

# HOW TO MAKE MEETINGS MORE EQUITABLE AND INCLUSIVE





“In the average meeting of twelve people, only four people think they’re heard,” says New York Times best-selling author [Keith Ferrazzi](#). That should be a concern for any team leader.<sup>1</sup>

If two-thirds of the people in a meeting don’t feel like they’re being heard, they will hesitate to voice their opinions, raise legitimate objections, or contribute fresh ideas. It means great ideas may never be expressed. It means a majority of people in meetings feel ignored or undervalued. This is not good for business, and not good for employees.

On the other hand, a company culture where everyone feels engaged and empowered to speak up during meetings is one where ideas can flourish and innovation follows.

How do organizations achieve an inclusive meeting culture in a hybrid environment, with its mix of onsite and remote attendees?

“Meeting equity involves the use of interpersonal behavioral tools for enabling full participation among all meeting attendees and the leader as well as the technological tools necessary to ensure everyone is seen and heard,” according to Dr. Joe Allen, Ph.D., University of Utah Health.

In this article, we’ll focus on three elements of meetings and discuss their impact on meeting equity:

- ✔ Meeting culture
- ✔ Meeting etiquette
- ✔ Video collaboration tools

The first two are typically seen as “people and culture” issues. The third is definitely an IT concern. We believe that creating truly equitable and inclusive meetings requires a commitment to people, culture, and technology.

## Create a Meeting Culture Where Employees Feel Engaged and Empowered to Speak Up

Meeting equity is the ability for all meeting attendees to fully participate, regardless of their location, device, language, or experience level. It's about making sure that everyone is seen, heard, engaged, and valued.<sup>2</sup>

There are a number of proven best practices organizations can employ in order to nurture a culture where meetings feel inclusive and equitable.

### ESTABLISH PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

Psychological safety should be a priority for any organization that wants to realize the benefits of an engaged, committed workforce. Originally defined by Harvard Business School professor Amy Edmondson, [psychological safety](#) is "the belief that one will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns, or mistakes."

Dr. Edmondson considers psychological safety a critical factor for high-performing teams. When individuals feel safe to speak up, they are more likely to share their opinions when they don't agree with others, they are able to avoid the perils of groupthink, and they more readily take initiative.<sup>3</sup>

Experts on this topic tend to agree on some key recommendations for people who lead teams:

- ✓ Be open to feedback
- ✓ Build trust by being transparent
- ✓ Include your team in decision-making
- ✓ Show value and appreciation for ideas
- ✓ Demonstrate concern for team members as people
- ✓ Reassure employees that mistakes are okay
- ✓ Promote openness and inclusion
- ✓ Foster camaraderie among employees

Leaders who reinforce these values will have better success in creating an equitable environment where people feel heard and validated, and where they speak up to share opinions and ideas.

### LEAD WITH EMPATHY

Empathy has always been a critical skill for leaders, according to sociologist and author [Dr. Tracy Brower](#). But, she writes, research shows "...it is taking on a new level of meaning and priority. Far from a soft approach, it can drive significant business results."<sup>4</sup> Leading with empathy is also a primary tool for managing a team that is dispersed and decentralized,<sup>5</sup> and thus it's critically important in today's hybrid work environment.

Brower cites a study of 889 employees by [Catalyst](#) that uncovered significant positive effects of empathic leadership, including:

- ✓ Innovation
- ✓ Engagement
- ✓ Retention
- ✓ Inclusion
- ✓ Work-life balance

Laslo Bock, founder and CEO of Humu, says that now especially leaders need to prioritize empathy.<sup>6</sup> This means asking questions and actively listening. He suggests starting every conversation with the simple question: How are you?

In equitable meetings, this approach is demonstrated when the meeting organizer takes a moment to acknowledge everyone in the room or on video. It's not that agenda isn't priority #1. It is. But, says Bock, "don't dive into action items."



