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VIRTUAL MEETINGS MANUAL

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Manual de Reuniões Virtuais preparado no âmbito do Projeto FOF.IOMng.P50 Team Management in Industrialization Projects (TMIP)

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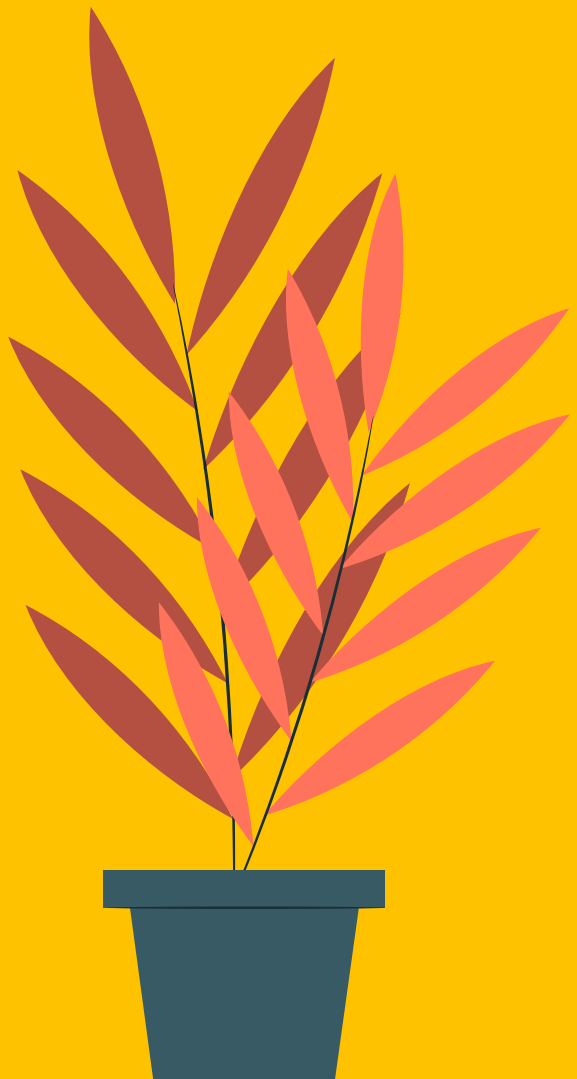
INTRO DUCTION



COMMUNICATING IN VIRTUAL TEAMS

In 2014, White reminded that it is very unlikely that a team will achieve its goals without quality meetings. In fact, good communication between team members is essential for tasks to be completed successfully (Anderson, McEwan, Bal & Carletta, 2007). However, the COVID-19 pandemic and the demands of social distancing have brought new challenges to corporate teamwork since 2020.

COMMUNICATING IN VIRTUAL TEAMS

At Bosch Car Multimédia Braga, however, this scenario of physical distance between teams is not new. As far as the project management department is concerned, it has long depended on the work of teams that are often geographically distant. Although most employees work at the same facilities, albeit in different departments, other project team members work from other plants and countries. Thus, remote communication in virtual teams is not new at Bosch.

According to White (2014), a team is defined as "(...) a collection of individuals who are interdependent in their tasks, who share responsibility for outcomes, who see themselves and who are seen by others as an intact social entity embedded in one or more larger social systems, and who manage their relationship across organizational boundaries"

(p.112).

COMMUNICATING IN VIRTUAL TEAMS

As a result of technological and social transformations, in a process accelerated by the pandemic, virtual teams have grown in contemporary organisations, are increasingly common and are different from traditional teams because of their ability to operate without time and space limitations towards the achievement of a common goal (Laitinen & Valo, 2018). A team is considered *virtual* if its members are geographically dispersed and work electronically with little face-to-face interaction (Lipnack & Stamps, 2000; Malhotra, Majchrzak, & Rosen, 2007).

Constant developments in information and communication technologies have had significant impacts on work environments in such a way that organisations have been adopting digital media to support the completion of tasks and increase the efficiency of telecommuting. (Anderson et al., 2007; Schaefer & Erskine, 2012).

COMMUNICATING IN VIRTUAL TEAMS

However, the arrival of COVID-19 accelerated the process of distance working adoption. The highly transmissible nature of the new coronavirus, its potential for asymptomatic transmission, and the lack of effective treatment required the application of strict quarantine and social distancing measures to limit the rate of infection and reduce pressure on health systems (Amparore et al., 2020).

