

The commensality model: From team practice to organizational flourishing

Petr Houdek 

Faculty of Business Administration, Prague University of Economics and Business, nám. W. Churchilla 1938/4, 130 67 Praha 3 – Žižkov, Czech Republic

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Commensality
Organizational well-being
Social connection
Hybrid teams

ABSTRACT

In workplaces shaped by time pressure, hybrid arrangements, and reduced informal interaction, organizations need ways to strengthen relational capacity. We develop the Commensality Model, a five-stage diagnostic and design framework that treats shared meals as a contingent intervention whose value depends on team context, implementation choices, and ongoing monitoring. The model specifies when commensality is likely to reinforce trust, psychological safety, inclusion, and coordination, and when it may backfire by amplifying conflict, hierarchy, or forced participation. We further argue that repeated team-level relational gains can accumulate into organization-level benefits through denser informal networks, stronger cross-unit coordination, and a climate of everyday connection. Finally, we extend the framework to hybrid and remote settings by examining digital commensality and non-food substitutes that preserve key mechanisms when shared meals are infeasible. The article positions commensality as a practical tool for organizational flourishing.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

When commensality is appropriate. Shared meals work best where a team's relational baseline is functional but thin such as newly formed or reorganized units, distributed and hybrid teams, and cross-functional groups that need contact more often than retreats can supply. Commensality is an amplifier, not a repair because it deepens trust, psychological safety, and coordination that already have somewhere to grow, at a fraction of the cost and planning of episodic team-building.

When it is not. Do not use shared meals as a first-line intervention where there is unresolved interpersonal conflict, distrust of leadership, or a structural coordination failure. In those teams the same practice amplifies the problem as it creates forced proximity without the procedural safeguards a facilitated intervention provides. Address the underlying issue first. Stand down as well when participation cannot be made genuinely voluntary, when dietary, religious, or sensory needs cannot be reliably accommodated, or when a fixed meal time would repeatedly burden the same site or the same people.

What managers should measure for evaluation of the practice. From the first pilot, track (for example) these four indicators - participation equity (sign-up rates broken out by level, tenure, and demographic group); the time or number of emails needed to locate expertise for a novel problem; upward voice reported after mixed-level sessions; or intent-to-stay in engagement surveys. If participation stratifies by rank or pay, or if attendance holds while

visible engagement falls, redesign or discontinue because the practice is being experienced as an obligation rather than a break.

62% eat alone: rediscovering the lost art of workplace mealtime

Despite organizations' desire to foster trust, collaboration, and employee well-being, today's workplaces, shaped by time pressures, hybrid arrangements, and widespread digital and AI tools, reduce genuine social interaction. [1,2] As a result, 62% of American workers eat lunch alone at their desks, [3] even though employees who do take daily meal breaks report higher engagement, job satisfaction, and productivity. [4] In this article, we propose a framework centered on *commensality*, the practice of eating together, as a long-term proven intervention to enhance interpersonal connections and fortify prosocial organizational culture. [5]

We suggest that commensality offers a unique pathway to address persistent challenges such as poor team coordination, social isolation, and burnout because shared meals can cultivate trust and a sense of belonging through synchronized behaviors and the reciprocal sharing of experiences. These interactions, in turn, can reduce conflict, promote psychological safety, and help employees with the complexity of interpersonal dynamics in their jobs.

Several mechanisms underpin the proposed benefits of commensality. First, fostering environments that encourage shared food consumption enhances perceived closeness among team members, thereby

E-mail address: petr.houdek@vse.cz.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orgdyn.2026.101267>

Available online 25 August 2026

0090-2616/© 2026 Elsevier Inc. All rights are reserved, including those for text and data mining, AI training, and similar technologies.

improving cooperation and social cohesion. Second, inclusive menu planning that acknowledges varying dietary restrictions and preferences reduces the inadvertent exclusion of employees who may otherwise feel marginalized due to cultural or health-related constraints. Third, inviting employees to express and explore food or drink preferences can confer a sense of agency, acceptance, and voice in the workplace.

This article outlines how commensality-focused practices can be adapted to organizational contexts – whether physical or virtual. By integrating commensality strategies into broader organizational development efforts, we propose that leaders can strengthen the relational foundation that underlies employee well-being and organizational performance. Finally, we compare commensality with other team-building activities and list the risks and boundary conditions under which commensality may not have positive effects.

Indeed, commensality is not a panacea, and in teams marked by

serious, unresolved conflicts and where the core problem is structural coordination failure or deteriorated team relationships, managers should address those issues directly, because meal-based practices may play, at most, a secondary role. We formulated the Commensality Model (Fig. 1 for a practical flow model and Fig. 2 as a conceptual framework) as a pre-implementation diagnostic framework. Before introducing any meal-based practice, managers should assess how the team's context is suitable for commensality, which design choices are appropriate, which risks are most likely, and which early indicators would signal that the practice is helping, neutral, or counterproductive. In this view, commensality is a contingent intervention, as its effects depend not only on the presence of food but also on who initiates it, whether participation is genuinely voluntary, how hierarchy and payment are handled, how often it occurs, the size of the group, and whether the format is inclusive. Fig. 1, therefore, functions as a decision model, and Table 1 as its

