

Digital meetings

Summary

Digital meetings are gaining ground and have been the norm for many in 2020. Many meetings are great digital, with the exception when full communication is required. This is, for example, in sensitive meetings where difficult decisions are to be served. Our guess is that the proportion of digital meetings will be large going forward so you might to learn how to implement these in the best way. In light of this, we have created a guide, partly based on own experiences and partly from the book "Digital Meetings" by Lacinai & Darmell.

Digital meetings vs. physical meetings

Disadvantages of digital meetings include:

- "Poorer" communication; body language makes up 55% of communication (A. Mehrabian, 1971) and this does not arrive in the same way as in a physical encounter. This makes it easier to misunderstand each other and complex meetings become worse. As an example, conflict management can be more complicated.
- More difficult to actively create participation.
- Technology mess-ups.
- Harder to maintain focus.
- Participants become more tired.
- The meeting leader loses his mind about what the participants are doing during the meeting.
- More one-way communication.

Advantages of digital meetings include:

- Environmental benefits.
- Can save money.
- Can save time.
- Easier to make sure that the right people can participate.
- Can enable quick action.
- Does not spread Covid-19 (or other illnesses)
- Since everyone has computer access during the meeting, information can be looked up quickly.

Advice regardless of the form of the meeting

80% of the success factors for having good meetings are independent of the meeting form.

Reflect on meetings

- What should meeting time be used for?
 - Discussions
 - Reflections
 - Decision-making
- What should meeting time not be used for?
 - Information. This is better done through other communication channels, such as e-mail, intranet, video presentations etc.

Types of meetings

- Briefings
 - Have the information available before the meeting. Discuss the material during the meeting.
- Idea generation, such as workshops or brainstorming sessions
 - It can be a good idea to let the meeting participants know the meeting will be of this nature beforehand.
- Decision-making meetings
 - Set aside time to walk through decision ground material in peace and quiet before the meeting.
 - Sum up, discuss and decide at the meeting (consensus decisions are best, but clarify/have a plan for what happens if the group does not agree).

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Before the meeting

- Prepare; set aside time for planning the meeting by making an appointment in participant's calendars.
- Agree on meeting rules such as: When should the invitation be sent? What is ok to do during the meeting?
 - Take advantage of the feature that recurring meetings can be booked in digital calendars. If the meeting is recurring, schedule all meeting participants with a recurring booking in their calendars.
- Gain control over the 6 parameters that control the meeting:
 1. What is the purpose of the meeting?
 2. What is the goal of the meeting? Tips for goal formulation:
 1. Attractive (Why should we do it? Everyone needs to understand this)
 2. Concrete (What to do? And how should it be done?)
 3. Timed (When should it be done?)
 4. Responsibility (Who's going to do that?)
 5. Measurable (Need to know when the goal is reached)
 3. Who is invited and what is the role of each person at the meeting?
 4. Are there prerequisites for participants in the form of prior knowledge?
 5. How long does the meeting last?
 1. Create an agenda that fills 80% of the time.
 2. Have meetings 45 - 50 minutes instead of 60 minutes.
 6. Technical conditions (ensure that the technology works before the meeting).

During the meeting

Recommendations for an efficient meeting:

- Be on time and be ready on time!
- Be clear about roles in the meeting pointing out who moderates/holds the meeting and who takes meeting notes. At smaller meetings, it might be the same person who holds the meeting and takes meeting notes. If possible, you should allocate these roles to different people since both tasks require a lot of focus.
- Welcome the meeting participants.
- Create energy during the meeting; active participation provides energy.
 - Talking rounds
 - Voting
 - Ice-breakers
 - Let several present during the meeting
- Plan for pauses in the agenda if the meeting is long. Different kinds of pauses include:
 - Communication pauses to socialize with other meeting participants.
 - Job pauses to deal with burning commitments.
- Use the last 5-10 minutes to sum up, go through actions and discuss what's gone well during the meeting.
- Offer the opportunity for everyone to stand up during the meeting. For discussion meetings with fewer participants, it works perfectly well to have a walk-and-talk meeting.

After the meeting

- Distribute meeting notes focused on:
 - Action tasks (What to do? Who's going to do it? When should it be ready?)
 - Decisions (What has been decided? Who made the decision? Who is responsible for implementing it? When should it be implemented?)

Specific advice for digital meetings

20% of the success factors for having good meetings depend on the meeting form.

General advice for digital meetings

- Learn the technology better than meeting participants.
- Practice dealing with technical problems.
- Ensure everyone has access to great technical solutions for digital meetings.
- Do not necessarily stick to the same technology platform; choose based on the purpose of the meeting.
- Appoint a co-host during the meeting.
- Remember that everything negative is magnified in a digital context; ensure you know how to handle possible set-backs.

Before the meeting

- Create rules for digital meetings
 - What technology should we use for which meetings?
 - Who is responsible for handling the technology?
 - Should we start with informal talk or not?
 - Who's talking? / Who doesn't talk?
 - Put the same volume on all meeting participants.
 - Turn off microphones when you are not talking.
 - Multitask or not – what's OK?

During the meeting

- Everyone should sit individually, if multiple participants sit together in the same room, it may create a feeling of loneliness for the single participants who are the "satellites". This can create imbalanced communication.
- Be in a secluded room or talk quietly if you are among people.
- Use the mute function when you are not talking.
- Speak extra clearly and slow down to make sure your point gets across to the other meeting participants.
- Create time for pauses during the meeting.
- Make sure to not talk in each other's mouths.
- Cultivate the relationship, not just the subject matter. This becomes extra important in digital meetings because there is no natural contact before and after the meeting
 - Commit the first part of meetings to build trust, e.g., by letting everyone say something at the beginning of the meeting.
- A digital meeting should be shorter than a physical meeting, timewise.
 - Digital meetings typically require more energy from the participants than physical meetings.
 - Absolute maximum meeting time is 2 hours.
 - Our attention span is 3-4 minutes; after this, something needs to happen.

Different techniques for different meetings

- Conference call, i.e. a meeting when you do not see the other participants
 - General advice
 - Say your name before you speak if there are many participants in the meeting, this way it is easy to know who says what.
 - Technology
 - Make sure to use a headset covering both ears.
 - Check battery life on the phone/computer before the meeting.
- Video meeting, i.e. meeting when you can see other participants and have access to digital tools
 - General advice
 - Use body language.
 - Find ways to involve participants, at least 2 times per 60 minutes.
 - Technology
 - Be near the camera and look at the camera, not at the screen.
 - Have good lighting and a neutral background.
 - Use a good microphone and webcam.
 - Record the meeting and distribute the recording to relevant people. This is especially effective at information meetings where it is mostly about one-way communication.
- Webinar
 - General advice
 - Think TV production; vary and create dynamic meeting elements.
 - Avoid presentations longer than 5-10 minutes.
 - Use shared writing areas (such as the Whiteboard feature in MS Teams or Mural) to create dynamics.
 - Technology
 - Record the meeting and distribute the recording to relevant people.