

Interpersonal Synchrony and Trust in Hybrid Teams

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Abstract

Hybrid teamwork combines face-to-face and technology-mediated collaboration, creating a work environment in which team members must maintain interpersonal connection despite unequal physical presence, varying communication channels, and discontinuous patterns of interaction. This study examines interpersonal synchrony as a potential relational mechanism through which trust may develop and remain stable in hybrid teams. Interpersonal synchrony has traditionally been studied as temporal coordination in movement, rhythm, and social interaction, with experimental research demonstrating associations with affiliation, cooperation, cohesion, and prosocial behavior. The present study extends this principle to hybrid teamwork by conceptualizing synchrony as the perceived temporal and behavioral alignment of team members across meetings, communication exchanges, task handoffs, response patterns, and coordinated work episodes. Because no original organizational dataset was supplied, a transparent simulation-based research design was employed.

A reproducible synthetic dataset containing 384 hypothetical hybrid-team-member observations was generated to examine relationships among interpersonal synchrony, communication reliability, hybrid dispersion, and perceived team trust. Simulated mean trust increased from 2.69 under low synchrony to 3.30 under moderate synchrony and 3.95 under high synchrony. Multiple regression produced a positive coefficient for interpersonal synchrony ($B = 0.563$), a positive coefficient for communication reliability ($B = 0.281$), and a negative coefficient for hybrid dispersion ($B = -0.127$). The model explained 67.8% of simulated variance in team trust. These values are illustrative outputs rather than empirical population estimates.

The theoretical interpretation is that synchrony may provide recurring behavioral evidence of responsiveness, predictability, shared attention, and mutual adjustment, thereby reducing relational uncertainty when team members alternate between physical and digital interaction. The study argues that hybrid-team trust should not be managed solely through formal monitoring or communication frequency. Organizations should also design interaction rhythms that create repeated opportunities for mutual responsiveness and coordinated participation while avoiding artificial or excessive synchronization that constrains autonomy.

Keywords: interpersonal synchrony, hybrid teams, team trust, virtual teamwork, temporal coordination, communication reliability, social affiliation, distributed collaboration



1. Introduction

Organizations increasingly organize collaborative work through combinations of physical and technology-mediated interaction. Rather than belonging exclusively to either conventional face-to-face teams or completely virtual teams, many work groups operate across a continuum of virtuality in which geographic dispersion, electronic dependence, structural dynamism, and differences in physical presence vary across tasks and periods. Gibson and Gibbs demonstrated that virtuality is better understood through several dimensions rather than as a simple categorical distinction between “virtual” and “nonvirtual” teams. Hertel, Geister, and Konradt similarly reviewed virtual-team research as a field concerned with distributed teams whose members rely substantially on electronic communication and coordination. For the present study, a hybrid team is consequently conceptualized as a work group whose members perform interdependent tasks through recurring combinations of co-located and digitally mediated interaction. This arrangement offers flexibility, but it also changes the interpersonal conditions through which members observe responsiveness, establish expectations, interpret silence, coordinate timing, and determine whether colleagues can be trusted.

Trust is particularly consequential in technologically mediated teamwork because members frequently depend on colleagues whose actions cannot be continuously observed. Jarvenpaa and Leidner's work on global virtual teams demonstrated that communication practices are central to the development and maintenance of trust when members are separated by space and culture. Breuer, Hüffmeier, and Hertel subsequently showed through meta-analysis that trust is positively associated with team effectiveness and that its importance is especially relevant under conditions of virtuality. More broadly, De Jong, Dirks, and Gillespie's meta-analysis established a positive association between intrateam trust and team performance across a large body of team research. These findings indicate that hybrid work does not reduce the importance of trust. Instead, reduced direct observation and uneven interaction conditions may make the behavioral foundations of trust more consequential.

One potentially important foundation is interpersonal synchrony. Research outside organizational settings has repeatedly shown that people who move, act, or respond in temporal coordination often experience greater affiliation and cooperation. Hove and Risen demonstrated that interpersonal synchrony increased affiliation, while Wiltermuth and Heath found that synchronous activity could increase cooperation through stronger social attachment. Cacioppo and colleagues reported greater perceived synchrony and social affiliation toward synchronous partners. Meta-analytic evidence from Rennung and Göritz similarly identified a moderate positive effect of interpersonal synchrony on prosocial attitudes and behavior. Lang and colleagues further connected synchronous activity with liking and behavior in a trust game, suggesting that synchrony can influence not only subjective affiliation but also behavior under conditions involving interpersonal vulnerability.

