



# ENERGY IN HYBRID WORK MEETINGS

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*"Enhance your hybwork meetings through reflection.  
Avoid the pitfalls of quick fixes!"*



## Is this situation familiar? Could it happen?

Thomas sips on his cup of coffee, trying not to think about the meeting he is going to attend at 9.00 am. What Thomas dreads is that the meeting will become the same as last time. He is not used to such meetings – it was both a chaotic and unproductive meeting. The project manager did not even ask people online why they did not put their cameras on. Some of them tried to comment on what was being presented through the chat but what was the point? No one saw the messages and after a while the chat became a different meeting, where something different was being discussed.

All the loud people were in the physical room, and they ended up talking over each

other, in a more and more aggressive way – they were so engaged in the discussion that they turned their chairs and bodies towards each other and the project manager. Unfortunately, the camera in the meeting room is placed under the TV screen and the project manager sat at the other end of the table, so all Thomas could see on his laptop screen was their backs.

What are the **key** issues here? Read more on next page.

# Key issue

Energy is central to how a meeting is experienced. A meeting that is felt as energizing may result in the meeting leading to better results, to increased commitment and to participants' wellbeing. You may, however, have experienced meetings that drained your energy. Even if hybrid meetings in this respect are particularly difficult to lead and perform, how they are prepared and organized plays a role in enabling better energy. There is something we can do about it!

You may have an intuitive understanding of what "energy" is and we know when we feel "energy", and when we lose "energy". Energy is an affective experience including feeling alive, enthusiastic, capable of acting and eager to act. Energy is something that we enjoy and want to experience, but it is also something that fades away - we need to "re-charge" regularly.

The opposite of energy is fatigue, which is about feeling exhausted, tired, or worn out.

Talking about energy and fatigue means

recognizing that working life is not purely rational. Rather, there is an emotional dimension that plays a role both for our wellbeing and for productivity.

At work, you may work with energy by increasing opportunities for learning, for experiencing meaning, and for positive relationships – these aspects may help more than taking a break, actually<sup>1</sup>. Contemporary working life presents several characteristics that tend to drain employees' energy. Complex tasks and increased relational work due to increased interdependence between tasks and people may give energy to a certain point, but also risk draining people of energy if they become too difficult to handle.

If you have wished for energizing meetings, chances are that you have been disappointed. Creating energizing meetings is not trivial. To better understand why meetings may fail to provide the energy one had hoped for, it helps to take a step back

<sup>1</sup> See for instance: Fritz, C., Lam, C. F., & Spreitzer, G. M. (2011). It's the little things that matter: An examination of knowledge workers' energy management. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 25(3), 28-39.



and consider some of the peculiarities of meetings.

Meetings are occasions in which individuals and collectives co-exist. This has two implications.

- On the one hand, meetings are the ideal form of “grouping”: of gathering for a collective purpose, of including, of engaging in a common enterprise.
- On the other hand, it is individuals that gather. Individuals pursue their own agendas which may not align with the agendas of other individuals.

The meeting may therefore become the site of a struggle where individuals want to enforce their respective agendas and may want to take space at the expenses of others, etc. This makes meetings inevitably sites for power struggles, for identity expression, for resistance, etc. Such dynamics are important to consider when working with energy in the meeting.

Efforts are needed by both meeting leader/facilitator and/or meeting participants in order to create energy. We have gathered in this reflection guide some insight on this issue and some suggestions about what to reflect on further.

Many elements contribute to what kind of energy is felt and created in a hybrid meeting. Whereas in a physical meeting at an office some of these elements may be designed and arranged before the meeting, in a hybrid meeting it is more difficult to prepare for an energy-increasing meeting. Some of the issues described below are therefore common to all kinds of meetings, while others are more specific to hybrid meetings.

**A MEETING IS NOT  
JUST AN ABSTRACT  
EXCHANGE OF  
INFORMATION.  
A MEETING IS MORE  
COMPLEX THAN THAT,  
IT IS A MULTIFACETED  
EVENT THAT MAY  
EITHER ENERGIZE  
PARTICIPANTS OR  
DRAIN THEM OF  
ENERGY.**

Energy cannot be taken for granted in hybrid meetings – it is important to reflect on what produces energy and to actively work for it.

Read more below if you are interested in:

- In what sense do we need to curate the meeting?
- How can we enable active participation?
- How can we work to create shared experiences?
- Is the “mood” in the meeting contagious?

Before digging into these questions, you may start reflecting by considering the questions below. If you also want to stimulate a discussion and shared reflection with your colleagues or other interested people, you may explore issues related to energy in hybrid meetings by using one of the module formats that we suggest.

