How to evaluate communication in your hybrid and remote company?

GUIDEBOOK

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Foreword

This guidebook was created by Remote-how with contributions from our experts, as well as two great Partners: Doist and Prezi, who help remote employees better communicate asynchronously.

We're sharing here our know-how gathered throughout the past years, when we were building Remote-how platform, that today offers on-demand access to the world's best remote & hybrid work consultants for companies at any stage.

We've already been entrusted by 400+ clients including Walmart, Olx, ING, Techstars, Trueventures, BWG Food, and Lifespan. And now, you've trusted us to help you evaluate communication at your company. Thank you.

Iwo Szapar, CEO
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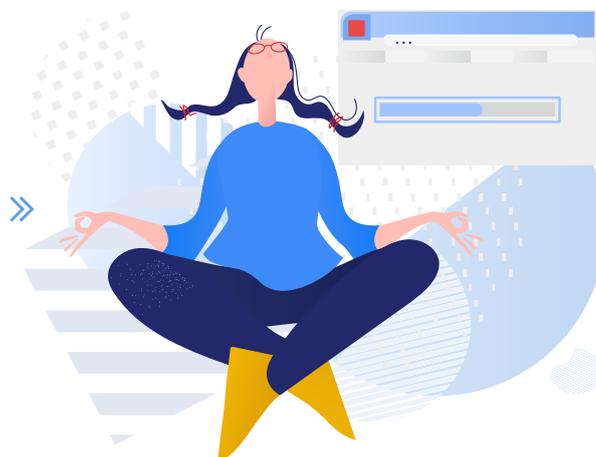
Introduction

The past year has been such a huge change in work conditions that everyone has been thinking more about how they communicate. According to Buffer's State of Remote Work 2021, 41% of those surveyed noted that collaboration and communication have changed the most now they work remotely.[1]

In an office setting, bad communication can be avoided much easier in comparison to being remote. For anyone working in a remote or hybrid team, it can be your enemy number one. We simply don't get the opportunity to organically correct small misunderstandings and mistakes so easily.

This point leads to a feeling that remote and hybrid teams need to make up for this lost contact and try to emulate the office. Remote workers attend on average 14% more meetings than their office counterparts.[2] Whether these are effective or not is a question we'll explore further.

Even the tools available to remote and hybrid teams can be more tiring to use mentally. Almost half of all surveyed employees since the pandemic last year have reported feeling exhausted from remote video calls.[3] With Zoom fatigue becoming commonplace, it seems about time that we start evaluating the methods we communicate with in hybrid and remote teams.

So how do we begin tackling this seemingly mammoth task and start the process of evaluating your company's communication? The key here is consensus. Some employees may be better than others at getting their ideas across, but the chain is only as strong as its weakest link.

Bad communication is an organization-wide problem, no matter where the fault lies.

It's one of the more sensitive topics in an office too. Everyone has their style of communication. Some are loud, others shy... maybe some people want a task set in email and other employees want a video call. With communication being so inherently personal, it's a difficult topic for many of us to bring up.

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1   https://buffer.com/2021-state-of-remote-work
2   https://resources.owllabs.com/state-of-remote-work/2019
3   https://www.roberthalf.ca/en/44-of-workers-are-suffering-from-video-call-fatigue-robert-half-research-shows

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Employees may not want to talk about the problem because it can be seen as whining. Or inadequacy. Or even failure. **Getting the trust of your teams onboard when auditing your communications should be a key goal.**

The reality is that everyone is dealing with the same problem. It isn't anyone's fault, but it will take collective action to fix. The first big step to take is simply beginning a thorough evaluation of your remote and hybrid teams' communication.

EXPERT'S COMMENT

"How to start a conversation about fixing communication in your organization?"

Jana Piske
Founder of Fairlinked and Coach for Remote Team Building

Particularly in remote teams, people are very reluctant to tackle conflicts. On the one hand, it is in the nature of many people to prefer to avoid conflicts, and this works particularly well in a remote team because of the physical distance. Quite in the sense of out of sight out of mind. On the other hand, most people also lack the necessary skill set to successfully resolve conflicts in a purely online environment. In order to start a dialog about difficulties in online communication, it helps to create a safe space for exchange, preferably before the conflict arises. Every team needs a space where the emotional and meta-level is welcome and reflected. Where you reflect together on the way of working, personal well-being and cultivate teambuilding. In this trusting atmosphere, the topic of online communication difficulties may be taken up.