Hybrid teamwork presents a theoretically interesting extension of this research because synchrony cannot be reduced to physically moving together. Team members may be synchronized through conversational turn-taking, timely acknowledgment, coordinated handoffs, shared meeting rhythms, reciprocal adaptation, simultaneous attention to a problem, and predictable cycles of synchronous and asynchronous work. Such forms of temporal coordination may signal that colleagues are attentive to one another and capable of adjusting behavior to changing collective demands. At the same time, technology can disrupt these cues through latency, camera-off participation, delayed



messaging, interruptions, uneven access to physical meetings, and fragmented interaction. The same team may therefore experience strong interpersonal synchrony in one episode and weak synchrony in another. The central theoretical question is whether recurring perceptions of being “in sync” provide relational information that contributes to trust when collaboration moves repeatedly between digital and physical contexts.

2. Objectives of the Study

2.1 To Examine the Association Between Interpersonal Synchrony and Trust in Hybrid Teams

The first objective is to examine whether stronger interpersonal synchrony can theoretically correspond with higher perceived trust among members of hybrid teams. Synchrony is treated as the extent to which interaction partners experience temporal alignment, reciprocal responsiveness, coordinated communication, and behavioral adjustment across digital and face-to-face work episodes.

The study does not assume that synchrony automatically creates trust. Rather, it investigates whether repeated coordinated interaction can provide behavioral information that makes colleagues appear more dependable, responsive, and socially connected.

2.2 To Examine Communication Reliability as a Complementary Trust Condition

The second objective is to evaluate the role of communication reliability. Hybrid-team synchrony can be difficult to sustain when messages are inconsistently acknowledged, deadlines are communicated ambiguously, meetings start unpredictably, or team members frequently disappear from shared interaction without explanation.

Communication reliability is therefore treated as a complementary condition that may independently strengthen trust by making interaction more predictable and interpretable.

2.3 To Assess the Influence of Hybrid Dispersion

The third objective is to examine whether increasing dispersion across physical and digitally mediated settings creates additional difficulty for team trust.

Hybrid dispersion is conceptualized as the extent to which members experience unequal locations, uneven channel access, separation across work periods, and limited overlap in interaction. The model proposes that dispersion does not make trust impossible, but it can increase the importance of deliberate coordination and reliable communication.

3. Review of Literature

3.1 Interpersonal Synchrony, Affiliation, and Cooperative Behavior

Interpersonal synchrony describes temporal alignment between interacting individuals. Although synchrony can appear in movement, vocal rhythm, physiological patterns, attention, and other forms of interpersonal coordination, much of the foundational experimental literature has investigated synchronized movement. The relevance of this literature lies in the social consequences of temporal coordination rather than in any single physical activity.

Hove and Risen demonstrated that interpersonal synchrony increased affiliation. Participants who were more synchronized with an interaction partner subsequently expressed stronger affiliative



responses toward that partner. Their findings suggest that temporal alignment can influence relational evaluation even when synchrony itself is not the explicit social goal.

Wiltermuth and Heath extended this principle to cooperative behavior. Across their experiments, synchronous activities increased subsequent cooperation, and the authors interpreted the pattern in terms of strengthened social attachment among group members. This finding is important for teamwork because cooperation requires individuals to coordinate their actions while accepting some dependence on other group members.

Cacioppo and colleagues provided additional evidence that perceived synchrony influences social affiliation. Their behavioral findings showed that individuals expressed greater affiliation toward synchronous than asynchronous partners. Synchrony may therefore operate partly by changing perceptions of relational similarity, responsiveness, or shared experience.

Lang, Bahna, Shaver, Reddish, and Xygalatas examined mechanisms connecting synchrony with social outcomes. Their experiment found that synchronous activity affected liking and investment in a trust game, while self–other overlap and perceived cooperation contributed to aspects of the social response. The use of a trust-game outcome is particularly relevant because trust requires one actor to accept vulnerability based on expectations regarding another actor's behavior.

Large-group research provides complementary evidence. Jackson and colleagues reported that synchrony and physiological arousal were associated with cohesion and cooperation in naturalistic collective settings. Wilson and colleagues likewise found that behavioral synchrony and task demands both influenced perceptions of cohesion. These findings caution against treating synchrony as a purely mechanical phenomenon. The meaning of coordination depends partly on the social and task environment in which it occurs.

