

# SMART COLLABORATION ACCELERATOR



## Your Smart Collaboration Report

Chris Sample

April 27, 2020

## Introduction

---

The aim of this report is to help you identify ways that you can maximize the effectiveness of your *virtual* collaboration activities. Research has identified seven behavioral dimensions associated with Smart Collaboration—each can serve as a catalyst toward effective action when understood and used with intentionality. Based on your responses to the self-assessment, this report shows your likely behavioral tendencies on each dimension and explains how you can leverage each of these to make virtual collaboration more effective.

The report has been jointly created by Dr Heidi Gardner and Communication Labs Ltd. Smart Collaboration is a registered trademark of Gardner and Collaborators, LLC.

## The Research Behind Smart Collaboration

---

Today’s multifaceted, complex problems require experts to integrate their unique knowledge and perspectives in order to generate more holistic, optimal solutions than any of them could produce on their own. This is what we call “Smart Collaboration.”

In her research on Smart Collaboration, Dr Heidi K. Gardner shows that firms earn higher margins, inspire greater client loyalty, attract and retain the best talent, and gain a competitive edge when specialists collaborate across boundaries. Research also shows that individuals who engage in Smart Collaboration enhance their reputation, attain greater professional success, and enjoy benefits related to personal wellbeing.

Collaboration isn’t easy, and doing it *virtually* poses even more challenges. The good news is that each person has the potential to enhance collaboration by drawing on their unique combination of strengths. Smart Collaboration hinges on team diversity. When you are aware of your natural tendencies and make smart choices about how to behave in a team setting, you have the power to help the group to leverage members’ potential and make collaboration more effective.

## How to Use This Smart Collaboration Report

---

Each of the seven dimensions of Virtual Smart Collaboration is anchored by two poles, representing fundamentally different approaches to collaboration. Your relative position along the range is not inherently good or bad for virtual collaboration. Rather, it indicates the consistency of your behaviors along that dimension: scores closer to an end point suggest that you behave this way more frequently, likely because you are relatively more comfortable with those kinds of actions.

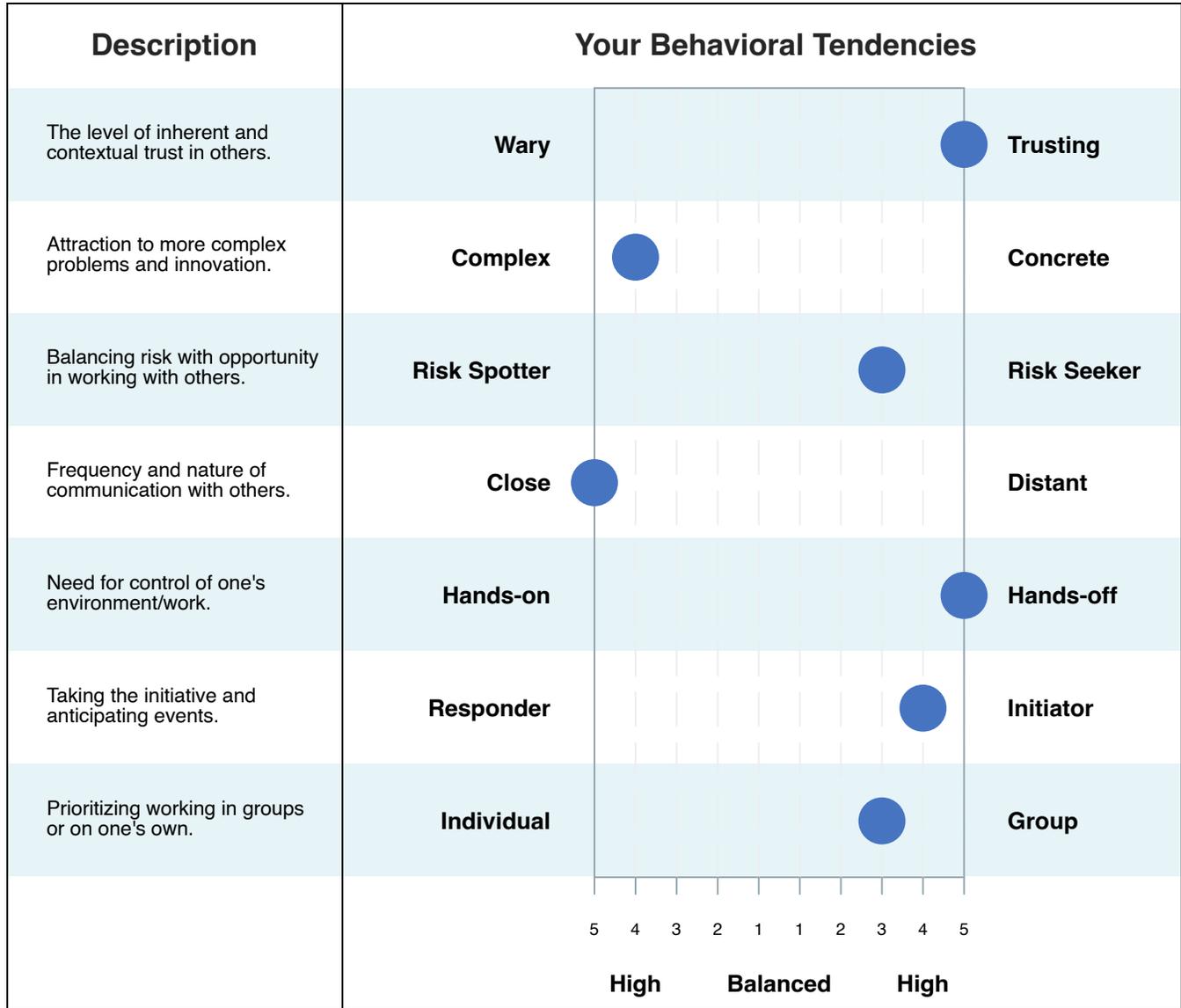
Understanding your profile with respect to each dimension will allow you to become more aware of when those behavioral tendencies promote effective virtual collaboration. Then you can also consider ways to ‘flex’ your behaviors dependent on the context, such as the business need, team dynamics, and your role.