However, the dialog should not revolve too much around the problems, but rather focus on possible solutions. It should not be about blaming individual points of conflict, but rather focus the team's attention on finding a common solution as the objective of the meeting. My tip for the perfect conversation starter about communication problems is to say: "Hey friends I would like to chat with you about our online communication. I would suggest it as the next topic for our Wednesday exchange. Excited to hear about your experiences!".

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Communication in hybrid and remote companies

What is synchronous and asynchronous communication?

Synchronous communication means that two or more people exchange information in real-time. In an office space, most day-to-day communication happens naturally this way. People expect real-time responses with an in-person conversation.

Getting immediate responses relies on everyone being in the same place at the same time. This is a huge disadvantage for remote and hybrid teams who may be in multiple time zones, have different availabilities, or are simply focused on other tasks

Asynchronous communication relies on leaving messages or communications that can be responded to in the recipient's own time. There are no distractions and no expectation of an immediate reply, here. While this seems counterintuitive in an office, it's a perfect way for remote and hybrid teams to communicate.

There is however a time and place for synchronous communication for remote workers. It really depends on the situation. Let's dive into some common examples when it comes to remote/hybrid teams:

Synchronous communication

- **Video Calls:** One of the most common ways for out-of-office team members to synchronously communicate. A video call has the added benefit of being able to see your team members and picking up on non-verbal cues. This can help greatly with understanding context and meaning.

- **Phone Calls:** Not every conversation requires you to see the other person in your call. Phone calls can be best for smaller, more spontaneous conversations that don't require multiple team members to join.

- **In-Person Conversations:** If your team is hybrid, there will of course be some communication that is done offline between co-located team members. This can be used in place of instant messaging, but shouldn't replace group calls.

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- **Instant Messaging/Team Chat Tools:** Slack, Telegram, and Webex are global standards for asynchronous communication in remote teams and colocated ones. You can easily see the availability of other team members to get immediate answers when needed. These tools can be used asynchronously depending on their exact usage.

- **Physical meetups:** Meeting up with your teammates in person is a bit of a luxury for most remote companies. However, if you have the budget there is nothing better than an occasional retreat for all your employees. Combining socializing with group work sessions is worth it at least once a year. There are without a doubt benefits to this in building up more personal bonds and relationships.

Asynchronous communication

Asynchronous communication makes it possible for people to respond and act on their own terms. It doesn't require all parties to participate at the same time to be effective.

This type of communication allows all parties to consume and respond to content when it's convenient, appropriate, or possible for them. They don't have to stop their work to engage with someone else's schedule.

- **Email:** Probably the most old-school form of online, asynchronous communication. There are benefits to using emails for task-setting and messages that are not particularly time-sensitive. The format is however becoming less popular with companies in favor of other asynchronous methods.

- **Async Video:** Although it sounds counter-intuitive, video can work as asynchronous means of communication! By using tools like Prezi Video, you can create engaging videos in minutes. Share an agenda ahead of time, explain a project before kicking off a brainstorm meeting, or walk your team through some training.

- **Intranet Portals:** It's not uncommon for larger companies to have a portal for HR-related activities and to act as a knowledge base. Internal announcements which don't require immediate attention are sometimes posted here depending on company policy.

- **Team Communication Tools:** Many popular communication tools (e.g. Twist, Slack, MS Teams) enable teams to communicate with one another in a structured manner in a discussion thread or forum style. This way of communication proves to be much less of a distraction in comparison to traditional chat programs.

- **Project Management Tools:** Todoist and Asana are commonly used tools to handle projects both in-office and remotely. They are great places to not just

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manage your projects, but also organize asynchronous discussions related to tasks. All messages can be organized according to the work being done, and notifications can be sent out too.

- **In-App Comments:** When working on a shared project or document, leaving comments can be more beneficial than sending a direct message. In this way, the recipient sees the related message when they begin working on the document. This is less distracting than sending an instant message which may be seen and forgotten about. Examples of such apps would be Google Docs, GitHub, Figma, or Marvel.