3.2 Trust Development Under Virtuality and Distributed Collaboration

Trust can be understood as willingness to accept vulnerability based on positive expectations regarding another party's intentions or behavior. Within teams, trust reduces the need to monitor every action and supports cooperation under interdependence. De Jong, Dirks, and Gillespie's meta-analysis confirmed a positive relationship between intrateam trust and team performance across 112 independent studies involving thousands of teams. Trust therefore functions as more than an interpersonal preference; it can influence collective performance.

Distributed teamwork complicates trust because direct observation is reduced and communication becomes more dependent on technological channels. Jarvenpaa and Leidner's research on global virtual teams demonstrated that trust can emerge in geographically separated teams, but communication patterns contribute strongly to whether initial trust is reinforced or undermined. Their work showed that virtual teams should not be presumed to lack trust automatically. Rather, team members infer trustworthiness from the communication and behavioral evidence available to them.

Meyerson, Weick, and Kramer introduced the concept of swift trust to explain how temporary groups can begin coordinated activity before members possess a long history of interpersonal experience. Their framework suggests that temporary teams may initially act on provisional expectations and subsequently revise these expectations as interaction produces additional information. This perspective is especially



useful for hybrid project teams whose membership can change rapidly or whose collaboration begins before extensive relationship development has occurred.

Hertel, Geister, and Konradt's review of virtual-team research emphasized that management of distributed teams involves preparation, launch, performance management, development, and other processes that must compensate for limitations created by distance and technology-mediated interaction. Their dimensional view is consistent with contemporary hybrid work because teams can vary in virtuality rather than falling into mutually exclusive physical and virtual categories.

Gibson and Gibbs further demonstrated that geographic dispersion, electronic dependence, dynamic structure, and national diversity constitute distinct dimensions of virtuality and can influence team processes. This framework supports the present study's use of hybrid dispersion as a meaningful contextual variable. Hybrid teams differ not merely because some employees work remotely, but because the distribution of access, timing, communication channels, and physical presence can generate uneven relational experiences.

3.3 Linking Synchrony to Trust in Hybrid Interaction

The theoretical bridge between synchrony and hybrid-team trust is built around predictability, responsiveness, and mutual adaptation. Trust requires individuals to form expectations about how others will behave. Synchrony provides recurring micro-level information about whether an interaction partner notices, anticipates, and adjusts to one's actions.

This mechanism can be observed even in simple interpersonal situations. Hove and Risen showed that temporal coordination increased affiliation, while Cacioppo and colleagues linked perceived synchrony with stronger social affiliation. Lang and colleagues found that synchrony influenced behavior in a trust-game context. Taken together, these studies suggest that being behaviorally aligned can change expectations about the social relationship.

Hybrid interaction may make these signals especially useful because conventional cues are inconsistently available. A remote participant cannot always observe whether a colleague is occupied, distracted, physically absent, or deliberately unresponsive. Silence in a physical office may be interpreted differently from silence in a digital channel. Delayed responses can therefore generate ambiguity.

Reliable temporal coordination reduces some of this ambiguity. Team members learn when colleagues normally respond, when decisions are made synchronously, when asynchronous work is expected, how quickly handoffs occur, and what constitutes an acceptable delay. Over time, predictable rhythms can make distributed interaction easier to interpret.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Research Design and Simulation Logic

The study employed a quantitative simulation-based design. This approach was selected because no genuine employee survey, organizational dataset, communication log, or experimental dataset was supplied. The analysis therefore demonstrates a theoretically specified relationship without representing synthetic observations as completed empirical research.

A reproducible dataset containing 384 hypothetical hybrid-team-member cases was generated with a fixed random seed of 42. Interpersonal Synchrony was modeled on a continuous five-point scale. Values represented increasing perceptions that team members coordinate their timing, respond reciprocally, maintain compatible interaction rhythms, and adapt their behavior during shared work.

Communication Reliability was independently simulated on a five-point scale representing consistency of acknowledgment, information exchange, meeting behavior, and follow-through on communicated commitments.

