

Smart guide

# Make web meetings more motivating and meaningful

7 ways to overcome the obstacles



# Web meetings don't have to be frightening. Here's help.

**By now, virtual meetings have become an everyday practice at most organizations.**

So it makes you wonder why so many web meetings are like scary movies: They're creepy and spooky and they send chills up your spine.

It doesn't have to be this way. In fact, web meetings can be more engaging and productive than face-to-face sessions. But you can't just improvise—an effective virtual meeting requires both careful planning and attentive facilitation.

Here are the seven most alarming challenges of web meetings and ideas for overcoming each obstacle.



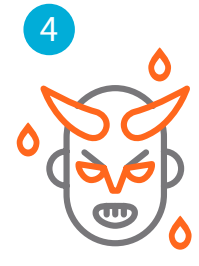
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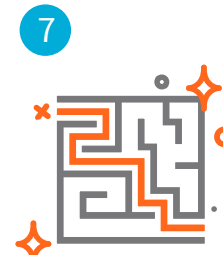
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# 1 Challenge: Jaws



## Problem

The meeting doesn't accomplish anything—no progress is made—so after an hour, everyone's hungry for action.

## Solution

Develop one to three clear objectives.

Decide on one to three outcomes for your meeting (no more). The worst virtual meetings contain a kitchen sink full of miscellaneous stuff, messy and without direction. It's the "and" trap: "As long as we're holding the meeting," organizers say, "we might as well cover this and that and the other thing, and something else." By contrast, the best are focused with a clear purpose.

The solution is to limit the agenda to one to three (and no more) topics that matter most, and spend quality time exploring each.

To hone it down to those few objectives...

### Ask yourself these questions:

- What do I need participants to learn during this meeting?
- What will they know afterwards that they didn't know before?
- What decision will be made?
- How will participants' viewpoints or perspectives change?
- How will their beliefs be affected?
- What will participants be prepared to do after the meeting?
- How will they take action?





## 2 Challenge: The Blob



### Problem

The session has no structure, and oozes from topic to topic without a plan.

### Solution

Create an interactive agenda.

Design your meeting to achieve your objectives. The old-fashioned word for this is “agenda,” but you need to do more than create a bulleted list of content to cover. You should “design” your web meeting to have a flow that makes sense, opportunities for participants to... well, participate, and to manage time so that you get everything done. This is not a task you can dash off in 10 minutes; you need to think through how to cover your subject matter and engage participants.

To get started, think of your virtual meeting as a television talk show. You’ll need a dynamic host, interesting guests, supporting visuals, clips and stories, and opportunities for audience feedback.

In a virtual setting, you have to plan opportunities for collaboration and participation. Identify the tools you’ll use in your agenda so it’s clear what the speaker or facilitator should do.

Here are three ways to build in interaction:

- **Provide verbal and visual cues.** For example, with a leader on a live video feed, they can say, “After I finish sharing this information, I will ask for your thoughts and ideas.”
- **Use “Chat.”** The instant messaging tool allows participants to write a question or a comment at any time, which is then posted for all to see, and which the facilitator can respond to when ready.
- **Go “around the table.”** Using the participant list, ask each person to provide his/her input in turn. Capture key points on the whiteboard.



# 3 Challenge: Twilight Zone



## Problem

Participants that can't attend the meeting in person feel like they're in an alternate universe.

## Solution

Give all participants the same experience.

Hosting a virtual meeting is a great way to involve people from many locations. But you have to make sure that each attendee has an equal opportunity to share, collaborate and participate.

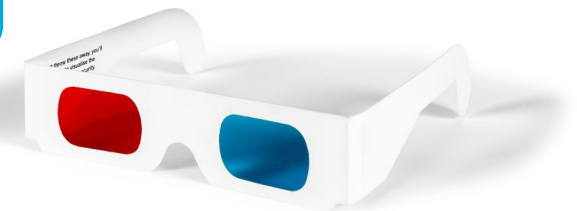
The best way to accomplish that? Have everyone participate virtually, with no one physically in the same room.

If that's not possible, here are two ways to create a more equal experience:

- 1 In each location, assign a facilitator whose role is to collect local questions and comments. Each facilitator then provides that input to a central coordinator, who posts responses or verbally shares what people are contributing.
- 2 Go global, then switch to local. Invite all locations to join for a virtual all-hands meeting hosted by a top leader. Then turn off the feed and hold in-person sessions at each location, at which time a leader facilitates a discussion about what attendees need to do to support the overall effort.



*Also, don't forget to get feedback at the end of your meeting. By finding out what's working and what isn't, you have an opportunity to continuously improve your web meetings.*



# 4

## Challenge: The Exorcist



### Problem

The presenter becomes possessed and drones on and on with little opportunity for others to participate.