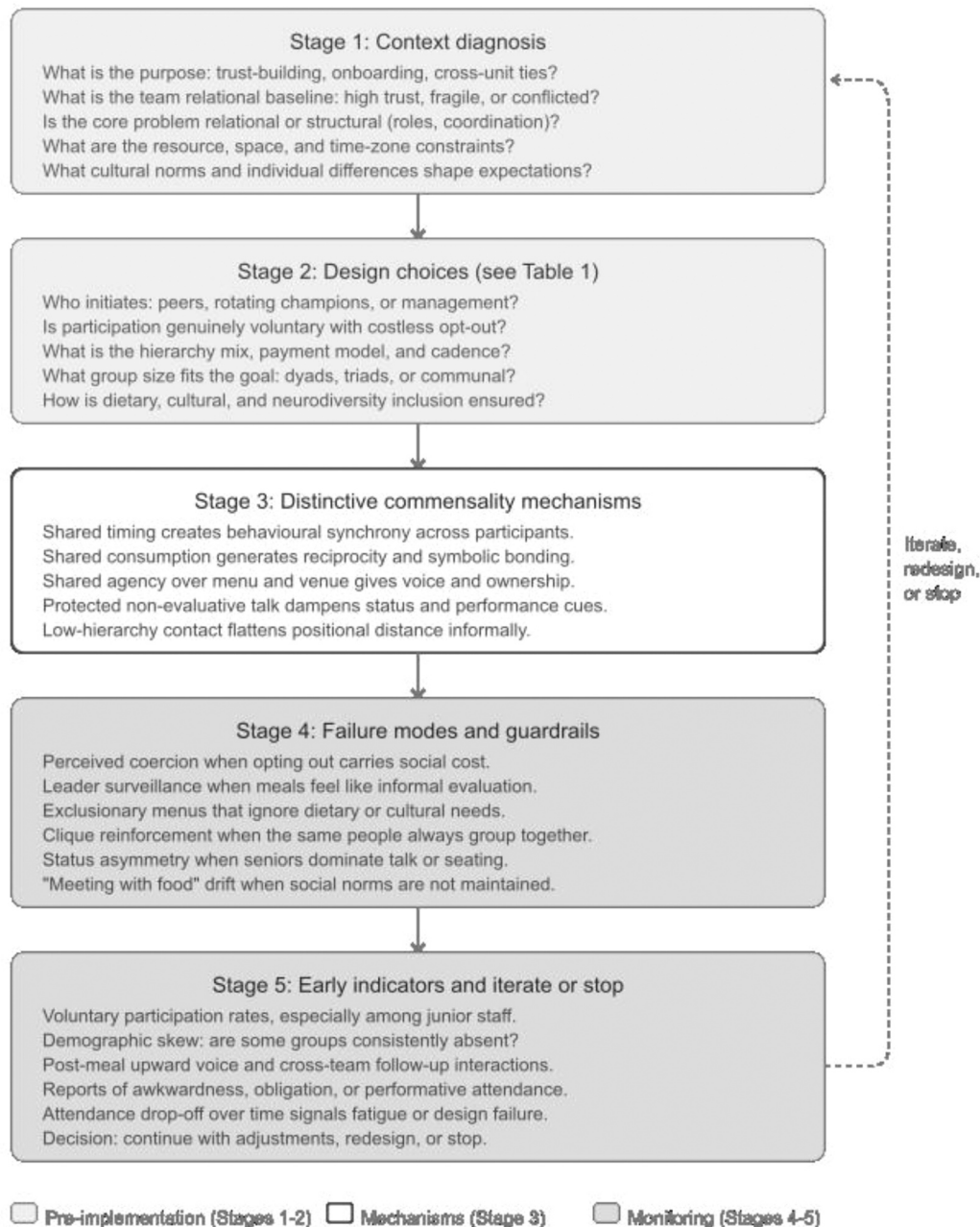


Fig. 1. The Commensality Model Flow: A five-stage design and monitoring framework. Stages 1-2 structure pre-implementation decisions. Stage 3 identifies the mechanisms distinctive to commensality. Stages 4-5 embed failure modes and early indicators into the model. The dashed feedback arrow indicates that monitoring results trigger iteration, redesign, or discontinuation.

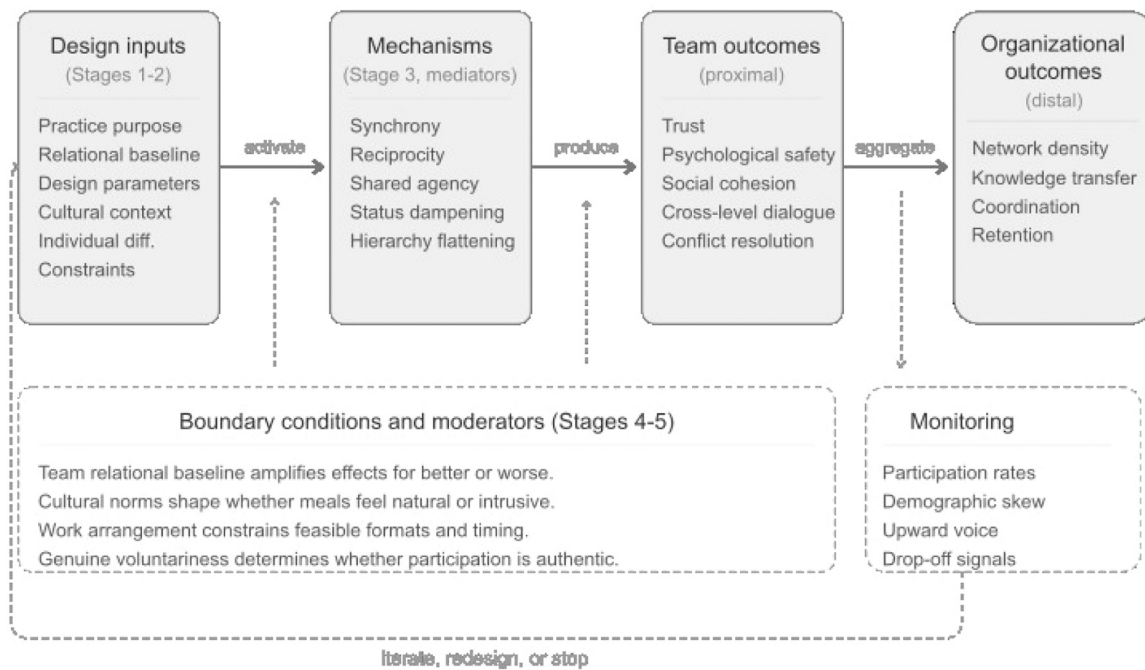


Fig. 2. Conceptual model of the commensality-outcomes relationship. Design inputs activate five commensality mechanisms (mediators), which produce proximal team outcomes that aggregate into distal organizational outcomes. Dashed arrows indicate moderation by boundary conditions and feedback from monitoring indicators. Solid arrows indicate mediation paths.

operational diagnostic.

The design levers in this model (initiation, voluntariness, group size, cadence, and the rest) operate at the team or unit level, where managers make daily decisions about how people interact. However, the model's ultimate claim is that team-level relational gains aggregate into organization-level outcomes through several established transmission channels. First, when multiple teams independently build relational capital through commensality practices, the cumulative effect is a denser informal network across the organization, which accelerates knowledge transfer, reduces duplication of effort, and shortens the time to locate expertise. [6–8] Second, relational coordination within teams spills over into cross-team coordination when employees who have built trust at the lunch table later collaborate on cross-functional projects. High relational coordination quality strongly predicts team and organizational performance. [7,9] Third, the cultural signal sent by an organization that systematically invests in low-pressure social connections shapes organizational climate over time, strengthening norms of mutual support and psychological safety that individual teams cannot sustain in isolation. [10,11] The model therefore operates at the team level by design and at the organizational level by aggregation.

Commensality and its enemies

The concept of *commensality*, or the practice of eating together at the same table (in Latin, the prefix *com-* means something shared between people, and *mensa* is "a table" or *mensalis*, meaning what is on the *mensa*), has long been recognized as a fundamental aspect of human social behavior. Historically, anthropologists and sociologists have emphasized the ritualistic and cultural dimensions of shared meals, noting that food consumption is tangled with social bonding, cooperation, and identity formation. Communal feasts and rituals often served to solidify group identity and social order. [12–15]

However, in the 1970s and 1980s, French sociologist Claude Fischler argued that Western societies were witnessing an erosion of structured meals in favor of individualized eating or snacking, potentially harming social integration and health. [13] He suggested that eating together provides a vital means of social integration, so the breakdown of

communal meals could lead to "nutritional disorders" in physiological, psychological, and societal senses. His warning is highly relevant because, although most people think sharing meals is a good way to bring people together, the average adult now eats 10 of 21 meals alone each week. [16] Going out to lunch with colleagues used to be the norm; nowadays, around a third to a half of employees eat alone at work (indeed, there are significant cross-cultural differences, with around half of employees in the UK eating alone, compared to only a fifth in Italy). [16,17] Skipping a shared lunch break with coworkers weakens individual well-being and broader workplace cohesion. Research on within-day job recovery indicates that socializing during lunch contributes positively to employees' sense of relatedness and can help replenish the energy needed for the rest of the workday. [18] Moreover, most studies indicate that loneliness and social isolation in eating are associated with harmful eating behaviors, such as low intake of fruits and vegetables and poor overall diet quality. [19,20]

Commensality as a mechanism for social bonding and conflict resolution

One of the key arguments in favor of commensality is its capacity to foster interpersonal trust and cooperation. Eating together promotes group cohesion by reinforcing shared identity and mutual affiliation. The Christian Eucharist (the ritual consumption of bread and wine) is an especially illuminating example; by identifying the bread with the body of Christ, each participant symbolically partakes of the same undivided food, thus transcending the self-centered, exclusionary quality of a meal and illustrating the unifying power of shared sustenance.

When individuals consume similar foods or share meals from the same source, they experience greater perceived closeness and coordination. [21,22] Notably, acts of sharing food and drink routinely feature as important elements in reconciliation rites across diverse societies. It is often used in international relations as "culinary diplomacy" (a legend has it that the sumptuous dishes of Antoine Carême, a royal cook, helped maintain peace in early 19th-century France by providing a welcome distraction and easing the embarrassment surrounding Napoleon's capitulation). [23]

Table 1

Commensality design diagnostic: seven parameters for managerial decision-making.

