



# Keeping Up with Changes in Business Communication

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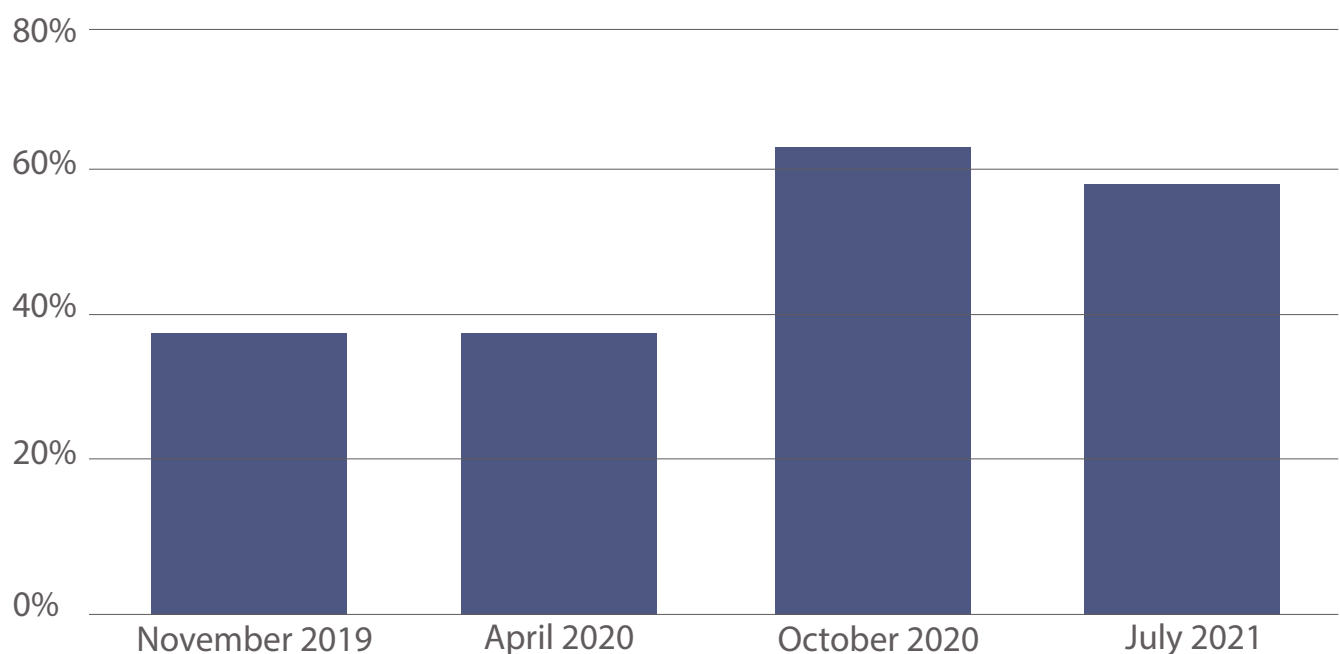
Unless we count ancient cave paintings, for much of history communication meant talking to someone face-to-face. In the last 50 years, that has begun to change. The movement to online communication platforms exploded in 2020 and has led to a need for instruction on how to contribute effectively using these platforms. The definition of communication has changed over the years and has required businesses to adapt to the current advantages and limitations of these platforms. In-person communication is often seen as most effective, but because of current circumstances, online platforms are taking precedent. As a result, the students in the Marriott School of Business must learn how to effectively use video meeting platforms.

# The Background

As technology improved, written forms of communication such as letters came into use. More recently, the telegraph allowed for immediate forms of written communication. However, for the most part, the preferred type of interaction was face-to-face. As phones then computers and smartphones were invented, written communication became more streamlined. Even with phones and computers, in-person communication was preferred and most often the norm. Online communication was limited to necessity, especially in the workforce. The Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 changed all of that.

Overnight the world changed. In-person communication was suddenly limited to the people you lived with. Online communication became essential, and the world quickly figured out how to use video apps such as Zoom, Hangouts, Skype, and Facetime. People joined important work meetings from their homes with their children in the next room on a video call for school using video apps. For months people thought that this sudden peak in online communication would be temporary. By 2021, the idea of going back to normal began to change. Figure 1 shows the percentage of remote employees expected to be fully remote in 5 years. In 2020 the percentage spiked from 38% to 58%.<sup>1</sup> The pandemic lasted longer than anyone expected and people began to feel

Figure 1: Percentage of remote employees fully remote in 5 years



more comfortable with video calls. By the time things could have really gone back to “normal” or at least to the way they were, the world realized that what had been might not actually be the best way.

This raised the question of what type of communication really is better: in-person or online? For a couple of years that was the debate, and wow was it debated. A quick Google search pulls up hundreds of articles, some arguing online is the future and we should embrace it, while others believe that face-to-face worked for centuries so why should a pandemic change that. Before I get into that debate I want to help all of us understand what communication truly is.