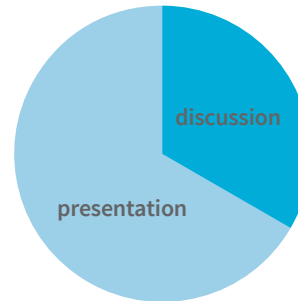
### Solution

Manage time wisely.

The ideal web meeting lasts from one hour to 1.5 hours—any shorter and you may not be able to accomplish your objectives; any longer and participants begin to tire. Because time is limited, the wise management of time is a critical success factor for web meetings. (Conversely, the most common pitfall of web meetings is a presentation that goes on too long, stealing time that could be spent discussing the issues, solving problems or developing ideas.)



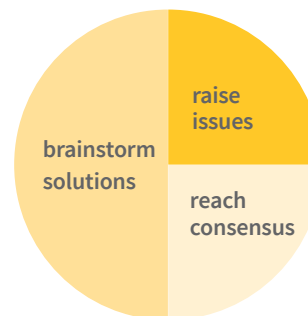
Think about the ideal ratio for managing the time during your meeting:



When you have a lot of content to get through, you might want to allocate two-thirds of the meeting for presenting. But make sure to allow one-third for discussion and other participation.



For a meeting that's designed to solve problems and come up with action steps, consider a 1/3-1/3-1/3 format.



Web meetings don't have to include presentations. Here's a format for a meeting where participants raise issues about a particular problem, then spend the rest of their time developing solutions.

# 5 Challenge: The Sixth Sense



## Problem

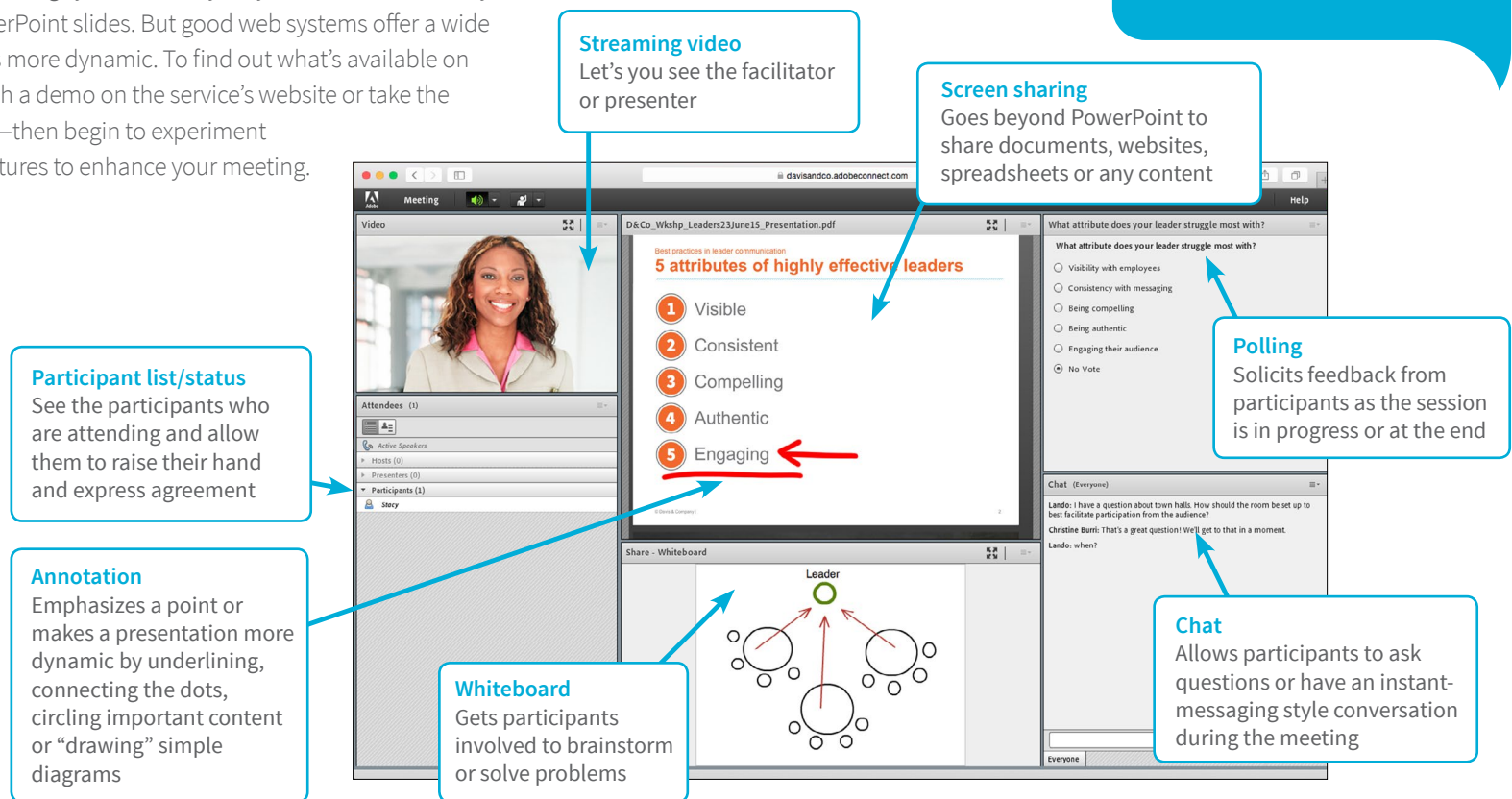
Participants can sense a poorly planned web meeting and aren't engaged.