Design parameter	Recommended practice	Failure mode to avoid	Early warning sign
Initiation	Let peers or rotating champions propose and organize meals. Leaders seed the idea but hand ownership to the team. Rotate the organizing role across levels, functions, and locations.	Top-down mandates create the impression that meals are a management tool. Employees treat the event as surveillance rather than a connection. A single organizer burns out or imposes a narrow format.	Sign-up rates decline after the first few cycles. Post-event comments reference a management agenda. Only the organizer promotes events while others stay passive.
Voluntariness	Frame every event as opt-in, with no consequences for missing it. Managers model occasional non-attendance themselves. Provide discreet channels for signing up or opting out. Offer non-food alternatives for employees who prefer them.	An implicit obligation builds when leaders consistently attend or when absences are publicly noticed. Participation becomes performative rather than genuine. Employees with social anxiety or introversion feel trapped.	Employees attend but disengage visibly during the meal. Private complaints surface through HR or exit interviews. The same individuals consistently avoid events without explanation.
Hierarchy mix	Use peer-only sessions for psychological safety and mixed-level sessions for cross-level trust. Set an explicit norm: no performance or evaluation talk at the table. Train leaders to listen more and speak less during meals. Include leader-absent rounds to give junior staff space.	Senior staff dominate the conversation and set the agenda. Junior employees treat the meal as an informal performance review. The lunch becomes an extension of the regular meeting.	Talk time is visibly unequal across ranks. Junior staff report discomfort in anonymous feedback. Conversation topics consistently default to work tasks.
Payment	Fund meals centrally or distribute equal stipends. No individual should routinely pay for others. Rotate low-cost formats such as soup clubs or brown-bag lunches. Keep the financial model transparent and visible to all.	A leader who routinely pays creates patronage dynamics and felt obligation. Employees with lower incomes quietly opt out to avoid the expense. Budget cuts eliminate the program without a substitute.	Lower-paid employees participate less often. Informal talk frames meals as the boss's treat. Participation correlates with seniority or pay grade.
Cadence	Start with a biweekly pilot of 30–40 of minutes. Adjust frequency based on participation data and team feedback. Vary formats within the cadence to prevent staleness. For fragile-trust	Daily meals cause fatigue and crowd out personal recovery time. Monthly meals fail to build habit or relational momentum. A rigid schedule ignores seasonal workload variation.	Attendance plateaus or drops after the initial period. Employees describe meals as routine or stale.

Table 1 (continued)

Design parameter	Recommended practice	Failure mode to avoid	Early warning sign
Group size	teams, keep sessions shorter and more structured. Default to small groups of three to five for trust-building. Use dyads to onboard new hires to the team. Use larger communal formats for network breadth across units. Match the group size to the goal and to participants' comfort levels.	Large groups fragment into side conversations, leaving quieter members excluded. Introverts and newcomers withdraw rather than compete for airtime. Fixed groups become cliques that exclude outsiders.	Conversations consistently split into persistent subgroups. Quieter or newer members sit at the margins. The same clusters form at every event despite open seating.
Inclusion	Offer rotating cuisines with guaranteed safe options at every event. Solicit dietary, cultural, and sensory needs confidentially. Invite employees to contribute dishes or ideas for dishes. For neurodivergent staff, communicate menus and attendees in advance. Provide quieter, smaller-group alternatives alongside main events.	Default menus exclude employees with cultural, religious, or health-related needs. Scheduling overlaps with religious observances such as fasting periods. Communal noise and unpredictability overwhelm sensory-sensitive employees.	Specific demographic or personality groups are repeatedly absent. Employees raise food or format concerns informally, not officially. The same cuisine type dominates despite a diverse team.

Note. Each parameter corresponds to Stage 2 of the Commensality Model (Fig. 1). Failure modes map to Stage 4; early warning signs map to Stage 5. Context diagnosis (Stage 1) determines which parameters require the most attention for a given team. Cultural and organizational norms and individual differences should inform all seven parameters.

The collaborative effect of sharing food is also confirmed experimentally. [21,22] When pairs of strangers were assigned to eat identical snacks versus different snacks before engaging in a negotiation task, those who ate the same food were more likely to trust each other and reach an agreement, suggesting that incidental food similarity can act as a social glue. Related research shows that the manner of sharing matters. A study found that pairs who ate from shared plates resolved a conflict faster in a negotiation than pairs who ate from their own plates. Even when participants had opposing interests, those who took food from a common plate achieved better joint outcomes than those with individual portions, indicating that sharing food enhanced coordination and compromise. Commensality can thus increase interpersonal synchronization and empathy, leading to cooperation. Cross-cultural psychology research likewise indicates that dining together may bridge social differences. When individuals eat in a group, they tend to perceive people of different ethnicities or backgrounds as more similar or equal than they would in other settings (and it is also easier for them to talk about those differences); as a study found: "*principles of hospitality and commensality, common across many cultures, were expressed in this team, were recognized as important in bonding*" [24].

The synchronization in eating behaviors can extend beyond the dining context, improving team performance and negotiation outcomes in organizational settings. A study of professional firefighters found that

teams who regularly ate together exhibited significantly higher levels of cooperative behavior and work-group performance. [25] Firehouses, where cooking and eating together are long-held traditions, provide a perfect model for understanding how mealtime interactions shape organizational culture. One firefighter described the firehouse kitchen as "a fishbowl – everything is focused on the kitchen," emphasizing its role as a central hub for informal debriefing, problem-solving, and trust-building. Another stated: "this is like a holiday meal every day," stressing that shared meals create a familial atmosphere that strengthens team bonds. [25] Notably, firefighters who participated in group meals also reported greater willingness to support their colleagues beyond their formal job duties. The study also found that teams pooling meal funds in advance reported greater job satisfaction, likely due to the implicit trust required in such collective decision-making.

Eating in groups creates a sense of reciprocity and interdependence. When applied to workplace environments, this insight suggests that structured communal meals could serve as an intervention to strengthen workplace bonds, particularly in teams experiencing fragmentation due to remote work or high workload pressures. Indeed, the social benefits of commensality are evident not only in controlled experiments or work-related research but also in everyday life. A large UK survey found that people who ate with others more frequently were significantly happier and more satisfied with their lives. Those who have regular social meals are also more trusting of others and more engaged with their local communities. [16]

Commensality as amplifier

Group-level interventions may intensify pre-existing interpersonal patterns rather than replace them; thus, commensality is not inherently beneficial, as it may amplify both positive and negative relational dynamics within a team. In teams with a functional relational baseline, shared meals deepen trust and accelerate coordination. [22,25] In teams with unresolved conflict or fractured trust, the same practice can surface tensions, reinforce exclusion, and create new grievances. Managers must therefore diagnose the team's relational baseline (Stage 1 of the model) before selecting a commensality format.

When a team has strong psychological safety and established norms of mutual respect, commensality operates as a reinforcement mechanism. Newly formed teams, recently reorganized units, or teams with polite but distant relations occupy a middle ground, and commensality should be treated cautiously and experimentally. [26] Commensality can serve as a trust-building catalyst, but design choices must lower the interpersonal stakes. The primary risk is premature escalation and moving to large or unstructured formats before trust has developed, which can trigger social anxiety and withdrawal, particularly among introverted or neurodivergent employees (see also Section Individual differences). [27–29] Finally, when a team is marked by unresolved interpersonal conflict, distrust of leadership, or active grievances, commensality should not be used as a first-line intervention. Shared meals in this context risk being perceived as forced proximity and can backfire when the other conditions for positive contact are absent, because the informal, unstructured nature of meals removes the procedural safeguards that mediated or facilitated interventions provide. In such teams, the priority is to address the underlying conflict through direct means (e.g., conflict mediation, team coaching, structural redesign) before introducing any commensality practice. [30]

The impact of commensality on workplace inclusion and belonging

In addition to strengthening relationships, commensality may foster workplace inclusivity. Indeed, commensality bonds participants, but it also excludes outsiders. Employees with dietary restrictions (whether due to cultural, religious, or health-related reasons) often experience social isolation when their food needs are not accommodated [20] (the

differences in food preferences are used as an excuse for teasing and bullying since childhood, with up to a third of children with food allergy reporting being bullied, which is significantly associated with decreased quality of life and increased distress [31]).

Recognizing and incorporating diverse dietary preferences in workplace meals signals a cultural shift from tolerance to understanding and active acceptance, reducing feelings of exclusion and enhancing employees' sense of belonging. This can even be leveraged when employees gain agency to prepare "their" food (specific to the individual, their family, culture or country) for colleagues. In turn, when employees feel truly included, they are more likely to trust organizational leaders and engage in supportive behaviors toward colleagues, ultimately improving team cohesion.

