

Running virtual team sessions



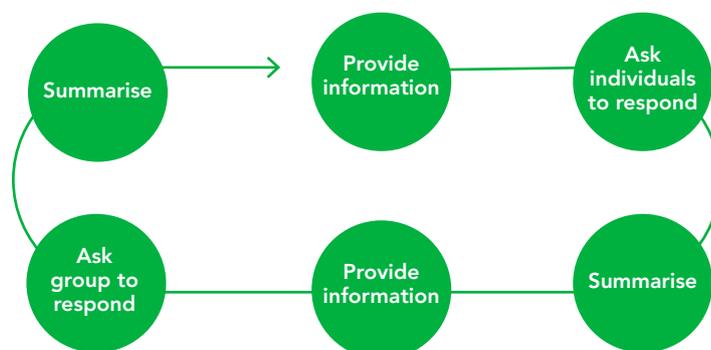
LEADING AND WORKING IN VIRTUAL TEAMS – A TOOLKIT



In the past, virtual colleagues could often get overlooked in meetings where the majority of the team were office based. Now, you need to think virtual first. Here's our checklist on running a great virtual team session.

Try to run the session ONLY online	If everyone is available in person, you could run it face to face. BUT if anyone needs to attend virtually, make it a wholly online event (e.g. run via Teams).
Book a room to run the session	Do not run a virtual session in a noisy office area.
Have each participant use their own headset and microphone even if they are in the same room	The audio will be better than a shared microphone. No one likes missing half the conversation because someone is sat too far away from the microphone.
Get a co-presenter (aka producer) if possible	You can run the session while the producer manages the recording, monitors the audio quality, and lines up the next poll etc. They can also help people having technical issues, put people on mute when they need to be, and keep an eye on the chat – drawing out key questions and comments and ensuring they are read into the recording.
Prepare thoroughly and set up early	Upload everything in good time and practise beforehand with the technology so you are familiar with its functionality. You don't want to be figuring out how things work when you have a dozen people waiting for you to do something! Also, don't try to cover too much – aim for one content slide every two minutes as a good general rule.
Start on time	It's very dull for your remote audience to listen to people getting themselves organised – or to listen to silence.
Encourage people to stay on mute and use the chat	Check the chat regularly, and invite people to come off mute if they want to expand their question/point.
Avoid handovers	If multiple people are presenting, either present from one machine, or if it's unavoidable, practise handing over to each other, so it is seamless during the presentation.

Think radio	Any kind of silence is always to be avoided (especially at the start) - imagine you are on the radio. Keep talking and always keep your audience informed about what is happening. Make sure you talk directly into the microphone.
If you are using a single microphone, position it sensibly	Make sure it is away from laptop or projector fans, and that anybody who is speaking is sitting near it (or move the microphone to where people are – but people who are presenting need to sit near each other).
Explain silence	When the meeting is starting, make it clear whether people should be expecting to hear something – try a slide saying 'no audio yet – please put yourself on mute', or play some music before the webinar starts so people can check their audio. If the mic is on, don't have internal conversations while you're preparing – it can sound unprofessional.
Remember it is a two-way process	If you don't have a producer, regularly pause your presentation to address the chat comments (you don't want dead space at the end as you review the chat). If you have a producer, you should still do this - it involves your audience and can lead to interesting side conversations). If things are slowed down by a lot of typing, encourage the person to come off mute and talk into their mic.
Remember some people will be watching a recording	So be very clear and read out in full any questions or comments people have put in the chats.
Make the most of your voice	In the virtual world, it's all you have; with no eye contact or body language, you need to be dynamic and welcoming through your voice alone. Keep energy levels up but don't rush. Compensate for not being able to see your audience by using the chat – ask them to 'use the emoticons to let me know what you think'.
Remember all they see is the slide you are showing	Don't start talking about something that's not there. Have a slide to cover everything you are going to say or do. Use slides to signpost the session. Plan to pose a question? Put it on a slide (even if it is a poll question). It helps virtual participants know what's going on.
Remember bandwidth	Slide transitions, animations, and videos, may not work very well. And don't go too fast – the audience may not be seeing what you're seeing if there's a small delay.
If it's a meeting	People don't find it easy to interrupt, so again, use the chat so people can make points or ask questions. If you are chairing, ask for input/questions by going round the virtual room so everyone is clear when they have a chance to speak.
Keep it simple	It is always worth keeping things as simple as possible in a virtual session as there are fewer ways in which you can control attention. There is a danger that participants can get lost or overwhelmed. Here's a very useful model to follow:



If you have to run a session that is a mixed in-person and online audience, then you must pay extra care to the points below:

You must ensure that you give equal time to questions from online and from the floor.

If people ask questions or make comments in the room, repeat them for the recording and so everyone can hear them. Keep conversations in the room to a minimum; equally, any conversation in the chat should be shared back with the room.

The presenter should avoid pointing to things on the screen, or turning their back to the microphone.

Anybody in the room who says something, should say it into a microphone to avoid the delay while people online wait to hear what they are saying.

Say who people are as they talk or as you refer to them.

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