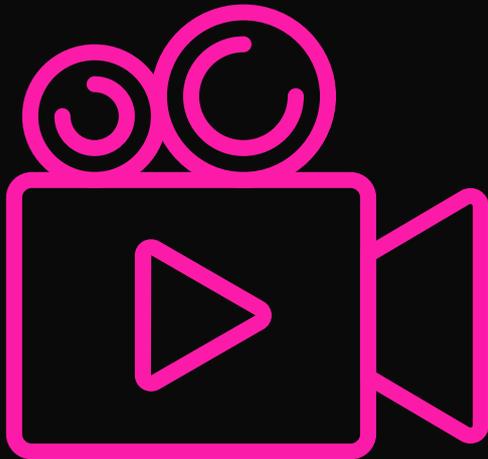




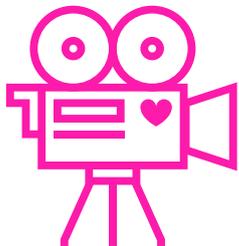
**COLLABORATION SUPERPOWERS**

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**TURN  
YOUR  
CAMERAS  
ON**

# BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES TO TURNING CAMERAS ON DURING ONLINE MEETINGS



In the wake of the pandemic, video conferencing has become a common practice amongst workers worldwide. And the question about whether or not we should turn our cameras on has sparked great debate between managers and employees, with many managers believing that in the absence of cameras, workers show lower levels of engagement and productivity. However, there is new evidence to suggest that turning your video cameras off during online meetings may actually increase productivity and engagement levels. But before everyone begins turning their camera off, we must also explore some of the other benefits of being “present” in online meetings, and what we all can do to make the experience better.

## WHY DO WE WANT TO SEE OUR COLLEAGUES?

Humans are profoundly visual by nature. In order to build rapport, trust, and understanding, visual cues are helpful, and imagery is well understood to be a powerful tool to help us learn new information. When we can't see the people we are communicating with, we're unable to gauge our audience's response, which would further allow us to direct or redirect the meeting. From a simple nod and note-taking to a far-off gaze and crossed arms, these signals help inform and encourage people during presentations. Explaining the benefits of adding this visual element to the conversation could help motivate people to switch their cameras on.

### TIP!



Run an experiment. Turn your camera off without any warning in the middle of a meeting and see how people react. Most often they will begin to comment that you've lost connection, or your camera is broken. You can then hold a discussion of the impact it had on the meeting.

“Approximately 30% of meetings involved email multitasking, according to a recent study.”

Another major inhibitor to leaving the camera off is that it can be perceived as showing a lack of interest. Some believe that turning a camera off is a clear indicator of “disconnect” and often comes with a fear of not being able to see if people are interested and engaged with what they are seeing and hearing. A “camera-off” culture allows behaviors we would not otherwise accept in face-to-face meetings, such as checking email and mobile phones, grabbing a snack, and completely disengaging.

Approximately 30% of meetings involved email multitasking, according to a recent study (1). Not surprisingly, many participants (32%) noted they were more likely to multitask when the video camera and microphone were turned off. According to these findings, multitasking was more likely to occur at meetings that were large, long in duration, scheduled early in the morning, routinely occurring, or perceived as less relevant.

## SOME CHALLENGES WE FACE

“Zoom fatigue” is a term we’re all too familiar with by now, with many workers reporting feeling mentally and physically exhausted by online meetings. Recent research (2) has shown that this exhaustion is due to several factors, one of which is prolonged direct eye gaze. In a typical face-to-face meeting, participants spend very little time looking directly into each other's eyes. On the contrary, in a video conference, individuals tend to stare more intensely at one another for the duration of the meeting (3).

### TIP!

Have camera free meetings or days. Not every meeting needs to have cameras on and if you embrace turning them off at times, people may be more likely to turn them on when needed.





...seeing one's self-image can make users hyper-aware of their own appearances, leading to the feeling of self-consciousness and always being on. ”

Another factor is that images of others on screen can appear too large and too close, causing increased brain activity, biochemical changes, and physiological states associated with high alert and fight-or-flight responses (4). This is because the size and proximity of such images can infringe on our sense of personal space or cause us to subconsciously perceive them as threatening.