Beyond inclusion of people with distinct food preferences, shared meals can also mitigate hierarchical barriers by providing informal settings for employees at different organizational levels to interact. Fischler highlights that commensality may either reinforce or erode hierarchies, depending on how group meals are structured. [12] In traditional corporate environments, meal privileges just for executives and other elites reinforce power disparities, perpetuating feelings of distance and formality. By contrast, organizations that leverage communal dining spaces, open seating, or rotate leadership presence at lunch can foster an egalitarian ethos. In such climates, employees may report a stronger sense of psychological safety, i.e., a shared belief that it is safe to take interpersonal risks, and are more likely to voice ideas, share knowledge, or request help. [10]

Inclusive dining practices enhance approachability and, over time, can transform mealtime into a catalyst for cross-level dialogue without large social distances; as a global leader in a study on the benefits of a decrease in positional power acknowledges [32]:

"Sometimes, you have people reporting to you that are older than you, which means, when you are in the office, you are their boss ... If they go for dinner after that, the position changes. And the respect is on age, not on position ... So the boss serves the employee who is older, and in that position [the employee] is superior."

These events allow collaborative work within their teams to proceed more easily and productively. Moreover, compared with leaders who did not display this behavior, those who did received stronger job performance evaluations and advanced to higher-level executive positions more readily over time.

However, the concept of pro-organizational commensality does not necessarily require the removal of hierarchy and status. Consider Oxbridge formal dining, where highly ritualistic meals remain actively embraced for their capacity to cultivate organizational unity, continuity, and a sense of tradition. [33] The formal hall dining becomes a powerful integrative mechanism, reinforcing the college's collective identity and offering a scaffolding through which members can negotiate shared meaning. In this sense, the deliberate pomp and ceremony of formal dining is lauded as a living tradition that helps sustain both the symbolic prestige and the daily cohesion of the collegiate community.

When leaders consistently model organizational dining customs (e.g., encouraging potlucks, supporting cultural food events, or hosting formal celebratory dinners), employees may view these actions as authentic expressions of the organization's values. This perceived authenticity strengthens employees' emotional attachment to their workplace and can improve retention, job satisfaction, and organizational citizenship behaviors.

Practical implementation strategies for managers

Managers can leverage commensality in the workplace by embedding shared meals into the organizational routine (see Table 1 for specific moves). The first step may be providing dedicated spaces and opportunities for communal dining. This might include creating comfortable lunch areas or kitchens where employees can gather, and

scheduling regular break times that encourage group meals rather than isolated desk lunches.

Google, for instance, provides free meals in campus cafeterias and has long credited this practice with enhancing collaboration. Google's CEO Sundar Pichai observed that casual conversations over meals have sparked countless innovative ideas, with the benefits "*dwarfing the costs*" of the food program. [34] He noted that offering communal meals "*sparks creativity*" and "*creates community*," and highlighted how the informal lunchtime dialogue can lead to new projects and the cross-pollination of ideas. Google deliberately designed its facilities (e. g., large open dining areas and shared coffee bars) to maximize employee mingling across departments. The case shows a key advantage of commensality because it organically breaks down silos. Employees who might not interact in meetings can form connections in the cafeteria line, expanding their internal networks. For organizations without Google-style campuses, the same logic can be achieved with low-infrastructure formats that seed frequent, lightweight encounters. Teams can rotate "host desks" for brown-bag clusters or take walk-to-the-park lunches and picnic-blanket huddles when weather allows. Mobile coffee carts or a weekly "pop-up coffee bar" create spontaneous gathering points in hallways or lobbies.

Another strategy is to establish rituals or programs that make shared meals a regular part of culture. This can range from weekly team lunches to rotating potluck events or cross-department "lunch roulette" pairings. Such initiatives deliberately bring together employees who might not typically interact, fostering new connections and knowledge exchange. Swedish *fika* (a short communal coffee break) is one example of a culturally ingrained practice that companies may adopt to boost camaraderie and reduce stress. [35] During *fika*, employees from all levels gather informally, which may wear down barriers through shared respite. Similarly, some Japanese companies have group lunch hours, and start-ups around the world organize weekly team meals (from Taco Tuesdays to Friday pizza parties) as a ritual to build a family-like culture.

BenchPrep, a Chicago-based e-learning startup, is another example of how to build commensality into the daily routine of a small firm. [36] BenchPrep subsidized lunch (\$12.50 per person per day) and used a simple ordering flow (employees chose from 4 to 8 rotating restaurants, food arrived simultaneously) so that everyone could sit and eat together at large shared tables. Leaders framed lunch as a social ritual rather than a meeting; employees reported that the practice deepened relationships and became one of the firm's most valued perks. BenchPrep's COO argued that, relative to off-sites or sporadic events, everyday shared meals delivered a distinctive return by saving coordination time and sustaining cross-team rapport. The program was maintained as head-count grew, with the company estimating 30 minutes saved per employee per day due to simplified logistics (ordering, pickup, cooking at home). This case illustrates a low-friction blueprint for SMEs, i.e., synchronized delivery, shared seating, clear social-only norms, and a transparent payment model.

However, commensality is not an end in itself; its strategic value lies in reducing social friction and accelerating knowledge flows. When employees regularly form and refresh weak ties across levels and functions, organizations tend to share context faster, resolve conflicts earlier, and coordinate with fewer handoffs. Over time, this shows up as quicker problem-solving, shorter cycle times, and higher retention in relationship-intensive roles. Managers may track several indicators to show whether commensality nudges are working, such as the time (or number of emails) to locate expertise for novel problems, the frequency of upward voice reported after mixed-level lunches, voluntary participation rates across demographic groups (equity of access), or intent-to-stay in HR surveys. When these metrics move together, the organization builds relational capacity that supports agility, innovation, and performance.

Individual differences: culture, introversion, social anxiety, and neurodiversity

As with any group activity, commensality is culturally embedded and has uneven effects on groups and individuals. Managers should therefore avoid treating shared meals as a universally natural or universally welcome practice. For some individuals or teams, eating together may feel routine and affiliative; for others, it may feel ceremonial, overly intimate, or performative. [37] In teams that span multiple cultural contexts, the safest approach is to start with the least assumptive format (i.e., small, opt-in, low-formality) and to surface cultural expectations through the pilot's feedback loop (Stage 5) rather than assuming homogeneity (for more about cross-cultural working environment, see Section Exclusion and Dietary/Cultural Sensitivities). But even within a culturally congruent setting, employees differ in their appetite for social interaction, their comfort with unstructured group settings, and their sensory and social processing styles. These individual differences shape whether commensality is experienced as energizing or depleting.

For example, for more introverted employees, frequent large-group lunches may be experienced as more effortful or depleting, especially when they resemble trait-incongruent social demands. [29,38] Opt-out norms must be genuine, meaning not just stated in policy but modeled by managers and socially costless in practice.

Social anxiety is distinct from introversion and more clinically significant as it involves persistent fear of negative evaluation in social situations and affects an estimated 7–12% of the population at some point in their lives. [39,40] For employees with social anxiety, eating in front of others, making conversation with unfamiliar colleagues, or navigating unstructured social space can be distressing. Managerial guidance should include several mitigating procedures; for example, structured conversation prompts or light activities (a quiz, a recipe exchange) that reduce the burden of spontaneous self-presentation. Another approach is to allow employees to participate in peripheral roles, such as helping set up, choosing the menu, sharing a recipe asynchronously, etc., which provides social connection without requiring full immersion in a group-eating context.

Some neurodiverse, specifically autistic employees and those with sensory processing differences, may experience communal dining environments as overwhelming due to noise, unpredictable social cues, unfamiliar foods, or the simultaneous demands of eating and conversing. [28,41] Design accommodations include offering quieter or smaller-group alternatives alongside the main event, communicating the menu and attendee list in advance so that the situation is predictable, and avoiding surprise elements or spontaneous format changes. These accommodations follow the principles of universal design, benefiting employees who need them most while also reducing friction for those who prefer structure and predictability.

