

Supersizing Your SMEs' Output (and Satisfaction!) in a Virtual Environment

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- 20 years of experience facilitating diverse groups of people
- responsible for assisting clients with test development including job analysis, item writing, item review, and standard setting.
- Master's in educational leadership from the University of Northern Arizona;
- lives with her husband and children in California.

- Program Manager and former Test Development Professional
- over a decade of experience in the fields of education and training, both in the public and private sectors.
- Masters in Anthropology and International Development from George Washington University
- lives with her husband and son in Alexandria, VA.

Presentation Agenda

- Background information
- Unique challenges of the virtual environment
- Who is succeeding, and who is struggling, and why?
- Building rapport – does it really matter?
- Maintaining SME attentiveness– tools, tips and tricks
- Addressing fatigue, low motivation... and just LIFE!

Who are we, and why should you listen to us?

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Who are we, and why should you listen to us?

- Alpine has been 100% virtual since 2006
- Work with professional credentialing and licensing organizations, IT programs, educational institutions
- Our partner orgs have SME cadres ranging from ten to hundreds of SMEs
- We have seen a wide range of responses to the pandemic from our clients— and we know what has worked and what hasn't
- We have dedicated countless hours to researching new approaches to support our clients and their SMEs



Challenges of Exam Development in a Virtual Environment

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Common Challenges Include:

- Loss of rapport, trust and sense of belonging
- Difficulty integrating new SMEs into existing SME groups
- Lack of attentiveness during virtual work
- Production challenges

- Oh, and you know... there's a GLOBAL PANDEMIC to think about.



Let's talk about what isn't working...

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In our work, we have seen a wide range of responses to these challenges

- Here's what isn't working for testing orgs:
 - The “Let's just pretend this isn't happening”
 - The “Let's double the time commitment required of SMEs to make sure we hit our targets”
 - The “Let's just recruit double the normal amount of SMEs to hit our targets”
 - The “I'm going to email you every day until you turn in your assignments”

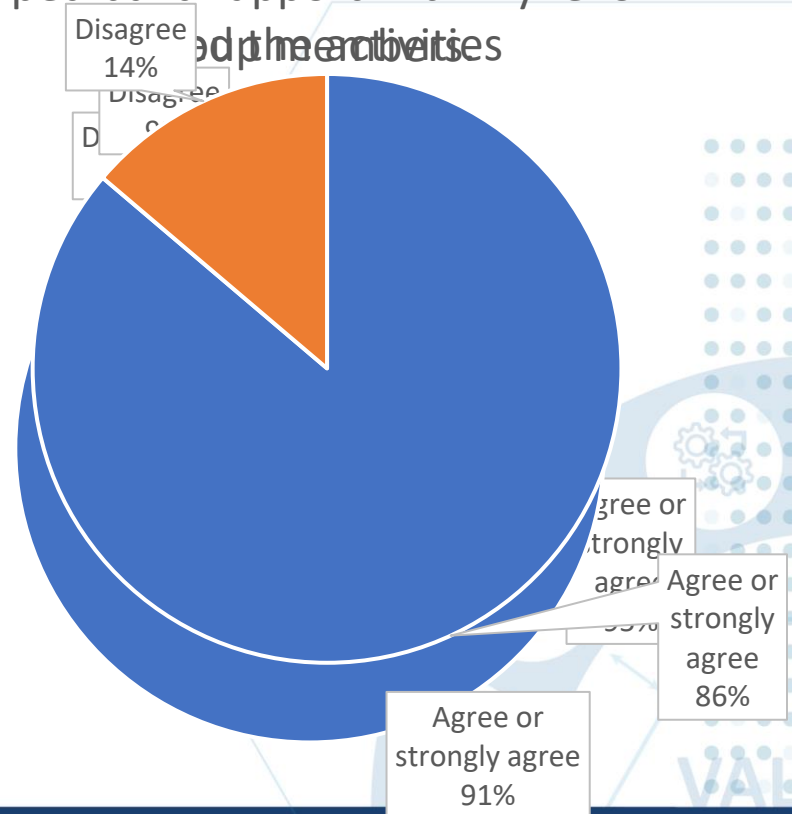
So... what CAN you do to SOS (SAVE OUR SMES)?

