



STATE OF

# VIRTUAL MEETINGS

2021

The title is styled with 'VIRTUAL' in blue and 'MEETINGS' in green. The year '2021' is in black. The text is surrounded by icons of people in circles connected by lines, representing a network or meeting.

# Table of Contents

|                              |    |
|------------------------------|----|
| Executive Summary            | 01 |
| The Results                  | 02 |
| Technical and Social Hurdles | 03 |
| Finding Our Way              | 04 |
| Closing Summary              | 05 |
| Special Thanks               | 06 |

# Executive Summary

---

**Meetings are eating the world.**

*When the world went remote,  
virtual meetings became the  
norm overnight.*

# Executive Summary

## Meetings are eating the world.

Since March 2020, the workplace has only accelerated its digital transformation, and virtual meetings have been at the forefront ever since. Something unexpected happened, too.

Virtual meetings spilled out from our work and into many aspects of our personal lives. Less than a quarter of the people we surveyed used virtual meetings exclusively for work.

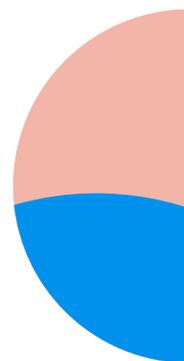
With Zoom Communications reporting an annualized figure of [3.3 trillion](#) meeting minutes in its 2020 Analyst Day presentation and Microsoft reporting a new daily record of [2.7 billion](#) meeting minutes in one day, it's safe to say we've already surpassed the tipping point for video communication.

Not only did we cross that milestone, we crossed into another new age of communication, featuring a wide range of tools and applications that add a layer of collaborative possibilities we're only beginning to understand and leverage.

In collaboration with our partners at [WorkPatterns](#), [Colibri](#), [Fellow](#), [Prezi](#), [Pledge](#), [Rev](#), and [Warmly](#), we collected over 21,000 data points across an audience of over 500 modern professionals.

We set out to explore this rapid shift in communication norms. To what extent have our work days—and even our weekends—filled with meetings? And how has our meeting behavior evolved over the past 12 months?

**The short answer:** We spend a lot more time in meetings than we did before, and we're still figuring out how to find our flow.



Although most of us have experienced technical difficulties at some point this year, they only represent a small proportion (**20%**) of the challenges respondents identified.

We'll take a deeper look into the other challenges people are facing, and some potential means of addressing them.

Nearly *everyone* we surveyed reported multitasking during meetings, but the overwhelming majority (**about 75%**) of the time, multitaskers are completing work-related tasks.

For meeting organizers looking to capture more of their audience's undivided attention, we'll cover some simple ways to make meetings more engaging.

Finally, while there are many challenges we've yet to overcome, most of the news is good news. Despite meeting fatigue, most respondents (**about 93%**) believe virtual meetings are a valuable use of their time, and two-thirds believe they're becoming more productive over time.

Check out the '**takeaways**' portions of this report for some tips on making meetings even more productive.

# The Results

---

We pored over the data from our State of Virtual Meetings survey to capture a catalog of helpful, heuristic, entertaining insights.

# We're spending 5X more time in meetings



Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, knowledge workers reported spending **two hours each week** in virtual meetings. Now? The average time has ballooned to **10 hours each week**.

Put another way, we spend one-fourth of our work week in virtual meetings, be it Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Google Meet, or otherwise.

# We're discovering new avenues

to connect and collaborate through virtual meetings.

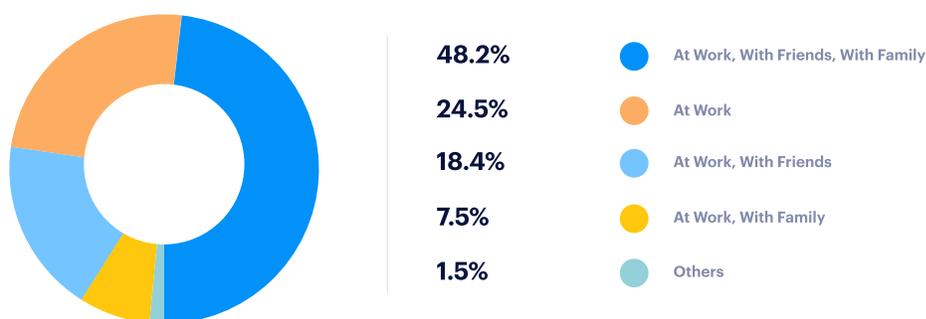
While many respondents use virtual meeting tools exclusively for work, a towering majority used video communication tools like Zoom not only to connect with colleagues, but also with friends and family.