ACTION ITEM #1

Check which communication style your company is leaning towards

Now that you understand the difference between asynchronous and synchronous communication, check which style your company is leaning towards.

Outlay all communication touchpoints that happen across your organization and rank how much time they take in different departments or teams. Consider whether they are asynchronous or synchronous.

- Emergency meetings
- Recurring and planned meetings
- Immediate feedback e.g by phone or chat with an expected immediate reply
- Direct messaging
- Collaboration e.g. providing feedback over a document with comments, or in the project management tool
- Group discussions
- Deep work

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Level (from the most frequent to least frequent)	Estimated time (daily, weekly, or monthly)	Asynchronous or synchronous?
1 -		
2 -		
3 -		
4 -		
5 -		
6 -		
7 -		

- Compare the results between different departments or teams.
- Do you see that some departments are leaning more towards asynchronous and some towards synchronous communication? Why do you think that is?
- Where do your employees currently spend the most time on communication? Do you think it supports their productivity and happiness at work?
- If you could rank all the levels of communication across different departments, what would be the order you'd propose?

Keep in mind, that well-functioning remote and hybrid teams spend most of the time communicating asynchronously, so if at the moment your company is mainly communicating synchronously, that's the first thing you should work on.

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Why should hybrid and remote companies take an asynchronous-first approach?

Without a doubt, the most common communications approach for hybrid and remote companies is asynchronous. Why is that though? Well, it comes down to a couple of things.

An asynchronous-first approach is also a much fairer and equitable way of communication. Everyone can participate in the conversation in their own time, and easily understand everything that is going.

You also want to give all your remote and hybrid employees equal access to development opportunities and knowledge. With team members possibly being located all around the globe, or at least with different time schedules, asynchronous communication provides the most equality for everyone.

It's unfair if someone misses important opportunities to contribute because they are still in bed. It's also unfair for a teammate's performance to decline simply because they miss important meetings due to their schedule.

There's another big benefit when it comes to asynchronous-first communication too, and that's the concept of deep work:

"Work performed without distractions, in a deep state of concentration that allows you to engage your cognitive skills to the max."

Deep work is a great advantage for remote and hybrid teams. With all the distractions present working in a physical office, it's hard to get down to any real concentrated work.

This isn't to say however that deep work can't happen in an office. It's just working from home makes dedicating two solid hours to a project or task much easier... and this can produce amazing results.

Anything that you can do to facilitate this kind of deep work should be prioritized. For remote workers, a quiet office without distractions can produce work to a higher quality in a shorter amount of time.

If you look into the communication flow in hybrid and remote companies, at the top level you'll see asynchronous collaboration enabling periods of deep work. There are advantages and benefits to not trying to replicate the exact communication style you use in the office.

Synchronous-first	VS	Asynchronous-first

Synchronous-first

- Default to meetings
- Time zone coordination is crucial
- Focused on real-time collaboration
- Encourages an always-on culture
- Fleeting conversations
- Exclusive

Asynchronous-first

- Default to writing
- Time zones are not important
- Focused on deep work
- Encourages mindful disconnection
- Permanent documentation
- Inclusive

Source: https://blog.doist.com/remote-first/

How will async communication impact your bottom line?

Becky Kane
Editor, Doist Inc.

Modern knowledge workers are experiencing a crisis of distraction. **Whether by explicit team policy or implicit expectations, employees feel like they have to stay constantly connected in order to respond quickly to emails and messages.** As a result, workers spend their days ping-ponging from meeting to meeting and team chat to team chat, splitting their finite attention between communicating about work and actually doing the work.

To make matters worse, **people often make up for the productivity lost to interruptions by putting in longer hours.** It's a recipe for mental exhaustion that doesn't benefit employees or employers in the long-run.

Async communication is a concrete way teams can cut down on interruptions and re-establish a balance between collaborating as a team and getting work done individually. For example, at Doist our policy is to respond to new comments in our async messaging app, Twist, within 24 hours. Most people have three or fewer hours of meetings a week. That means most days I spend the first 3-4 hours doing my

Remote
- How

most mentally demanding work — usually writing and editing — without interruption. I don't have Twist open. I have all of my notifications turned off permanently. In fact, I don't even have Twist installed on my phone. I respond to messages after my most important and demanding work is done. That's a typical workday at Doist.

