Tips for successful online meetings
In these times when one part of society enjoys the privilege of teleworking and having an Internet connection, we are trying to sharpen our skills to facilitate online environments. We see these spaces as an experience of gathering between the people who participate, as an opportunity for collective wisdom to emerge.

An online meeting is usually more than a webinar where communication is fairly one-way and people’s participation is often reduced to typing questions in a chat room.

An online meeting tries to incorporate some elements of face-to-face meetings, such as facilitated dialogues in the large group, small group conversations, cohesion and networking dynamics, etc. by adapting the techniques and methodologies you would use in a face-to-face meeting to a virtual environment.

From our practice in Altekio, we would like to share some recommendations to have satisfactory experiences that achieve the objectives of the meeting, while taking care of the process and the participants.
There are several factors to consider at different moments of the meeting

Before the meeting  During the meeting  After the meeting
**Before the meeting**

**Choose the right platform according to accessibility**

Ensure that all persons called have information on how to access the online meeting and can participate; consider whether the capacity of the platform is commensurate with the number of people attending the meeting and its functionality in relation to the objectives to be achieved. On many occasions, we will need to combine several platforms. We recommend testing the ones we will use before the meeting.

In the following links you can find an online tool repository developed by our partner cooperative Andaira and another website with useful tips to improve participation.

- [On-line Tools, Andaira S.Coop.Mad](#)
- [Tips & Tools, CMX Hub](#)

**Think about the technical difficulty that the meeting will have**

If it is not much, it may be enough for one person to be attentive to the role of facilitation. In any case, it is advisable that two people are looking after the process of the meeting. One person whose look has more to do with the technological part (that all the people access, doubts in the chat...) and another person taking care of the times and the agenda, that everybody can speak, maintain a safe space, that the subject is focused, and achieve the expected results.

**Send the necessary materials to read in advance**

However, do not assume that everyone has been able to read them during the design process, because there is a diversity of situations in relation to the possibilities of teleworking, so incorporating the key information synthesis points serves to support the whole group and especially those who have not had time to read them.

**Design a space for collaboration in the virtual environment**

This can be useful both for taking the minutes and for generating mind maps or developing any collaborative work in real time.
If it is a space for dialogue and decision making

A detailed schedule of times, defining those responsible for bringing the information in each point and the expected results of each of those points are simple aspects that we need to specify. The process that we recommend is, after bringing the information, to see if there are any clarifying questions and after answering them, enter into a dialogue in the background.

If this is a space for inquiry and generation of proposals

We can organize small groups to apply some technique: to develop from a dialogue coffee/world café online to an open space where we can elaborate proposals that can later be taken to a joint decision making space.

- **World Cafe**
- **Open Space**

Explore the possibilities for digital facilitation

There are many possibilities to adapt the tools of face-to-face facilitation to digital facilitation. Some resources that can inspire us to do so are the Seeds for Change manuals and the IIFAC resource pack.

- **Facilitation Tools, Seeds for Change**
- **IIFAC Resources**

During the meeting

The beginning of the meeting is important

In addition to presenting the agenda, it is necessary to establish a good starting atmosphere, in which to welcome the diversity present in the group, and to generate a safe and effective space. To do this, we can make an initial round establishing a clear form of participation.

For example, making sure that the floor is passed around to avoid wasting time or overlapping and ensuring that everyone who wants to can participate. In these days, we have also practiced bringing something that connects us closely (for example, using metaphors such as food, animals or places on earth that help us generate connection and warmth).
Check if the meeting is going to be recorded

For those who have not been able to attend, this is another delicate aspect to consider. We need to check that all the people involved agree. For this, we can use the thermometer technique (thumb up if I agree, thumb in between if I need to nuance, thumb down if I don’t agree). In the case of people with thumbs down or horizontal, we need to explore under what conditions there might be agreement (for example, the person with the thumb down does not want their face to appear on the recording and can be invited to participate with the camera covered, or the person with the thumb horizontal wants the recording to be accessible only in audio and for people who are from the organization and have not been able to attend today). In the case that there is no permission, discard the idea and look for other ways to make it possible for the people who have not been able to be there to find out about the content of the meeting.