In fact, **less than a quarter** of those surveyed joined virtual meetings exclusively for work.

Does this phenomenon sound familiar to you? With each passing day, we're becoming more accustomed to using the same set of tools to organize a meeting, a birthday party, a therapy session, or a happy hour.

Despite that widespread adoption, in some ways we're feeling the strain of fitting such a diverse range of events into virtual meetings.

## In What Ways Do You Experience Virtual Meetings?



# We're working closely together

**despite increased physical distance.**

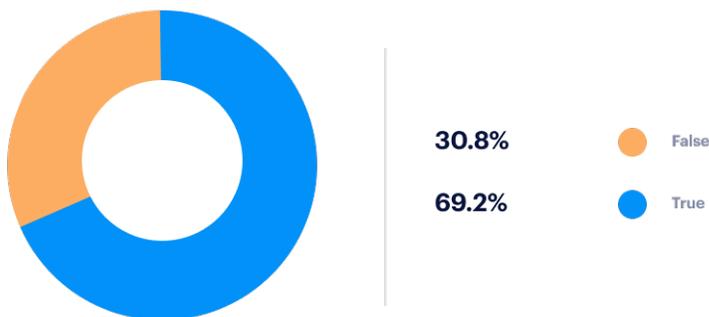
With so many employees working remotely, data suggest a trend of hiring and retention across a broader geographic landscape. Nearly **70 percent** of survey respondents reported that their colleagues were distributed across a greater distance over the last year.

This striking trend of increased distance could be reflective of multiple changes in the way we do business.

Employers can now leverage distributed work as a means of bringing on talent from distant regions.

Employees no longer tied to a corporate HQ are free to leave city centers and metropolitan areas in search of less costly accommodations, closer proximity to friends and family, or both.

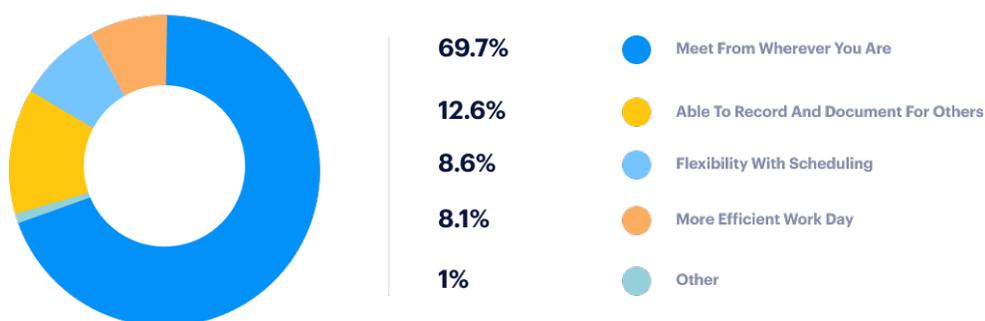
Have You And Your Colleagues Become More Geographically Distributed In The Last Year?



# We're enjoying greater flexibility

in how and where we meet.

What Do You Find To Be The Greatest Benefit To Virtual Meetings?



While there are a number of unique advantages associated with virtual meetings, we found one significant standout among our audience.

When asked what they find to be the greatest benefit to virtual meetings, about **70 percent** of those who responded chose being able to “meet from wherever you are.”

This ability to meet from your office, a city park bench, or even your (safely parked!) car outranked all other benefits, including the ability to record and document meetings for those who couldn't attend.

# Tips and Takeaways

## **We're spending more time in virtual meetings than ever before.**

While these meetings are a necessity, there's an opportunity to reduce the amount of time we spend in meetings by increasing the quality of time we spend.

Teams looking to level up meeting quality can start by exploring options like designating 'meeting free' days, setting collaborative agendas, and sending post-meeting effectiveness surveys to focus in on what works.

## **People are becoming more familiar with video communication tools, and their needs more sophisticated.**

As we bring video communications into an increasingly broad swath of our activities, the amount of time we spend in video calls continues to surge.