This kind of async communication may be slower at times, but at the end of the day, we get more done. Afterall, **the goal of communication is to facilitate the actual work being done, not distract from it.** Async communication is better for employees and better for business.

doist

Is synchronous-first ever suitable?

A synchronous-first approach plays to the strengths and circumstances of working in an office. But working remotely has its own setup and benefits to use when communicating. Remote companies play to the strength of there being considerably fewer people asking you questions or demanding your attention in the home office.

For a hybrid or remote employee, synchronous communication is much more difficult to stay on top of. We all have our own different schedules that other team members can't see. This is why asynchronous collaboration and deep work make for a strong combination. The first addresses a remote work weakness, and the latter plays to a remote work strength.
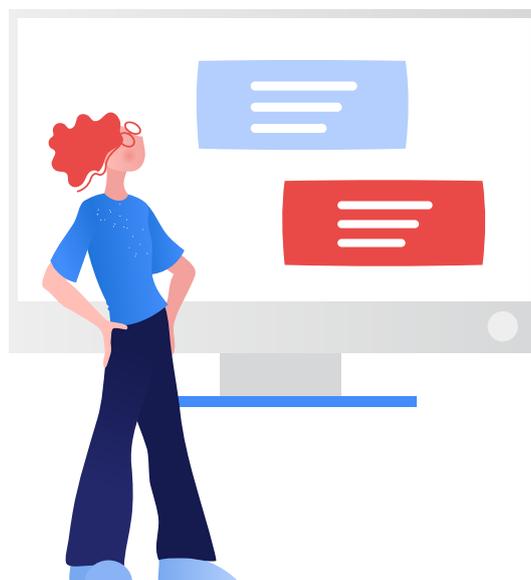
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"Why should remote and hybrid teams take an asynchronous-first approach?"

Chris Dyer
Remote Work Consultant and CEO at PeopleG2

Truly flexible work is the goal for top-performing remote and hybrid teams. To make that happen, work should be planned around an asynchronous model. As employees get their best work done it should easily flow to the next person without having to stop and meet up. Great work flows through the ebbs and flows of real-life changes.

Leaning to asynchronous communication requires open communication lines and transparency. Clearly define what's expected of employees. Make key information—such as data, financials, and who does what in your company—available to the whole staff to give them the tools they need to perform well, particularly when unsupervised.

Set policies to encourage interaction at the time convenient for all the parties. In my organization, for instance, we have a virtual open-door protocol—anyone in the company may contact anyone else to seek help or input, from interns to the CEO. We stay in touch via Slack, hold video conferences, and get together face to face once a year, minimum. In addition, I survey my people weekly, either with a common policy question, an opinion about what we could be doing better, or a trivia puzzle, just for fun.

This helps us get to know one another, both professionally and personally. That's how we build trust and teamwork and how we become engaged. Disseminating information and leveling the playing field also prepare us to have more serious discussions when the situation warrants it.

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Inventory your communication tools

It's time you match your desired communication flow with the right tools. Before you begin adding in new software and programs, a thorough inventory needs to be taken of what your teams are already using. It's the only way to see if current practices can support your desired flow or not.

It's extremely common for communication flows and tools to vary across teams, especially between your tech and more creative departments. Sometimes this is necessary, and other times not. This is a key principle you need to determine in your tools audit.

If your company doesn't have a communication policy regarding tools usage already in place, different teams may have defaulted to their own preferred methods of communication. When it comes to inter-team collaboration, this can end up causing friction.

Keep in mind that some teams can be more flexible than others. When dealing with technical work, some tools might be necessary even if they don't quite fit your flow.

"How to make sure your remote team is equipped with the right toolstack?"

Iwo Szapar
Remote Work Advocate, CEO and Co-Founder at Remote-how

The most important aspect is to get your team involved in this process. You can't fall into the trap where decisions on the tools they will be using, will be made without them. Gather detailed feedback (preferably with an online survey), that will focus on auditing the current toolstack. Learn how it's used through "scenario-based" questions, so people can relate to specific situations. Make sure you also ask about their ideas for improvements as well as specific tools they came across that could help them communicate better. The more engaged a team is in the process, the higher chances of a decent tool adoption rates

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Tool use cases

- **Tools for emergency communication:** *WhatsApp, Telegram, phone call, SMS, video calls*

  At some point, you may need to contact a team member with an emergency piece of information. This method of communication will have to be synchronous and is often a personal form of contact.