**Effectively deploying these behavioral tendencies can make them your catalysts for Virtual Smart Collaboration.**

Keep these points in mind when you are considering your results:

- The report identifies tendencies relevant to virtual collaboration; this is not a personality assessment.
- Your position along the range for each dimension indicates your behavioral tendencies; tendencies are not immutable aspects of personality. You can flex your behaviors.
- There are no right or wrong tendencies.
- No matter where you fall on any dimension, you can positively affect collaboration; the key is to understand your tendencies and consider how to optimally turn that dimension into a catalyst for better collaboration, dependent on the situation.
- If you are unsure about any of the results, consider asking a colleague for honest feedback on how they perceive your behavior when it comes to collaboration.

## Your Smart Collaboration Profile



## Dimension 1 - Typical Tendencies

Wary	Trusting
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do not trust others until they prove they can be trusted.</li> <li>• Are less optimistic about how things will work out.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trust people innately.</li> <li>• Tend to be quite optimistic about how things will work out.</li> </ul>

### Your Behavioral Tendency: Trusting



You instinctively trust other people’s competence and believe they have good intentions unless proven otherwise. Your confidence in others translates into an ability to bring experts together and naturally foster collaboration even in the virtual world. You are usually quick to see others’ point of view, which can make you an understanding and inclusive collaborator.

### Recommended Actions

Use your tendency to trust others as a catalyst to enhance virtual collaboration by increasing the diversity of ideas, giving people a chance to contribute, and widening the circle of collaborators.

**Take the lead in fostering trust among virtual group members.** Trust - both in others’ competence and their character - is critical to a virtual group’s ability to collaborate effectively. You can be a huge asset by mustering your trusting instincts to help foster confidence and interdependence among group members, especially if many in the group are high Wary. Some

ideas for how to establish trust in a virtual group:

- Seek opportunities to visibly demonstrate trust. For example, communicate your trust in others' competence and/or character in group meetings.
- Act as a bridge to new team members by actively engaging them.
- Ask your colleagues about the virtual conditions under which they perform best versus what they currently face. A sudden shift to virtual working is an adjustment for everyone, and may make them seem suddenly unreliable. Helping the group understand each other's constraints allows them to give each other the benefit of the doubt if a problem arises.
- Make it clear, even over-communicate, that you keep an open (virtual) door policy and colleagues are welcomed to 'swing by' during specific 'drop-in times'. Be sure to protect those blocks diligently in your calendar so that you are available for impromptu discussions.