## PRIORITIZE DIVERSITY OF VIEWPOINTS

Promoting diverse viewpoints in the workplace has clear benefits. Socially diverse groups “are more innovative and productive than homogeneous groups,” reports Forbes.<sup>7</sup> According to Great Place to Work, organizations experience higher rates of innovation when they cultivate diverse viewpoints based on ethnicity, gender, age, educational background, experience level, and so on.<sup>8</sup>

Nurturing diverse viewpoints by giving everyone an opportunity to be heard is in a sense the very definition of equitable meetings. But how do you know when you’ve met this goal?

According to Forbes, these are the features of a healthy, engaged, and diverse culture<sup>9</sup>:

- ✓ Employees know that their voices will be heard, and that they are a valuable part of the team
- ✓ Employees know they are safe to express differing viewpoints and perspectives — regardless of their age, background or experience level
- ✓ When all voices are given airtime and everyone’s ideas are considered, the organization uncovers the insights and creativity needed for innovation

## BUILD SOCIAL BONDS

We typically think of business meetings in terms of goals and objectives. But meetings are also inherently social — and this aspect of meetings is often undervalued.

Social connection is a vital part of worklife for all employees. Healthy social connections also deliver benefits for the business or larger organization, in part by fostering employee engagement and loyalty. According to [Forbes](#), by supporting social connections in the workplace and helping employees form strong relationships with one another, employers can foster a happier workforce that is also more loyal and engaged.

Leaders in the organization can take steps like creating a regular cadence of employee get-togethers. This is especially important in a hybrid work environment where many employees are entirely remote or seldom in the office. (Here’s how to [create the perfect onsite](#).)

Leaders can also foster social connection during daily business meetings. For example, they can encourage employees to:

- ✓ Make time for “small talk.” By relaxing formalities at the beginning of a meeting, organizers can make time for social connection.<sup>10</sup>
- ✓ Expect disruptions. Interruptions by children and pets are probably unavoidable when people join meetings from home. These disruptions show that we’re all human after all.
- ✓ Celebrate individuality. The window we have into the lives of our colleagues who work from home can help us get to know each other a little better.<sup>11</sup>
- ✓ Occasionally schedule unstructured meetings. Impromptu meetings, like hallway conversations, are sometimes where the most important work gets done.<sup>12</sup>

## Emphasize Etiquette in Hybrid Meetings

Hybrid meetings require that participants make a greater effort to include everyone. The principles of meeting etiquette can help.

Consider for example how interactions differ between in-person meetings and hybrid meetings. When everyone in the meeting is in the same room, conversations may be animated at times, with people talking over each other or holding side chats. This situation may not be ideal, but it can be managed, says Dr. Allen of the University of Utah. However, he notes in his book *Suddenly Hybrid*, when some people are in person and others join virtually, “talking over each other creates inequities. Those who are virtual will only hear snippets of sentences while in-person attendees will likely only hear themselves talk.”<sup>13</sup>

When the conversation revolves around those in the room, it’s really hard for a remote person to get a word in. The tendency is for people in the room to focus on each other and pay less attention to those who are remote, says Sara Osterhaus, People & Culture Business Partner at Logitech. “While I wish we all were great at these basic meeting skills, like active listening, we aren’t. And that’s a key reason meetings aren’t always equitable.”

With that in mind, it can be helpful to establish a set of guidelines or ground rules for all meetings — but especially for hybrid meetings. These guidelines should not be “handed down from on high,” writes Dr. Allen.<sup>14</sup> Ideally, each team should have an open discussion and agree upon a set of guidelines that suit the group as a whole.

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– **DR. ALLEN**, AUTHOR OF *SUDDENLY HYBRID*.

