



PART 2

Read the text below and answer questions 14–26.

LEADING DISTRIBUTED TEAMS: CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES

Distributed teams—groups that collaborate across geography and, increasingly, across time zones—have shifted from an exception to a normal feature of organisational life. Yet the change is not simply logistical. When colleagues cannot rely on co-presence, many of the cues that once supported coordination and trust become unreliable: a manager cannot “see” effort, overhear emerging problems, or repair misunderstandings in a corridor conversation. As a consequence, leadership in distributed settings often replaces presence-based supervision with deliberate systems that make work legible and relationships sustainable.

A recurring difficulty is that communication channels vary in their capacity to carry nuance. Media Richness Theory proposes that “richer” media—those that allow immediate feedback, multiple cues, and a personal focus—are better suited to ambiguous or emotionally charged issues than lean media such as text. In a distributed team, however, text-based tools dominate because they are searchable, asynchronous, and scalable. The implication is not that text is inferior, but that leaders must match channel to task: complex conflict, sensitive feedback, or high-stakes negotiation may require synchronous conversation, while routine updates are often better handled through written records.

Time-zone separation intensifies this problem by forcing a choice between speed and inclusion. If decisions happen only when a critical mass is online, those outside the dominant time window may become structurally peripheral, receiving outcomes rather than shaping them. Many teams respond by adopting an asynchronous-first workflow: proposals are drafted in shared documents, updates are recorded, and decisions are documented so that progress continues while others sleep. This shift can make collaboration more equitable, but it also raises the cognitive demands of reading, interpreting, and responding to written material without immediate clarification.

That cognitive load becomes visible when roles, handovers, and ownership are vague. In co-located settings, ambiguity can sometimes be repaired informally; in distributed work it often produces duplicated effort, stalled tasks, or “phantom accountability” where everyone assumes someone else is responsible. High-performing teams therefore externalise thinking: they use templates for project briefs, standardise handover notes, and maintain decision logs that record what was decided, why, and by whom. The purpose is not bureaucracy for its own sake, but a shared memory that reduces confusion and prevents the same debates from recurring.



Trust formation also changes under distance. In many studies of team effectiveness, trust is linked to perceived competence, reliability, and goodwill. Remote colleagues rarely observe effort directly, so reliability is inferred from outputs, responsiveness, and follow-through. Leaders can support this by setting explicit goals, clarifying what “done” means, and recognising contributions in ways that are visible to the whole team. When work is documented and progress is auditable, the team can avoid a surveillance mentality while still making performance intelligible.

A subtler risk is proximity bias: the unconscious tendency to value, promote, or trust those who are physically closer—or, in hybrid arrangements, those who share the dominant office or time zone. Proximity bias can operate even when leaders believe they are being fair, because familiarity and informal access shape perceptions of competence. In distributed teams, this can translate into unequal opportunities to influence decisions, receive mentoring, or be assigned high-visibility work. Countermeasures are structural: rotate meeting times, write down decision criteria, distribute “ownership” of important projects across locations, and ensure that recognition is tied to outcomes rather than to online visibility.

Culture and belonging likewise require intentional design. In offices, identity forms through informal talk and unplanned contact; remotely, newcomers may struggle to infer norms and may hesitate to ask questions in public channels. However, “culture-building” can backfire when it becomes forced socialising that privileges particular personalities, languages, or caregiving situations. More durable approaches include predictable check-ins, mentorship pairing, and lightweight rituals that respect boundaries, while also creating psychological safety for disagreement.

Finally, well-being is not peripheral to performance in distributed work. The same technologies that enable flexibility can blur boundaries, encouraging an “always-on” norm—especially when colleagues are active around the clock. The idea of a Right to Disconnect has therefore gained attention as a policy principle: employees should not be implicitly required to respond outside agreed hours. Leaders can operationalise this by setting response-time norms, distinguishing urgent from non-urgent channels, and modelling healthy behaviour. Over time, sustainable productivity depends less on constant availability than on clear expectations and recoverable workloads.

Overall, distributed teams succeed when coordination is made explicit and fairness is engineered into systems. The central shift is from managing by observation to managing by design: selecting appropriate media for different tasks, protecting against proximity bias, reducing cognitive load through documentation, and evaluating people by deliverables rather than digital noise. When these conditions are met, distributed teams can combine



diverse expertise and offer resilience; when they are ignored, distance can amplify misalignment, isolation, and invisible inequality.

Questions 14–19

Select the correct answer.

14 Why must leaders in distributed teams rely less on direct observation?

- A** Remote employees usually produce work that cannot be measured through outcomes.
- B** Digital collaboration makes formal coordination less necessary than in offices.
- C** Distance removes many informal cues that previously helped managers notice effort and emerging problems.
- D** Employees working across locations generally resist supervision based on shared procedures.

15 How should leaders apply Media Richness Theory to distributed communication?

- A** Use synchronous communication whenever a message involves more than one participant.
- B** Choose communication channels according to how much ambiguity, emotion and immediate interaction a task involves.
- C** Prefer written communication because searchable records compensate for the absence of social cues.
- D** Reserve richer media for routine updates so that complex issues can be documented asynchronously.

16 Why can an asynchronous-first approach improve collaboration across time zones?

- A** It allows the dominant office to make decisions quickly without waiting for other locations.
- B** It removes the need for team members to interpret detailed written material independently.
- C** It ensures that all important discussions take place when the entire team is online.
- D** It allows work to continue while giving people outside the main working hours more opportunity to contribute.

17 What problem are decision logs and standardised handovers intended to address?

- A** Unclear responsibility and repeated discussion caused by information that would otherwise remain implicit.
- B** Excessive dependence on written communication when sensitive issues require richer media.



- C** Unequal recognition of employees who work outside the dominant office or time zone.
- D** The tendency for remote employees to remain available beyond their agreed working hours.

18 Why can proximity bias persist even when managers intend to treat staff fairly?

- A** Employees working remotely generally have fewer measurable outputs than office-based staff.
- B** Written decision criteria tend to favour people who contribute most frequently in online channels.
- C** Familiarity and informal access can influence perceptions of competence without leaders consciously recognising it.
- D** Rotating meeting times gives employees in some locations greater access to senior managers.

19 What problem is the Right to Disconnect intended to address?

- A** The difficulty of coordinating urgent work when colleagues use different communication channels.
- B** The expectation that employees should remain responsive outside agreed working hours.
- C** The exclusion of employees who cannot attend meetings held in the dominant time zone.
- D** The additional reading burden created by asynchronous-first workflows.

Questions 20–23

Complete the summary below. Choose **ONE WORD ONLY** from the text for each answer.

Challenges of coordinating distributed teams

Communication channels differ in their ability to carry **20**, so leaders need to select media according to the task. Time-zone differences can leave some colleagues structurally **21** if decisions are made mainly during dominant working hours. When roles and ownership are unclear, teams may experience “phantom **22**,” with everyone assuming that someone else is responsible. In the longer term, sustainable productivity depends less on constant **23** than on clear expectations and manageable workloads.

Questions 24–26



Choose **TRUE** if the statement agrees with the information given in the text, choose **FALSE** if the statement contradicts the information, or choose **NOT GIVEN** if there is no information on this.

24 The passage specifies a fixed limit on how many written updates a distributed team should send each day.

25 The passage suggests that making work and progress auditable can support trust without requiring constant surveillance.

26 The writer suggests that sustainable productivity requires employees to remain continuously available across time zones.

Answer Key

14. C

15. B

16. D

17. A

18. C

19. B

20. nuance

21. peripheral

22. accountability

23. availability

24. NOT GIVEN

25. TRUE

26. FALSE