Moreover, meeting participants may also experience information overload as they attempt to focus on multiple faces at the same time, all in one-inch boxes that often jump from one position on the screen to another as different individuals speak. This is complicated by the fact that during virtual meetings, participants' attention is drawn not only to other people's faces but also to people or things visible in other people's backgrounds (5).

## OTHER ISSUES & DISTRACTIONS

Although useful at times, the chat function can add to participants' information processing load, especially if the content detracts from the meeting (6). Furthermore, seeing one's self-image can make users hyper-aware of their own appearances, leading to the feeling of self-consciousness and always being on (7).

Zoom fatigue isn't the only issue we face. When people are starting at different playing fields, issues will begin to arise.

### TIP!



Turn off self-view. The research suggests that "self-presentation" is one of the major stressors. You can minimise the reminder of self-presentation by disabling your self-view.

“Low bandwidth, lack of private home office, and embarrassment of the home environment are all among the many reasons people don’t turn their cameras on.”

Policies and programs delivered by organizations and the managers they support hopefully ensure that everyone has access to the “same” or “equal” opportunities. But our diverse employee populations have different experiences and different needs. The work from home (WFH) model that’s taken hold since the start of the pandemic has exposed these differences more than ever, which has brought up the question of equity.

To have reasonable expectations, we must take into account that not everyone has access to the same resources. Low bandwidth, lack of private home office, and embarrassment of the home environment are all among the many reasons people don’t turn their cameras on. While some high-paid executives can afford top technology and high bandwidth, the reality of some of their colleagues is exceptionally different.

## NO ONE SAW IT COMING

Because many remote workers have been forced into the situation due to COVID19, they weren't prepared to move their offices into their homes. There's a lot of thinking and investing that goes into a remote work setup, and finances have to be considered. There are people who may not be able to afford the internet speed needed to facilitate online meetings. Furthermore, they may not be able to join a meeting free of kids, pets, and other distractions, in which case, they opt to leave their cameras off.

### TIP!



Craft a few questions related to camera's on/off and let the team debate and discuss what the pros and cons are of having cameras on during meetings. As a team, come up with a plan that works for everyone.

# WHAT THE NEW EVIDENCE SUGGESTS...

It's widely regarded as one of the biggest faux pas of our digital age – but a new study (8) led by Allison Gabriel, McClelland Professor of Management and Organisations and University Distinguished Scholar in the University of Arizona Eller College of Management suggests that **turning your camera off during a video meeting may actually be beneficial, stating that those who kept their cameras off were more productive and less fatigued.**

The analysis, which included a four-week experiment of 103 participants, and over 1,400 observations, concluded that having cameras on can have a negative impact on the overall meeting. The authors of the study believe this is due to the self-presentation pressure associated with being on camera.

The study found that the effects were stronger for women and newer employees. “Women often feel the pressure to be effortlessly perfect or have a greater likelihood of childcare interruptions, and newer employees feel like they must be on camera and participate in order to show productiveness,” states Gabriel.

The team of researchers also found that workers feel more exhausted when their camera is on during the virtual meeting and are, therefore, contributing less. The experts further observed that excluding the video camera makes workers free from gazing at each other's faces; so that they can concentrate more on the main topics of the meetings.

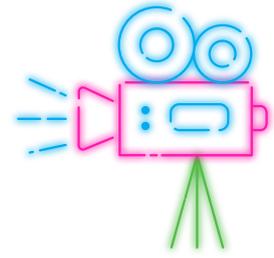
Gabriel suggests that rather than expecting employees to keep their cameras on during online meetings, they should be given the autonomy to choose whether or not to use their cameras, and employees should not make assumptions about distractedness or productivity if the camera is off.

## TIP!

Ask people to turn their cameras on for the first and last five minutes to say hello and goodbye. This gets them comfortable with it and they eventually forget to turn it off.



