

Effective Communication in a Remote Environment

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In a world that is striving to return to more “normal” personal and professional environments, there are opportunities to reflect and improve on adaptations that were born out of necessity due to the COVID-19 pandemic. While there were disruptions in the usual processes that professional entities used pre-pandemic, not all changes made in the last couple years should be scrapped, nor should organizations completely revert to the ways of the past.

The largest shift in the business environment due to the pandemic was the sudden need for a remote working environment. While remote working helped realize some large positive shifts for organizations, remote communication has also decreased the efficiency of “normal” business activities.

Remote Environment Working Channels of Communication

The abundance of different types of communication channels is fantastic for organizations; however, the amount can lead to an overwhelming amount of choices for organizations. The common remote communications are phone calls, video conferences, and emails.

The positive aspect of each of these mediums is that each has strengths for different purposes. Phone calls are good for questions that may need quick follow ups and to be able to hear verbal cues. Video conferences are wonderful for being able to see each person on the call as well as picking up on non-verbal indications. Emails are fantastic for keeping information in a place that is able to be reviewed in the future and put more detail into questions and responses. Each of these forms of communication do help to bridge the gap

between the remote environment and keeping lines open between organizations or within organizations; however, these mediums do have their own weaknesses.

Weaknesses of Remote Communication

The reason so many options for communication exist is due to the fact that each of them contribute something positive to business organizations' ability to effectively communicate. While having many forms of communication in a remote environment is great for organizations to be able to respond to other organizations through multiple mediums, not all forms are without their issues.

Remote working is associated with more productivity due to less travel time – offices are 15 feet away from where individuals get ready for the day as opposed to 15 miles. However, deficiencies can be caused by the very communication mediums that try to increase effectiveness of being in a remote environment.

Phone calls are probably the most efficient way to communicate in a remote environment, unless a game of voicemail tag commences when two individuals are not near their phones at the same time. The biggest issue for this form of communication is not having a record that can be revisited after the call. Unless the callers have outstanding memories or very simple questions, other forms of communication may need to be used to make sure that all thoughts and ideas can be used in the future.

Video conferences solve the issue of saving information because most can be recorded with a simple click of a mouse. The problem with this medium of communication, though, is that video conferences usually need to be scheduled, requiring another form of communication to set up the meeting before it can actually commence.

Emails address problems faced by the two other main forms of remote communication. There are no concerns about being able to review the information; emails will save all information between both parties. The other positive is that emails are able to be forwarded, saved, and reviewed by other individuals or organizations. Timeliness is the concern with using emails as a form of communication. Emails are quite simple to lose track of, can sit in an inbox for weeks without receiving a response, and can lack the emotional clarity that can be understood from other mediums of communication.

Improvements for the Future

A simple fix to the challenges associated with different forms of remote communication would be to perhaps remove the remote side of things and walk down the hall for a quick chat; however, remote working is not going anywhere anytime soon.

The emphasis should not be on a selecting a “best” form of remote conversation, but that, while there are many options available, understanding how and when certain mediums should be used over others is always dependent on the needs of specific organizations and individuals.

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