**Be inclusive.** Consider who you can bring into the group to increase the diversity of thought. This might involve bringing someone in as a regular contributor or even as a one-off to share their perspective in order to enrich the group's thinking.

## Key Things to Watch Out For

---

**Don't underestimate the criticality of trust.** Trust is critical to effective collaboration, and it can be harder to build and maintain when teams are working virtually. Just because trust comes naturally to you, remember that others may be highly wary.

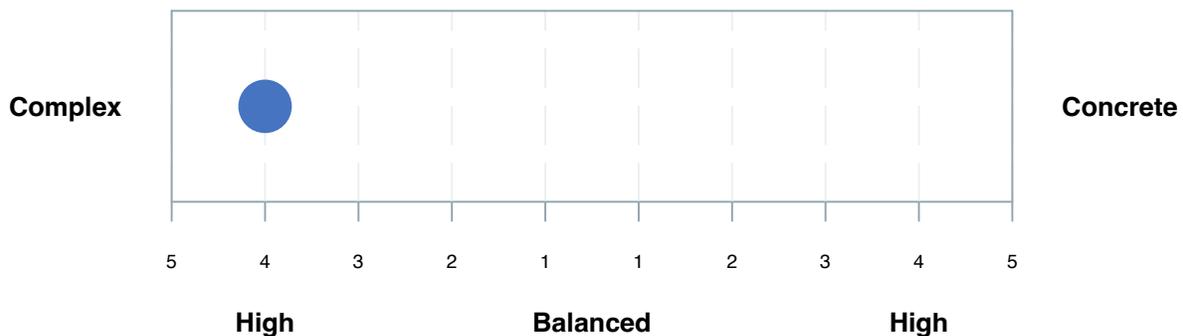
**Don't be naïve.** Given your relatively strong tendency to trust others, in high stakes situations consider what evidence you have that people you are relying upon are truly reliable. For people whom you haven't worked with extensively, perhaps consider mitigations, such as buddying them up with someone whose competence you know well.

**Actively manage your people.** Because you tend to have high trust in your subordinates, you might not notice issues - essentially a "no news is good news" management style. Make sure to set regular check-ins with the team, even if you do not feel it's necessary. And reassure people that you will continue to trust them, even - perhaps especially! - if they ask for help.

## Dimension 2 - Typical Tendencies

Complex	Concrete
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enjoy philosophical and abstract concepts.</li> <li>• Enjoy new things and new ways of working.</li> <li>• Value innovation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are skeptical of new things/ processes until they have been proven to be better.</li> <li>• Prefer to deal with practical ideas and applications.</li> </ul>

### Your Behavioral Tendency: Complex



You enjoy the intellectual challenge of complex problems and are driven to create innovative solutions. You are likely to lean into ambiguous and uncertain problems while others shy away from them, especially under the pressures of virtual working.

### Recommended Actions

**Take on the complex issues.** Drive the group to delve into the bigger, more complex challenges than any member could tackle on their own - especially by engaging a group of diverse experts. These are often the highest value problems to solve.

**Make the complex comprehensible.** Consider how you can make ambiguous problems, complex ideas and innovative solutions more relatable to others. Research has shown that a shared 'mental-map' and common understanding of the challenge/question is an essential

component of high performing teams and will enhance collaboration. There are several strategies for doing this:

1. Make your thinking is less abstract through story telling. Telling stories helps others picture what you are saying in their 'minds-eye', which makes them more likely to accept your idea and work with you on it.
2. Practice communicating your key messages in 3 sentences. This will help you keep your explanations succinct and simple.
3. Leverage technology to your advantage. Shared white-boards and video can help facilitate remote work on complex problems.
4. Help those who are more visually oriented by supporting the concepts with visuals representations.

**Protect your thinking time.** Your ability to engage with the big challenges is invaluable for the group and requires focus. With remote working, distractions (video/audio calls, texts, chats) come in fast. Schedule deep-thinking in your most productive times and keep those blocks protected in your calendar.