These restrictions made teleworking and virtual teams no longer just an option for multinationals or the most avant-garde organisations to become part of the routine of almost all companies and institutions. Thus, although face-to-face meetings have not disappeared, the pandemic forced a reckoning, and the digital environment has become the traditional medium for holding meetings (Kopec & Stolbach, 2020; Rubinger, L. et al., 2020; Sutzko, Martin & Chu, 2021).

COMMUNICATING IN VIRTUAL TEAMS

In this context, the adoption and adjustment to a new set of digital tools were enhanced, enabling all kinds of professional activities to continue. (D'Anna, D'Arco & Van Goethem, 2020; Kopec & Stolbach, 2020; Rubinger, L. et al., 2020; Taylor et al., 2020). We refer to videoconferencing platforms that have become part of the routine of people and organisations, facilitating virtual interaction and allowing people to meet, greet each other, exchange information, communicate and work in groups despite being confined to their homes (D'Anna, D'Arco & Van Goethem, 2020). With good quality interactive video and audio resources, programs such as Skype, Zoom or Teams have been promoting real-time interactions and simulating an experience close to face-to-face contact (Amparore et al., 2020).

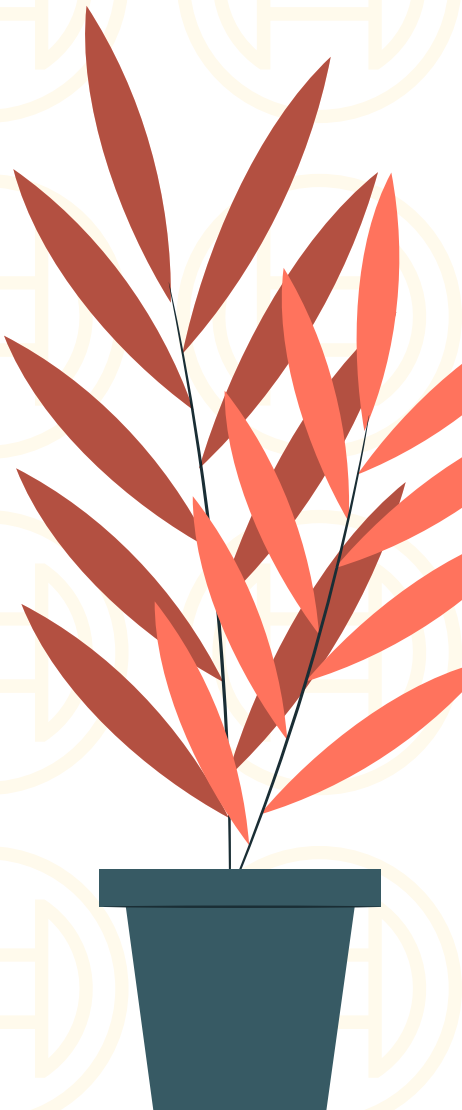
COMMUNICATING IN VIRTUAL TEAMS

However, human contact and emotions cannot be reproduced in a virtual environment. In addition, it is much more difficult to develop a common commitment and a sense of belonging in virtual teams because communication and interaction are less frequent (Malhotra, Majchrzak & Rosen, 2007; McEwan, Bal and Carletta, 2007).

So, the efficiency of virtual teams is largely dependent upon good communication between colleagues (McEwan, Bal and Carletta, 2007). That is not a new argument or related to the emergence of the pandemic and telework. In the context of industrialisation project management in particular, where virtual collaborative work is part of the routine, academics and professionals have long advocated the importance of team communication efficiency (Hamdi & Rajablu, 2012; McCartney & Campbell, 2006; Ozaeta & Na, 2014; Qusef & Ismail, 2007; Remidez & Jones, 2012; Shendar & Dvir, 1996; Zerfass & Huck, 2007).

COMMUNICATING IN VIRTUAL TEAMS

Therefore, these new virtual teams need to set up new communication standards that support their functions and work routines. In the absence of these norms, each member resorts to the use of practices associated with their habits and context, and this makes each one communicate in their own way, making team interaction and understanding, and consequently the attainment of the defined objectives, difficult (Malhotra, Majchrzak & Rosen, 2007).



