

16 Rules for better video conferencing

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The almost blanket proliferation of cheap broadband connections and mobile networks make it possible: **via web we can now work together and we share globally, without which we need to be in the same place.** This has several advantages: it allows home working and video conferencing, reducing travel and pendulum costs (which is good for the environment). But it also has some disadvantages: there is a difference between being physically and sitting in front of each other or discussing only through a monitor. Although containing the two major channels of communication - audible and visual signals - it may come easy to misunderstand or to see unproductive rounds of talk à la Will & Co. Some remedies could create the following videoconference rules:

Before the meeting

1. Making an agenda for all the people: which should be the result of the meeting? What should be discussed? Who has to be connected to that? When does the conference start? When is she definitely over?
2. Keep the **group size** as small as possible! Communication researchers say that a meeting with more than eight members would hardly work or be efficient: it would become a theatrical performance.
3. Turn off **sources of interference.** . Most video conferencing systems are equipped with ball microphones. In contrast to directional microphones, these pick up all the noises around them evenly - and thus traffic noise from open windows, telephone ring, barging in colleagues. They are trying to eliminate those troublemakers, especially the acoustic. In fact, in the TV conference is a good, trouble-free sound more important than a brilliant image. However, this also applies to: lighting up the room properly and never sitting against the light, because otherwise you would really look like the shadow man.
4. Look at the possibility to make a well – matched **composition of** the participants (so there is less friction), but still different enough to inspire the thought processes (so only new ideas will emerge).
5. Keep at sight the **seating arrangement.** This does not mean that you should worry about who sits next to whom, but that all are recorded by the camera and are visible behind it.

6. Avoid striking patterned **clothes**. . TV people hate checkerboard, bright-coloured shirts or ties and strong contrasts. This gives the image flickering - and that strongly distracts the viewer. The same applies to highly sparkling jewellery or other reflective objects in the room.
7. If you organize the meeting: arrive early and make sure that the **connections** are available before you start. There´ s nothing more annoying than the sound - check in a meeting. It's like presentations, when the speaker starts with the first Powerpoint, motto: Yesterday we went more ...
8. Appoint a **moderator**, who distributes the right to speak. While in meetings in which all are physically present the loudest people impose themselves mostly, transfer delays often occur with video conferencing (especially trans-continental). This results in slightly bizarre and time-shifted conversation starts. The latest, it needs someone to determine who is speaking when next. This is especially true in video conferencing: he can talk only one at a time.

During the Meeting

9. Begin always on **time**, keep the meetings deliberately brief and regulate the time! After the so-called **Parkinson's Law** , work expands out in exactly the available time extent for its accomplishment. The best ideas are demonstrated only in the last minutes. Save time!
10. Ask the participants shortly before or let them **introduce** themselves. This is not only polite, but moreover allows a direct approach. This connects the participants and avoids the conflicts. What also helps: oversized nametags, which are read on the screen too. Even better: start the meeting with a highlight. Start with an anecdote of something that you've recently learned, or that you have enjoyed this week. Tell a story of people that you can hark back to. Studies show that the opening of a meeting strongly influences the entire course. Once the boss starts with a reprimand, no one will want to get involved anymore. People will only make their job.
11. **Please behave** naturally: speak into the camera, emphasize your normal duties, but avoid sweeping gestures. Look at image transmission is always disadvantageous and aggressive.

12. If you have said something, give the others more than usual **time to respond**. In this way, the participants will get the chance to make themselves heard. Meetings feature anyway mostly from the fact that is constantly talking. Take advantage of silence. He who is silent, perhaps is thinking too, and saves an end of the round so bad - conceived. In addition, our brain time to the many ideas and thoughts, referred to a new link, needs to be improved. If someone is constantly sounding off in between, the creative spark fades even before it can ignite.
13. Stay **polite**: Do not whisper with your neighbour, do not check your emails on the BlackBerry or read a newspaper. While this applies to all meetings, mostly during TV conferences, here is extremely disturbing.
14. Be careful with **coffee cups** you bring to the meeting! Especially when you put it down again on the table where the microphone unit is, there is a very loud and ugly noise transmission. The same goes for rustling of paper stacks or nervous games with the stylus. When you have been drinking coffee during the conference, keep the cup in your hand or put it down only once - when it is empty.
15. If you notice that the discussion is threatened to drift and latch on two participants at a **side issue**, ask them to clarify the matter after the meeting in private - and you will come back to the agenda. Otherwise, this will be very boring for the rest of the participants and the creative spirit can tilt into the negative.

After the meeting

16. Summarize results and distribute the **register** later to all the participants - for example by e-mail! This will prevent future misunderstandings and later conflicts.

The most important rule however is: do not overdo with the discussions. There are studies that show that the mood and motivation of staff declines nearly in the same degree as the number of meetings have **attended** by the people is increasing. Correlated to this, is the statistic that everywhere in the world is increasing the number of meetings, not just the rosy prospects. And is important anyway, to paraphrase the words of a German Chancellor, what comes out of the back.