Pushing those boundaries requires a wider range of interpersonal skills and a new digital toolkit with specialized functions to enhance the standard video meeting experience. Platforms like Slack, Zoom, and Microsoft Teams enable application developers to build custom tailored experiences to meet these needs.

Organizations that leverage these new tools and skills effectively have an opportunity to build an advantage over those who neglect to modernize their collaborative structure.

# Tips and Takeaways

## **We're collaborating in increasingly flexible, distributed teams (and most of us love that).**

A distributed team structure gives organizations easier access to top talent across the globe and offers employees greater flexibility, but it also requires more thoughtful collaboration to accommodate multiple time zones and cultural norms.

Both team leads and individual contributors can improve the distributed work experience by exploring more asynchronous processes wherever possible. Leveraging tools like meeting recordings, transcripts, and collaborative agendas can make it easier to respect time zones and keep everyone up to speed, no matter where they live.



# Technological and social hurdles

---

While the explosion of virtual meetings hinges on solving technological challenges, our data suggest it's more complicated than finding reliable wi-fi.

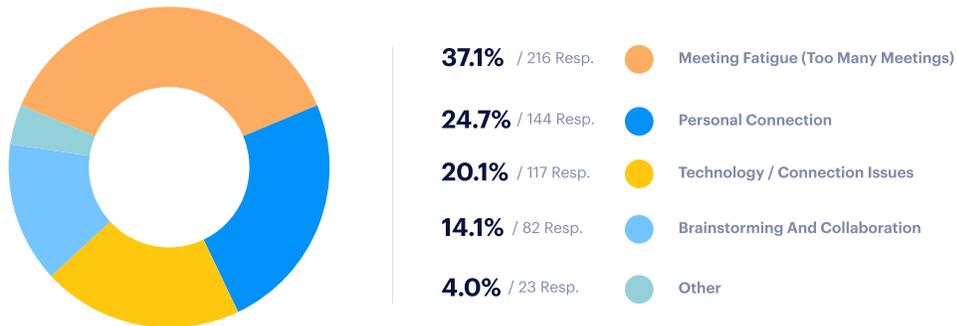
# Playing catch-up

## as technology outpaces social norms.

We've all experienced technical difficulties at least once during our virtual meetings. Despite how disruptive and frustrating it can be while you're in the midst of a technological hurdle, **only 20%** of respondents listed technology as their greatest virtual meeting challenge.

Instead, the majority of challenges we seem to be facing are social and personal in nature.

What Do You Find To Be The Greatest Challenge?



582 Out Of 587 Answered

## Meeting fatigue is real

In the past year, our virtual meeting time increased **five-fold**. It's no wonder that the number one challenge of virtual meetings is meeting fatigue. **One out of three** respondents named "too many meetings" as the greatest challenge of this new way of working.

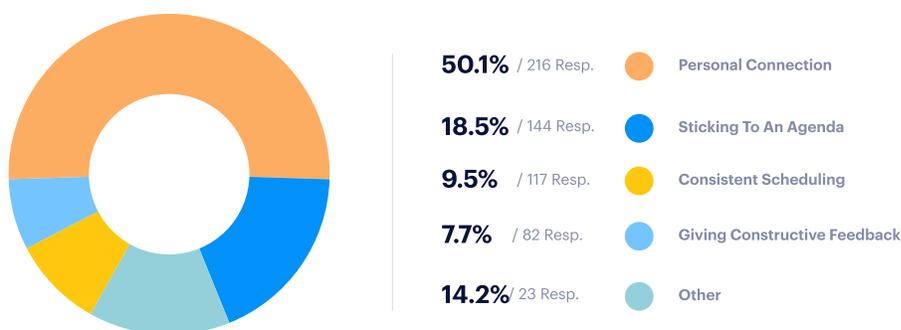
## We're struggling to connect

If meeting fatigue is the top challenge, a close second is the lack of a personal connection to teammates and colleagues.

One in four respondents identified that connecting with one another has proven to be quite daunting in this new in-meeting environment. Despite gaining an unprecedented exposure to our colleagues' home lives, pet and kid antics, we're still struggling to connect.

This trend is amplified in virtual one-on-one meetings.

What Is Your Biggest Challenge In Remote 1:1s?