CONTEXT AND OBJECTIVES OF THIS GUIDE

This manual aims to contribute to developing communication standards for the virtual teams that make up the management of industrialisation projects at Bosch Car Multimédia -Braga, whose remote activity intensified with the pandemic. More specifically, this document presents a set of steps that should guide the preparation, holding and follow-up of virtual meetings, helping industrialisation project management teams answer the following questions:

CONTEXT AND OBJECTIVES OF THIS GUIDE

HOW SHOULD I PLAN A VIRTUAL MEETING TO GUARANTEE THE DISCUSSION OF THE RELEVANT TOPICS?

HOW CAN I MOTIVATE PARTICIPATION AND ENSURE THE ATTENTION OF ALL MY COLLEAGUES / TEAM MEMBERS?

WHAT SHOULD I DO AFTER THE MEETING?

CONTEXT AND OBJECTIVES OF THIS GUIDE

Although remote meetings are not a novelty at Bosch Car Multimédia Braga, their mandatory adoption to replace face-to-face contacts urges the creation of a document that guides project teams on the best communication practices to adopt in virtual meetings, turning them into productive and pleasant moments for all team members. In the next section, the benefits and challenges associated with virtual meetings will be discussed, and eight steps will be listed as indicators for successful virtual meetings.

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BENEFITS OF VIRTUAL MEETINGS

BENEFITS OF VIRTUAL MEETINGS

01.

VIRTUAL MEETINGS CAN EASILY **TAKE PLACE FROM ANYWHERE** AS LONG AS ACCESS TO A COMPUTER, TABLET OR MOBILE PHONE AND INTERNET CONNECTION ARE GUARANTEED;

02.

THEY ALLOW MORE **FLEXIBLE** AND **EFFICIENT** MANAGEMENT OF SCHEDULES AND WORKING TIME, SINCE THEY **DO NOT INVOLVE TRAVELING**;

03.

THEY **FACILITATE THE INTERACTION** AND COLLABORATION OF GEOGRAPHICALLY DISTANT TEAMS;

04.

THEY MAKE IT POSSIBLE TO **SHARE CONTENT IN REAL-TIME** AND EDIT DOCUMENTS SIMULTANEOUSLY, RESULTING IN A **FEELING OF TOGETHERNESS AND CLOSENESS** VERY SIMILAR TO FACE-TO-FACE MEETINGS, THANKS TO THE CONSTANT IMPROVEMENTS OF THEIR IMAGE AND SOUND SYSTEMS;

05.

VIRTUAL PLATFORMS ARE INCREASINGLY SIMPLE AND INTUITIVE, AND TECHNICAL **FAILURES TEND TO DECREASE** AS PARTICIPANTS BECOME MORE EXPERIENCED IN USING TECHNOLOGY.

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CHALLENGES OF VIRTUAL MEETINGS

CHALLENGES OF VIRTUAL MEETINGS

01.

VIRTUAL MEETINGS REQUIRE PREPARATION AND PRIOR ADAPTATION OF EMPLOYEES TO VIRTUAL PLATFORMS;

02.

THEY PROVOKE FEELINGS OF FRUSTRATION, ANXIETY AND RESISTANCE IN INDIVIDUALS WITH LESS TECHNOLOGICAL APTITUDES;

03.

THEY ARE SUBJECT TO TECHNICAL FAILURES (SUCH AS SOUND AND IMAGE CRASHES) THAT LIMIT THE PARTICIPATION OF EMPLOYEES AND CAUSE LOSS OF INFORMATION;

04.

THE QUALITY OF THE MEETING IS STRONGLY DEPENDENT ON THE CAPACITY OF THE INTERNET NETWORK;

CHALLENGES OF VIRTUAL MEETINGS

05.

THE ABSENCE OF NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION (WHICH HAPPENS WHEN COMMUNICATION IS RESTRICTED TO SOUND ELEMENTS) MAKES IT DIFFICULT TO UNDERSTAND AND INTERPRET THE MESSAGES EXCHANGED IN A VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENT;

06.

THE ABSENCE OF DIRECT INTERACTION MAKES VIRTUAL MEETINGS MORE DIFFICULT TO FOLLOW, AS PEOPLE ARE MORE LIKELY TO BE DISTRACTED AND USE THE MEETING TIME TO PERFORM OTHER TASKS, SUCH AS REPLYING TO EMAILS OR EVEN HANDLING TASKS UNRELATED TO THE JOB;

07.

THE LACK OF FACE-TO-FACE INTERACTION MAKES PEOPLE FEEL LESS INVOLVED WITH THE TEAM AND LESS MOTIVATED TO CARRY OUT THEIR TASKS;

08.

