Closing the hybrid experience gap:
Checklist for meeting equity and more

Hybrid work is here. Joining meetings from remote locations is now old hat, and a mix of remote and onsite participants is becoming the norm.

Continuing to collaborate is vital for business productivity and innovation. But there's growing recognition of the gap between remote and co-located participants' experiences. As more employees return to the office, companies must ensure a level meeting "field" — providing both technology and human connections to foster an equitable experience for everyone, no matter where they are.

"I think you're muted"

It's challenging to convey inclusion in hybrid meetings, even to onsite employees who are together in a common meeting space. Remote participants in particular worry about not feeling heard.[1] So nearly half of those who join a meeting remotely do not speak at all.[2] Since it's hard to read body language and hear voice nuances, people often interrupt, inadvertently cut one another off, or hear the dreaded, "I think you're on mute." Participants viewing a gallery layout can't always tell who's speaking, nor can they see more than a slice of the in-person meeting room and those participants.

The experience is even more challenging for mobile participants who join a meeting while on the go or while using a smaller device like a mobile phone or tablet. The number of mobile devices accessing meetings rose 200% in just 18 months.[2] Yet employees on the go often feel other participants dismiss them as not being fully engaged.

New technology features can address many of these issues. But companies must first lay a strong cultural foundation that embraces, supports, and reinforces new meeting and collaboration norms.

What's meeting equity?

In the hybrid work model, meeting equity means all participants can access meetings and contribute fully, regardless of location, device, or meeting platform — with an equitable, though not necessarily identical, experience.

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Freshen up professional skills

Training gives everyone the chance to feel valued and more hybrid-capable. Some examples:

- Optimizing on-camera presence
- Presenting content
- Facilitating hybrid meetings
- Navigating hybrid work
- Managing hybrid workers
- Promoting company culture

Building hybrid culture

We are living the new paradigm that work is what you do, not where you go to do it. Similarly, culture is less about the look and feel or tangible perks of a corporate environment, but more about the set of values, norms, and unwritten rules that underpin behaviors and unite the workforce.

Companies can reinforce their culture with adaptable workspace layouts, flexible equipment considerations, and attention to evolving physical workspace components. Strong cultures create a sense of belonging — exactly what's needed for employees to not only **be** included in hybrid meetings, but to **feel** included.

Setting a hybrid tone

Setting the tone is key, as is setting an example. Company leaders might consider working remotely sometimes and joining hybrid meetings. Some organizations suggest onsite participants join meetings from their own devices to equalize experiences.

The same kind of flexibility that spurred hybrid locations and schedules can be applied to collaboration outside of meetings. Companies should balance synchronous and asynchronous communication options to extend equitable collaboration across different time zones and workstyle preferences.

Meeting organizers (and participants) can check in with remote participants during the meeting, making sure everyone can see, hear, and participate. Inviting participation and input is a good way for team leaders to equalize the meeting experience.

To mitigate employees' fear that working remotely leads to "proximity bias," managers can spend extra time connecting with each employee.

A McKinsey study found that "small moments of engagement" among employees fostered coaching, mentorship, and idea sharing — and boosted productivity.[3]

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It's time to up-level the hybrid technology experience

When enterprises needed to go remote overnight, there was a scramble to accommodate employees at home. Most made collaboration work in makeshift offices with existing or quickly purchased technology. But the quality of tools and collaboration varied widely.

With intensely competing priorities, many companies haven't had the time or resources to make changes and are still relying on these initial setups. With the transition to hybrid underway, now is a great time for teams to reassess. A range of technology solutions, some of them quite simple, can make a world of difference in the hybrid workday, both in the office and at home.

Enterprises are changing the focus from getting through a crisis to creating a thriving hybrid workforce, with everyone equally enabled — stepping up from yesterday's new-normal basics to tomorrow's next-normal success by adding smarter technology.