  However, each team differs in the amount of synchronous communication they want to use. Not everyone is comfortable taking work Whatsapp calls, so check how you can make this fit in with your flow.

- **Tools for meetings:** *Google Meet, Zoom, Webex, Microsoft Teams, Prezi Video*

  We're now luckily at a point where there are universal standards for setting up remote meetings. Whether you use Google Meet, Webex, or Zoom, they all provide the same basic functionalities. These tools are fairly interchangeable and should usually fit any new communication flow.

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- **Tools for announcements:** *Intranet, Twist threads, Slack channels, email*

  Usually, unless they're really important, tools and methods for announcements end up being quite asynchronous. A dedicated tool usually isn't needed and others can be used that can fit into most styles of communication flow.

- **Tools for discussions:** *Slack groups, conference calls, voice chats*

  Differences can vary greatly between teams in the kind of discussion tools they use. This can be especially so between developers, tech, and the more creative side of your business. Audit fully the actual needs of each team, as it may be that a developer requires necessary communication tools for their workflow.

- **Tools for collaboration:** *Comments in Google Docs, Asana threads, Jira tickets*

  A lot of communication and discussion takes place inside collaboration tools, so make sure you understand exactly what is going on and where. Comments left in a Google doc can be just as critical as an email or instant message. It's quite likely however that your new communication flow won't disrupt these conversations too much.

- **Tools for feedback:** *Google Docs, intranet, voice calls*

  Feedback can take a lot of forms, some of it synchronous and some of it not. Some times might like to give direct feedback in a session or call, and others in a written form. Dedicated feedback tools are rare, so another tool will probably be for this purpose.

ACTION ITEM #2

Do a toolstack inventory

Understand better your communication landscape by evaluating the tools your teams are using to communicate on different levels.

- How many devices and apps do your employees use daily?
- Which apps do they use for which levels of communication? (e.g. ask which tools they'd use to ask someone for feedback, which they'd use to start a discussion, and see whether the answers are similar)
- Do your employees have easy access to all the tools?
- Do your employees feel comfortable using different tools?
- Are your employees free to suggest new tools?

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Type	Names of all the tools used:	Is there a protocol on using this tool known to each employee?	Are there any issues with access or security concerns?	What to improve?
Tools for emergency communication				
Tools for meetings				
Tools for announcements				
Tools for discussions				
Tools for collaboration				
Tools for feedback				

Example of assessment sheet you can create to go through all the tools used in your organization with your team leaders.

Depending on the results of your inventory you should implement accurate action points in your plan. If for example, you're seeing bad or ineffective usage of some apps, you should put stress on the leadership team to provide the right example as well as training and education.

If for example, your employees often lack access to certain tools or juggle passwords that might breach your security, you should take up the issue further with your IT leaders.

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Meetings culture

Despite some of the downsides of synchronous communication, meetings remain an important part of remote team communication when utilized in the right quantity and context.

While we always usually go for an asynchronous approach first, some meetings can only be done in real-time.

Meeting types

- **Team Check-In Meetings:** Not every meeting needs to be about a specific problem or address a certain agenda. There is a benefit to simply meeting as a team to discuss what you've been up to and how everyone is doing.

  Some time can be spent figuring out goals for the week or where people can collaborate. These are extremely important for remote or hybrid teams where not everyone gets to see each other regularly.

- **Project Meetings:** Throwing around ideas and quickly brainstorming can only really be successfully done when everyone is collaborating live. You'll be much more agile and come up with ideas in half the time it takes to do it through a collaboration tool or email.

  For a hybrid team, your onsite team members can use conference calling tech to dial in remote team members. To achieve this successfully, invest in good conference calling tech so everyone can be heard.

  For a fully remote team, a reliable video calling software solution is a must. Emphasize also to your team members that good quality audio is key so that everyone can contribute effectively.

- **1:1 Meetings:** While some 1:1 calls can be quite casual, important topics warrant a more scheduled, formal meeting. Much more can be achieved in a 30-minute call than through emails or instant messaging. By their nature, 1:1 calls rely on intimacy and even non-verbal communication.

