

# Effective remote communication

These days, when most of us are working remotely and our physical social contacts are as limited as possible, we find ourselves online more than ever. We have reset our daily meetings to conference calls and online team meetings. We can no longer drop in at a colleague, so we phone, Skype, use apps and emails. And what happens in the evening? Then we find all sorts of ways to stay in contact with family and friends whom we cannot see right now.

All these types of communications place immense demand on our brain. Concentrating for one hour during an online meeting is more intensive than when you are in a room with one another. This situation often combines work and private life, which creates necessary distractions. The mental load increases and this can ultimately lead to complaints, such as concentration problems, headaches, neck and shoulder problems, irritation or fatigue.

It is time to reorganise your tasks and to come to agreements about work. These tips will help you in having necessary meetings that cost less energy and run more efficiently.

## Organise the meetings in a different way


**Per meeting, determine what is most efficient.** Working remotely is truly different from working in the office. We miss many of the non-verbal signals and technology also has its limitations. So don't switch all your regular meetings to digital meetings, but determine per meeting what is most efficient. And here too, the saying is still valid that 'good preparation is half the job'. Is the goal clear? Are all the documents shared? Make sure that this is relevant for everyone or cut up the meeting into separate relevant sub-meetings. Appoint a chairperson who is good at keeping the meeting(s) on track.


**Select in advance a medium that is best suited for your company.** Preferably, choose a solution that lets you see each other, allowing you to have far more non-verbal information. That makes it easier to maintain attention and keeps people from doing other things in between. Check and test in advance if everyone has access to prevent starting problems.

**Keep the meetings as brief as possible.** See which tasks can be divided and make clear agreements about these. Keep everyone updated about the progress and plan a new meeting for an update.


## Pay attention to etiquette during the meeting


When several people are participating in an online meeting, it is important to follow a number of rules to ensure that the meeting runs well (a.k.a. ether discipline). This is certainly a challenge nowadays when everyone is working from home and many of these employees are looking after their children at the same time. Internally, we can accept the fact that not everything runs smoothly, but we cannot expect the same from customers. So share these rules with one another and help each other in applying them.


 **Prepare the meeting well and in advance.** Read the documents beforehand and note your important questions.


 **Look for a place where you can sit relaxed when calling.** Make clear agreements with any of your household members.

 **Be available on time.** It is very annoying to have to wait for latecomers to the call.


 **Activate 'mute' if it is not your turn to speak** – and especially if you don't have a headphone, otherwise there is resonance.

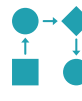
 **Switch off 'mute' if you want to say something.** You announce your name if you are calling without a video and if not everyone knows each other well.


 **Make sure there is minimum noise.** Take into consideration background noises or movements as well as your own breathing if you use a headset.


 **Be brief and concise.** Don't make too many jokes and stay on topic – then the session will not last too long.


 **Let each other finish talking** and be alert to delays.

 **Stay within the set time.** If the meeting runs overtime, check 5 minutes before the end time whether there is room for an extension. If not, then schedule the next meeting.


 **Divide up tasks** that each person can undertake independently and schedule brief updates.


 **Stay attentive to the topic(s) at hand.** Do not get distracted by checking e-mails, etc., but keep your wits about you. That way, you don't miss anything and you can provide worthwhile contributions.


 **Keep it relevant.** If the meeting is of little value to you, discuss this and together determine an approach for the next meeting.


 **Especially during these times:** be attentive to one another. Now is the time to actively organise social support and therefore, at the start of the meeting, take a moment to ask everyone how things are going. If additional support is necessary, then you can organise that with each other after the call.

## Extra points for attention in video calls Especially with customers and commissioning parties

 **Dress for the occasion.** Make sure that you look representative, just as you would in real life.

 **Check who wants to be seen on video.** Not everyone feels comfortable in a video call. Give people the possibility to turn off their camera.

 **Keep your background professional.** Private photos, the drying rack, household members should not appear on video.

 **Pay attention to non-verbal communication.** Video calls have the advantage that you see the other participants. However, be aware that body language, facial expressions and gestures are not seen as well as they do in a physical meeting.

**Finally: be attentive to others, but also to yourself**

Do not schedule these updates all in one day. Try to prevent yourself from being in meetings all day and that you are stuck in your workplace. Make sure that in between you take enough breaks and move about or pocket your phone and take a walk through your house, in the garden or in the neighbourhood. Of course, the latter suggestion applies only if you have no symptoms and while maintaining social distance of 1.5 meter if you encounter people.

And last but not least: make sure you balance your life well. Switch off now and then. Go outside (for as far as allowed), move about/exercise, do the laundry, go sit in the sun with a cup of coffee. That way you save some of your energy to go online for private communication, too.