Individual differences should be treated as an input at Stage 1 (context diagnosis) alongside the team's relational baseline. The pilot protocol's baseline survey can include a brief item on preferred social format (small group, dyad, asynchronous, or large communal) to ensure the chosen design reflects the distribution of preferences within the team rather than defaulting to the format preferred by the most socially dominant members.

Adapting commensality to hybrid and remote work environments

While commensality has been associated with in-person dining, digital transformations in the workplace necessitate adaptations of these practices for hybrid and remote teams. [42] The concept of *digital commensality*, in which remote employees participate in virtual meals via video conferencing, has emerged (especially during the COVID-19 pandemic) as a potential solution for maintaining social cohesion in distributed teams. [42,43] Such practices can help sustain interpersonal bonds and cooperative team culture, even in the absence of physical

proximity. Although some researchers suggest that synchronous experiences, such as eating at the same time, may generate a sense of shared presence and connection, the absence of physical co-presence may limit the full benefits of traditional commensality. [44] Virtual commensality should also be treated as an amplifier rather than a substitute. In teams that already have workable trust and coordination routines, brief social rituals may preserve familiarity and humanize remote interaction. In teams with weak trust, however, asking people to share a meal on camera may magnify discomfort rather than reduce it.

The effectiveness of digital commensality in companies remains an open question. First of all, a social norm needs to be established as to whether it is actually a shared meal and not just a loose association between virtual meetings and meals – in the latter case, individuals who eat during virtual work meetings are perceived as less professional, less competent, and less likely to experience career success. [45]

Companies with virtual teams should experiment with creative solutions to replicate the camaraderie of in-person dining. For instance, during virtual coffee breaks or lunch roulette sessions via video chat, employees are randomly matched to share a meal (it can be a synchronized order of identical food) or coffee, aiming to mimic spontaneous conversations around office cafeterias. Several technological tools can help create a more realistic setting; for example, there is a roomXT, a prototype communication system designed to enable realistic, shared dining experiences between people in different locations. By combining a large, wall-sized display with head tracking and a 3D-rendered virtual environment, roomXT aims to mimic the sense of physical co-presence during mealtime. [46]

Other examples could be virtual cooking demos, recipe exchanges, or wine tasting during virtual team lunches or dinners. A study on a virtual wine tasting provides this participant testimony [47]:

"We participated in a tasting by the company before Christmas, so with work colleagues and after a few sips of wine it was quite fun. We just told old anecdotes, what we have experienced together. We haven't seen each other in person for ages. The sommelier also said it was okay, because it is also somehow part of such an event."

The study then concludes that recounting personal experiences and sharing memories seems vital for participants in a virtual context as well. In cooking demos, a colleague-volunteer demonstrates an easy dish or shares a cultural specialty while others follow along or simply watch. By aligning all participants in a common culinary activity, these digital experiences harness synchronous interactions that can cultivate a sense of shared presence. These sessions provide a structured yet lighthearted context for employees to collaborate, share wine notes and cooking, and ultimately eat "together" despite geographical distance. Employees may feel more personally connected and less isolated, paralleling benefits observed in traditional commensality contexts.

In fully remote and hybrid settings, virtual commensality works best when it is designed as a short, social micro-ritual rather than "a meeting with food." In practice, this means brief sessions, explicit norms (e.g., social break; no evaluation talk; cameras optional), small groups instead of large grids, rotating times for time zones and caregivers, and automated pairing to reduce friction. For example, at GitLab, these patterns are institutionalized through an all-remote handbook that explicitly promotes informal communication (including virtual coffee chats). GitLab also reinforces casual reconnection after time away by recommending employees schedule informal coffee chats as they return, underlining that such rituals are part of day-to-day operating norms rather than one-off events. [48]

Another example comes from Zapier, a fully distributed company that uses the Donut Slack app to recreate serendipity via opt-in, randomized pairings for short video coffees. Donut posts an introduction to each pair (or small group), nudges calendaring, and supplies conversation starters. Zapier emphasizes no fixed agenda and treats conversations as casual get-to-know-you chats that sometimes, but not necessarily, spill into work topics (an approach they report "goes a long

way" toward replacing the hallway encounters remote teams lack). [49]

In teams spanning multiple time zones, synchronous commensality creates an inherent equity problem as any fixed meal time is convenient for some members and disruptive for others. When the same subset of employees repeatedly accommodates an inconvenient time, the practice reinforces existing power asymmetries, typically favoring headquarters or the location of senior leadership. Organizations should adopt a structured rotation protocol. A practical approach is to define two or three synchronous time slots and rotate the off-peak burden across locations so that no single site consistently absorbs the inconvenience. Research on virtual teams suggests that fairness in team processes becomes particularly important under high dispersion, while time-zone differences reduce opportunities for synchronous interaction and increase coordination costs. [50,51]

Ultimately, these examples illustrate how organizations can adapt the concept of commensality to virtual settings, creating new rituals that replicate the social and psychological benefits of eating together in person. However, ongoing research is needed to determine whether such virtual adaptations can consistently achieve the deeper social bonding or conflict-resolution effects traditionally observed with face-to-face meals.

However, when meals are logistically infeasible (e.g., due to time-zone dispersion, cultural discomfort with eating on camera, religious fasting periods), managers should not abandon the five-stage model. They should instead select substitute practices that preserve as many mechanisms as possible. Any synchronous social ritual, such as a walking meeting, a virtual coffee break, or a brief team quiz, can activate shared timing. Shared agency transfers readily to collaborative decisions unrelated to food, i.e., letting a team vote on the theme of a social session, or choosing a group challenge preserves the sense of collective voice that menu selection provides in a meal setting. Protected non-evaluative talk requires only an explicit norm that can be applied to any social format, not only meals. Low-hierarchy contact is achieved through randomized pairings or leader-absent rounds, neither of which depends on a dining context. The mechanism most difficult to replicate without food is shared consumption and the reciprocity it generates, because consuming from a common source carries symbolic weight that few other workplace activities match. Partial substitutes include sending tasting kits or local food items to remote team members so participants can share something, even when apart.

The practical implication is that commensality sits at one end of a continuum of structured social interaction. It is the richest available format because it bundles several mechanisms into a single, low-effort, everyday practice (see Fig. 2). When managers move away from food-based formats, each substitution typically sacrifices one or two mechanisms. The model makes this trade-off visible so managers can make informed choices rather than default to either the "free lunch" or nothing. What drives coordination quality is not any specific communication medium but the frequency, timeliness, and relational character of interaction – shared goals, shared knowledge, and mutual respect. [7] Commensality is a particularly efficient vehicle for these relational qualities, but it is not the only one.

Commensality vs. other bonding strategies

Workplace commensality can be viewed alongside other team-bonding or fun-related interventions, such as off-site retreats, team-building exercises, or after-work social events. Each approach has its merits, but commensality offers unique advantages and distinctive limitations.

Unlike corporate retreats or annual team-building days that occur infrequently, shared meals can happen daily or weekly with minimal disruption. By leveraging a routine (eating) as a bonding experience, commensality creates a steady drip of social interactions. Traditional team-building or inner networking activities may feel artificial or require extraordinary effort, [52–54] whereas eating together is easily integrated into the workday. Commensality doesn't require employees

to block off large amounts of personal time; it transforms an existing habit into a team asset. Of course, special events like retreats can quickly achieve a depth of engagement and be memorable shared experiences. They might foster intense camaraderie through novel challenges or travel, which a routine lunch cannot fully replicate. However, retreats demand significant planning and expense, and their positive effects may taper off once employees return to routine. Shared meals, by contrast, sustain connection through continual reinforcement and cost less and involve less logistical complexity.