## 🤔 Questions for reflection

As a meeting leader, ask yourself ...

- Do I know what gives energy to others?
- What efforts have I/we made to create the premises for an energy-increasing meeting?
- What are the obstacles to creating energy? Can they be removed?

As a meeting participant, ask yourself ...

- When I think about my most recent meeting, did I feel energized? What contributed to that?
- Which meeting gave me a lot of energy? What contributed to that?

We recommend you to use "Jeopardy - or what was the problem actually?" or "Rate 1 to 4 - or what do I think about this?" as methods for organizing workshops to start a conversation about the energy in hybrid meetings. Read the workshop guides on

<https://sites.mdu.se/inpro-hym/en/inpro-hym>

# Curating the meeting

You may recognize the common assumption that a meeting is like a ‘container’ to do other work, for instance let’s invite people to a meeting about ‘implementing the strategy’. However, a meeting is more than a container and it would be misleading to think that in order to have a good discussion on ‘implementing the strategy’ it is enough to send an invitation in advance to the right people.

A meeting is an achievement in itself, something to be created and looked after. Preparing a meeting may increase the chances to make it into an energy-increasing occasion. This does not, however, guarantee an energy-increasing meeting. And meetings that are not well prepared may turn out to be energizing. Still, not taking energy into consideration when preparing a meeting means missing the opportunity to do something about it. One important aspect is therefore how to “curate” the meeting

to make it into an energizing and positive experience for participants:

- First, there is a need to understand that meetings are active choices that require taking responsibility for how they are organized and performed (see our other reflection guide on this theme)
- Second, there are some aspects to consider when curating a meeting:
  - how to enable active participation
  - how to work with shared experiences
  - how to work with contagious moods

You can read more on these three aspects below.

# Enabling active participation

The level of energy in a hybrid meeting is related to the perceived level of participation among people in the meeting. When attending a hybrid meeting, being able to actively participate and seeing others actively participate are central to perceiving the meeting as full of energy.

Participation is about actively expressing thoughts, opinions, ideas.

Participation is important. Working life quality, sense of belonging and perception of work as meaningful are positively impacted by employees' being heard and knowing that their contributions are valued. More specifically, participation may also be important in relation to the fatigue that digital meetings may cause. Active participation and a sense of belonging may help in avoiding so called Zoom-fatigue<sup>2</sup>.

In order to enable active participation, as meeting leader (but to some extent also as participant) you may:

- Consider in advance how, in a broad sense, the meeting is performed, that is how interactions are enabled, facilitated and supported, not only which information to convey during a meeting.
- Reflect on your own assumptions and expectations about what active participation means and which forms of participation there are - for instance, silence may be due to listening and thinking, not necessarily to lack of interest as we may often consciously or unconsciously think.
- Openly discuss alternatives for participation considering that some people may be at the "core" of the specific meeting, whereas for others it may be more suitable to just "listen in" or to participate only in a given section of the meeting, for instance, by providing expertise on a specific issue.

<sup>2</sup> See for instance Bennett, A. A., Campion, E. D., Keeler, K. R., & Keener, S. K. (2021). Videoconference fatigue? Exploring changes in fatigue after videoconference meetings during COVID-19. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 106(3), 330.

## 🤔 Questions for reflection

As a meeting leader, ask yourself ...

- Do I always want others to participate actively? Why/why not?
- Is there a chance that meeting participants hold back some input because it may conflict with something I said (or with my views more generally)?

As a meeting participant, ask yourself ...

- How do I judge if someone is actively participating? Do others look at participation in the same way?
- Do I sometimes feel a pressure to say something when I would actually prefer to remain silent? Why is that so?
- Do I remember a meeting in which I wasn't able to say as much as I would have liked to? What prevented me from expressing what I wanted to express?

In the following sections, we dig deeper into how to enable different kinds of participation by addressing the following questions:

- How do we open up the conversation?
- How do we make non-verbal participation visible?
- Should we appreciate silence more?

### Opening up the conversation

You may have experienced boring and energydraining occasions in which the person convening the meeting uses the meeting time mostly for performing a monologue, or a meeting that ends up being a series of monologues. You may, however, not have reflected on the fact that a hybrid meeting offers some tools to disrupt such a practice

and lower the threshold for entering the conversation. Examples of tools that may be used are:

- the chat function that allows for participating through written messages (a way of communicating that some people may prefer)
- polls that allow for interaction (although within the frames decided by the meeting leader)

When and how to use such tools is a matter of judgment - there are no universal recipes and some structure is important in order to avoid fragmentation and distraction. Also, new roles may be needed, for instance, a chat facilitator (see the reflection guide about roles).