## Key Things to Watch Out For

---

**Simplify your communication.** Your preference for complexity can result in a complex communication style making it difficult for Concrete thinkers to follow. Practice summarizing your Complex thinking in 3 sentences or representing in a diagram.

**Collaborate.** Focus on goals that are also important for the group; you are more likely to get them implemented. Your passion for vexing issues may lead you to go it alone but remember that there is strength in diversity. Don't let the challenges of remote working prevent you from engaging with colleagues who will bring different views and insights.

**Focus on results.** Avoid the trap of engaging with complex topics for their own sake. Keep the goal in mind and drive toward solutions. Working with your Concrete colleagues with a bias toward execution may help.

## Dimension 3 - Typical Tendencies

Risk Spotter	Risk Seeker
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More readily see problems and risks and are strongly motivated to avoid them.</li> <li>• See success as avoiding failure.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More readily see opportunities for success and are strongly motivated to pursue them, even if there is a risk of failure.</li> </ul>

### Your Behavioral Tendency: Risk Seeker



You are quick to identify opportunities and naturally optimistic about their potential. You are comfortable taking chances, like to move quickly, and ‘play to win’.

NB: When we talk about perception of risk in this context, it is not risk in your technical area of expertise - i.e. a lawyer’s ability to identify legal risk, an accountant’s ability to identify compliance risk. The perception of risk is related to your pursuit of opportunities. For example, if you were to identify a new potential business line, a Risk Seeker is more likely to focus on and be motivated by the opportunity for success than the risk that the venture might fail; the Risk Spotter is more drawn to identifying and acting on the likelihood of failure.

### Recommended Actions

**Get people excited about the opportunities.** When working with a virtual team, share the opportunities you see and surface the diversity of perspectives in your group to evaluate them.

Your ability to see the benefits of collaboration is critical for unlocking the group's potential. Lead with confidence and you will inspire others.

**Get an accurate estimate of the risk.** In order to balance your risk seeking with an accurate assessment of potential downsides, draw on multiple perspectives. It can be helpful to regularly ask the group about what risks they see. When everyone is excited and pushing to make things happen this can be a difficult emotional ask; we are often conditioned to provide positive reports.

- An opportunity: Virtual teams allows for a broader, nearly unlimited talent pool to contribute to your work! Go and explore who are the most relevant experts of the field who could contribute.

**Foster creativity.** Research has shown that helping a group to adopt a Risk Seeker mindset can increase the creativity of their thinking. You can do this by talking about the opportunities you see and asking others in the group to do the same. Set the purpose of the meeting as a 'creative one' so that people keep their overly-critical comments in check - at least for the time being. Let any Risk Spotter on the team know that they will have the chance to scrutinize ideas before you take them forward, but that initially you are looking for unbounded creativity.

**Manage setbacks.** Problems are inevitable and you are able to take them in stride more than those with a tendency to avoid risk. Help bring perspective to the group when setbacks arise and keep them focused on the goal.

## Key Things to Watch Out For

---

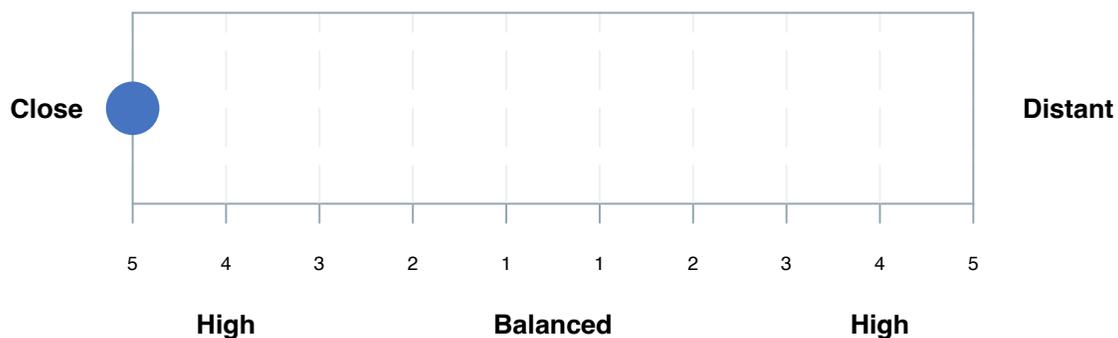
**Encourage the discussion of challenges/risks.** You make it safe by not reacting immediately to the risks when they are brought up. Thank people for their contribution and enquire further. Reacting emotionally to what is raised will shut down the conversation and signal to the group that it is better not to raise problems that they see.