IT IS MORE DIFFICULT TO GIVE AND RECEIVE FEEDBACK.

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THE EIGHT STEPS FOR SUCCESSFUL VIRTUAL MEETINGS

THE EIGHT STEPS FOR SUCCESSFUL VIRTUAL MEETINGS

As we have seen, several challenges and difficulties still affect online meetings. In exploring this manual, the reader will find eight steps that will assist them in conducting successful and efficient virtual meetings. These steps are divided into three moments that should be part of the organisation of a good team meeting: the preparation (before the meeting), the implementation (holding the meeting) and the follow-up (after the meeting).

THE EIGHT STEPS FOR SUCCESSFUL VIRTUAL MEETINGS

BEFORE THE MEETING

1. SELECT THE APPROPRIATE PLATFORM FOR THE MEETING;
2. CREATE A MEETING AGENDA;
3. PREPARE THE MEETING ENVIRONMENT.

DURING THE MEETING

4. GET THERE EARLY
5. START AND END THE MEETING ON TIME
6. GREET AND ENGAGE
7. BUILD TRUST AND ENCOURAGE PARTICIPATION

AFTER THE MEETING

8. FOLLOW-UP

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THE EIGHT STEPS FOR SUCCESSFUL VIRTUAL MEETINGS

BEFORE THE MEETING

BEFORE THE MEETING: PREPARATION

The success of an organisational event depends, above all, on its planning and execution. A team meeting can be seen as a micro event on which harmony, motivation and efficiency also depend on the teams. When a meeting is well prepared and organised, communication happens smoothly, interaction barriers between colleagues are reduced, feelings of belonging and commitment are enhanced, and employee motivation is achieved.

THE EIGHT STEPS FOR SUCCESSFUL VIRTUAL MEETINGS

BEFORE THE MEETING: PREPARATION

01. SELECT THE APPROPRIATE PLATFORM FOR THE MEETING

Several video conferencing platforms have appeared on the market in the last few years. With the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic and the obligation of teleworking and distance learning, platforms such as Zoom Colibri, Skype or Microsoft Teams became part of the work routines.

At Bosch, Skype has been used as the favoured communication channel to allow interaction between teams that work remotely. However, in the past few months and given the new pandemic context, distance contacts have become more frequent and required introducing another platform that is more suitable to current needs.

01.

BEFORE THE MEETING: PREPARATION

Microsoft Teams was then adopted as the most suitable platform for the current Bosch project management environment. Its user-friendly interface and the potential for collaborative interaction made this video conferencing tool the most sustainable option. Through Microsoft Teams, colleagues can see and hear each other; they can share their screens and various types of files; and work collaboratively on the same document. Additionally, some features such as chat, the option to raise your hand to speak and the possibility of recording sessions make this platform more appealing for teamwork.

01.

BEFORE THE MEETING: PREPARATION

Choosing the right communication technology is essential to ensure a successful interaction, but it is not enough. All potential users must be oriented about platform features.

The technology used must be perceived as inclusive and appropriate. Thus, it can be very useful to create small training sessions that present the approved video conferencing tool and explain and clarify its usage techniques. Teams prepared to use selected technologies can better deal with unforeseen events and technical failures.

01.

BEFORE THE MEETING: PREPARATION

02. CREATE A MEETING AGENDA

Once the videoconference platform has been chosen, it is necessary to create an agenda that should include the date, time, objectives and program for the meeting. Afterwards, this agenda needs to be communicated to the whole team. Team leaders must ensure that this agenda is clearly defined and sent in advance so that all elements needed for the discussion know that they must attend.

A poorly prepared virtual meeting facilitates the dispersion of attention on issues that must be dealt with and prevents the meeting purposes from being achieved. For team time to be optimised, the agenda must be realistic because, in the online environment, attention time is shorter, and people are easily distracted. So, the following tips can help prepare this agenda:

02.