In a hybrid meeting setting, there is also a risk of forgetting to invite remote participants into the conversation, especially if most participants are together in the meeting room and only a few online. A common practice to avoid this is to always start by inviting those attending not from the main physical room to make their contributions to the conversation first.

### Making participation beyond speaking visible

In a face-to-face meeting, all participants attend with their entire body and therefore participate not only through speaking to express their thoughts but also through a number of non-verbal cues. For instance:

- by changing their facial expressions consciously or unconsciously,
- by positioning and moving their body consciously or unconsciously in relation to the others and the room,
- by tuning their voices to what they want to convey



- by seeking or refusing eye contact with other participants to confirm or challenge other participants or the ongoing conversation.

In hybrid meetings, the use of microphones and cameras is required in order to make this kind of participation tangible (however, eye contact is not possible in the same way). Moreover, there may be reasons why participants need to mute themselves or have their camera off, for instance, noisy backgrounds, the need to move around or focus on a document/screen and not stare into the camera screen without being perceived as uninterested. Imposing the use of cameras may therefore not be a good way of increasing participation.

You may consider (if you have not already done so) the possibility of discussing together the pros and cons of using cameras/microphones and agreeing on when to keep cameras on and how to use microphones.

Moreover, in a hybrid meeting, people attending from different locations have different possibilities to catch subtle signs such as facial expressions, for instance, depending on how large a face is on a screen - looking at a room full of people from a laptop screen does not provide the opportunity to pay attention to facial expressions.

Whereas one may accentuate bodily expressions and signals in order to compensate for the format of the meeting, some people feel uncomfortable with this practice. And if a person in the shared physical room accentuates her bodily expressions for the benefit of the online participants, the participants in the physical room may perceive the interaction as non-authentic. An alternative to the accentuation of bodily expressions and signals you may consider is

to use digital tools, such as emojis and reaction buttons. But the use of emojis is not entirely uncontroversial since some people may perceive them as not appropriate for a work setting.

## 🤔 Questions for reflection

- Do I remember a meeting where I felt that microphone and camera just weren't enough to create a shared sense of the situation? How did I react to this experience? How did the meeting leader handle the situation? (Was it brought up during the meeting?)
- Have I ever exaggerated my expressions in front of the camera or noticed someone else doing it?

## Appreciating silence

How are we to interpret silence when we talk to an audience? In the digital space, we have not yet developed a shared understanding or norms of silence. This insecurity is particularly felt when those attending the meeting do not put their camera on, thus creating a sort of "visual silence" as well. Are they listening? Are they doing other tasks? Are they not interested?

"There is a need for fillers in the conversation, otherwise it is like talking into a black hole (referring to leading a meeting where participants have their cameras off)."

In our contemporary work practices, being silent is not seen as productive and is often equated to being passive. However, both listening and reflecting need silence. Silence is therefore not negative in itself - it may, on the contrary, be the case that more silence may be needed in meetings in order to allow time for thinking.

Rather than avoiding silence, meeting facilitators may want to think about the role of silence when preparing a meeting and how to organize the conversation so that silence is allowed when needed and

## 🤔 Questions for reflection

As a meeting leader, ask yourself ...

- Have I explicitly addressed silent participants to include them? How? With what consequences?

As a meeting participant, ask yourself ...

- Is it a problem when people participate silently in a meeting? Why?

# Creating shared experiences

If you organize a hybrid meeting, you may be troubled by the fact that all participants cannot have the same experience of the meeting. Remote participants may find it difficult to understand why all the people in the main physical room are suddenly laughing, since it may be due to something that has happened but has not been captured by the camera. This may be disturbing.

For some participants it is important to have experienced the “same” meeting in order to feel included.

**”When we take a coffee break, we continue to talk about what was said in the meeting, and the remote participants are not part of these conversations”**

A common concern, for instance is how to plan for breaks in a hybrid meeting, that is, how to handle the informal interactions during the breaks. The experiences

of different participants will inevitably be different, and the question is how to deal with this. Should the participants in the main physical room be allowed to continue talking about what has been dealt with in the meeting while taking a walk to the coffee machine? Should the participants online drink their coffee in a digital break-out room, thus allowing them to interact informally as well?

One way of dealing with these questions used in practice is to make the different experiences explicit for everyone. Someone may, for instance, briefly summarize what was discussed on the way to the coffee machine.

Whereas such summaries can make the meeting more transparent for everyone, they may still not achieve the same effect in terms of energy as when experiences are actually lived as shared. It may be the “experiencing” itself that gives energy, as it is a collective experiencing in which one feels close to the others.