**Mind your language.** A Risk Seeker's positive opportunity-focused language such as 'hope,' 'vision' or 'opportunity' can prime people to focus more on what is going well and less likely to pay attention to or report problems. (In psychology, "priming" means that a stimulus, in this case words, can subconsciously trigger people to behave in certain ways). This is especially true when you are further up in the hierarchy. In virtual communications that lack rich cues (that is, email instead of a discussion, or a call instead of an in-person meeting), people might latch onto the few signals they do get. Try, therefore, to balance the language you use.

## Dimension 4 - Typical Tendencies

Close	Distant
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communicate with others relatively more frequently and will often speak first and for a relatively higher proportion of the time.</li> <li>• Are warm and friendly in their communication.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communicate with others when they perceive a need to do so and tend to speak proportionally less in conversations.</li> <li>• Are less expressive in their communication.</li> </ul>

### Your Behavioral Tendency: Close



As a Close communicator you are outgoing and enjoy connecting frequently with your colleagues. You are comfortable revealing some personal information, which allows others to see you as warm and friendly - it's not "all business". Because of your openness, your colleagues generally know where you stand. You are likely to inject energy into any meeting you are a part of, which can be an asset to boost morale in virtual teams.

### Recommended Actions

**Maintain your network.** You probably have a relatively large set of relationships, both inside and outside work. This network becomes more important than ever when working virtually because it allows you to keep connected. It may come quite naturally to you to find time and interest 'stopping by' at someone's virtual desk to catch up. As long as you assess the other

party's readiness and willingness to do the same, keep it up!

**Be a connector.** Be a catalyst for stronger virtual collaboration by reaching out and connecting people. Stress can lead people to reduce interactions. By keeping people engaged and connected you are more likely to identify collaboration opportunities for you and others.

**Balance warmth with efficiency.** Leverage your openness and warmth to help the group stay personally connected. If you are engaging in small talk before a meeting starts, signal its purpose with statements such as "I am mindful that we are working remotely, so I wanted to see how you all were first before we get to business".

## Key Things to Watch Out For

---

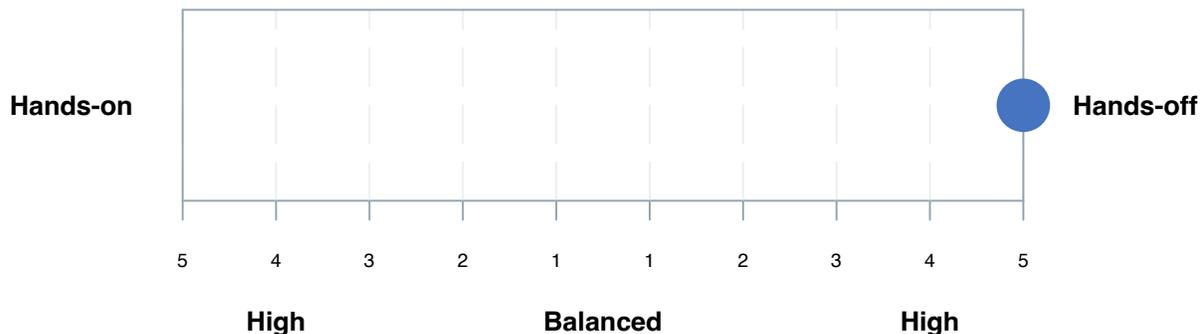
**Use video sparingly.** Overuse of video can be exhausting. Vary the forms of communication.

**Consider those on the periphery.** Humans' natural tendency, especially when under stress, is to gravitate toward people who are similar to us (what psychologists call "homophily"). Consider how you can broaden your network virtually by including more people on the periphery (new joiners, junior staff, or people who are demographically or socially different from the core group).