One criticism of team bonding exercises is that they can feel forced or contrived. Employees often recognize when trust breaks down or when scripted games are used to manufacture camaraderie, which can breed cynicism. Many workers despise team-building activities that feel implicitly mandatory, especially if they intrude on personal time or privacy. [53,54]

By comparison, sharing a meal is a more organic form of bonding – conversation flows around personal interests, stories, and daily life, rather than, say, a staged teamwork challenge. Commensality typically creates a relaxed environment where team members can be themselves, leading to more genuine relationships than a highly structured activity might. That said, even social meals can become "forced fun" if mishandled. For example, a celebration in the form of an office cake can be "a great way to show appreciation" or, as 6% of participants in one study rated it, something that should never happen again. [55] Or when a manager invites subordinates to an informal dinner at home, but attendance is essentially forced, and a casual get-together devolves into tension and awkwardness (as vividly illustrated by "The Dinner Party" episode in the TV series *The Office*).

However, the key difference is that commensality can be voluntary and employee-driven (people naturally gravitate toward the lunch table), whereas many team-building events are HR-driven. Indeed, while most workplace commensality involves people eating together, managers or team leaders can turn mealtime into an intentional team-building opportunity by integrating cooking or meal-planning activities. For instance, instead of merely meeting at a restaurant, a team might collaborate on choosing a recipe, assigning cooking tasks, and experimenting with unfamiliar techniques. This process naturally incorporates key team-building components (goal setting, role assignment and clarification, problem-solving, etc.) while retaining the communal and social essence of sharing a meal.

Compared to formal retreats or structured team exercises facilitated by HR staff, informal meals create a setting where hierarchical distinctions can soften. In a lunchroom, a junior employee can comfortably strike up a conversation with a senior executive over a shared meal, an interaction less likely to occur in a formal meeting. Other bonding activities, such as competitive team games, might inadvertently reinforce hierarchies or personality clashes.

In summary, commensality stands out for its frequency and informality – it turns a daily necessity into relationship-building, offering consistent reinforcement of social bonds that complement the more sporadic, structured bonding strategies, such as retreats. Managers may find that encouraging commensality fills the gap between major team-building events by keeping the team spirit alive day-to-day. Because meals are frequent and lightweight, they can sustain relational coordination at low cost, complementing episodic interventions (e.g., retreats) and supporting day-to-day knowledge exchange. [56]

Potential downsides of commensality and how to mitigate them

While commensality has many benefits, managers must be aware of its potential pitfalls. If implemented poorly, shared meals can unintentionally exclude or discomfort employees and even exacerbate power imbalances. Below, we discuss several key concerns – and ways to address them – so that communal eating remains a positive, inclusive force in the workplace. The Commensality Design Diagnostic (Table 1) embeds each failure mode alongside its corresponding design

parameter, enabling managers to anticipate and mitigate problems before implementation rather than respond reactively. Implementation research suggests that interventions are more usable in practice when they specify relevant mechanisms, contextual contingencies, and likely barriers in advance. [57,58]

Exclusion and dietary/cultural sensitivities

The meaning, frequency, and social function of shared meals vary substantially across cultural contexts and determine whether a commensality initiative feels natural or imposing. In Mediterranean, Latin American, and many East Asian societies, midday meals are extended, communal, and socially normative; colleagues who eat alone may be seen as distant or antisocial. [17] By contrast, in Northern European and Anglo-Saxon workplace cultures, lunch is more often treated as a brief personal interval, and organized group meals may be perceived as an intrusion on autonomy or as management overreach. [53]

Another risk is that some employees may feel left out of group meals due to dietary restrictions, allergies, or cultural and religious food practices. [20] If the team's bonding revolves around foods or timings that certain members cannot partake in, commensality could cement exclusion rather than inclusion. For example, a Muslim employee might be uncomfortable at a team lunch during Ramadan fasting, or a vegan employee might feel alienated if team outings are consistently to steakhouses. The same applies to the role of alcohol. After-work dinners with alcohol are a central bonding ritual in some national and industry cultures (for example, the Japanese *nomikai*) but they exclude employees who abstain for religious, health, or personal reasons. The model's inclusion parameter (Stage 2) should be applied to beverages as rigorously as to food, i.e., non-alcoholic alternatives must always be available and socially normalized rather than treated as exceptions.

Managers should design commensality initiatives with inclusive menus and alternatives. This means rotating cuisine calendars with guaranteed "always-safe" options at every event, opt-in ingredient transparency, and proactively accommodating vegetarian, vegan, gluten-free, halal, kosher, and other needs at every group meal (e.g., choosing restaurants with diverse options or catering with flexibility). It also involves being mindful of scheduling – rotating the timing of events or avoiding exclusionary periods (such as happy hours that exclude those who don't drink alcohol or lunches during religious fasts).

Another approach is to invite employees themselves to contribute ideas for group meals, ensuring everyone has a stake in the traditions. Commensality can celebrate diversity – for instance, hosting potlucks where employees bring dishes from their culture can educate colleagues and honor different backgrounds. The goal is to make each person feel that they can fully participate without compromising their dietary needs or beliefs. Managers should solicit feedback confidentially about food-based initiatives to catch any unintentional exclusions and adjust accordingly. By being culturally sensitive and flexible, organizations can prevent communal meals from alienating team members.

Power and finance imbalances at the table

Sharing a meal in a work context does not automatically erase rank and status. Who sits next to whom, who initiates or dominates the conversation, and even who pays for the meal can all become reflections of workplace hierarchy. Anthropologists have long noted that meals can perform social hierarchy within groups – for example, in traditional feasts, higher-status individuals receive preferential seating and portions to highlight their position in the community. [12,59] In a modern office, similar patterns might appear as a manager might unconsciously monopolize discussion, or junior staff might feel obliged to display deference during a team lunch. There is also the question of psychological safety – some employees may not speak freely at lunch if their boss is present, treating it almost like a meeting rather than a casual break.

To mitigate negative power imbalances, setting the right tone and norms for workplace meals is important. Companies should emphasize that these gatherings are off-the-record and social, not an extension of the work meeting. One practical tip is for leaders to listen more and let others talk, especially those lower in the hierarchy, so the conversation isn't top-down. Rotating seating or mixing groups can prevent cliques or status-based groupings (e.g., not always having executives at one end of the table) and help to span structural holes and improve the flow of novel information. [60]

Understandably, not every social meal with a random selection of coworkers will create an enjoyable or creative atmosphere, and sometimes companies have to contribute effective event design to make it work. Take inspiration from Denis Martin's Michelin-starred restaurant, which solved the initial social awkwardness by placing toy cows on the tables [61]:

"Nothing happens at the start of service until one of the diners, curious as to whether what they see before them on the table is a Swiss take on a salt shaker or pepper grinder, picks up their cow. When they tilt it to look underneath, it lets out a mourning moo. Diners often laugh in surprise. Then, within a few moments, the dining room erupts into a chorus of mooing cows, and the restaurant is full of chortling diners. The mood has been lifted..."

Additionally, addressing the who-pays issue can equalize the playing field. If the company sponsors the lunch (or everyone pays their own way, or there is an ex ante voluntary contribution), no individual wields financial power over the meal. Contrast this with a scenario in which a high-ranking person routinely pays – some juniors might then feel indebted or feel that certain attendance is expected. Having the organization cover group meals as policy sends a message that this is a collegial activity, not a favor from a superior.

Organizations can keep commensality equitable by combining small monthly stipends or vouchers earmarked for social breaks (so no one pays out of pocket) with centrally administered pooled funds that cover shared costs without making a manager the de facto sponsor, thus avoiding leader-as-patron dynamics and the power debt that can follow. To further lower barriers, teams can rotate through free/low-cost formats, such as soup or chili clubs. Together, these mechanisms normalize participation regardless of personal means, keep signals of obligation low, and make the practice sustainable across budget cycles.

Voluntariness and avoiding forced participation

Perhaps the most significant caveat in promoting workplace commensality is ensuring that it remains voluntary and enjoyable, not an obligatory chore. What begins as a well-intentioned team lunch can backfire if employees feel they have no choice in the matter. Forced socialization can lead to pushback or disengagement, undermining the very trust and camaraderie such meals are meant to foster. Introverted or busy employees might feel particularly that their autonomy is violated if they are compelled to attend every gathering.