4.2 Construct Operationalization and Proposed Instrument

Table 1: Operational Framework for the Simulation Study

Construct	Operational Definition	Scale	Analytical Role
Interpersonal Synchrony	Perceived temporal and behavioral alignment in conversational responses, shared attention, meeting rhythms, task handoffs, and reciprocal adaptation	1–5	Primary predictor
Communication Reliability	Consistency, clarity, predictability, and follow-through in work-related communication	1–5	Predictor
Hybrid Dispersion	Degree of separation across physical locations, work schedules, and technology-mediated interaction contexts	1–5	Contextual predictor
Team Trust	Confidence that other team members will behave dependably and cooperatively under interdependence	1–5	Outcome
Synchrony Category	Relative degree of interpersonal synchrony	Low = 1.00–2.33; Moderate = 2.34–3.67; High = 3.68–5.00	Descriptive comparison

For subsequent empirical validation, exactly five preliminary questionnaire items are proposed. Q1: “During hybrid teamwork, members of my team adjust the timing of their communication and actions in response to one another.” Q2: “Whether we are working online or in person, our interactions usually develop a coordinated and predictable rhythm.” Q3: “I can rely on team members to acknowledge important messages and task handoffs within an expected period.” Q4: “I feel confident that members of



my team will fulfill their responsibilities even when I cannot directly observe their work.” Q5: “Differences in physical location rarely prevent our team from maintaining coordinated interaction.” These proposed items were not administered in the present study and should undergo expert review, pilot testing, reliability analysis, factor analysis, and construct-validity assessment before use as a formal instrument.

4.3 Analytical Procedure and Ethical Status

The analysis was conducted in three stages. First, Interpersonal Synchrony was classified into low, moderate, and high categories. Descriptive statistics were then calculated for Team Trust within each

Third, the statistical pattern was interpreted against established research on synchrony, trust, virtuality, and distributed communication.

The simulation does not require human-participant ethics approval because no employees, managers, students, organizations, or identifiable individuals were recruited or observed. No private communication, employment records, biometric measures, or digital traces were collected. Future organizational testing of the proposed model should obtain appropriate institutional ethics approval where required, provide informed consent, protect confidentiality, and avoid using communication-monitoring technologies in ways that create undisclosed employee surveillance.

5. Analysis

5.1 Trust Across Different Levels of Interpersonal Synchrony

- The 384 simulated observations produced a clear positive progression between Interpersonal Synchrony and Team Trust.
- The low-synchrony category contained 99 synthetic cases and recorded mean Team Trust of 2.69, with a standard deviation of approximately 0.50.
- The moderate-synchrony category contained 187 cases and recorded mean Team Trust of 3.30, with a standard deviation of approximately 0.47.
- The high-synchrony category contained 98 cases and produced the highest mean Team Trust score of 3.95, with a standard deviation of approximately 0.44.
- The difference between low and high synchrony conditions was approximately 1.27 points on the five-point trust scale.

This progression supports the theoretical proposition that recurring temporal and behavioral coordination can function as relational evidence. When team members repeatedly experience others as responsive to conversational cues, work rhythms, deadlines, shared attention, and task transitions, uncertainty about colleagues' behavior may decrease.

