



## Business (not) as usual:

# Tips for strategic virtual collaboration

Business is navigating disruptive and unprecedented times. In such uncertainty, aligning teams, solving important problems, gaining deep insights and accelerating decision-making is more important than ever.

While some aspects of 'normal' business activity will temporarily cease, the need for insightful and impactful co-created solutions won't. The options businesses physically use to 'get together,' such as workshops, storyboard sessions and breakout groups are no longer possible to many, for the time being. Nevertheless, well-designed collaboration remains vital to maintaining business continuity.

Virtual collaboration requires more than a video conference call, and it is important that organisations continue to create the opportunity and space for truly collaborative insights and outcome-driven conversations to occur. Where complexity exists, it's important to make the effort to go beyond the basics of a shared slide presentation on a video conference call and to maintain the value of a human-centred experience, even in a virtual world.

Enabling alignment and accelerated decision-making online will require a combination of [behavioural science](#), human-centred design, content curation and impartial facilitation.

Here are some of the most important elements to keep in mind in developing a virtual facilitated session:

### Design for humans

The magic of collaboration is in humans. But for it to happen, the technology used should make engagement easy and enjoyable, not more difficult. Put people's experience first (human-centred design) to craft a session that feels natural, purposeful and memorable so that everyone can engage before, during, and when necessary, after the session. Multiple methods of facilitation are also important, such as small group activities between virtual teams, whole group facilitated conversations, interactive virtual whiteboards and gamification techniques.

### Inhabit the same space

In a virtual session, the imperative of having everyone in the same 'room' doesn't change — that room just happens to be online. Staring at someone's back while they work on a physical whiteboard with sticky notes that you can't read from your laptop isn't much fun, therefore it's important to ensure the only space the work is done — whether a whiteboard or sticky note — is virtual. Everything people need should be on their screens and accessible in the same 'virtual room'.

### Be democratic (but remember, it's not a democracy)

In a physical environment, it's easier to notice when people want to contribute and what's required to keep a group on track to achieve the desired outcomes. In a virtual session this can be more problematic. Facilitators need to actively guide discussions to ensure everyone has equal access to contributing to the conversation and being heard. This can engender confidence in the value of the session — promoting active participation by all, accelerating progress and aligning outcomes.

## Deliver an experience

Distraction is a constant threat in virtual meetings, especially when people are dialing in individually from remote (and distraction-full) locations such as working from home. It's crucial to design sessions that are highly experiential and engaging from the initial invitation through to optimising the length and time of the session and the range of experiences and interactions throughout.

## Engage early and prepare like never before

Pre-engagement and preparation are arguably more important for virtual sessions. Everyone needs to understand the conditions for success. It's a good idea to send participants a pre-session kit, including things like how to test their technology before the meeting and how to participate fully in the session. Helping each person prepare to be online in their own right, and designing the experience accordingly, will provide the opportunity for people to participate as much as they would if they were there in person.

## Steps to design for outcomes

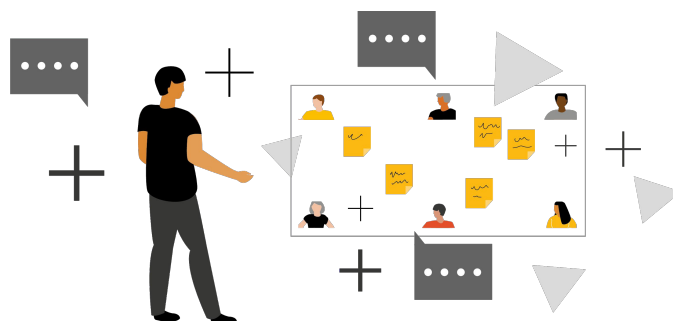
There are four essential steps that should be taken when designing a virtual collaboration session to support successful outcomes.

**1. Scope informed objectives:** Firstly, set up expert, impartial facilitation of a core group of sponsors (who will own the outcomes) to co-create a concise scope and clear objectives for the session from rational, emotional and political perspectives. This step — and the right people — are crucial to co-designing a relevant, meaningful session that will reach actionable outcomes.

**2. Curate and design:** Co-design the session with the sponsors to identify the insights, content and subject matter expertise required. Sourcing diverse perspectives with the right participant group can ensure the session stimulates the right discussions. Guiding the simplification and curation of existing, often complex, content to suit the virtual environment, meet session objectives and make productive use of time will be key.

**3. Facilitate and deliver:** The end-to-end experience should be facilitated. This means the entire session should exist in a virtual space created specifically for the occasion such as a virtual whiteboard platform or event app. Facilitation throughout with clear direction, inclusion of all voices and allocating fixed time periods for activities can inspire confidence and active participation. Facilitators should stimulate diverse thinking and productive conversations through a range of individual, small group and whole group work that leverages the group's collective thinking, rather than just that of the loudest voice in the room.

**4. Maintain the momentum:** Real time capturing and sharing of the work can enable action and broader engagement beyond the session. Agree on an approach to accelerate implementation and action and immediately develop a communications strategy and effective tools. This can engage, align and activate outcomes and maintain the momentum created by the session.



## Real collaboration doesn't need a real room

In this time of disruption, virtual collaboration sessions can help you to keep working on your most important issues, harness group wisdom and importantly, achieve outcomes that can help deliver. Impartial, skilled facilitation and precise communication will be imperative to effectively bring in relevant voices, solve problems, accelerate decision-making and align outcomes. While at first it may seem difficult not being in a physical space together, the tools exist that can set you up for successful collaboration in a virtual environment now and into the future.

### Contacts

Justin Homer

+61 423 608 699

justin.homer@pwc.com

Karyn Hobbs

+61 416 224 901

karyn.hobbs@pwc.com

[pwc.com.au](http://pwc.com.au)

© 2020 PricewaterhouseCoopers. All rights reserved. PwC refers to the Australia member firm, and may sometimes refer to the PwC network. Each member firm is a separate legal entity. Please see [www.pwc.com/structure](http://www.pwc.com/structure) for further details. Liability limited by a scheme approved under Professional Standards Legislation.