Shared Mental Models

This is where most organizations fail. They see the problem—poor communication in virtual teams—and buy better tools. But tools don't fix the underlying issue: people don't know what's expected, and they're afraid to ask. Virtual teams make trust both more necessary and more fragile. Systems thinking clarifies why: trust isn't just a sentiment except an *emergent system output* formed by feedback loops, measurement regimes, and shared interpretive frameworks. Ackoff and Deming warn that poor informational design and misaligned incentives generate confident dysfunction rather than learning. Denzau and North explain why interpretive alignment is a prerequisite for coordinated action, not a downstream benefit of it. The virtual team literature shows that trust can form rapidly but depends heavily on early communication trajectories and reliable execution. A humanomics lens adds the irreducible point that trust is also moral and interpretive capital — it rests on meaning, dignity, and perceived intent, none of which can be automated.

AI can strengthen this system when it increases lucidity and reduces friction. It can degrade trust when it obscures agency, accelerates misalignment, or intensifies performative measurement. The central design challenge is therefore *institutional*: building virtual-team systems that make trustworthy behavior legible, repairable, and worth sustaining — not because it is monitored, but because the system makes it the natural path of least resistance.