## Dimension 5 - Typical Tendencies

Hands-on	Hands-off
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Have a high desire for routine and structure.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prefer spontaneity and less structure in their day to day.</li> </ul>

### Your Behavioral Tendency: Hands-off



You are the role model of focusing on the output as opposed to where or how to work. You give people quite a lot of autonomy and hate to be micromanaged. Given your strong ability to rapidly change focus and move between projects, virtual collaboration may come easier to you than for others.

### Recommended Actions

**Collaborate widely.** Your Hands-off approach allows you to change focus and move flexibly between projects/engagements. This potentially enables you to have input into a much larger number of collaborations, broadening your impact considerably.

**Check in regularly.** In a remote working situation, your Hands-off approach might leave teammates feeling isolated or forgotten and make you seem disengaged. Book time in your calendar to check on how they are feeling, whether they are coping with stress, if they need any kind of additional support or resource. Also provide regular updates on your work to the team.

**Focus on where you add most value.** In any collaboration focus on where you can add

most value and enlist others when there is a need to closely manage a project end to end. By focusing on delivering what is most important and or valuable you are likely to maximize your contributions to a group efficiently.

## Key Things to Watch Out For

---

**Give feedback.** The stress of virtual working leads many people to neglect giving feedback - and you likewise may drift further toward the Hands-off zone. When people are working from home or feeling anxious, they need reassurance and constructive pointers.

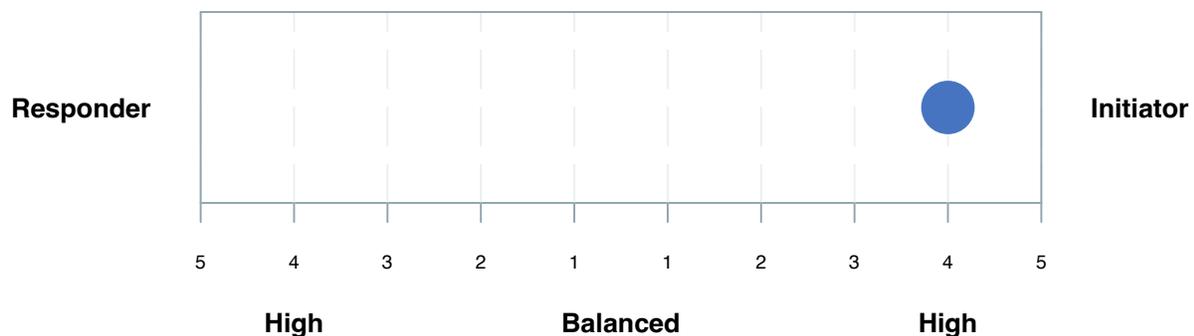
**Project Manage.** Things can go off track quickly when teams are virtual. Your Hands-off approach brings increased risk in this environment, where you might not spot issues quickly enough. Overinvest in managing the project, especially when collaboration brings in outside experts or people with different knowledge bases.

**Help your team decipher you.** You appear Hands-off under normal circumstances and this will be exaggerated in virtual work. Increase your input on what's working, what's not, and where change is needed. Communicated appropriately, this clarity will bring reassurance to the team.

## Dimension 6 - Typical Tendencies

Responder	Initiator
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tend to deal with situations as they arise.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Look several steps ahead of where they are to see what the situation could be in order act now to influence the future.</li> </ul>

### Your Behavioral Tendency: Initiator



You are naturally proactive. You anticipate others' needs, and work to address any problem you've spotted. You also have a strong ability to overcome barriers. If you believe in something, you will drive to make it happen. You won't let the hurdles of virtual working stop you from making progress.

### Recommended Actions

**Surface the barriers to collaboration.** What are the barriers for collaboration (skills gaps, leadership, organizational structure, comp systems, other)? As an Initiator seeking greater collaboration, train your strength on identifying and breaking down these barriers.

**Deepen external relationships.** Initiate conversations with clients to offer assistance or simply check in with them - but be careful not to come across as pushy. Set this time aside to listen: what matters to them and where they could use a helping hand, rather than entering a conversation with a specific agenda or immediate selling goal. You can also bounce ideas

off of them or even seek their advice. Research shows that you strengthen relationships by making yourself vulnerable through seeking help - provided you genuinely value their inputs and reciprocate when you have the opportunity.