5.2 Regression Analysis

Table 2: Simulated Descriptive and Multiple Regression Results

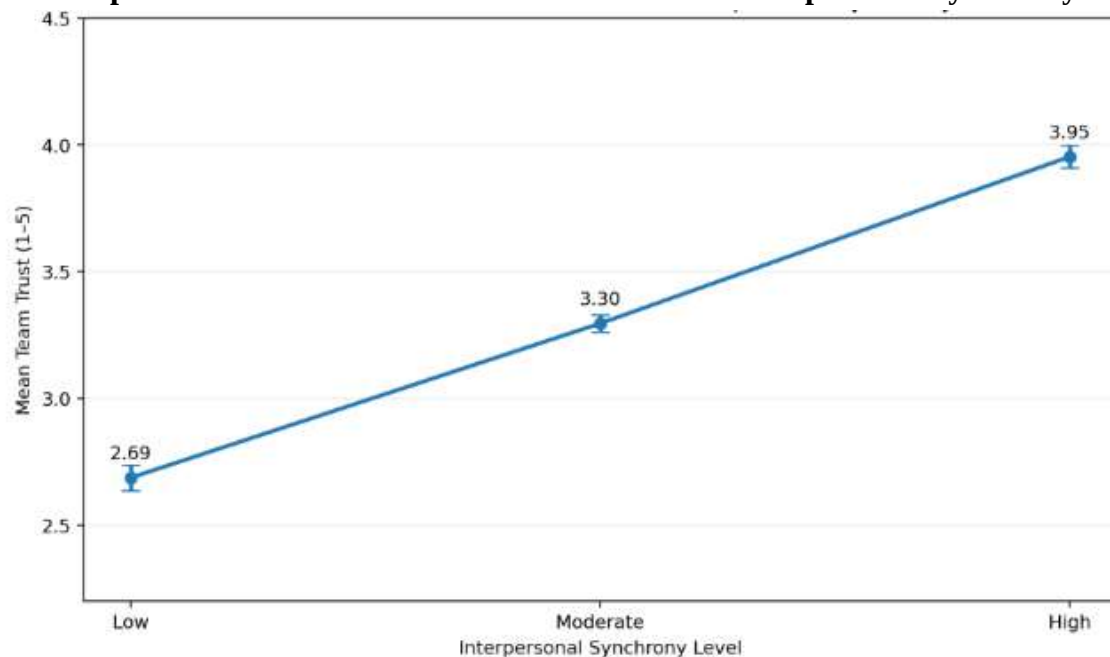
Analytical Component	Statistic	Estimate	Interpretation
Low Interpersonal Synchrony	n	99	Synthetic observations
	Mean Team Trust	2.687	Lowest trust level
	SD	0.499	Simulated dispersion
Moderate Interpersonal Synchrony	n	187	Synthetic observations
	Mean Team Trust	3.296	Intermediate trust
	SD	0.470	Simulated dispersion
High Interpersonal Synchrony	n	98	Synthetic observations
	Mean Team Trust	3.953	Highest trust level
	SD	0.440	Simulated dispersion
Regression	Interpersonal Synchrony, B	0.563	Strong positive association
	SE	0.022	—
	t	25.738	—
	p	< .001	Recoverable simulated relationship
Regression	Communication Reliability, B	0.281	Positive association
	SE	0.027	—
	t	10.450	—
	p	< .001	Recoverable simulated relationship

Analytical Component	Statistic	Estimate	Interpretation
Regression	Hybrid Dispersion, B	-0.127	Negative association
	SE	0.024	—
	t	-5.243	—
	p	< .001	Recoverable simulated relationship
Model Fit	R ²	0.678	67.8% of synthetic variance explained
	Adjusted R ²	0.675	Adjusted model fit
	F	266.140	Overall simulated model statistic

Interpersonal Synchrony produced the largest positive coefficient. A one-unit increase in the synthetic synchrony scale corresponded with an estimated 0.563-unit increase in Team Trust when Communication Reliability and Hybrid Dispersion were statistically held constant.

5.3 Graphical Pattern

Graph 1: Simulated Team Trust Across Levels of Interpersonal Synchrony



Graph 1 shows a continuous increase in Team Trust from low through moderate to high Interpersonal Synchrony. Mean trust rises from 2.69 under low synchrony to 3.30 under moderate synchrony and 3.95 under high synchrony.

The pattern illustrates the theoretical possibility that team members accumulate relational confidence through repeated experiences of coordinated responsiveness. A single synchronous interaction is unlikely to establish durable trust, but recurring alignment may become evidence that colleagues are attentive and capable of adjusting their behavior to collective demands.

6. Discussion

6.1 Interpersonal Synchrony as a Micro-Foundation of Hybrid-Team Trust

The most important theoretical implication is that trust in hybrid teams may develop partly through small, repeated coordination experiences rather than exclusively through formal assurances or major episodes of successful collaboration. Traditional trust research appropriately emphasizes competence, integrity, benevolence, and behavioral reliability, yet hybrid work also requires employees to interpret the timing of others' actions. A colleague who consistently enters a discussion at an appropriate moment, acknowledges a handoff, responds when coordination is necessary, adjusts to changing group tempo, and remains attentive during shared work communicates that they are responsive to the team. These actions may gradually reduce relational uncertainty even when coworkers do not share a physical workspace continuously.

This interpretation is consistent with interpersonal-synchrony research. Hove and Risen showed that synchrony increased affiliation, Wiltermuth and Heath connected synchronous activity with cooperation, and Lang and colleagues demonstrated effects extending to behavior in a trust-game context. Meta-analytic research by Rennung and Göritz further indicates that synchrony has a meaningful overall association with prosocial attitudes and behaviors. The present framework does not assume that the physical synchrony used in experimental studies can simply be transferred unchanged into organizations. Instead, it identifies a more general relational principle: people may interpret reciprocal temporal adjustment as evidence of social connection and cooperative orientation.