- ✔ Be respectful and kind. This should go without saying and yet it’s still a good reminder for everyone, especially when people have conflicting views or topics are contentious.
- ✔ Challenge the discussion, not the person. Remove blame or judgment and focus on outcomes rather than past behaviors or mistakes.
- ✔ Listen and be present. Put away phones and other distractions that may take the focus away from the meeting.
- ✔ Stay focused on the topic. Avoid distractions and discourage side conversations that leave some attendees out. This is as true for remote participants as for those in the room.
- ✔ Acknowledge everyone in the meeting. Remote participants feel more included and encouraged to speak up when meeting organizers take the simple step of acknowledging them at the beginning of the meeting.
- ✔ Give remote participants the mic. Pause conversations as appropriate to ask remote participants what they think.
- ✔ Talk to the camera. When those in the room look only at each other, remote participants can feel excluded. By simply directing their attention to the camera, in-room attendees make the meeting more inclusive and equitable.
- ✔ Lean into the chat function. Remote participants may have difficulty getting a word in when people in the room are actively talking, and the chat function offers a way for them to comment. The meeting organizer or a designated assistant should monitor chat to give the message’s author the opportunity to speak up.

## Leverage Technology to Facilitate More Equitable Meetings

Meeting participation, when encouraged by leaders and embraced by attendees, has the strongest long-term impact on meeting outcomes and post-meeting behavior.<sup>15</sup> The people skills required to encourage participation are critical, but in a hybrid work environment [technology can also play a massive role](#) in meeting equity.

### EQUIP THE UNDEREQUIPPED WORKER

Hybrid work is video-first and collaboration-centric. It requires new tools for employees to communicate and collaborate. However, while organizations update their workstations and meeting spaces for video conferencing, home offices are often neglected. As a result, employees who work from home are poorly equipped for high-quality video collaboration.

In [a survey of IT hardware decision-makers](#), we found that less than 40% of respondents said their organizations provided remote employees with external webcams, headsets, or other accessories that would enable them to collaborate productively.

In addition to the standard-issue laptop, keyboard, mouse, and perhaps monitor, each employee needs at minimum a high-quality webcam and headset. These devices should be optimized for business and certified for Microsoft Teams, Zoom, and Google Meet so they can be used flawlessly

with the video platforms most organizations have standardized on.

Proactively equipping hybrid workers with the tools they need for virtual collaboration is one of the easier ways to address issues that have stemmed from hybrid work.

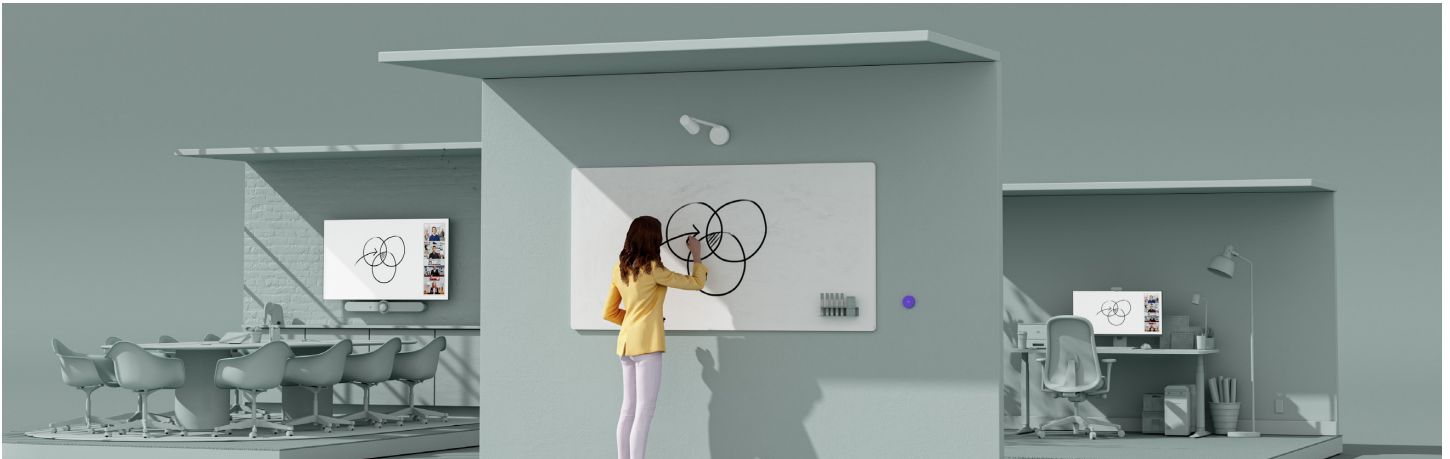
### MAKE MEETING ROOMS MORE EQUITABLE

Equipping remote workers with the right tools is a step toward equitable meetings. But it's just as important to properly outfit meeting spaces.