THE EIGHT STEPS FOR SUCCESSFUL VIRTUAL MEETINGS

BEFORE THE MEETING: PREPARATION

- THE AGENDA SHOULD BE PREPARED TO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THE LENGTH OF THE MEETING, NOT FORGETTING THAT SOME TIME SHOULD BE SET ASIDE FOR INFORMAL INTERACTION MOMENTS BETWEEN TEAM MEMBERS;

- A VIRTUAL MEETING THAT TAKES MORE THAN 60 MINUTES IS UNLIKELY TO BE SUCCESSFUL;

- THE MEETING OBJECTIVES, AGENDA AND THE ROLE OF EACH GROUP MEMBER MUST BE COMMUNICATED IN ADVANCE, SO EVERYONE KNOWS WHAT WILL BE DISCUSSED AND WHAT IS EXPECTED FROM THEIR PARTICIPATION.

02.

BEFORE THE MEETING: PREPARATION

03. PREPARE THE MEETING ENVIRONMENT

Setting the meeting environment means preparing yourself for leading the interaction moment and optimising a space suitable for the professional context. Thus, although each person's home has also become their office, separating the spaces and moments of personal, leisure and work-life is very important.

Establishing these borders begins with taking care of one's image. The first step is getting dressed and virtually leaving the house to work. That will help create awareness that the workday will begin. In addition, it is important to maintain a professional image at team meetings.

After that, it is essential to prepare an appropriate workspace that is well lit, free from unnecessary distractions from excessive background noise. In addition to promoting concentration, a quiet and bright environment favours image and sound quality during online meetings.

BEFORE THE MEETING: PREPARATION

USEFUL TIP

Get ready to turn on the camera. Using video makes people feel like they are all in the same meeting. It gives the illusion that they are sharing the same space. Remote sessions are most effective when participants can see each other's facial expressions and body language.

The connected cameras help recreate the proximity of a personal meeting. Encourage the entire team to adopt this habit, making the discussion becomes more dynamic and engaging. This will promote a sense of commitment and team involvement.

03.

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THE EIGHT STEPS FOR SUCCESSFUL VIRTUAL MEETINGS

DURING THE MEETING

THE EIGHT STEPS FOR SUCCESSFUL VIRTUAL MEETINGS

DURING THE MEETING:

04. GET THERE EARLY

Being in front of the computer at least 15 minutes before the meeting starts is an important practice to ensure the productivity of the appointment. It is the timing required for leaders to test the audiovisual equipment and ensure all the basic resources are operational. Answering the following questions can help:

- **IS THE AMBIENT BRIGHTNESS ADEQUATE?**
- **IS THE INTERNET CONNECTION GOOD?**
- **IS THE COMPUTER WORKING PROPERLY?**
- **DOES THE VIDEO CONFERENCING PLATFORM OPEN CORRECTLY?**
- **DO THE MICROPHONE AND SOUND WORK?**
- **IS THE CAMERA WORKING WELL?**
- **ARE MY SURROUNDINGS PLEASANT AND FREE FROM DISTRACTIONS?**
- **IS IT POSSIBLE TO SHARE THE SCREEN?**
- **DO MY PRESENTATIONS OR VIDEOS WORK WELL?**

04.

THE EIGHT STEPS FOR SUCCESSFUL VIRTUAL MEETINGS

DURING THE MEETING:

Most platforms used for virtual meetings include features to test and adjust sound and camera settings.

Sometimes, it is important to close all applications that will not be used during the meeting to improve the bandwidth and ensure image and sound quality. Moreover, when the surrounding context or the equipment itself does not assure the best sound and image conditions, it may be convenient to invest in stand-alone cameras or microphones.

It may be useful to have an expert assigned to assist participants in solving technical challenges during the meeting to ensure technical problems do not disturb.

04.

THE EIGHT STEPS FOR SUCCESSFUL VIRTUAL MEETINGS

DURING THE MEETING:

USEFUL TIP

Microsoft Teams, for example, allows participants to select their microphone, camera and background settings before joining the meeting. Thus, it is possible to choose whether to share sound and image or just sound and it is also possible to customize the alternative backgrounds.

04.

THE EIGHT STEPS FOR SUCCESSFUL VIRTUAL MEETINGS

DURING THE MEETING:

05. START AND END THE MEETING ON TIME

Starting and ending the meeting on time entails respecting the schedules and the subjects and objectives defined for the meeting.

As mentioned above, it is essential to set the agenda and share it with all participants to ensure the efficiency of the meetings, which must be designed according to the participants' available time and the time needed to achieve the session's objectives.

It is important to remind the participants of the basic rules of interaction and the topics to discuss, at the beginning of the meeting, to ensure the agenda is fulfilled and starts and ends on time.

05.

