

## Video Conferencing in the Workplace

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Technological advances and the rapid expansion of business boundaries going beyond one location incur significant changes in the ways of organizing the working process. One of the most important aspects of any company or firm is having conferences or meetings to discuss essential points of the working process and to introduce possible changes. Concerning the fact that many employees use the option of remote work, or the chain of companies is placed within different countries, the possibility of using video conferencing instead of face-to-face meetings significantly facilitates the organizational process, and also saves money. At first glance, advantages proposed by introducing video conferencing in the workplace are undeniable; nevertheless, it is essential to analyze all possible flaws and irreplaceable elements of human communication.

The main component of the successful implementation of video conferencing instead of face-to-face meetings is an ability to evaluate the scope of a company critically. Frost & Sullivan compiled a list of questions to pose before deciding whether it is a time to organize a virtual workplace. According to them, employers should consider the geographical location of customers, partners, and employees, the high costs for the organization for travel, psychological factors related to employees who are working remotely, and the desire to contribute to the protection of the environment through reducing our carbon footprint (“Leveraging the power...,” 2012, 5). The final decision should also be based on the fact of whether such an innovation would make a firm competitive in the chosen marketing scope.

The financial aspect and opportunity to save costs with the help of advanced technologies are the primary reasons to consider video conferencing instead of face-to-face meetings in companies with a broad scope of their building locations. There are several ways to save money

intended to cover expenses for the travel to a conference; for instance, it is organizing one car for several workers if the place can be reached without a plane. Nevertheless, according to Frost & Sullivan's research, air travel requires "average \$1,000 per person," and the cost of a car traveling "can hit hundreds of dollars" ("Leveraging the power...", 2012, 7). Applications for conducting video conferences require lesser costs; they can be completely free or have a subscription "on average, from \$40 to \$100 per person" ("How much...", 2015, para. 10). Since there could be problems with Internet connections, business-oriented video conferencing can use such applications as "iMeet, GoToMeeting, GlobalMeet, and WebEx" ("How much...", 2015, para. 7) to ensure the high quality of sound and video. At the same time, it is crucial to remember about the cost of equipment needed to conduct a video conference; there is always the possibility that the equipment will fail at the most inopportune moment and turn off in the middle of a conversation. Apart from that, the cost of a quality camera and sound system can be "between \$8,000 and \$18,000" (Gerdeman, 2014, para. 25). In this way, if the specifics of a company require frequent meetings, the choice in favor of video conferences will significantly reduce costs and allow allocating time spent on traveling on the working process itself. Otherwise, financial costs will not return investments.

Reducing the cost of organizing meetings is not the only advantage presented by video conferencing; however, it is always important to consider the peculiarities of a company. The Frost & Sullivan report includes decreasing cycle times and boosting the bottom line among the productivity and supporting employees working in different places ("Leveraging the power...", 2012, 3). Another advantage is to use video conferencing as part of the recruiting process in combination with the communication via phones in case a company provides a service of finding suitable staff members (Telegraph Sponsored, 2016). Video conferencing is also a solid option

for people whose specialty is sales or marketing to cover all segments of a target audience. In this way, they can improve their productivity and work for the benefit of a company through an opportunity to communicate with potential customers or partners on a global scale (“Leveraging the power...,” 2012, 8). Apart from that, human resource departments can use video conferencing to conduct various trainings to study their responsibilities in a changing business world effectively. For instance, a new role of HR managers to serve as strategic partners in collaboration with different companies.

The peculiarities of video conferencing allow the sound and visual presence of a person, which, in its turn, can be compared to face-to-face meetings. Nevertheless, it is a matter of high importance to understand when a video conference should not be used as a substitute for a face-to-face meeting. First of all, technology and the Internet cannot convey the warmth of a handshake, an act of courtesy at a meeting, which is the first step towards building mutual trust. Moreover, the research conducted by the University of Chicago and Harvard states that handshakes contribute to a better outcome of negotiations, and it can be explained by the fact that this gesture activates specific brain centers related to rewards (Vanderkam, 2015, para. 3). Video conferencing, even with a clear picture, can blur facial expressions, which hides the real intentions of a person. In this way, face-to-face meetings are still a better option when an employer wants to understand the genuine feelings of his or her employees or future partner. Another factor should be considered while trying to organize the spirit of cooperation inside a team. In her article, Laura Vanderkam (2015, para. 10) mentions the work published in the *Academy of Management Discoveries*; it states that office workers often feel sad and frustrated when the number of remote workers increases. The reason for this lies in the fact that a large number of people still need social interactions to feel comfort and inspiration to complete a job.

To conclude, regardless of the money spent on equipment for conducting quality video conferences, such an option justifies its value for companies with employees, partners, and clients living in different cities, countries, and even continents. It is a superb means of saving costs and efforts invested in traveling; moreover, video conferences allow constant cooperation between projects members who are separated by distance or organizing online training for HR managers. At the same time, it is always crucial to understand when video conferencing should not substitute face-to-face meetings. For instance, the first negotiation with new business partners, when handshaking could form a mutual trust. Apart from this, the permanent use of a video conferencing option for remote workers could disrupt social interactions between employees who are still working in an office. Overall, the key to successfully introducing video conferencing is the ability to evaluate all the positive and negative impacts for a company, not a simple desire to be a part of a business trend.

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