Ramp up remote

From status quo	To inclusive smart collaboration
Devices	
Video-enabled but inconsistent quality	Performance and graphics for high-quality video
Work interruption with device or location change	Seamless transfer among devices
Infrastructure and software	
UC platform* for virtual meetings	UC platform plus chat, whiteboarding, polling, transcription
Basic internet connectivity	High-speed broadband
Email for exchanging documents to review/edit	Shared documents and editing in the cloud
Accessories	
Laptop screen or basic monitors	High-resolution touchscreen displays
Simple built-in webcam and speakers	AI camera and intelligent, immersive sound bar
Services	
Support tickets	24/7/365 phone and remote troubleshooting

Enrich onsite

From status quo	To inclusive smart collaboration
Collaboration space	
One person, one desk, one space	Range of rooms for individual focus, "alone together," and team collaboration, plus options for hot-desking and social interaction
Traditional conference tables	Semi-circular or other alternative seating
Meeting technology	
Hard-to-use, low-quality collection of disparate components	Streamlined meeting room systems with advanced audiovisual capabilities
Individual laptop screens or basic displays	Interactive flat panel displays
One-function virtual meeting applications	UC platforms* with video, mobile apps, and engagement features like chat and whiteboarding
Basic screen sharing	New content presentation features that improve remote readability
Traditional participant galleries	New gallery layouts with more natural, face-to-face sightlines

* Unified communications platform such as Microsoft Teams Rooms, Zoom, and Google Meet.

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The secrets of hybrid success

According to McKinsey, we are entering an extended period of "test and learn."[4] Fulfilling the hybrid promise and reaching meeting equity will take time. Culture and technology will need to change and evolve.

This scenario requires great flexibility on the part of IT leaders, who may need to pivot repeatedly and make changes quickly. Easy hybrid solution implementation will be essential.

Consider CaaS

"As a Service" models are gaining popularity for their cost-effective, flexible convenience. Collaboration as a Service promotes equity in its own way, putting companies on par with much larger enterprises for regularly refreshed technology and service/support levels comparable to those provided by significant in-house IT resources. CaaS is perfect for the hybrid transition — allowing companies to meet evolving needs without capital investment risk.

Equitable collaboration is one of three tenets Lenovo has developed for successful hybrid work.

Learn more about ubiquitous, equitable, and seamless collaboration in our report, "Unlocking innovation in a hybrid world."

Download it at
www.lenovo.com/ThinkSmartReport

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Together with industry leaders, Lenovo delivers Smart Collaboration solutions for a hybrid world. When you're ready, we're here to help.

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Sources

1 Logitech UK survey, "UK Attitudes to the New World of Work," 2021
2 Cisco, "Hybrid Work Index," October 2021
3 McKinsey & Company, "What executives are saying about the future of hybrid work," May 2021
4 McKinsey & Company, "It's time for leaders to get real about hybrid," July 2021

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Raise the bar on hybrid meeting equity

Hybrid is here. Video-first is the norm. And meetings are evolving to ensure employees stay connected and productive anywhere — with full, equitable participation for everyone. Visual collaboration is the lifeblood of hybrid collaboration. Here are some recommendations for technology adoption and culture shifts that will help equalize the meeting experience in your organization.

Culture

- ☐ **Create a culture** that welcomes and supports equal participation for home-based and hyper-mobile employees.

- ☐ **Establish best practices** for meeting equity — assess and adjust often.

- ☐ **Reevaluate meetings** for the new hybrid environment: How often? How long? Who should be there? What kinds of meetings are best suited for in-person venues?

- ☐ **Balance synchronous and asynchronous communication** to promote flexible, equitable collaboration for different time zones and workstyle preferences.

- ☐ **Provide visual collaboration skills training** — meeting facilitation, virtual content presentation, on-camera presence.

- ☐ **Adjust leadership styles** to make sure remote workers get equal attention and opportunity before, during, and after meetings.

Technology

- ☐ **Simplify and standardize hardware and software** for compatibility and consistent employee interface.

- ☐ **Choose a UC platform*** with inclusive features like chat, transcription, whiteboarding, polling, and in person-like gallery layouts.

- ☐ **Invest in modular or all-in-one meeting systems** and interactive touchscreen displays to improve the onsite meeting experience.

- ☐ **Take advantage of camera and sound bar innovations** for wide field of view, auto-framing, immersive audio, noise cancellation, and more.

- ☐ **Reconfigure furniture** for more natural visibility and interaction.

- ☐ **Help employees set up their home offices** for an experience equal to those collaborating onsite.

Together with industry leaders, Lenovo delivers Smart Collaboration solutions for a hybrid world. When you're ready, we're here to help.

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