  There is little difference here between a remote and hybrid setup. If your team prefers video calls, then that is the best way to proceed. Otherwise, a voice call can do the job and make some team members feel more at ease with their camera off.

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"What is the key to running successful 1:1 remote meetings?"

Andre Ben Hamou
Co-Founder at PeopleStorming

The key to running successful 1:1 remote meetings is to keep them frequent and consistent. As you work remotely, the 1:1 is a critical part of the rhythm of the business - keeping you well-connected. The ideal cadence is weekly for most organizations.

Being consistent indicates to your team that you care, that you're available, and that you're reliable. In terms of the content, you want to steer away from status updates. Those should be done through project management tools and other team rituals. Instead, the 1:1 is a time to focus on the development and growth of the individual. Also, don't be afraid to go meta - ask how the 1:1 could be more effective or valuable periodically.

Finally, as a coach, you should work to understand good question construction. My favorite question is 'What's harder than it should be right now?'. You can learn all the secrets to success for effective growth-focused 1-1s in my live, interactive workshop.

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- **Socializing:** The benefits of building up more personal relationships between team members are obvious. Successfully socializing leads to happier employees, and happier employers enjoy their work more. It's really difficult to achieve this however with asynchronous forms of communication.

  Fully remote teams are all on the same page when it comes to socializing. If you have a hybrid team, however, there is a real chance that your remote team members are missing out on a lot of socializing already taking place.

  Whether it's some time set aside for a simple group call or a game of skribbl.io, find out what everyone would like to do. For fully remote teams, your activities will look a bit different from a hybrid team.

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Evaluate your meetings culture

Your meetings culture is an important part of your communications. If people are tired of them, feel like their time is wasted, or don't feel heard, you might see this affecting their engagement and soon torpedoing your business goals.

To evaluate your meetings culture, tackle these questions:

- How do your employees feel about the number of meetings they currently have?
- How do your employees feel about the meetings culture in your organization?
- Do your employees feel heard on their 1:1s/team meetings/project meetings?
- Do your employees feel like their 1:1s/team meetings/project meetings are productive?
- Do your employees feel like their 1:1s/team meetings/project meetings are tiring?
- What could improve their 1-1s/team meetings/project meetings?

Be aware that the answers here might strongly vary from one department to another, or even from one team to another.

You should spot which teams are struggling, and with which meetings in particular. Help them by providing the right frameworks reinforced by the leadership team.

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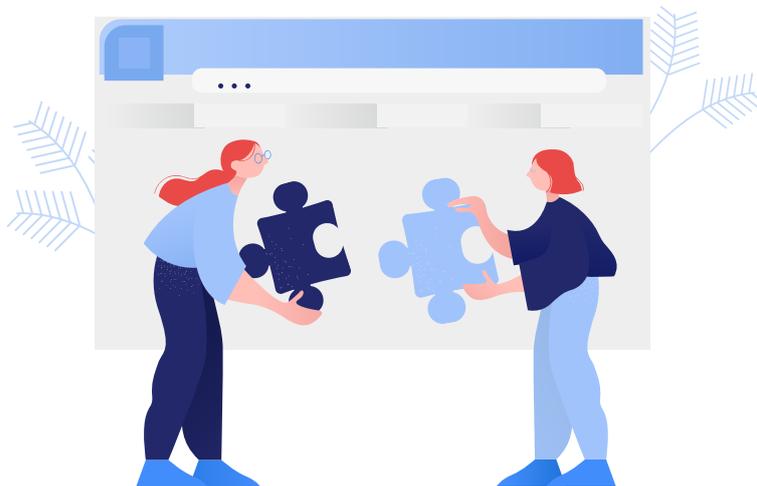
How to create more engaging video meetings in a hybrid world

Lorraine K. Lee
Editorial Director at Prezi

Over the past year and a half, many of us have heard about and likely experienced various degrees of video meeting fatigue. Is it because we're tired of video? <u>The success of streaming services during the pandemic</u> suggests that not only are we *not* tired of it, we're loving video more than ever before.

The issue is therefore not in the medium, but rather, the content.