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What IS working for our clients?

- Taking the time to BUILD RAPPORT
 - This is not the time for just the quick and dirty “What’s your favorite food?” icebreaker.
- We recently conducted extensive rapport building activities with one of our clients with a large number of SMEs.

I would like to have these activities built into the next item development meetings. The ice breaker/team building activities helped build rapport with my fellow development meetings.



- We know... these activities aren't universally beloved
 - You will have those who think “this is a waste of my time... we should be doing real work!”
- However, our experience shows time and time again: rapport matters.
 - Helps develop feelings of responsibility:
 - “I’m going to make time to do this assignment because my team is counting on me.”
 - Helps expedite discussions:
 - People who are comfortable with one another can “get to the point” more quickly, and it helps minimize the awkward silences.
 - Increase quality of discussions:
 - Developing mutual respect increases likelihood that SMEs will treat each other as people, not just voices coming from their computers.

The GOOD STUFF– Activities to help you build rapport

- Mentimeter
 - <https://www.mentimeter.com>
- Content-relevant “mad libs”
 - Using Google Jamboard
- Creativity-inducing games/activities
 - Maps
 - Pictionary
 - Balderdash
 - Scattegories
 - <https://scattegoriesonline.net/new-game-create.xhtml>

Remember— it may feel like it, but it's not just fun and games

- Increase creative thinking
- Help people enter a positive mindset
- Get to know fellow SMEs
- Treat everyone as equals – new or veteran SME, the activity will be new to all, so the playing field is level!
- Building rapport is fun but it does take effort and planning



Ok, on to heavy stuff... Productivity

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First, let's level set--

- People are working from home
- Children are often at home
- People have additional family/community/etc. obligations than they had a year ago
- Life priorities have shifted
- There is a LOT for people to feel anxious about, and many people feel severely overextended
- And, can't forget... there's a GLOBAL PANDEMIC to think about.
- The fact that you even HAVE SMEs willing to dedicate any of their mental energy is frankly amazing.

Huzzah!



Straight talk— chances are, you are going to see a decline in productivity

- Recognize that to some extent, this is out of your control
- Here is what you CAN do to try to match in-person meeting productivity



- Time blocking
 - Doesn't rely on SMEs completing homework
 - Allows them to ask “just in time” questions
 - Competition can be a motivator (if culturally appropriate)
 - Helps people compartmentalize and focus – asking for complete attention for a short amount of time
 - Providing realistic expectations for what can be accomplished in that time
 - Gives SMEs a feeling of accomplishment with incremental, achievable goals

Intersperse your rapport building activities

- If you aren't using time blocking, have pre-established activity breaks (hint hint... all the games and activities we talked about earlier)
- Gives people something to look forward to
- Resets the brain's tolerance for focus



- We are seeing incentives more important than ever before
- For many orgs with SMEs, the incentive used to be the travel... but that's not an option at the moment.
- Does this mean you have to pay your SMEs? Nope!
- Incentive ideas:
 - SWAG (pens and notebooks go a LONG way)
 - Meal service gift cards
 - Snack boxes
 - Coloring books, puzzles

Pre/Post-Meeting Gathering


- Coffee breaks (send your SMEs some coffee and tea)
- Happy hour (BYOB, or send a mocktail ingredients, or custom mixers) – plan a social activity
- Coloring contest, design contest
- We recommend these activities be optional for all, since this is above and beyond



Nursing Your SMEs Through Common Challenges

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- Jam boards – get a head start on those item ideas
- Round robin item development
 - Everyone has 20 minutes to start at item. At the buzzer, pass your item to the next person.
- SME crowd-sourced distractors
 - Each SME writes a stem and key. The group reviews the item and generates distractors together.
- Scenario templates
 - Think about using the Mad Libs as scenario starters
- Unicorn items
 - Items that arrive to group congruence and accuracy review requiring no changes. Celebrate! Add them to the unicorn farm!



We thank you for allowing us to
present to you today!

Please reach out with any questions:

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Enjoy the conference!

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