Top Tips for Participants & Hosts of Video Meetings

April 2020
Introduction

Welcome to your ‘Top Tips for Participants and Hosts of Video Meetings’. This content is designed with the host and participants in mind, as crucially, both are responsible for ensuring the meeting success.

For many, video meetings can be daunting, and the overall experience can be chaotic. This can result in poor engagement with less assertive participants or those with softer voices who might feel uncomfortable opting to withdraw rather than fight for ‘airtime’.

Therefore, video meetings need to be actively ‘hosted’ to be effective, focused and inclusive. Successful participation requires a heightened need for self-awareness and recognition of personal impact.

In video meetings, facial expressions, and the physical environment, and choice of words are in sharp focus, often provoking an unfair snap judgement of professionalism. To minimise these distractions and maximise your positive personal impact, it is worthwhile planning in advance how to both host and participate effectively and manage the energy of the meeting. Here are some quick tips to guide you.

Hosting Tips for Effective Video Meetings

Meeting Size and Format

Video meetings can work for many different types of meeting. Technology such as Office 365 Teams has tools and techniques to generate many different outputs (screen sharing, whiteboards) provided you follow simple virtual engagement.

The formality of the meeting will be determined by the participants in line with what is the desired outcome from the meeting. It is useful to consider the size of the group to determine how best to work within video and invite only those needed to deliver effective outcomes.

- **Team Management:** Dividing workloads, delegating asks, agreeing actions, one to ones
- **Development Meetings:** Coaching, mentoring, performance feedback and personal development plans
- **Collaborative Meetings:** Creative thinking, problem solving, ideation, thinking partners, document and data reviews, co creating slide decks or other documents
- **Team Building:** Social engagement, virtual tea breaks, networking
- **Town Halls:** Sharing updates, calls to action

Meeting Purpose and Outcomes

- **Identify a clear purpose:** Communicate any desired outcomes in any pre- meeting invitations
- **Stakeholder engagement:** Ensure the right people are available to achieve the outcome
Tips to manage participants energy levels to ensure your meeting achieves your desired outcome

When you do not physically move location, it can be more difficult to disconnect from the subject matter of one meeting and refocus and energise for your next meeting.

- **Build in breaks**: If the duration of the video meeting is more than an hour in duration, build in a break to allow people to stretch and break concentration.
- **Duration of single agenda items**: From a concentration and engagement perspective, ideally no single agenda item should run for more than 20 minutes.
- **Scheduling multiple meetings**: Schedule to start at 5 minutes past the hour and finish at 5 minutes before the hour to allow 10 minutes break if scheduling multiple meetings.
- **Digital eye exhaustion**: Practice taking a 20 second break from the screen and focus your eyes on an object 20 feet away every 20 minutes.
  - There is lots of useful information on working remotely on Trinity’s Staying Healthy while working from home webpage.

Advance Preparations

- **Circulate an agenda**: Share the talking points, and set the tone on any preparations required by participants.
- **Minimise ‘report outs’**: If more than 5 participants and timebound, try circulating updates in advance and focus the meeting discussion rather than waste the valuable time and opportunity of being together.
- **Pre read documents and preparations**: Ensure appropriate lead in time if circulating any ‘pre read’ documents that need to be reviewed e.g. are decisions required or is ideation a required output.
- **Check that the technology is working**: Microphone, speaker, video, whiteboard, instant messaging screen, whatever tools are needed to achieve the outcomes.

Agree the Ground Rules for the meeting upfront

- **Share of Voice**: Outline how you work together within the meeting. Think about the share of voice and to moderate the agenda navigation to keep it moving.
- **Formalise how to signal intent to contribute**: Options can include for small meetings to raise a ‘virtual hand’ or for larger groups create a visible ‘live messaging’ panel.
- **Consider introduction protocol**: Depending on the size of the meeting you could consider prefacing your contribution by stating (full) name (press conference style).
- **Signposting Transition to next agenda item**: Formally indicates when you are closing out and transitioning to a new agenda item to ensure all thoughts and comments have been aired.
- **Mute Microphones**: Request participants to mute microphone to allow one voice at a time.
Building rapport and demonstrating respectful inclusive behaviours

- **Time management:** Be on time and set the tone required
- **Relationship building:** If time permits and people do not know each other but collaborative engagement is needed, build in time for socialising as people join. Then signal the start of the meeting formally.
- **Clarify shared understanding:** Introduce yourselves at the start with name and role/specialism and remind participants of agenda
- **Record names of participants:** You can use them within the meeting or connect offline as needed
- **Actively ‘host’ an inclusive:** Build in regular check ins to see everyone can keep pace, understand and follow the proceedings
- **Create structure and transparency:** Outline how the technology will be used for the duration of the meeting, reminding everyone of the communication protocols
  - If you are using a live messaging pane to assist with questions
  - Be upfront if using recording technology to capture minutes, or for other purposes (whilst these tools exist, they may not always be appropriate as they record verbatim what is said, so may also inhibit contributions)
- **Manage time:** To be respectful of people’s time manage agenda item airtime and ensure the meeting ends on time.
- **Closing the Meeting:** Ask all participants if they have final comments, summarise ownership of action points and agree next steps to progress.

Positive Personal Impact in Video Meetings for Participants

Maintaining our professional impact within Video meetings can be compromised if we are not aware of the potential communication traps. See below simple tips to aid you participate effectively.

**Participant Tips**

- **Professional Environment:** Your physical environment should lend itself to conveying your professionalism in line with the purpose of the meeting e.g. networking focus vs formal feedback giving vs job interview.
- **What is in camera shot:** Think about what your visible workspace might convey. What is visible behind you may distract or impact the perception of your professionalism to other participants. Some applications will allow you blur your background.
- **Pause after speaking:** Wait a moment after the ‘speaker’ finishes their response to account for potential time lag time due to slow internet speeds. This way, you won’t cut them off before you have heard the full extent of their point prior to responding.
- **Non-Verbal Communication:** Self monitor to ensure minimal unconscious communication disclosure e.g. avoid eye rolling, wincing, audible sighing, walking out of video shot or other unconscious reactions that could be perceived to be rude and disrespectful
- **Consciously engage with speakers:** Be authentic in your practice of visible active listening signals and participate when invited by the host e.g. Nod, smile and keep eye contact with speaker
- **Mute your microphone:** Avoid unconscious communication
Minimise background noise: In open office/shared spaces/busy environments use headphones

Adopt agreed video communication protocols: List when the host is sharing what is the preferred way to communicate effectively throughout

Manage your airtime and maximise your impact: When speaking keep it focussed, sharp and concise, and relevant to the purpose/outcomes required

Limit unconscious physical movement: Do not walk out of camera shot, minimise distracting hand movements, tapping etc.

Be present: Minimise multi-tasking such as emailing or texting whilst online, you are on camera

Build connection with other meeting participants: Record names of other participants so you can attribute points made to correct individuals, and address your responses to them directly, using their name within the meeting

Personal Development: Find a trusted advisor within the group from time to time and invite feedback post meeting to continually enhance your effectiveness and positive personal impact in video meetings

Working environment Protocols: The above are not all encompassing when it comes to professionalism within meetings, so it is also good to adhere to normal office protocols e.g., speaking in a respectful manner, no smoking/vaping etc.