Until recently, meeting rooms were not optimized to include remote participants. Prior to the pandemic, most meetings took place in person. And if people did join remotely, they put up with the poor experience — or suffered in silence.

The pandemic and subsequent move to hybrid work radically changed our perspective, as so many of us found out how painful the remote experience can be. Fortunately, rapid innovation is improving this situation, and organizations should look for solutions that make the meeting experience far more equitable for everyone — those in person *and* those who are remote.





## Learn More

At Logitech we know that the best technology gets out of the way of the people using it. Hybrid meetings should feel natural, easy, and inclusive for everyone who participates.

We offer a complete suite of workspace solutions for remote employees, including business-grade webcams, headsets, mics, keyboards, and docking stations. These tools support people who work from home and provide them with a high-quality, more equitable meeting experience.

For meeting rooms, we offer hardware and software technology to support equitable meetings, such as:

- ✔ [Logitech Sight](#), a tabletop, center-of-the-room camera with intelligent multi-participant framing to provide both room context and individual speaker views
- ✔ [Logitech Scribe](#), which enables anyone in the room to effortlessly share whiteboards so remote participants can see them clearly
- ✔ [Grid View](#), an AI software feature that works seamlessly with Microsoft Teams Front Row to level the playing field and creates a more [inclusive experience](#)

To learn how these solutions make meetings more equitable, view our on-demand presentation, [Hybrid Work, Equitable Meetings and The New Logic of Work](#).

<sup>1</sup> Keith Ferrazzi on How the Pandemic Taught Organizations to Be 'Crisis Agile,' Harvard Business Review, March 4, 2022.

<sup>2</sup> "Creating Equitable Hybrid Meetings: A Practical Guide," Logitech and Google, November 2021.

<sup>3</sup> "9 Strategies to Create Psychological Safety at Work," Quantum Workplace, June 3, 2021.

<sup>4</sup> "Empathy Is The Most Important Leadership Skill According To Research," Forbes, September 19, 2021.

<sup>5</sup> "Why Compassionate Leadership Matters," Salesforce, December 14, 2021.

<sup>6</sup> "Leading through COVID: Manage Your Team with Empathy," Yale Insights, April 20, 2020.

<sup>7</sup> "Diversity Confirmed To Boost Innovation And Financial Results," Forbes, January 15, 2020.

<sup>8</sup> "Why Diverse and Inclusive Teams Are the Engines of Innovation," Great Place to Work, June 11, 2020.

<sup>9</sup> "Diversity Confirmed To Boost Innovation And Financial Results," Forbes, January 15, 2020.

<sup>10</sup> For more information, see: Allen, J. A., Landowski, N., Lehmann-Willenbrock, N. (2014), "Linking Pre-meeting Communication to Meeting Effectiveness." Journal of Managerial Psychology, 29(8), 1064-1081.

<sup>11</sup> For more information, see: Gerpott, F., & Lehmann-Willenbrock, N. (2015), "How differences make a difference: The role of team diversity in meeting processes and outcomes." In J. A. Allen, N. Lehmann-Willenbrock, and S. G. Rogelberg (Eds.) The Cambridge Handbook of Meeting Science. (pp. 153-176). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>12</sup> For more information, see: Allen, J. A. & Rogelberg, S. G. (2013), "Manager-led Group Meetings: A context for promoting employee engagement." Group and Organization Management, 38, 543-569.

<sup>13</sup> Reed, Karin and Joseph Allen, Suddenly Hybrid: Managing the Modern Meeting. Wiley, February 2022.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. Reed, Allen. Suddenly Hybrid: Managing the Modern Meeting.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. Reed, Allen. Suddenly Hybrid: Managing the Modern Meeting.