## Solution

Know your web meeting tools.

Get to know the tools in your (web meeting) toolbox. Many meeting organizers are not comfortable with the meeting system, so they only use the few tools they know—usually presenting PowerPoint slides. But good web systems offer a wide array of tools to make meetings more dynamic. To find out what's available on your web meeting service, watch a demo on the service's website or take the available training (usually free)—then begin to experiment with how you can use these features to enhance your meeting.

Here's what's available on **Adobe Connect**. Most web meeting systems offer similar tools.





# 6

## Challenge: Night of the Living Dead



### Problem

With no role in the meeting, participants become so bored they need to be brought back to life.

### Solution

Set expectations and provide opportunities to participate.

Employees are used to one-way web meetings, where they do other work while pretending to pay attention. But you're about to change the game, to make the web meeting a much more interactive experience. So it's important to manage participants' expectations, so everyone understands when and how to participate.

To set expectations, at the beginning of every meeting let participants know:

- What will be accomplished in this session (objectives/outcomes)
- What will be covered, including order and timing (agenda)
- What everyone in the meeting will do (roles)
- How the meeting will be conducted (rules)

But, just setting expectations doesn't guarantee people will participate. When you're sitting alone at your computer, it's hard to be creative right off the bat. Help attendees out by facilitating discussion and participation.



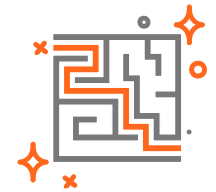
### Here's how

- **Prime the pump.** Boost idea-generation by introducing some concepts at the beginning of your session.
- **Ask a question and invite a messy flow of answers.** The "chat" tool is great for this because participants can all contribute at the same time.
- **Write ideas on the whiteboard.** From the chat stream, pull concepts that have potential and post them on a whiteboard.
- **Vote on concepts to pursue.** Create a poll where you ask participants to rate the top five ideas based on certain criteria: whether it has the potential to have a significant impact, for instance, or whether it's easy to implement.





# 7 Challenge: The Labyrinth



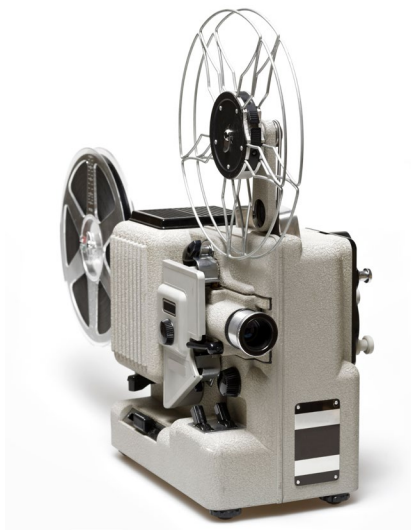
## Problem

There is an elaborate structure of PowerPoint presentations that are long, complicated and impossible to decode.

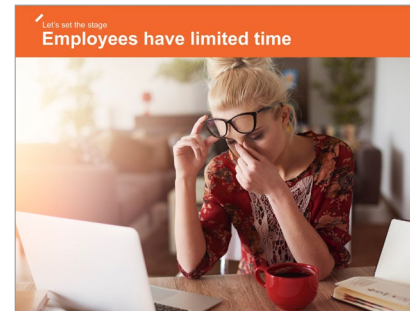
## Solution

Use more visual slides.

Web meetings have a wonderful attribute: the ability to use visuals to make the session more compelling. That's why it's a shame when a presenter clicks to a slide and stays there and stays there, as the minutes tick (slowly) by. Since it doesn't cost you more to add slides, use a lot of them—and keep them moving. But you need to change the construction of your slides: one point or topic per slide using less words and more visuals.