465 Out Of 587 Answered

One-on-one meetings (often held between a manager and a direct report) have adapted in many ways over the past 18 months with everything from 1:1 agendas, consistent scheduling, and feedback.

But the biggest challenge, felt by **50 percent** of 1:1 participants, is the struggle to retain a personal connection with each other.

While there are still numerous hurdles to overcome, it turns out we're already on our way to clearing them.

# Everyone is multitasking

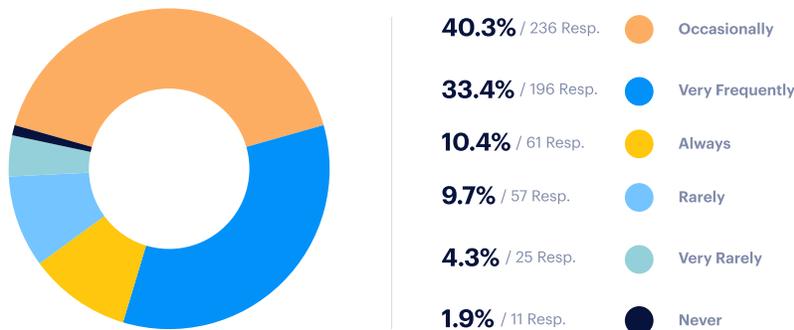
Well, practically everyone.

Since we're spending more time in virtual meetings, we obviously have less time to work... or do we? Turns out that most of us are finding a way to get work done while on our calls.

And unless you're a statistical outlier, you probably do, too.

Almost **90%** of respondents are meeting multitaskers. **Ten percent** *always* multitask. **74%** multitask very frequently or occasionally.

## How Often Do You Multitask During Virtual Meetings?



586 Out Of 587 Answered

As for the 1.9% of respondents who claim never to multitask: we salute your focus and determination.

## How are we spending our multitasking time?

Productively. According to survey respondents, the most popular multitasking activity competing for our attention during meetings is completing work-related tasks (**75 percent** of multitaskers).

The second most common activity is checking email. If it's any consolation, two of the *least likely* activities to tempt multitaskers are checking social media and reading the news.

### When You Multitask, What Tasks Do You Switch To During Online Meetings?

Doing Other Work-Related Tasks



Checking Email



Messaging



Checking Social Media



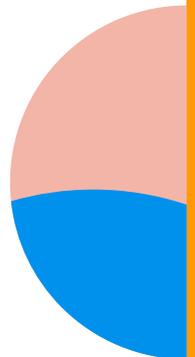
Reading News



Other



574 Out Of 587 Answered

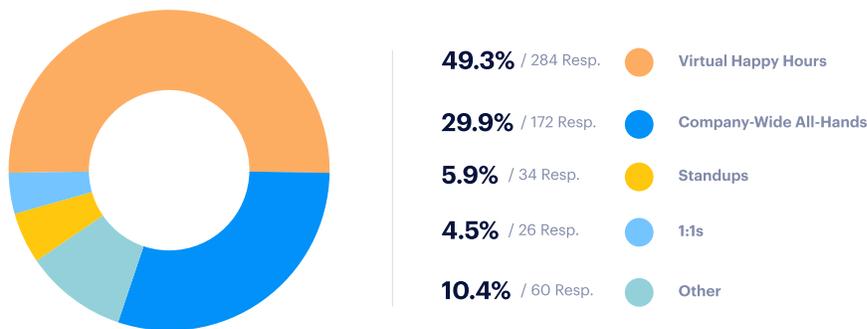


# The most challenging meetings might not be the ones you expect.

At what point does a virtual meeting become too crowded?

According to respondents, the ideal number of meeting attendees is 10 or fewer—any more and the meeting loses its productivity. By nature, an all-hands meeting at a large company will far exceed the 10-person threshold, and often a virtual happy hour will, too.

What Type Of Meeting Do You Find Most Challenging In A Virtual Setting?



465 Out Of 587 Answered

With that in mind, it may come as a little surprise that when asked about the most challenging types of virtual meetings, respondents had two clear picks: virtual happy hours and all-hands.

Both of these meeting types involve a large number of people, and hinge more on social connection than collaboration. While these meeting formats remain challenging, there's still plenty of good news to report about virtual meetings overall.

# Tips and Takeaways

## **Virtual meeting tech is evolving faster than social norms.**

With platforms like Zoom Apps and Microsoft Teams, we have more ways than ever to foster collaboration, engage audiences, and build stronger connections across long distances.