Setting expectations

Online meetings are no worse than face-to-face meetings, and can even be better in many ways, if anything, they are different. Setting expectations - having a conversation with the group about how they want to conduct the meetings - and agreeing on a few clear guidelines at the beginning of the meeting can greatly enhance everyone’s experience.

List when opening a set of attitudes/agreements

For an online participation that takes care of each person and the group. Preparing the space to limit possible distractions, assigning specific time to the meeting, checking the proper functioning of your system in advance (especially the audio), mute the microphone, turn off the camera if you are moving, attention to the mobile and multitasking, postural aspect from diversity, etc.

We can have a virtual fridge (collaborative document) in which we can place topics that arise that do not belong to the agenda and we leave them there for the end of the meeting to see where we place them, if in the meeting itself in case we have time or in future calls. It is especially important to clarify how speaking turns are to be taken. There are platforms that offer this function but it is important to know if it is only seen by the person coordinating the call or if it is something visible. Each time a point is opened, you can poll how many people want to speak in order to allocate the time. And before closing it, check if there’s anyone else who wants to talk.
The atmosphere of the meeting will change

It is important to be aware of signs that are sometimes more difficult to perceive than when we are in a physical space. For example, tones of voice, changes in facial expression, silences or moments when several people are talking at once, indicate these changes to which we should pay attention. Framing this situation and slowing down the conversation so that we can actively listen to and understand each other is key.

Paying attention to rhythm and duration

It is recommended that online sessions run at a slightly slower pace than face-to-face ones. Sometimes, there is a delay of a few seconds in communications and so that everyone can keep up with the pace this is advisable to take this into account. If you are a participant, you can draw attention to yourself before addressing the group by waving or saying “question” or “comment” and then wait a couple of seconds before continuing. In terms of duration, it is recommended that sessions are also shorter than they would be in person and that each topic does not last more than 30-40 minutes.

Take care of the breaks and propose activation exercises

They are fundamental elements in these spaces. We need to look for adequate practices for the group culture and those that serve you for the type of attention that is required.

For example, inviting people to clap their hands all at once as a way of tuning in again after having worked in small groups, simulating a little rain on our heads all at once to stimulate concentration before making decisions, giving ourselves a hug or thanking ourselves at the same time, or getting up and saying goodbye and thank you in a creative way, are small expressions that we can use as a way of closing after having been in the same position for a long time with a high demand for attention.

Here are some other exercises suggested by 350.org Training for Change

If the meeting lasts more than an hour and a half or two hours, it is advisable to establish a break that allows you to stretch your legs and/or move your body, go to the toilet, attend to other needs or other small matters, etc.

∞ On-line Energizers, 350.org

Before finishing, make a summary of what was agreed

So that everyone is clear about it, as well as to confirm that the person who has taken the notes has done so by recording what has been said in a reliable manner. In addition, it is important if there are tasks or actions to be carried out, that these have a responsible person and a deadline, in order to be able to follow them up.
Outcomes summary

It will be important to send, as soon as possible, the minutes or outcomes of the meeting to reinforce clarity on what has been achieved. We can also generate a space for feedback that generates learning to improve the ground rules in the form of attitudes or agreements for future meetings. We can also generate a space for feedback that generates learning to improve group agreements to be taken in the form of attitudes or agreements for future meetings.

And… how many people can participate in an online meeting?

As with any meeting, the choice of who should participate depends on the objectives of the meeting, as well as the degree of participation desired. In any case, the typical size of an online meeting is from 2 to 25 people. Sometimes for smaller groups, email can be a suitable tool. If the group is larger, other complementary tools can also be considered such as surveys or asynchronous discussion tools (such as a forum, for example). In our experience, up to 40 people in call format is a possible size with two facilitators.
We hope that these recommendations will be useful to you to have effective online meetings in these present times where you can combine physical distance and social connection.

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