THE EIGHT STEPS FOR SUCCESSFUL VIRTUAL MEETINGS

DURING THE MEETING:

USEFUL TIP

Presentations should be short. The only thing worse than a long presentation at a face-to-face meeting is a long presentation during a virtual meeting. Meetings should be moments of discussion and conversation where participants can interact.

05.

THE EIGHT STEPS FOR SUCCESSFUL VIRTUAL MEETINGS

DURING THE MEETING:

06. GREEET AND ENGAGE

Greeting participants and encouraging a few minutes of friendly conversation before diving into the agenda helps build the relationship needed for a successful meeting.

Starting the meeting with an informal conversation "breaks the ice" facilitates the creation and strengths of interpersonal relationships. Thus, the meeting leader can encourage each member of the group to share any relevant events in the past few days. It can also be equally motivating to start the meeting with the acknowledgement of specific successes of some members of the team.

06.

THE EIGHT STEPS FOR SUCCESSFUL VIRTUAL MEETINGS

DURING THE MEETING:

USEFUL TIP

When participants are joining the session, you can share a fun playlist to sheer up the group at the start of the meeting.

06.

THE EIGHT STEPS FOR SUCCESSFUL VIRTUAL MEETINGS

DURING THE MEETING:

Usually, when the participants already know each other, these informal moments are common and are part of the ritual that characterises the beginning of the work meetings. The greeting with "good morning" or "good afternoon", followed by a courtesy expression "is everything okay?" or "how is it going?" facilitates group involvement and motivation to discuss work issues.

06.

THE EIGHT STEPS FOR SUCCESSFUL VIRTUAL MEETINGS

DURING THE MEETING:

07. BUILD TRUST AND ENCOURAGEMENT

It is essential to keep all participants involved during the meeting. Only then will this moment of discussion become really valuable. However, keeping the whole group interested and motivated is not easy, especially remotely. In fact, getting everyone to participate is one of the most challenging aspects of online meetings. However, some of the following techniques can help:

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THE EIGHT STEPS FOR SUCCESSFUL VIRTUAL MEETINGS

DURING THE MEETING:

- AT EACH MEETING, DESIGNATE A **DIFFERENT PERSON TO GUIDE** AND MODERATE THE CONVERSATION;
- **ENCOURAGE** INDIVIDUALS **TO PARTICIPATE** IN THE DISCUSSION, SHOWING AN INTEREST IN THEIR IDEAS AND OPINIONS;
- TRY TO **GIVE FEEDBACK** IN REAL-TIME, VALUING THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF EACH MEMBER OF THE GROUP;
- WHENEVER POSSIBLE, **PROMOTE COLLABORATION** IN REAL-TIME, FOR EXAMPLE, WITH THE SIMULTANEOUS EDITING OF DECISIONS BEING MADE;
- **ASSIGN DIFFERENT ELEMENTS** TO CONTROL THE TIME.

07.

THE EIGHT STEPS FOR SUCCESSFUL VIRTUAL MEETINGS

DURING THE MEETING:

In virtual meetings, it is important to overcome the feelings of isolation of group members and build team cohesion, establishing rules for collaboration and participation so that all participants feel motivated to contribute to the success of the meeting.

"In short, the most effective virtual team leaders enhance the team experiences for each of their members by ensuring that each has an opportunity to learn, grow, contribute, and feel an integral part of the team."

(Malhotra, Majchrzak & Rosen, 2007, p. 67)

07.

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THE EIGHT STEPS FOR SUCCESSFUL VIRTUAL MEETINGS

AFTER THE MEETING

AFTER THE MEETING

08. FOLLOW-UP

Meetings are moments when people check the status of tasks, make decisions and commitments for future development. Therefore, they represent a starting point from which new goals are expected to be achieved.

Thus, closing each meeting with a checklist of decisions made and goals set for the future is crucial. In addition, at the end of the meeting, all group members must know what has been defined and what responsibility has been assigned to each individual, as well as the respective deadline for completion.

Sending a follow-up email to all meeting participants is a good way to summarise the issues discussed and remind each of their next tasks. Ideally, this email should be sent shortly after the meeting is over.

08.

AFTER THE MEETING

"In sum, by orchestrating virtual team meetings carefully, virtual team leaders are able to reinforce the team's mission, increase team commitment and participation, leverage the team's collective expertise, and reinforce the value of virtual team membership."

(Malhotra, Majchrzak & Rosen, 2007, p. 66).

08.

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