The primary form of content sharing on video calls is still screen share. But when you screen share, you sacrifice showing and seeing the presenter. As a result, we lose the facial expressions, hand gestures, and body language that are so important in helping us understand and connect with one another in a remote and hybrid world. If it's just one without the other, you end up with less engaging and less productive video meetings. **Both speaker and content need to be visible for a successful video call.**

What does this mean for the future of meetings in the hybrid office?

In our hybrid future, most meetings will have at least one participant who isn't in the room. In order to treat all of your colleagues as equals and maintain the connection with remote teammates, **video will stay a primary form of communication.**

It's therefore critical that we find ways to increase engagement during video meetings.

From Prezi's research, we've seen that audiences are most engaged with meetings when the presenter brings their content onto the screen with them. **More engagement means better meetings, which will help bring your coworkers and teammates together across offices and time zones.**

Over this past year, we've all become more comfortable doing live video calls, but many teams have not had enough bandwidth to take a step back and evaluate remote/hybrid meeting processes.

Once you've figured out how to make your meetings more engaging, you'll need to decide how frequently you want to have those meetings. Talk to your team; poll your colleagues about their preferences, such as ideal

meeting times, which types of meetings are better live vs. recorded, best practices for the 1:1 vs. 1-to-many communications, etc. to establish more productive meeting processes for your team. As we move ahead with hybrid work, teams should look to **share more recorded video** for things like brainstorm primers, meeting agendas, and announcements, which will help us save time and make quicker decisions.

The flexibility that recorded video offers will improve employee onboarding, encourage cross-functional communication across teams, build a more efficient business, and so much more.

Looking ahead, it will ultimately be a combination of content, video conferencing (both live and asynchronous), and messaging apps that will converge to enable this and break through the challenges of time and location that the traditional synchronous enterprise faces.

Want to get a free upgrade to a Prezi Video Premium account? Fill out this form *here*.

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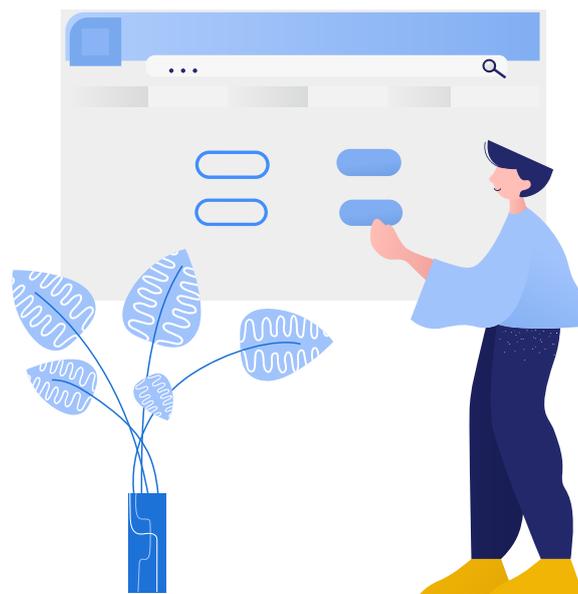
Communication guidelines

Once you have your comms workflow organized, the right tool stack, and a cohesive meetings culture, look next into your employees' communication habits.

Over the years, certain habits have snuck into our daily comms that present a common set of challenges. We're probably all guilty of some, and everyone needs to hold each other accountable when it comes to improving our communication behavior.

Most common communication challenges

- **Reply-all mentality:** This habit is a real throwback to the old days of internet communication. Before we had instant messenger tools, the only way to keep everyone in the loop was to hit the Reply-all button. There's no need for this kind of spam anymore and discussions should be limited to just the people who need them.

- **Employing urgency when there's no need:** If something is urgent, then there is always the option for a phone call. If it's less urgent, an instant message should do. Get your team members to think about the level of escalation something actually needs. If it can wait until tomorrow, then it's not that urgent and there's no need for pinging people multiple times.

- **Relying on 'quick calls':** Tying similarly into the point above, it's become all too common for us to ask someone to "jump on a quick call". A lot of the time, this may be done just to save the effort of having to write something.

  A 5-minute call could also have probably been solved asynchronously and not interrupted someone's workflow. There is a huge benefit to getting stuck into deep work, so we should minimize unnecessary interruptions as much as possible.

- **Communication silos:** This is another classic challenge. Different teams form silos and fail to communicate with one another. When they then have to collaborate, there is a knowledge and communication gap. Emails also create silos on information, even within the same team.