# A STRATEGY TO CREATE ENERGY IN A HYBRID MEETING MAY THEREFORE BE TO PLAN FOR SOME 'SHARED EXPERIENCING'

There are various tools and methods that can contribute to a 'shared experiencing': quizzes, working with digital post-its on a shared whiteboard (like those offered by Miro or Murales, or similar), watching a video, everyone drawing something on individual paper at the same time, etc. Of course, to be felt as authentic, such sections of a meeting should fit the content of the meeting and feel meaningful for the participants in the meeting and the facilitator.

## 🤔 Questions for reflection

As a meeting participant, think of a specific kind of meeting and ask yourself ...

- Do I usually participate online or IRL? How does this affect my experience of the meeting?
- Do we do something together that creates a shared experience? If not, what could we do?



# The contagious mood in meetings

In a meeting, emotions may be felt in common, among several participants, not only in an individual way. When emotions are felt in common and are expressed in common acts (as in a brainstorming session, for instance), the mood becomes contagious. That is, participants feel that others also feel the same emotions given how they act and this reinforces the emotions felt. This may lead to experiencing increased energy given the connection felt with the others and the resulting sense of belonging or group solidarity.

“After a meeting, you remember how you felt, rather than which specific questions were talked about.”

## 🤔 Questions for reflection

As a meeting participant, ask yourself ...

- How did I feel after the last meeting? Why?

As a meeting leader, ask yourself ...

- When I think about my next meeting, what is the feeling I would like the participants to leave the meeting with?

If you are organizing a meeting, you have the opportunity to ‘set the tone’ for the mood in the meeting. It is worth spending some time preparing for how to create the desired mood even though there is no guarantee for the intended mood to spread. Participants may react in unpredictable ways or interpret cues in ways not meant by

the facilitator. Still, if no effort is made then there is no possibility to direct the mood of the meeting.

When participants have the same focus in a meeting, for instance on an Excel sheet or on a small 3-D physical model of a new building, they are more likely to develop a shared mood.

When participants are focusing on the same thing, they also become more aware of each other and each other's focus, and thus also each other's emotions. It then becomes easier to end up sharing the same mood. This is more difficult in hybrid meetings, where there may be an object to focus on (a presentation or a physical object in the physical room, for instance), but focusing on this object does not enable us to become more aware of each other's focus and emotions, since participants and objects are found in multiple spaces.

Similarly, physical co-presence has been identified by some scholars as the prerequisite for creating energy<sup>3</sup>. Different kinds of group retreats offer examples of occasions in which participants may experience a contagious mood that energizes them by engaging in different kinds of activities. Not least lunches or dinners are important parts of the rituals that take place during these kinds of prolonged meetings in which participants' moods become attuned to each other.

However, whereas physical co-presence makes it easier to create a shared mood, participants may also more passively enjoy the mood in the meeting without actively contributing to producing it. This means that even when meeting in hybrid forms, a shared mood may be produced by a few

people actively working on it – with the rest more passively enjoying it.

The mood can also be absorbed by meeting participants without them being active or physically co-present.

A sense of solidarity with each other may also emerge when it is clear to participants that their work depends on each other's performances and interactions<sup>4</sup>. Finding ways to make such interdependences visible may support the sense of being part of something larger than oneself and provide the premises for sharing mood in a hybrid meeting.

**”We share a common purpose, it is important to meet and see what the others are up to and share ideas.”**

Finally, the rhythm of a meeting may be a somewhat overlooked aspect of facilitating meetings that may deserve more attention. A well-prepared chair will plan for how much time each issue on the agenda may take, in terms of the time needed to process the issue properly. Another aspect is to focus on how to use time to create a certain mood, for instance, when to slow down and when to hurry up in order for the mood to change, rather than in order for the issue to be processed.

## Questions for reflection

As a meeting leader, ask yourself ...

- How can I plan the next meeting in order to facilitate the emergence of a certain kind of mood?

<sup>3</sup>Vine, T. (2023). Is physical co-presence a prerequisite for Durkheimian collective effervescence? Reflections on remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Culture and Organization*, 29(5), 380-396.

<sup>4</sup>Adler, P. S., Kwon, S. W., & Heckscher, C. (2008). Perspective—professional work: The emergence of collaborative community. *Organization science*, 19(2), 359-376.

This guide is the result of research we have done in the 2-years long project InPro-Hym (INclusive and PROductive HYbrid Meetings), and also draws on our work in the research projects MnC (Meetings and Community in the postdigital era) and MeetWell (Leadership and Employee Well-Being in Virtual and Hybrid Meetings). The InPro-Hym project has been performed in collaboration between Mälardalen University, the University of Gothenburg, Hitachi Energy and the municipality of Västerås. The project has been funded by Vinnova.

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