## HOW CAN WE MOTIVATE OUR COLLEAGUES TO TURN THEIR CAMERAS ON?



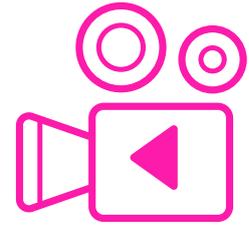
- **LEARN WHY PEOPLE DON'T WANT TO TURN THEIR CAMERAS ON.** The worst mistake we can make is assuming the reason is the same for everyone. As a manager, getting to know your team is important. From a simple questionnaire to one-on-one time, if you want your colleagues to turn the camera on, you must first understand what's holding them back.
- **SET REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS.** The best way to do this is by creating a Team Agreement – **an outline of company policies and expectations.** This should be made visible to old and new employees and updated often. Should cameras be required for every meeting or just smaller, shorter ones? **Having a professional background and looking ready, or keeping children out of the room are among some of the presentation pressures** that employees report feeling. To ease this, consider options for those who don't have access to private spaces.
- **SET MEETING ETIQUETTE.** Meetings are part of the everyday lives of most professionals – but that doesn't mean they're always professional. From showing up late to having a busy background, as a manager, you have to decide what's acceptable and what's not? Is it ok to eat and drink? If you don't want to see chewing during your online event, try not to schedule meetings during lunch hour. If you must for time zone reasons, try to be flexible with this – people will be less focused if they're thinking about what they're going to eat. Creating a list of "do's and don'ts" at the start of the meeting is a great way to keep things running smoothly.



## HOW CAN WE MOTIVATE OUR COLLEAGUES TO TURN THEIR CAMERAS ON?

- **ORGANIZE BETTER MEETINGS.** When constructed well, meetings can provide a forum for creative thinking, discussion, debate, information sharing, problem-solving, and decision making. They can also help organizations meet important employees' socio-emotional needs such as empowerment, engagement, affiliation, and perceptions of supervisor support. When poorly structured and managed, meetings can result in negative employee dispositions that lower employee perceptions of their work and well-being, as well as having a negative impact on an organization's bottom line. To avoid poorly focused and unproductive meetings, always set an agenda and goals for the meeting.
- **APPOINT A MEETING FACILITATOR.** A skilled facilitator can make a meeting feel thoughtful, cohesive, participatory, and even enjoyable. Every facilitator has a different style, and every group has different dynamics. A good facilitator adapts to the needs of each particular team and meeting. This person can get everyone to share their voices amidst the various personalities, opinions, and sensitivities that exist in any group of humans, while also guiding the group to achieve the desired outcome within the meeting time constraints.
- **TAKE THE PRESSURE OFF.** The research suggests that "self-presentation costs" are one of the stressors. To minimize the reminder of self-presentation, try turning off your self-view. And if you don't have access to a private space, choose a professional-looking virtual background so others can't see your home.

## HOW CAN WE MOTIVATE OUR COLLEAGUES TO TURN THEIR CAMERAS ON?



- **TAKE BREAKS.** Zoom fatigue sets in if meetings go beyond 1.5 hours and then you've lost your audience. If your meeting runs longer than 45 minutes, remember to take a 5 to 10-minute break to allow people to stand up, stretch, and refresh.
- **HAVE SHORTER MEETINGS.** To make remote meetings work, we must first acknowledge that meeting online is not the same as meeting in person. Before you even schedule the meeting, ask yourself if it's really necessary or if things can be done asynchronously. If it's important to meet, set a time (an hour or less) and stick to it.
- **RECOGNIZE TIME ZONE DIFFERENCES.** There are 24 different time zones worldwide, which, unfortunately, aren't divided equally. Throw daylight savings time into the mix and you've got a recipe for missed meetings. Because of time zone differences, you may have to schedule multiple meetings in a day. Be sure everyone has the same meeting agenda and assign groups according to their time zone.
- **HAVE REGULAR "EYES BREAKERS".** As we've seen in the research, staring at tiny pixels, and unnatural light all day can strain your eyes, which can lead to headaches, blurry vision, dry eyes, and neck and shoulder pain. To ease this, it's important to give your eyes a break. A good technique is to look into the distance and blink 20 times every twenty minutes. This allows your eyes to refocus and secrete the oils needed to keep the eyes lubricated and functioning well. ("Eyes breakers" is a term coined by Collaboration Superpowers' finance queen, Tahira Shameem).