To prevent this, companies should foster an opt-in culture around commensality. [62] Communicate that while shared meals are encouraged, they are not mandated – there are no negative consequences for opting out occasionally. One innovative approach is to allow people to opt out discreetly. For example, instead of making a daily team lunch obligatory for everyone, a manager could organize periodic lunches among rotating small groups (pairs or triads) who volunteer to get to know each other. Those not interested can simply not sign up. Another tactic is to offer alternative forms of bonding for those who are uncomfortable with group meals – perhaps a casual coffee chat or a collaborative project session – so that they're not entirely excluded from social networks if they skip lunch.

It's also important to be attuned to why someone might not participate, for example, a new hire might be shy, or an employee might need to run errands at lunch. Quietly checking in and ensuring they feel

welcome next time, without guilt, can help. Over time, as employees see that these gatherings truly are for their benefit, many initial skeptics may choose to join in when they're ready.

The paradox is that making commensality voluntary may increase genuine participation – people come because they want to, not because they have to. Organizations that respect personal time and boundaries tend to achieve better engagement in the long run. Eating together may thus be a better nudge to job satisfaction than expensive programs to promote job motivation or improve mental health (e.g., mindfulness or resilience training), which are usually forced and may backfire. [63] Unlike many individual-focused well-being programs, commensality directly addresses the relational context of work. It may therefore complement other well-being interventions by strengthening everyday social connections and perceived support. [64]

Conclusion

Workplace commensality can serve as a powerful lever to strengthen team cohesion, boost morale, and foster a more inclusive organizational culture. By turning mealtimes into regular, low-pressure opportunities for interaction, leaders can nurture trust, reduce social isolation, and enhance collaboration. At the same time, managers must be aware of pitfalls, including cultural insensitivities, hierarchical dynamics, and forced participation. When thoughtfully planned (see Table 1) and genuinely voluntary, commensality supplements other team-building efforts – filling in the everyday social gaps that large-scale events cannot address on their own.

The model presented in this article equips managers with a diagnostic and design framework that structures decisions about shared meals at the team level where those decisions are made. But the cumulative effect of multiple teams practicing well-designed commensality is an organization with denser informal networks, stronger cross-unit coordination, and a culture in which everyday social connection is normative rather than exceptional.

Funding

The work on this article was supported by the Czech Science Agency (GACR) project No. 22–29520S, “Behavioral Organizational Politics: Experiments in Prosocial Political Behavior.”

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Petr Houdek: Writing – original draft, Funding acquisition, Conceptualization.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process

The figures were created with the help of Claude Opus 4.6. Grammarly was used for spell-checking. Otherwise, the manuscript was written entirely by the author.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The author declares that he has no conflict of interest.

Acknowledgments

For valuable comments and advice on earlier versions of the manuscript, I thank participants at various workshops and discussion seminars (most notably EURAM, IAREP/SABE, and SJDM). My thanks also go to three anonymous reviewers who contributed to the significant improvement of the manuscript.

Data availability

No data was used for the research described in the article.

