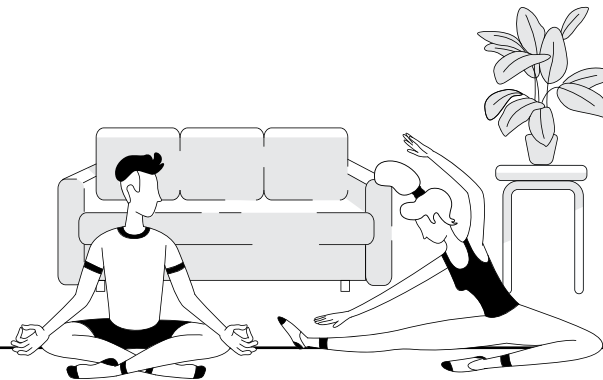
In some organisations this looks like a poll taking place on where the next team offsite should be. After a couple of messages back and forth, with dates and times mentioned throughout, the group comes to a decision. To allow for someone to easily know what the choice was, either update the main post with a summary of the discussion and decision or send a new message in the same channel to the team finalising the details. That way your people who are viewing the discussion at a later date, asynchronously, can quickly get to the point of the discussion and know what is happening with the team offsite. This creates an inclusive environment for all team members, regardless of distance or mode of work.

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Team connection channels.

For hybrid teams to truly feel connected and engaged there needs to be places for them to connect as individuals, outside of work. This means a messaging channel where team members are encouraged to share conversation about water-cooler type topics. You may find it helpful to tie these to your cultural rhythms and rituals or you may even find it helpful to involve your team in brainstorming some options.

Depending on your industry and the personalities and interests of your team, certain topic themes for connection channels may work better for you. As an example, we have a channel on Slack called #SocialSnaps where our team are encouraged to share photos of themselves connecting socially as a team as well as during times where they're living our cultural rhythms of 'Win The Morning', 'Seize The Midday' and 'Crafternoon'. It's a channel with a lot of activity and it's an important element of our day-to-day hybrid work schedules. This connection channel allows us the opportunity to engage with our teammates when we're separated by distance, whilst also encouraging us all to take action on our cultural rhythms.
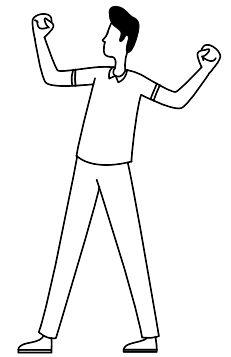
Encourage celebration.

In a hybrid work environment it's very easy for project milestones to be overlooked and individual team contributions to go unnoticed. When we don't see our team members in the office day to day we often lose the opportunity to celebrate and acknowledge the small wins. But it doesn't have to be this way. You can encourage celebration of project milestones and task completion within your hybrid team in many different ways. Some of them are synchronous (like all-team meetings) and some are asynchronous (like messaging channels). For the purpose of this guide to passing the baton, let's focus on asynchronous celebrations.

For example, you may have a team that is 6 hours behind in timezone from your main team. They may be working on a big project and coming up to a significant milestone. While they could very easily celebrate as a small group offline, it's far more impactful if there's a digital space where they can share a photo and message about what they've accomplished as a team and what some of the highlights so far have been. That way the main team, when online, can see the update and celebrate the team and feel more connected to the work they're doing and also have the chance to celebrate the individuals that have worked hard to bring the project to fruition.

At Pragmatic Thinking, we've got our own version in our chosen conversational platform, Slack. It's called #workshare and it's the place where we encourage our team to shout out their individual and collective achievements during the week. Everyone takes part, and because of this, everyone has the opportunity to celebrate each other's wins and milestones, no matter the time they see the message.

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Passing The Baton In Summary

All in all, asynchronous communication is about making way for your hybrid team to converse and connect despite time and work schedule differences. It's about a mutual understanding across the team that whilst not everyone is online at the same time, we are all connected as one team, working together to live up to our purpose as an organisation.

Be sure to check out the rest of our Work From Anywhere resources on **www.pragmaticthinking.com/wfabook** and discuss what you've learned with your team. The more you can involve your people in the large-scale shift to Work From Anywhere, the better.

And if you're keen for some help in adopting this approach and achieving high performance as a hybrid team, take a look at our **purpose-built program.**

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