

Communicating Effectively for Diverse Audiences and Contexts: Part 3

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Introduction

Whether it's to bring multinational talent together or to enable work to continue amidst the covid, or other, pandemic, understanding virtual teams and optimizing virtual communication are becoming increasingly important in today's society. Virtual communication carries with it many distinct benefits. It supports convenience, is time saving, fast, and saves money (EzTalks Video Conferencing, 2021). For each of these reasons, firms and organizations are increasingly seeing the need to support virtual communication and train employees on the effective use of virtual communication technologies. Use of virtual communication is instant and does not require traveling into the office or other similar physical meeting locations. Having communication by virtual means enables messages to be transmitted faster and enables decisions to be more informed and instantaneous. Operations can now evolve on a whim and delay is cut down (EzTalks Video Conferencing, 2021). But these are just the benefits extended to existing teams. Virtual communication goes beyond this and enables organizations to obtain talent from anywhere (EzTalks Video Conferencing, 2021). There are great benefits to firms that effectively use virtual communication. In this dissertation, I will share three clear, specific, and actionable recommendations for communicating effectively in virtual teams and best practices so firms can improve their ability to leverage virtual communication and further gain the benefits which I've enumerated.

Effective Virtual Communication

In our quest to migrate to virtual forms of communication, firms are seeking guidance on how to increase effectivity. To this end, I will provide three clear, specific, and actionable recommendations that can be immediately implemented for communicating effectively in virtual teams. Fortunately, there are many tips that can be immediately instituted that can increase the effectiveness of virtual communications, however, none come close to providing the benefits of this first suggestion that I have to share: Switch most remote communication to video calls (Dhawan & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2018). Video calls are superior to all other forms of virtual communication because it reduces the delay typically associated with virtual communication and it aids in building rapport and creating empathy (Dhawan & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2018). Second, create an agenda before holding a meeting and follow it (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2021). Preparing a meeting agenda helps by preparing the host, helping members to know what to expect, and aids in keeping all meeting participants focused and on-track (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2021). Finally, be engaging and keep your focus. In a virtual meeting it can become easy to be a 'low reactor', which is not good and is typically seen in taking actions such as multitasking, paying a low amount of attention, or keeping your video off or set to a static image (Huthwaite International, 2021). These are all things to avoid. Instead, be engaging, ask questions when appropriate or when clarification is needed, and stay focused on the meeting and give your attentiveness to the speaker. This way, you will be building rapport and bonding with the team rather than merely being an onlooker.

Best Practices Pre-Meeting and Intra-Meeting

Within virtual meetings it is paramount to clarify the purpose and desired outcomes for the meeting. This can be done by disseminating an agenda before the meeting, permitting

meeting participants to collaborate on a document containing notes for the meeting beforehand, and ending the meeting with a strong recap (Bárcenas, 2020). Collaborative pre-meeting notes can be hugely impactful. These enable meeting organizers to propose an agenda and for meeting participants to annotate items to further clarify which items will require brainstorming in the meeting and which items can be stricken from the meeting agenda since they may have only required a quick answer or clarification. This should take care of pre-meeting planning; next, an ice-breaker for meeting participants should be considered. While some may call it an ice breaker, what's needed is an activity to facilitate team cohesion. For first-time meetings, participants may be encouraged to work together after a game or speaking opportunity to talk about themselves personally, introduce themselves to the team, and learn about others who will be participating in the meeting (Sammer, 2022). Similarly, teams who have worked together before may enjoy a team-building game or activity centered around getting to know each other better that is funny or focused on getting everyone to share a little something (Sammer, 2022). Once meeting participants are awake, active, and fluidly communicating, then the team can begin going through items on the meeting agenda. Taking a step backward, let us explore some best practices for controlling the outcome of agenda items. First, meeting participants should have had an opportunity to submit agenda items and know the agenda before the meeting (Schwarz, 2015). Second, meeting topics should affect the whole team and not just a few participants (Schwarz, 2015). Finally, meeting agenda items should be worded as a question rather than declarative statements so that the participants can stay focused on the tasks at hand and issues up for discussion (Schwarz, 2015).

Best Practices to Share Leadership and Manage Time

The value of shared leadership has gone understated and should be added to our list of best practices. Shared leadership is a concept which keeps the corporate hierarchy intact but shares power and influence (Business News Daily, 2021). It promotes better organizational performance through increased transparency, autonomy, and increased receptivity to others' ideas (Fitzsimons, 2016). This is achieved practically by permitting colleagues to alternate taking lead in zoom meetings and other virtual meetings and encourages colleagues to step-up and take initiative (Business News Daily, 2021). This can also be achieved by granting authority to individuals or committees to make decisions and should not be confused with merely assigning a task to two individuals (Business News Daily, 2021). Best practices should also be considered for managing time effectively in virtual meetings. First, disparate team members should have a virtual office environment that is conducive for productivity and which minimizes distractions (VerBurg, 2020). Second, meeting participants should avoid overcommitting themselves so that they can remain focused during the entire meeting (VerBurg, 2020). Finally, appropriate time should be set aside for the full discussion and decision making process to be completed on each agenda item (VerBurg, 2020).

Best Practices for Meeting Evaluation and Review

Once a virtual team meeting is over, it may be tempting to think it truly is over, yet there are many best practices which should be implemented to ensure proper evaluation of the meeting is conducted and further review on action items (Conferences IO, 2019). First, participants

should have an easy way to submit an evaluation of the meeting afterwards and these evaluations should be reviewed by the meeting organizers (Conferences IO, 2019). Second, meeting participants should be able to submit anonymous meeting evaluations to encourage truthfulness and trueness of expression but should have the option to share their name if, for example, they wanted to receive a reply from the meeting organizers (Conferences IO, 2019). Third, the feedback received from the evaluations should be used by the meeting organizers to enhance future meetings (Conferences IO, 2019). Finally, meeting organizers should make a separate list of action items which require follow-up and should be attentive to follow up on each (Conferences IO, 2019). Often times meetings end with unresolved issues or items which require further action and it is imperative that these are reviewed and completed within an appropriate amount of time.

Conclusion

Virtual communication and meetings bring many distinct benefits, and whether it's to bring multinational talent together or to enable work to continue amidst the pandemic, firms are increasingly realizing the need for virtual communication, the benefits, and the need to implement best practices. Virtual communication is convenient, fast, effective, and the smart financial choice (EzTalks Video Conferencing, 2021). It enables operations to evolve on a whim and to virtually eliminate delay (EzTalks Video Conferencing, 2021). Three clear, specific, and actionable recommendations were shared which can be implemented immediately, and best practices such as the need to clarify the purposes and outcomes of the meeting through dissemination of a meeting agenda prior to the meeting (Bárcenas, 2020), the necessity of including a team cohesion activity (Sammer, 2022), and the techniques for clarifying meeting outcomes through pre-planning techniques which involve meeting participants (Schwarz, 2015). Best practices for sharing discussion leadership and for managing time were shared to promote organizational performance and increase transparency, autonomy, and receptivity (Fitzsimons, 2016). Finally best practices were shared concerning the necessity of proper post-meeting evaluation and follow-up of unresolved action items (Conferences IO, 2019). It is clear virtual communication methods are here to stay, and rightfully so since they so richly enhance teams and the companies that use them.

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