Technology isn't a panacea. It's up to us to keep pace with and leverage the myriad advances in communication and collaboration technology.

## **Social connection is still the greatest challenge for many virtual meeting attendees.**

Lighthearted games can [break the ice](#), while automated meeting prep and live collaboration tools bring the entire audience together.

Collaborative engagements and play both help bring the human element back into the meeting experience. Modern video communication tools have a wide range of options for both.

## **Many attendees are less engaged than they may appear.**

While a face-to-face meeting is inherently engaging, virtual meeting organizers need to craft an engaging experience. Lucky that's easier than ever.

Meeting organizers working to keep meeting attendees engaged should explore real-time collaboration tools that foster active engagement of more attendees during a session.

Adding a bit of fun, like a game of trivia or asking interactive questions can go a long way toward keeping audiences engaged from start to finish.

# Finding our Way

---

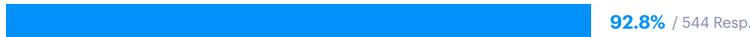
Every day, our ability to leverage virtual meetings as a conduit for collaboration grows—sometimes in unexpected ways.

# Virtual meetings are valuable and they're getting more productive.

Even though the rapid increase in virtual meetings was thrust upon us, we've mostly embraced it. Almost **93 percent** of respondents say that virtual meetings are a good use of time.

Yes Or No: Virtual Meetings Are A Good Use Of Time.

Yes



No



586 Out Of 587 Answered

## The good news continues

**Three out of four** respondents say that meetings are getting more and more productive. This new way of working is sinking in, and as the saying goes, "Practice makes perfect." (We've all had plenty of practice over the past several months.)

Yes Or No: Virtual Meetings Are Getting More Productive.

Yes



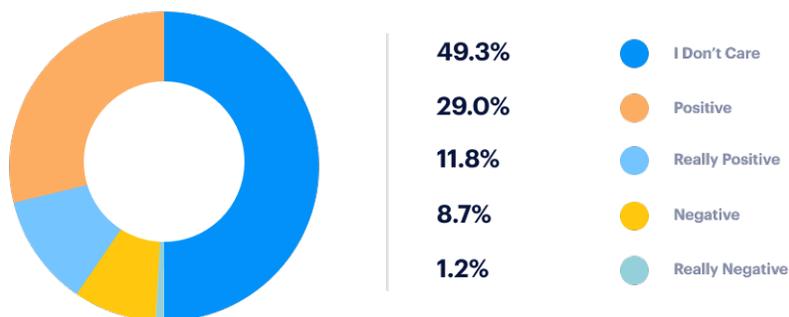
No



586 Out Of 587 Answered

# We don't care who's watching unless it's helping our colleagues.

How Do You Feel About Your Meeting Being Recorded?



Many of us have been in a recorded meeting at some point, and some of us are doing the recording. But how do people feel about being recorded during online meetings?

Data from respondents suggest the majority (about half of us) don't seem to care much at all either way. Only **1.2 percent** felt strong negative associations with being recorded, and just under **10 percent** of respondents had any negative sentiment at all.

The rest of the respondents reported positive feelings about meetings being recorded.

# Tips and Takeaways

## **Virtual meetings offer new avenues for asynchronous work.**

Despite all the technological advances we've seen in communication technology, we still haven't been able to make daytime the same time for everyone.

As a result, we need methods (like recording) to bring more people into the conversation. It's not perfect, but it helps fill the gap.

Teams working to fuel more asynchronous work might explore transcription tools and other means of documenting meeting minutes and outcomes to make the content more digestible and accessible for a variety of audiences.

## **Virtual meetings are a valuable tool that continues to improve.**

As the gap between virtual meeting technology and our ability to leverage it continues to close, they're becoming increasingly valuable and effective.

Teams looking for ways to further increase the value of their meetings might explore apps to set collaborative agendas in advance, get regular feedback on meeting effectiveness, and bring real time collaboration tools to the meeting.

# Closing Summary

**Virtual meetings are here to stay.**

*So, how do we make the most of the new possibilities virtual meetings offer, while minimizing the drawbacks?*

# Closing Summary

We're spending more time than ever in virtual meetings, and using them in ways we might not even have imagined just a few years ago.

