

Tips for Facilitating Virtual / Remote Teams

- Call participants individually before meeting to brief them and break the ice. In this brief discussion establish the meeting's purpose and agenda, anticipate resistance, etc.
- Create a written agenda and send it out in advance of the meeting—include goals, time frames, speakers, what to bring, how to prepare, etc.
- Establish norms and ground rules up front (i.e., don't use the mute, no multi-tasking, etc.).
- Test the media and technology beforehand to make sure it works.
- Verify who is on the line, and ask people to state their name before they speak.
- Call each person by name as often as possible during the meeting. This helps create a greater sense of connection and community.
- Reflect frequently; occasionally be more obvious by prefacing. For example, “Let me see if I understand what you're saying ...” or “Just to make sure I'm hearing you right, it sounds like...”
- Check for understanding frequently: “How does that sound?”; “What do you all think?”; “Are there any questions about what you just heard?”
- Announce your intention and preface questions: “I want to find out what each of you think...” or “To make sure we've explored every avenue...”
- Avoid one-on-one conversations and side-bar conversations, especially with people physically in room with you (or if you must, identify what you are doing).
- Wrap up and summarize at the end of the meeting.
- Soon after the meeting, distribute a summary that includes action items and accountabilities.
- In international settings:
 - verify languages spoken;
 - speak clearly and slowly;
 - use simple words;
 - summarize frequently;
 - avoid slang and acronyms;
 - appreciate and acknowledge time zone differences.
- When using PowerPoint:
 - use numbered slides, and announce what slide you're referencing.
 - avoid animation and special effects

Bibliography: Facilitation Skills and Virtual Teams

The Skilled Facilitator

Roger Schwarz: Jossey-Bass, 2002

This updated version of the classic work is filled with useful examples and contains techniques for running meetings, methods for handling emotions when they arise in a group, and a diagnostic approach for identifying and solving problems that can undermine the group process.

Leading Teams: Setting the Stage for Great Performances

J. Richard Hackman: Harvard Business School Press, 2002

This is a comprehensive examination of what it takes to create and sustain self-directed teams. It provides a general conceptual framework for success and offers a new and provocative way of thinking about and leading work teams in any organizational setting. It's also well written and full of relevant examples.

Virtual Teams: Reaching Across Space, Time and Organizations with Technology

Jessica Lipnack & Jeffrey Stamps: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1997

This book provides a comprehensive framework that makes virtual teams accessible and practical. Featuring insightful case studies, this reference offers information on virtual team principles, the skills and technologies necessary for creating a successful virtual team, and ways to support the dynamics of the cross-boundary team as well as enhance personal communications electronically.

The Distance Manager: A Hands-On Guide to Managing Off-Site Employees and Virtual Teams

Kimball Fisher & Mareen Fisher: McGraw-Hill, 2000

This work offers advice to managers about getting top performance from employees they rarely see. It explains how to coach employees via e-mail and telephone, and how to avoid communication and interpersonal problems caused by long distance working relationships.

Managing Without Walls: Maximize Success with Virtual, Global and Cross-cultural Teams

Coleen Garten & Kevin Wegryn: Mc Press, 2006

This pragmatic book offers many ideas for working with global teams, including understanding the phases of cultural adjustment when building a team, writing clear and explicit emails that prevent misunderstanding, celebrating local holidays, and even preparing for and managing catastrophes (which may well occur with people distributed all over the world). It includes a useful assessment of virtual management skills.