



# Quick E-Tips



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Thank you for subscribing to this newsletter brought to you by International Advantage® - *Leading Across Cultures™*. Every month we bring you tips to help your team and organization, especially those operating in culturally diverse environments, reach their business goals.

## Topic of the month: **How to Build Team Trust through your Email Messages**

According to an interesting study (\*) done by two researchers (University of Texas and INSEAD), trustworthiness in a global, virtual environment is not measured like the ordinary, relationship-based trust you might experience in the home office. Instead, for virtual, global teams, the study showed that trustworthiness is characterized as “action-based”.

“Action-based” trust is trust that is based on:

1. how much **action** you take
2. **substantive** input

Compare two emailers in global, self-directed teams:

**Emailer A:** *“Hi team, we will need a project lead on this. Who is interested?”*

vs.

**Emailer B:** *“I suggest that Caterina lead this project since she mentioned her experience on the “X” initiative last fall. I spoke with her and she agreed to be considered. I propose a teleconference on Wednesday to discuss project expectations, see if anyone else is interested, and determine who will be the leader of this one.”*

It's not hard to see that emailer B is more action-oriented and substantive.

While these findings seems obvious in some ways, I acknowledge that ever since I read this study, I am amazed at **how I look at my own “inbox”** (and “outbox”) differently. I can identify those who are – and are not -- taking real action or making substantive input. Note that “frequency” of interaction did not affect the level of trust!

At about the time I was reading the study, I experienced a clear example of my own. A colleague of mine had included me on distribution list with a **thoughtful, motivating message** proposing that we, as Gestalt practitioners and consultants, jointly develop a plan on how we might influence peace in the Middle East. It was also clear that my

colleague was not clear on first steps. But a recipient of the email responded with this: "Yes! Count me in!" My mind went to the study....Was there action? Substantive input?

Certainly, we cannot invest our energy in every email equally, but the quality of our response will influence the trust that our teams have in us.

Why should companies care? **Teams with high levels of trust appeared to be more capable of managing the uncertainty, complexity, and expectations of the virtual environment.**

Other findings for these global, virtual teams: The **areas of greatest team strengths** (as assessed by the team members themselves): task skills, virtual skills, idea sharing, role definition and communication systems. **Areas of greatest team weakness:** decision-making, critical feedback, problem resolution, being open to ideas from different cultures and trust.

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\* Sirkka L. Jarvenpaa, Graduate School of Business, The University of Texas at Austin, and Dorothy E. Leidner, INSEAD, Communication and Trust in Global Virtual Teams <http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol3/issue4/jarvenpaa.html>

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