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- **Not keeping transparent communication lines:** Moving conversations onto other platforms or discussing teamwork in a private environment leads ultimately to confusion. Team members will be out of the loop and oftentimes won't be able to follow the conversation trail necessary. Intransparency is a surefire way to communicate confusion

- **Not keeping different time zones in mind:** Hybrid and remote teams gain huge benefits from hiring all over the globe. However, this makes comms a bit more difficult if your members are distributed across different time zones. It's easy to forget that someone may be out of their office hours, or even asleep when shooting off an email or message.

Desired communication behaviors

- **Assuming positive intent:** It's difficult sometimes to get the true meaning or intentions out of someone's email. Without facial cues or further explanation, miscommunication can happen and even sometimes offense.

- **Being assertive and cutting out unnecessary words:** Keeping your communication short, simple, and to the point is the best way to stop misunderstandings. Your team members should make it crystal clear exactly what they want, by when, and how it should be done.

- **Be kind:** When sitting behind a keyboard in the safety of your home office, it can be easy to let off steam that you wouldn't do in person. Turning into a keyboard warrior has to be avoided at all costs. Take 5 minutes to think about what you've written if you've got the feeling it may cause some offense.

- **Provide context to written chats:** Forwarding lone snippets of conversations or tasks to people not originally involved is a recipe for disaster. They've missed all the preamble and only get a select part.

  Make sure to give decent context so the reader doesn't have to make it up for themselves. Better yet don't have siloed communication to begin with. An email with some context to a task is much better than a short and non-contextual request.

- **Know when to say no:** If you are invited to a meeting or call that you think is unnecessary, learn to say no and give a reason. Outline in your comms policy that this isn't personal, but simply the best way of keeping focussed time.

- **Know when to switch to synchronous:** If your email thread or instant message chat goes in circles and looks to be ineffective, you're gonna have to switch your tactics. There's a difference between a meaningful email or message and one that is essentially emulating a call with short statements. Learn the difference!

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- **Stay on track:** If you must have a meeting, stick to your agenda like glue! This goes for the time set aside as well. Everyone has their schedule, and at the end of the day, the amount of time you set for a meeting will always be filled.

- **Keep remote team members in mind in hybrid teams:** Referring to in-person conversations or discussing important issues offline is going to leave you with a lot of confused remote team members. Everything must be inclusive.

Implementation and steps going forward

If you've worked through all the activities and taken our advice on board, you should now have a comprehensive view of your overall communication situation. Now you've created an inventory of your tools and developed a new flow, it's time for implementation.

Hopefully, if you have involved your teams in the process then your employees should already know what to expect. Everyone at the end of the day needs to help each other stay on track with good habits and the use of new tools.

If there is one key takeaway from this guide, it's to not try and replicate the office for your remote and hybrid teams. More meetings won't help, and neither will constant forms of asynchronous communication.

Working outside of an office space gives your employees time to get into some real deep work and minimize their distractions. Play up to this and make it your key strength with a sensible, effective, and inclusive communications policy.

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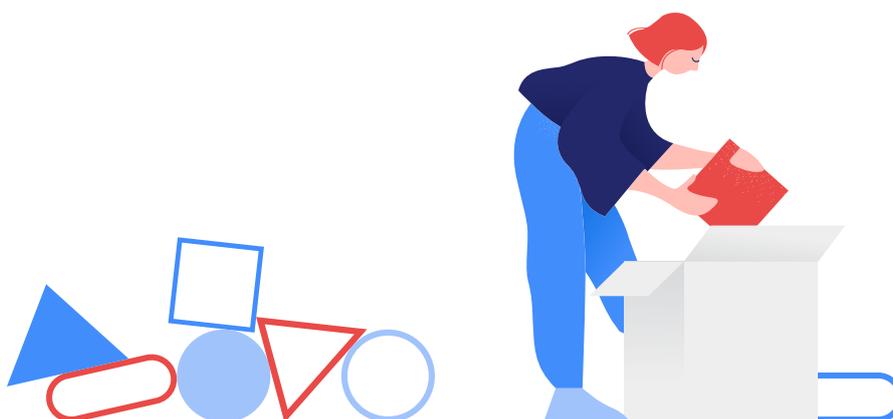
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