6.2 Communication Reliability, Dispersion, and the Limits of Synchrony

The positive simulated contribution of Communication Reliability demonstrates that synchrony should not be treated as an independent substitute for conventional trust-building practices. Team members may experience highly synchronized meetings but still distrust one another if commitments made during those meetings are repeatedly ignored. Conversely, an entirely asynchronous team can potentially maintain considerable trust if communication is dependable, responsibilities are clearly documented, and members consistently fulfill expectations. Synchrony is therefore one component of a broader trust system rather than a universal requirement for every work episode.

This position is consistent with virtual-team research. Jarvenpaa and Leidner demonstrated that communication behaviors are central to trust development in distributed teams, while Hertel and colleagues emphasized the importance of structured management practices across the virtual-team lifecycle. Breuer, Hüffmeier, and Hertel's meta-analysis likewise indicates that trust has substantial relevance for effectiveness in virtual teams. The practical implication is that organizations should not

confuse communication volume with communication reliability. Continuous messaging may create interruption without increasing confidence. Trust is more likely to benefit when team members can interpret the communication rhythm and rely on important information arriving through expected channels.

6.3 Organizational and Managerial Implications for Trust-Building

Managers can use the synchrony perspective to redesign hybrid routines around meaningful interaction rather than increasing the number of meetings. A predictable short coordination meeting may provide more relational value than numerous poorly structured video calls. Effective synchronization practices can include clearly defined overlap periods, transparent response-time expectations, explicit acknowledgment of task handoffs, consistent meeting openings and closings, equal opportunities for remote participation, and intentional pauses that allow digitally connected members to enter discussions. Such practices create recognizable interaction patterns without demanding continuous co-presence.

A further implication concerns trust repair. Synchrony should not be used to conceal substantive reliability problems. If trust has been damaged by missed commitments, exclusion, or poor performance, more frequent meetings will not necessarily restore it. De Jong, Dirks, and Gillespie's broader evidence on trust and team performance emphasizes the substantive importance of intrateam trust, while virtual-team research demonstrates that observable communication behavior affects how trust develops. Repair therefore requires both relational responsiveness and corrective action. A team member must not only appear “in sync” but also behave in ways that justify renewed confidence.

Organizations should also exercise caution if technological systems are used to measure synchrony. Digital platforms can quantify response times, meeting participation, speaking turns, or interaction patterns, but such metrics can easily become surveillance proxies. Fast responses are not inherently evidence of trustworthiness, and legitimate differences in time zones, disability, caregiving responsibilities, concentration requirements, job roles, or communication preferences may affect behavioral timing. Synchrony measures should therefore not be converted mechanically into employee-performance scores.

7. Conclusion

Interpersonal trust is a central requirement of hybrid teamwork because employees repeatedly depend on colleagues whom they may not observe directly and whose interaction with the group changes across physical and digital environments. Existing virtual-team research demonstrates that trust and communication are consequential for distributed team effectiveness, while interpersonal-synchrony research shows that temporal coordination can strengthen affiliation, cooperation, cohesion, and other prosocial responses. Integrating these traditions provides a useful framework for examining how relatively small interaction patterns may contribute to larger relational outcomes.

The present simulation illustrates this proposition. Synthetic Team Trust increased from 2.69 under low Interpersonal Synchrony to 3.30 under moderate synchrony and 3.95 under high synchrony. Multiple regression produced a positive synchrony coefficient of 0.563 and a positive Communication Reliability coefficient of 0.281, while Hybrid Dispersion showed a negative coefficient of -0.127 . These estimates are deliberately presented as simulation outputs rather than empirical findings. They

demonstrate how the proposed relationships can be operationalized and tested, but they do not establish their magnitude in actual organizations.

The study's principal conceptual contribution is the characterization of interpersonal synchrony as a micro-relational trust signal in hybrid teams. Synchrony can communicate that colleagues are attending to one another, anticipating dependencies, responding within recognizable rhythms, and adapting behavior when collective requirements change. Such signals may become especially useful when physical presence is discontinuous and conventional interpersonal cues are unevenly available. Communication reliability strengthens this process by ensuring that coordination is supported by dependable follow-through, while greater dispersion increases the need for deliberate interaction design.

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