Top tips for chairing effective hybrid meetings

Hybrid meetings are meetings in which some participants are present in person, and others are present online. This requires video conferencing software like Zoom, Microsoft Teams or Google Hangouts and hardware such as cameras and microphones for those present in the room. As more and more organisations move towards hybrid meetings, it's important to make sure your hybrid meetings are as efficient and engaging as possible. We've gathered our top tips below.

Prepare:

- As Chair, you should ideally be one of the people in the room, not a remote participant.
- Delegate some of your responsibilities if possible. Chairing a hybrid meeting requires you to split your attention more than usual. To make sure nothing falls through the cracks, consider assigning tasks to others. You could ask someone to act as a co-facilitator and to manage the remote part of the meeting for you. This person can mute participants when they're not speaking to reduce background noise, can let people back into the meeting if their connection fails and can keep an eye to make sure the remote side of the meeting is running smoothly. You could ask another person to help with time-keeping.
- Ensure the meeting has a clear purpose. If the only aim is to disseminate information, this could be an email. Meetings should be saved for collaboration and feedback.
- When scheduling, try to ensure gaps between meetings by starting at five past the hour and ending at five to the hour.
- Familiarise yourself with any hardware or software you'll be using on the day and make sure you're aware of all the features available on the video conferencing system you have chosen.
- Circulate the relevant sign-in details and instructions for the video conferencing platform you intend to use, as well as any other platforms you intend to use during the meeting.
- Test the sound and video quality for both in-person and remote attendees ahead of time.
- If more than one person physically in the room wants to dial in (in the same space), remember that only one audio device in the room should be connected at a time or you will experience feedback.
- Make sure the you can see the TV or laptop screen and all the people in the room – keep scanning both places to see if someone wants to speak.
- It is best practice to share any documents before the meeting, and upload them to the meeting platform. Ensure you reference page numbers when discussing the papers so that those who are not in the room are able to follow the discussion.
- Ensure you have everything you need for a successful hybrid meeting so that those attending in person and online can see and hear each other clearly. This may require a camera with a wide-angle lens and either multi-directional microphones or several microphones spaced out across the room depending on the number of attendees. It may be worth booking a designated meeting room with the technology for hybrid meetings.

Set expectations:

- Take a few minutes at the start of the meeting to make it clear to everyone what they need to do if they want to speak. For example, you might ask remote participants to raise their hand, or to use a "raise hand" feature on the video conferencing platform. Ask those attending the meeting in person to raise their hand if they wish to speak as well, to ensure they don't dominate the meeting.
- Make sure to remind remote participants to mute themselves when not speaking to reduce background noise.
- Often in hybrid meetings people will begin to speak over one another in a way that is not distracting to those in person, but is hard to follow when listening in remotely. Ask those in person to say their name before speaking so that those people who are remote know who is talking. If everyone talks at once then it becomes very difficult for remote attendees to follow the conversation.

- Inform participants if there will be a record of the meeting, whether in terms of a transcript, minutes or an executive summary. Be clear on whether comments will be associated with an individual's name. If you are recording the session, let all the participants know this right at the start of the meeting. Let the participants know who this recording will be available to and for how long.

Be inclusive:

- Ideally, those joining the meeting remotely should be able to see and hear everyone attending in person. If this is not possible, ensure remote participants can see at least one in-person attendee. The Chair is likely the most important person to be visible for remote participants.
- Make sure to use tools which are accessible to both in person and remote participants. Attendees can use virtual whiteboards, cloud-based text documents, chat functions, and a variety of other software tools to collaborate in real time.
- Ensure everyone has an equal voice, don't just default to people you can see or those in the meeting room. Ask those attending remotely for their feedback before asking those present in person to counteract the possible disadvantage of joining remotely. Call on each participant by name if necessary to ensure everyone stays involved.
- Don't allow those physically present to begin side conversations that remote participants cannot hear or take part in.
- The natural small talk at the start of any meeting can naturally become dominated by the in-person attendees at a hybrid meeting, leaving remote attendees feeling excluded before the meeting has even begun. Consider assigning some time at the start of the hybrid meeting to asking each attendee (remote and in-person) how they are getting on.
- Don't start in-person conversations before the meeting starts (or remote participants have joined) or continue conversations after they have left.
- Make sure you're only using features or tools which are available to everyone attending the meeting, whether in person or online. For example, those attending in person may not be able to see the chat function in the video conferencing software, so remote participants should be asked not to use this feature. Equally, avoid using equipment in the room (such as a flip chart or visual aids) that those attending remotely are unable to properly see. Present slides via the remote technology in use.
- With your meeting participants split between two places, it's not always easy for everyone to sense when a consensus has been reached, so you may need to spell things out a bit more than you would in a meeting where everyone is in the room together.
- Continually ask for feedback from your attendees, both in-person and online. An anonymous feedback form can point you in the right direction for how to improve your hybrid meetings and can make you aware of any potential issues that you might not have picked up on.

Carmichael has a range of meeting rooms and hybrid meeting technologies available for booking. See [here](#) for more information.

Sources:

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