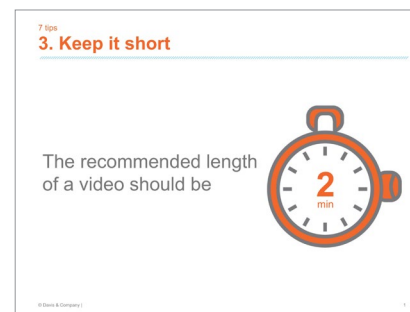
## The best slides...



Let visuals tell the story



Use large, clear type



Cover only one point



# Virtual meeting makeover!



## Situation

The Human Resources (HR) department of a global health care company was about to make significant changes to its performance management system, which would affect how employees were managed around the world. To prepare local Human Resources representatives for the change, HR management decided to conduct a web meeting for all 120 reps. But the organizers weren't very skilled at web meetings, so the session was a mess. Participants felt the meeting was too long, lacked interaction and left them feeling overwhelmed.

## Before

Here's the framework used for this meeting with **key problem areas highlighted:**

**Objectives** aren't really objectives, just a list of what will be covered

**The more attendees**, the more challenging it can be to manage group dynamics

**Information overload**—need to balance content with group participation

### Objectives:

- Share performance management competencies
- Provide context and definitions
- Show tools
- Discuss planning efforts
- Review cascade process
- Examine calendar

**Timing:** 2:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m. Eastern Time (3 hours)

**Participants:** All HR reps (120 total)

### Speakers:

- John McCullough
- Bob Jacobs
- Juan Santana
- Jill Li
- Amanda Gibbons

**Meeting format:** Web meeting with 125 PowerPoint deck slides; presentation followed by Q&A session

### Agenda:

- Performance management philosophy
- Overall changes
- New tools
- Timeline

**Too long**—and the time frame isn't convenient for participants in Europe or Asia

**Is it critical for everyone to speak?** If so, what is each person's role?

**Agenda** is loosely defined—missing introduction section to manage expectations, as well as timing and key discussion points for each section





# Virtual meeting makeover!



After

Here's how the meeting should have been held, applying the principles of effective web meetings described in this smart guide:

Reduce the length of the meeting by dividing the content into two parts.

Repeat the same session multiple times to accommodate different time zones and promote stronger group dynamics with fewer participants in each session.

Use online tools to make the meeting engaging, productive and dynamic.



## Objectives

By the end of this session participants will understand:

- What's changing with the performance management program and why
- What their role is in the process
- How to access related tools and information

Make your objectives clear, succinct and linked to participants' needs.

## Timing

Part 1: 7:00 a.m. – 8:30 a.m. Eastern time (1.5 hours)  
1:00 p.m. – 2:30 p.m. Eastern time (1.5 hours)  
Part 2: 7:00 a.m. – 8:30 a.m. Eastern time (1.5 hours)  
1:00 p.m. – 2:30 p.m. Eastern time (1.5 hours)

## Participants

HRBPs separated by region

## Speakers

	7:00 a.m. – 8:30 a.m.	1:00 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.
Part 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• John McCullough</li><li>• Amanda Gibbons</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• John McCullough</li><li>• Bob Jacobs</li></ul>
Part 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• John McCullough</li><li>• Jill Li</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• John McCullough</li><li>• Juan Santana</li></ul>

Assign a maximum of two speakers per meeting.

## Meeting format

Web meeting tools used as follows:

- Online PowerPoint presentation to guide the discussion
- Virtual whiteboard to brainstorm ideas
- Real-time chat to share thoughts and questions
- Quick polls to gauge needs and preferences

Establish a solid agenda, with key timing and discussion points clearly defined.

## Agenda

Time	Topic	Discussion points
15 minutes	Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Show slides containing the meeting agenda, roles and rules of the road</li></ul>
30 minutes	What's changing and why	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Engage participants by allowing them to brainstorm and document upcoming changes on a virtual whiteboard</li></ul>
30 minutes	Your role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ask participants to share their ideas for supporting the changes in real-time chat</li></ul>
15 minutes	Closing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Show slides containing a summary of discussion points</li><li>• Conduct an online poll to gauge participants' evaluation of the meeting</li></ul>

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## Take web meetings to the next level.

We can help you to:

- Develop clear objectives
- Create an interactive agenda
- Give everyone the same experience
- Manage the time
- Master web meeting tools
- Provide opportunities to participate
- Be more visual

## 5 things to know about us



**Global.** We've created communication programs that reach employees across the world, in nearly every continent (but not, we admit, Antarctica).



**Experienced.** We have decades of experience in communicating change, initiatives, HR programs and policies, and many other topics.



**Collaborative.** Our favorite way of working is to meet with our clients and put our heads together.



**Client-focused.** Our mission is to help you solve your problems. To set you up for success. To make sure you get the recognition you deserve. (We think you get the picture.)



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