References

- [1] L. Urrila, A. Siiräininen, L. Mäkelä, et al., Sense of belonging in hybrid work settings, *J. Vocat. Behav.* 157 (2025) 104096, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2025.104096>.
- [2] S. Stieger, D. Lewetz, D. Willinger, Face-to-face more important than digital communication for mental health during the pandemic, *Sci. Rep.* 13 (2023) 8022, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-023-34957-4>.
- [3] Reclaiming the office lunch. (2025, Apr 19). *The Economist*, 455, 59. Retrieved from <https://www.proquest.com/magazines/reclaiming-office-lunch/docview/3191178672/se-2>.
- [4] R.T. Malhotra, Take your lunch break!, *Harv. Bus. Rev.* (2021). <https://hbr.org/2021/01/take-your-lunch-break>.
- [5] M.J. Matthews, T.K. Kelemen, T. Watkins, et al., Food for thought: a review of food in organizational contexts, *J. Organ. Behav.* (2026), <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.70054>.
- [6] L. Argote, Knowledge transfer within organizations: mechanisms, motivation, and consideration, *Annu. Rev. Psychol.* 75 (2024) 405–431.
- [7] J. Hoffer Gittell, Coordinating mechanisms in care provider groups: relational coordination as a mediator and input uncertainty as a moderator of performance effects, *Manag. Sci.* 48 (2002) 1408–1426, <https://doi.org/10.1287/mnsc.48.11.1408.268>.
- [8] A.C. Inkpen, E.W.K. Tsang, Social capital, networks, and knowledge transfer, *Acad. Manag. Rev.* 30 (2005) 146–165, <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2005.15281445>.
- [9] C.A. Iyassere, J. Wing, J.N. Martel, et al., Effect of increased interprofessional familiarity on team performance, communication, and psychological safety on inpatient medical teams: a randomized clinical trial, *JAMA Intern. Med.* 182 (2022) 1190–1198, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-031413-091305>.
- [10] A.C. Edmondson, Z. Lei, Psychological safety: the history, renaissance, and future of an interpersonal construct, *Annu. Rev. Organ. Psychol. Organ. Behav.* 1 (2014) 23–43, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-031413-091305>.
- [11] A. Carmeli, J.H. Gittell, High-quality relationships, psychological safety, and learning from failures in work organizations, *J. Organ. Behav.* 30 (2009) 709–729, <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.565>.
- [12] C. Fischler, Commensality, society and culture, *Soc. Sci. Inf.* 50 (2011) 528–548, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0539018411413963>.
- [13] C. Fischler, Food habits, social change and the nature/culture dilemma, *Soc. Sci. Inf.* 19 (1980) 937–953, <https://doi.org/10.1177/053901848001900603>.
- [14] M. Jones, *Feast: Why humans share food*, Oxford University Press, 2007.
- [15] K. Woolley, S. Lim, Interpersonal consequences of joint food consumption for connection and conflict, *Soc. Personal. Psychol. Compass* 17 (2023) e12748, <https://doi.org/10.1111/spc3.12748>.
- [16] R.I.M. Dunbar, Breaking bread: the functions of social eating, *Adapt. Hum. Behav. Physiol.* 3 (2017) 198–211, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40750-017-0061-4>.
- [17] P. Corvo, M.F. Fontefrancesco, R. Mataracena, Eating at work: the role of the lunch-break and canteens for wellbeing at work in Europe, *Soc. Indic. Res.* 150 (2020) 1043–1076, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-020-02353-4>.
- [18] J.P. Trougakos, I. Hideg, B.H. Cheng, et al., Lunch breaks unpacked: the role of autonomy as a moderator of recovery during lunch, *Acad. Manag. J.* 57 (2014) 405–421, <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2011.1072>.
- [19] K. Hanna, J. Cross, A. Nicholls, et al., The association between loneliness or social isolation and food and eating behaviours: a scoping review, *Appetite* 191 (2023) 107051, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2023.107051>.
- [20] K. Woolley, A. Fishbach, R. (Michelle) Wang, Food restriction and the experience of social isolation, *J. Pers. Soc. Psychol.* 119 (2020) 657–671, <https://doi.org/10.1037/pspi0000223>.
- [21] K. Woolley, A. Fishbach, A recipe for friendship: similar food consumption promotes trust and cooperation, *J. Consum. Psychol.* 27 (2017) 1–10, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcps.2016.06.003>.
- [22] K. Woolley, A. Fishbach, Shared plates, shared minds: consuming from a shared plate promotes cooperation, *Psychol. Sci.* 30 (2019) 541–552, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797619830633>.
- [23] S. Chapple-Sokol, Culinary diplomacy: breaking bread to win hearts and minds, *Hague J. Dipl.* 8 (2013) 161–183, <https://doi.org/10.1163/1871191X-12341244>.
- [24] A. Means, K. Mackenzie Davey, P. Dewe, Cultural difference on the table: Food and drink and their role in multicultural team performance, *Int. J. Cross Cult. Manag.* 15 (2015) 305–328, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470595815606743>.
- [25] K.M. Kniffin, B. Wansink, C.M. Devine, et al., Eating together at the firehouse: how workplace commensality relates to the performance of firefighters, *Hum. Perform.* 28 (2015) 281–306, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08959285.2015.1021049>.
- [26] I. Yang, What makes an effective team? The role of trust (dis)confirmation in team development, *Eur. Manag. J.* 32 (2014) 858–869, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emj.2014.04.001>.
- [27] J.R. Methot, E.H. Rosado-Solomon, D.G. Allen, The network architecture of human capital: a relational identity perspective, *Acad. Manag. Rev.* 43 (2018) 723–748, <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2016.0338>.
- [28] N.H. Longmire, T.J. Vogus, A. Colella, Relational incongruence in neurodiverse workgroups: practices for cultivating autistic employee authenticity and belonging, *Hum. Resour. Manag.* 64 (2025) 59–76, <https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.22248>.
- [29] C.R. Wanberg, Y. Park, S.L. Ren, Introversion and trait incongruent work demands: episodic misfit at work, *Pers. Psychol.* 78 (2025) 151–175, <https://doi.org/10.1111/peps.12668>.
- [30] C.N. Lacerenza, S.L. Marlow, S.I. Tannenbaum, et al., Team development interventions: evidence-based approaches for improving teamwork, *Am. Psychol.* 73 (2018) 517–531, <https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000295>.
- [31] A.T. Fong, C.H. Katelaris, B. Wainstein, Bullying and quality of life in children and adolescents with food allergy, *J. Paediatr. Child. Health* 53 (2017) 630–635, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jpc.13570>.
- [32] T. Neeley, B.S. Reiche, How global leaders gain power through downward deference and reduction of social distance, *Acad. Manag. J.* 65 (2022) 11–34, <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2019.0531>.
- [33] M. Di Domenico, N. Phillips, Sustaining the ivory tower: oxbridge formal dining as organizational ritual, *J. Manag. Inq.* 18 (2009) 326–343, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1056492609336482>.
- [34] Google's free meal passes for employees is not a perk, says CEO Sundar Pichai; it is ... *Times India*. 2024.
- [35] C. Öberg, M. Larson, H. Scander, In the interest of the nation: Swedish fika, *Int. J. Gastron. Food Sci.* 37 (2024) 101003, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijgfs.2024.101003>.
- [36] How Tech Startup BenchPrep Made Lunch a Powerful Part of its Culture | Fooda. <https://www.fooda.com/resources/how-tech-startup-benchprep-made-lunch-a-powerful-part-of-its-culture> (accessed 14 April 2026).
- [37] M.M. Hasbi, A. van Marrewijk, Let's eat together! rhythm analysis of commensality and critique of everyday life in organizations, *Organ. Stud.* 47 (2026) 639–663, <https://doi.org/10.1177/01708406251380998>.
- [38] S. Leikas, Sociable behavior is related to later fatigue: moment-to-moment patterns of behavior and tiredness, *Heliyon* 6 (2020) e04033, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2020.e04033>.
- [39] M.B. Stein, D.J. Stein, Social anxiety disorder, *Lancet* 371 (2008) 1115–1125, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(08\)60488-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(08)60488-2).
- [40] A.M. Ruscio, T.A. Brown, W.T. Chiu, et al., Social fears and social phobia in the USA: results from the National Comorbidity Survey Replication, *Psychol. Med.* 38 (2008) 15–28, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0033291707001699>.
- [41] P. Houdek, Neurodiversity in (not only) public organizations: an untapped opportunity? *Adm. Sci.* 54 (2022) 1848–1871, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00953997211069915>.
- [42] C. Spence, M. Mancini, G. Huisman, Digital commensality: eating and drinking in the company of technology, *Front. Psychol.* 10 (2019) 2252.
- [43] L. Handke, A. Aldana, P.L. Costa, et al., Hybrid teamwork: what we know and where we can go from here, *Small Group. Res.* 55 (2024) 805–835, <https://doi.org/10.1177/10464964241279078>.
- [44] R.C. Pramudya, A. Singh, A.H. Patterson, et al., Power of presence: effects of physical or digital commensality on consumer perception and acceptance of meals, *Food Qual. Prefer.* 100 (2022) 104601, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodqual.2022.104601>.
- [45] K. Karl, Joy V. Peluchette, R. Evans, Food for thought on eating while meeting virtually, *J. Soc. Psychol.* 164 (2024) 863–878, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224545.2023.2196386>.
- [46] F. Heidrich, K. Kasugai, C. Röcker, et al., RoomXT: advanced video communication for joint dining over a distance. 2012 6th International Conference on Pervasive Computing Technologies for Healthcare (PervasiveHealth) and Workshops, 2012, pp. 211–214.
- [47] S. Paluch, T. Wittkop, Virtual wine tastings — how to 'zoom up' the stage of communal experience, *J. Wine Res.* 32 (2021) 206–228, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09571264.2021.1971640>.
- [48] Informal Communication in an all-remote environment. *GitLab Handb.* <https://handbook.gitlab.com/handbook/company/culture/all-remote/informal-communication/> (accessed 1 October 2025).
- [49] How calls with random coworkers make remote work better—and more productive | Zapier. <https://zapier.com/blog/recreating-random-encounters-in-remote-work> (accessed 1 October 2025).
- [50] M. Hakonen, J. Lipponen, Procedural justice and identification with virtual teams: the moderating role of face-to-face meetings and geographical dispersion, *Soc. Justice Res.* 21 (2008) 164–178, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11211-008-0070-3>.
- [51] J.A. Espinosa, S.A. Slaughter, R.E. Kraut, et al., Familiarity, complexity, and team performance in geographically distributed software development, *Organ. Sci.* 18 (2007) 613–630, <https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1070.0297>.
- [52] P. Matous, J. Pollack, J. Helm, Collecting experimental network data from interventions on critical links in workplace networks, *Soc. Netw.* 66 (2021) 72–90, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socnet.2021.02.004>.
- [53] P. Fleming, Workers' playtime: Boundaries and cynicism in a "culture of fun" program, *J. Appl. Behav. Sci.* 41 (2005) 285–303, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021886305277033>.
- [54] P. Fleming, A. Spicer, Working at a cynical distance: implications for power, subjectivity and resistance, *Organization* 10 (2003) 157–179, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508403010001376>.
- [55] L. Walker, O. Flannery, Office cake culture, *Int. J. Workplace Health Manag.* 13 (2020) 95–115, <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJWHM-03-2019-0039>.
- [56] D. McEwan, G.R. Ruissen, M.A. Eys, et al., The effectiveness of teamwork training on group behaviors and team performance: a systematic review and meta-analysis of controlled interventions, *PLOS ONE* 12 (2017) e0169604, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0169604>.
- [57] S. Michie, M.M. van Stralen, R. West, The behaviour change wheel: a new method for characterising and designing behaviour change interventions, *Implement. Sci.* 6 (2011) 42, <https://doi.org/10.1186/1748-5908-6-42>.

- [58] P. Houdek, Nudging in organizations: how to avoid behavioral interventions being just a façade, *J. Bus. Res.* 182 (2024) 114781, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2024.114781>.
- [59] M.C. Kassabaum, A method for conceptualizing and classifying feasting: interpreting communal consumption in the archaeological record, *Am. Antiq.* 84 (2019) 610–631, <https://doi.org/10.1017/aaq.2019.47>.
- [60] R.S. Burt, *Structural holes: the social structure of competition*, Harvard University Press, 1992.
- [61] C. Spence, *Gastrophysics: the new science of eating*, Penguin, UK, 2017.
- [62] G.R. Slemp, M.L. Kern, K.J. Patrick, et al., Leader autonomy support in the workplace: a meta-analytic review, *Motiv. Emot.* 42 (2018) 706–724, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11031-018-9698-y>.
- [63] W.J. Fleming, Employee well-being outcomes from individual-level mental health interventions: cross-sectional evidence from the United Kingdom, *Ind. Relat. J.* 55 (2024) 162–182, <https://doi.org/10.1111/irj.12418>.
- [64] M. Virtanen, T. Lallukka, M. Elovainio, et al., Effectiveness of workplace interventions for health promotion, *Lancet Public. Health* 10 (2025) e512–e530, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2468-2667\(25\)00095-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2468-2667(25)00095-7).