

Pros and Cons of Virtual vs. Face-to-Face Meetings



Refer to this guide when deciding on whether to meet virtually or face-to-face.

Face-to-face and virtual meetings each have their own advantages and disadvantages. Knowing them can help you make an informed decision about when to use each format and help support your decision when presenting to stakeholders or making recommendations to organizations.

Pros and Cons of Virtual Meetings

Pros:
Extension to geographically diverse participants: Virtual meetings can happen anywhere anytime someone has an internet connection. This means you can invite individuals to join from a variety of locations, cities, and countries. It also provides an opportunity for remote workers to join.
Reduced costs: Because you don't have to pay for travel, meeting rooms, and other items such as refreshments, virtual meetings can significantly reduce meeting costs.
Increased convenience: Learners can attend without the inconvenience of travel or time away from their desk and clients; meeting rooms don't need to be booked.
Recording and capturing capabilities: Virtual meetings can be recorded to view later to refresh on decisions or for attendees who missed the meeting; most meeting platforms will also record chat discussions and provide the ability to capture screenshots of items such as whiteboard annotations.
Increased participation: Because attendees can contribute ideas via tools such as chat, annotations, and polls, some attendees may find it easier to be candid in sharing thoughts and ideas.
Reduced carbon footprint: There are clear environmental benefits to removing the need for learners to travel, whether it is driving from one location to another or flying.

Pros and Cons of Virtual vs. Face-to-Face Meetings



Pros and Cons of Virtual Meetings, Continued

Cons:

Less interpersonal connection: Even with the enhancement of video, virtual meetings don't allow attendees to see or read all body language or pick up on some of the physical cues that support communication and connection and enhance trust.

Technological issues: Whether due to attendee aptitude or technical connection issues, technology can hinder the experience of a meeting and, at times, prevent attendees from participating altogether.

Increased distractions and miscommunication: There are greater chances of having a communication breakdown, which is due to many factors; however, a distracted environment or meeting attendees multitasking are a few of the main reasons.

Lack of engagement: It is much harder to stay engaged in a virtual environment. This is based on a combination of the points raised above as well as the fact that our brains can become fatigued more quickly in virtual meetings.

Reduced meeting time: Although some may see less time in a meeting as a positive, because engagement is lessened in a virtual environment, meeting facilitators and organizers will want to use a much shorter format. This could mean trimming topics, not allowing for enough discussion, or organizing two meetings instead of one.

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Pros and Cons of Face-to-Face Meetings

Pros:

More effective communication: Face-to-face meetings allow people to express themselves more easily and observe the body language of others. Eye contact, facial expression, and gestures contribute to the messages we send verbally.

Increased ability to build trust: Meeting face-to-face shows commitment; the subtleties of how we interact when in person (for example, eye contact) can increase or decrease trust. People can give and immediately receive feedback in verbal and nonverbal ways. That is why it is recommended to have face-to-face meetings when discussing sensitive subjects.

Participant presence/focus: When attendees take the time to travel to and/or attend a meeting in person, they are more committed to get things done. Distractions like phone, email, and interruptions are minimized, thus allowing participants to focus on the meeting.

Increased productivity: Face-to-face environments allow for easier discussions and brainstorming and provide a more effective environment for constructive or ideological conflict to occur. This often leads to a more productive meeting where effective decisions get made.

Personal connection: When people enter face-to-face meetings, they can greet each other with smiles and handshakes and make personal connections. Face-to-face meetings often have more time built in for check-ins and provide more space to build rapport and relationships.

Pros and Cons of Virtual vs. Face-to-Face Meetings



Pros and Cons of Face-to-Face Meetings, Continued

Cons:
Limits participation: Unless considerable planning is done in advance, participation is typically limited to those in the same location (or at least city). This means that some key stakeholders may not be able to attend, thus stalling conversations, decisions, and go-forward plans.
Less convenient: Whether you are meeting two floors down, across the city, or in another country, it takes time to physically get to a face-to-face meeting. These types of meetings also require advanced planning such as booking meeting rooms and organizing technology (for example, projectors).
Increased cost: Face-face meetings cost money. Whether it is travel considerations, the cost of the meeting room, refreshments, or the opportunity time lost for travel, they all add up.
Scheduling issues: It takes time to plan a face-to-face meeting; this can be particularly challenging when key stakeholders have tight schedules and need to attend from different locations.