Online Meetings

Lead them in such a way
that really exciting thoughts
are exchanged

VOIP

Virtual meetings can cut traveling and radically reduce expenditure of time for team members. Used in the right way, they really boost effectivity; used wrongly, they turn into a plain pain for everyone involved. With this practical guide, you will have a good recipe for avoiding pitfalls and making the most of teleconferences for your team.

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Boost workplace interactions

The new generational organizations (agile, teal, holocracy) share a key to success: multidisciplinary teams with more real-time, transparent and intense communication across the members of that community.

The working methods in these companies promote speedy and frequent communication across different teams, resulting in an increased number of interactions. In today's meeting-intense world, it is essential to participate in virtual meetings and use them right!

Boon and bane of online meetings

Meetings with online tools don't have to be boring. Virtual communication serves as an opportunity to involve team members who often stay silent in the meeting room, like introverts or less talkative people, by attaching less importance to physical appearance and rhetoric skills. Using text-based tools during a call at the right time – like whiteboards, online idea boards or voting – is an effective way to share power and decision-making by allowing all participants sufficient time to think and phrase their ideas. On the downside, the absence of nonverbal and visual cues reduces the efficiency of transmitting information radically – lowering it to only seven percent, like* – hence, talking virtually is often seen as a makeshift solution and is usually only used with remote teams. In modern organizations, people work in several and often remote teams, so it is essential to overcome the limitations and exploit the opportunities virtual communication provides for you.

Manage virtual communication

To get into a productive meeting culture, a first step could be to have a dialogue and agreement – not just within, but also across teams – about the rules you all want to follow in virtual meetings. After laying down the basic rules, proceed with discussing how to get the most out of teleconferences, sharing best practices, tips and tricks. In the matrix of available communication tools (e-mail, chat, personal, web, etc.) and the intended effect of communication, where do you place teleconferences? Repeat this exercise for other virtual communication channels that are in use in your company and build an effective, consistent communication culture in the virtual space!

* »The Mehrabian communication model in An Approach to Environmental Psychology«
Albert Mehrabian and James A. Russell; MIT Press; 1974

The dos and don'ts of online meetings

BEFORE	
Dos	**Don'ts**
Use it for complex tasks, problem solving or negotiating, which all require interaction and squaring different ideas and perspectives.	For agenda points that cover only one-way information, sharing an e-mail might be a much better alternative.
Send out the agenda in advance and highlight if any prework is needed. After seeing the agenda, some may decide to stay away or forward the invite to those who need to be there in order to be more effective.	Don't invite everyone as required unless they are key participants. Most calendar tools offer additional attendee groups for efficient planning.
Use a web meeting tool with a dial-in function to reduce the time spent on technical trouble-shooting.	Don't send out a meeting invite without including a link to join or specifying the tool you want to use for the call.

DURING	
Dos	**Don'ts**
In the absence of visual cues, more effort has to be devoted to detailed explanations and correct phrasing. Remember to ask if there are any questions about what you've just said.	Avoid using abbreviations or terminology that might not be familiar to everyone, especially if it's a cross-cultural team.
Increase interactivity and use the wide range of tools offered by most of the web meeting apps: — Screen sharing: if you take notes or talk about a specific doc. — Voting: to generate interest in a topic. — Whiteboard: to gather ideas or understand partici-pants' backgrounds. — Sub-calls: to promote pair discussions followed by plenary sharing. — APERA: a new generation online brainstorming tool we like to use at ICG.	Private channels have limited functionality, so don't use them for a professional call. Instead of searching for the most cutting-edge webinar tool, choose the one that serves your real needs best.
Start every question with a person's name to address them directly.	Don't shoot out messages into the virtual space hoping that someone will feel addressed.
Using a webcam (at least at the beginning of a call) can help create a trustful atmosphere.	Webcam usage without any specific reason during the call can draw attention to unnecessary details and limit intro-verts' willingness to contribute.
Hit the mute button if your surroundings are not ideal for a call (noise, a colleague next to you on the phone, etc.).	Don't use the mute button to hide your multitasking; if you need to focus on something else, be transparent with the team and together with them, find a workaround.

AFTER	
Dos	**Don'ts**
Take notes preferably on a shared online platform and summarize the outcomes at the end with a shared screen.	It shouldn't be the leader who takes notes; he/she has to manage the process.