**Grow your network of Responders.** Seek out and develop your network of Responders who can take forward the work you identify. Consider a positive reach-out to get references on potential collaborators. Tell people you are looking to grow your network of potential collaborators and want to understand what it was like working with specific people.

## Key Things to Watch Out For

---

**Watch out for wasted effort.** While it is great to be proactive, watch out for wasted effort. Take initiative in areas with the maximum return on investment for all those involved.

**Manage capacity.** Because you like to tackle issues as soon as they arise, you risk becoming over-committed: you may start projects at a higher rate than they can be completed. You might also over-burden your team with ideas for the “new new thing” and appear erratic. Especially when working remotely, make time at least once a week to align the team’s goals and priorities.

## Dimension 7 - Typical Tendencies

Individual	Group
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prefer to work alone and be reliant on themselves to get things done.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prefer to work as part of a team and work collaboratively to get things done.</li> </ul>

### Your Behavioral Tendency: Group



You prefer working as part of a team. You like the interdependencies of teamwork and care about its success. You get energy from personal interaction and are interested in others as people not just co-workers. Even in virtual environments you naturally seek to involve others, since you derive enjoyment from collaboration.

### Recommended Actions

**Champion collaboration.** Use your preference for group work to support and role-model collaborative behavior. Experiment with various options for collaborative virtual work to see what works best for your group. Help others, particularly colleagues with high Individual behavior, understand the commercial benefits of collaborating.

**Develop a positive group climate.** Use your enthusiasm for collaborative working to foster engagement and boost morale (both of which lead to quantifiable gains in productivity and other 'hard' business outcomes).

- Create and communicate norms for virtual meetings.
- Emphasize and role model inclusive and balanced group discussions: shared speaking-time, active and respectful listening, taking turns.
- Signal 'encouragement' (open body language and head nodding on the screen; supportive comments such as 'What an interesting thought') for colleagues' contributions, especially toward less-experienced or Distant communicator colleagues.
- Finish each virtual meeting with a clear summary of actions and timeline. This will help everyone to feel that meetings are productive as well as collegial.

**Facilitate virtual socializing.** Virtual teams still need to have a sense of culture and cohesion which is effectively achieved by socializing. Given your preference for group working, consider virtual ways you can get your team to socialize. For example, organize and mobilize your team to get together for virtual happy hours or team building meetings. The team can create a designated socializing channel to reduce perceived distance: for example, a group WhatsApp could become the break room where it is appropriate to share the latest memes, photos and random facts.

## Key Things to Watch Out For

---

**Execute.** Given you tend to enjoy working as part of a group, you may be prone to 'collaboration overdrive'. That is, you may engage in lots of group discussions about opportunities and or projects but take relatively little action as a result of the discussions.

**Balance Group and Individual work.** Not all work is best done as a group, so determine when you need to get on with work independently.

**Bring the team along.** Your tendency may frustrate some team members who enjoy group working less than you do, so you will need to make it worthwhile for them in terms of outputs. In virtual working, for example, explain the need to devote time for building community and boosting morale, and have an explicit discussion about how much time to spend on these 'off-task' activities.

## How to Turn Your Behavioral Tendencies into Catalysts for Smart Collaboration

### Your High Priority Actions

Trusting	<b>Role model inclusiveness.</b> Consider who you can bring into the group to increase the diversity of thought.
Complex	<b>Use your strength to guide the group toward the complex issues</b> - bigger than any one member could tackle on their own. These are often the highest value problems to solve.
Risk Seeker	<b>Get people excited about opportunities</b> and lead with confidence.
Close	<b>Be a connector</b> by reaching out and helping people build their networks.

### Your High Priority Watch-Outs

Trusting	<b>Don't assume they can read your mind.</b> Make sure to check-in with colleagues even if you don't think it's necessary.
Complex	<b>Simplify your communication</b> to make it easy for Concrete thinkers to follow. Practice summarizing your Complex thinking in 3 sentences or representing them in a diagram.
Risk Seeker	<b>Encourage the discussion of challenges/risks.</b> Draw on multiple perspectives and regularly ask the group what risks they see.
Close	<b>Balance warmth with efficiency</b> and ensure enough time is allocated to addressing key tasks.