Requirements for in-office presence may ebb and flow over the next few years, but we have already crossed the threshold into a world where virtual meetings are just as—if not more—common than those held exclusively in-person. More and more organizations are adopting a fully-distributed or hybrid work model. That's not likely to change anytime soon, and while there are myriad benefits to this arrangement, there's still a lot that remains for us to figure out together.

So how do we make the most of the new possibilities virtual meetings offer, while minimizing the drawbacks of a world where hybrid meetings outnumber in-person meetings?

At Polly, we've gone all-in on the distributed model. As more members of our own team feel comfortable coming back to the office, we'll remain a hybrid workforce. To ensure this arrangement is sustainable, we've been working hard to expand both our digital and social toolkit. While it's not always easy, those efforts are paying off.

We've introduced asynchronous processes into our workflows and continue to experiment with new tools and strategies like moderated Q&As in every all-hands. We spice up our virtual happy hours with trivia and Hot Takes, and strive to lead better meetings by setting agendas and checking in with our audience.

Most of all, we've focused on exchanging feedback, communicating clearly, leading with empathy, and listening to one another. If there's one thing we took away from the past year and a half of virtual meetings, it's how truly important those things are to foster.

# A Very Special Thanks

To our partners and survey respondents

When we set out to take the pulse of knowledge workers and meeting attendees across the globe, it was obvious we'd need some help.

Without the generous support of our partners and candid engagement from respondents, this report would not have been possible.

**Thank you!**

# About Our Partners

[Learn More](#)

WorkPatterns simplifies team management. Enabling continuous feedback, meeting management, goals, and workflow management—all in one place. Managers use WorkPatterns to organize team collaboration, regardless of where employees work from. WorkPatterns for Zoom guides your meetings within the Zoom meeting experience allowing managers and teams to manage their meetings, agendas, notes, and next steps without leaving Zoom.

[Learn More](#)

Pledge makes it easy for anyone, anywhere to turn their virtual meeting into a fundraiser for a cause. Our Zoom App allows hosts to embed a fundraiser page in a Zoom meeting and attendees can make donations without leaving the Zoom browser. Now every virtual birthday party, corporate meeting, happy hour can make a difference for 2M+ nonprofits around the world.

[Learn More](#)

For anyone who needs to transform audio or video into the more-accessible, more-actionable form of text, Rev provides the unmatched combination of the world's best automatic speech recognition artificial intelligence and the world's largest community of trained freelancers. Our services include: human transcription, machine-generated transcription, captions, foreign language subtitles, and live captions for Zoom.



[Learn More](#)

Prezi Video is the most engaging, interactive, and professional-looking way to share any content over Zoom. You can create content from scratch or bring any existing content - such as slides, images, and text - onto the screen with you by simply dragging and dropping. Prezi Video helps you get out from behind your slides, so you appear professional and your Zoom audiences stay engaged.

## #Warmly,

[Learn More](#)

Warmly is a tool that lets Zoom users gain instant insights on what you have in common with customers, clients, prospects, and teammates. Providing key context on everyone you meet, Warmly can reduce your prep time and make back-to-back Zoom calls a breeze.



[Learn More](#)

Colibri.ai is a live transcription and note-taking app for virtual meetings. It integrates with the user's video-conferencing app, records online calls, transcribes them in real time, and helps to generate concise searchable meeting notes that can be easily shared with teammates. Colibri enables individuals and teams to be effective and high-performing while collaborating via video conferencing tools.

## FELLOW

[Learn More](#)

Fellow is a meeting productivity and team management platform that helps teams collaborate on meeting agendas, record decisions, and keep each other accountable. Fellow's App for Zoom allows meeting attendees to record notes and action items within their video calls.



# About Polly

Polly empowers teams in Slack, Microsoft Teams, and Zoom to lead more productive, engaging meetings, capture and share crucial feedback instantly, and act confidently on the knowledge that drives their work.

Hold a vote, plan a sprint, onboard new employees, lead live Q&As, kick off a game of trivia, spark some friendly controversy with a Hot Take, and much more. To get started, add Polly to your favorite platform below, or [talk to sales](#).

[Try Polly for Slack](#)

[Try Polly for Zoom Apps](#)

[Try Polly for Microsoft Teams](#)

# The State of Virtual Meetings