

This combination of factors plays into the current workplace era, where flexibility is prioritized more than ever before and employees are given choices about how and where they want to work. For some employees, that means continuing to work from home. For others, that translates into a welcome return to the brick-and-mortar office. But for the largest proportion of knowledge workers surveyed time and again by various outlets and organizations, that involves a work-week where a few days are spent in the office and a few days are spent somewhere else, whether it be home, a local coffee shop, or a far-flung locale with decent Wi-Fi. The age of the hybrid workforce is upon us and at the center of getting business done is the hybrid meeting.

Prior to COVID-19, hybrid meetings were relatively rare and consisted of the majority of attendees being in-person with perhaps someone dialing in (and often forgotten about). The hybrid meeting of today has a totally different configuration and may involve a group of people gathered in one conference room, maybe another group of people gathered in a huddle room somewhere else, and a variety of folks showing up in their own individual boxes on screen via their personal webcams.

This relatively simple description undersells the complexity of a hybrid meeting in contrast to the meetings we are all more familiar with, where either everyone is gathered around a table or everyone is on their webcams. Managing the expectations, participation, and conversation flow for all of these different constituencies is fraught with challenges but presents opportunities as well. The leaders who lean into developing new skills and the attendees who figure out how to make their voices heard will emerge victorious in the evolving workplace meeting landscape, which can be more inclusive than ever before. But what do we need to learn, what skills do we need to develop in this hybrid meeting environment, and how do we know what actually works?

The Purpose of This Book

When we wrote our first book, *Suddenly Virtual: Making Remote Meetings Work*, it hit bookstore shelves at just about the right time – almost a year after the global stay-at-home orders were announced. At that point, many businesses were used to meeting virtually, but most did not feel like they were doing it well. They were also realizing that virtual meetings were not a Band-Aid, not simply a way to communicate with their teams and their customers in the short term until a return to face-to-face. Rather, virtual meetings were becoming an important part of the corporate communication DNA, and will likely remain so for years to come. *Suddenly Virtual* offered science-based insights into best practices, so businesses could be more strategic in their approach and get the most out of their virtual engagements, both internal and external. We are hoping *Suddenly Hybrid* will fill the same role.

Remember those muscles that we have been stretching seemingly nonstop since March 2020 as we have sought to respond to the changing face of the pandemic? So much of our energy has been focused on adapting to the primarily virtual way of working that it has actually constrained our ability to plan for the next normal – the inevitable hybrid modality. In late May 2021, a survey by McKinsey & Company found that a clear majority of organizations planned to go hybrid. However, only about a third of those organizations had developed a detailed plan to do so. More than two thirds of respondents said they did not have a plan in place (Alexander et al. 2021). Perhaps the planning process quickly accelerated after that mid-2021 survey, but with the arrival of virus variants, many organizations likely still lagged behind in formulating a solid return-to-office strategy. The good news is that wherever you are in hybrid work and the hybrid meeting transition, this book will serve as a key resource for both development of and revision of these plans.

The opportunity presented by this book is to learn how to optimize your hybrid meetings through a scientific approach, so the mistakes are minimized and the value of hybrid meetings is maximized – and there is a lot of value to be gained. We will share some initial data that points to the promise of hybrid meetings, and translate that into best practices to make your hybrid meetings as effective as possible – best practices based on the science of meetings that informs better management of multimodal meeting environments.

How to Use This Book

While theory is important, we believe practicality is critical, and that's why we include tools throughout this book that will help guide your implementation of hybrid meetings. We encourage you to not read this book passively but rather to actively engage with it by using its tools to assess yourself and your organization.

Checklists: In nearly every chapter, you will find a checklist that will help you apply the knowledge imparted. Sometimes the checklists involve a series of questions that will illuminate potential gaps in your hybrid meeting strategy. Sometimes they offer expert advice on what factors to consider on things like hardware, software or meeting room setup. While you can certainly check the boxes in the book itself, you can also access them on the book's website (www.wiley.com/go/reed-allen/hybrid), where you'll find all of the checklists available for you to fill out online or print out if you prefer putting pen to paper.

Chapter Takeaways: Each chapter is full of pertinent information for both those who are running and those who are attending a hybrid meeting, but we recognize the potential for information overload. That's why we include bulleted lists of key takeaways at the end of each chapter. Use these as a way to ensure that you have digested the most salient points, or return to them for quick reference at a later date.

Reflection Activity: At a minimum, we recommend going through the final exercise using something we call the Adaptive Improvement Model (AIM) framework. This reflection exercise will raise your awareness about where you are in your hybrid meeting transition and, most importantly, can reveal your next steps as you seek to make these meetings productive and satisfying for all.

Above all, we want you to gain confidence in your ability to conduct, manage, and take part in hybrid meetings. Reading this book is an excellent first step in accomplishing that goal.

Reference

Alexander, A., R. Cracknell, A. D. Smet, M. Langstaff, M. Mysore, and D. Ravid. 2021. "What executives are saying about the future of hybrid work." McKinsey & Company. https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/what-executives-are-saying-about-the-future-of-hybrid-work?utm_source=digg&utm_medium=email#

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