## What is Communication?

Communication is “the act of transferring information from one place, person or group to another.”<sup>2</sup> Sounds simple enough, right? However, the transference of information can be accomplished in so many different ways including the use of verbal, non-verbal, written, and visual forms. Even when people are face-to-face, much communication is done through the use of body language and hand motions. This non-verbal communication is not only hard to pick up but also hard to portray in a video call and can be impossible to pick up on or portray in an email or text. This is why communication skills are so important in the business world. Being able to communicate clearly is one of the most important skills to learn. Verbal and written communication skills help us to be understood, enabling us to become top hires which then leads to us becoming leaders.<sup>3</sup> Now that we understand everything communication encompasses, which type is more effective?

## Which is Better?

Many people claim that communicating face-to-face is the best form of interaction. This is in large part because “in-person interaction involves communicating nonverbally—from exchanging a smile, to touching, to modulating the sound of one’s voice to convey emotions.” The lack of non-verbal clues creates greater anonymity and weakens relationships.<sup>4</sup> According to Maggie Wooll communicating in person is significantly more effective than other forms of conversation including written and audio.<sup>5</sup> Much of communication is non-verbal so by seeing the other person, people are better able to understand each other.

In-person meetings allow for fewer misunderstandings and build trust allowing



both employers and employees to be more confident and persuasive. Employees are also able to stay engaged and be more efficient. Face-to-face communication creates a place where everyone can feel comfortable and stay in the loop as long as everyone listens and is willing to give feedback.<sup>6</sup> As effective as meeting physically is, it is simply not always possible. This was proven in 2020 when the switch to online communication hit the business world in full force.

The switch to online communication has created a systemic consequence on the psychological behavior of people.<sup>7</sup> Technology has enabled us to communicate in amazing ways, but it also provides countless distractions. Socializing is different now than it was 50 years ago, and not in all the best ways. Communicating online whether written or audio is less emotional. It is harder to create an emotional connection when you are not face-to-face especially when you have numerous notifications popping up on your device simultaneously. Despite all of these distractions, online has become the easiest and most popular way of communicating. With that in mind, we have to realize the importance of learning how to avoid the trap of distractions and maintain the ability to create genuine relationships even if they were formed online.

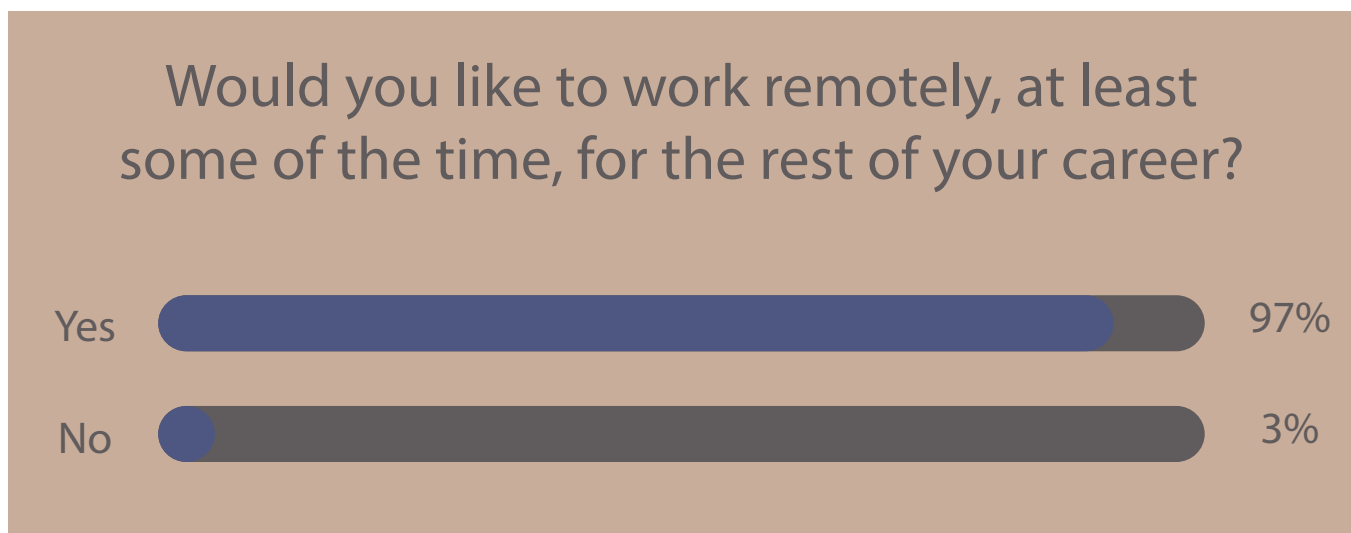


# Online is Inevitable

Regardless of what you believe is the superior form of communication, online interaction has become a part of our society and that will not change anytime soon. Buffer partnered with Noman List and Remote OK to conduct a survey asking employees about remote work. Figure 2 shows the results of the question “Would you like to work remotely, at least some of the time, for the rest of your career?” Almost all of the respondents said yes.<sup>8</sup> This means we must embrace the inevitable and truly learn how to make the best out of communicating online. As Kasprzak put it, “For better or worse, video calls are here to stay.”<sup>9</sup>

We can learn how to enhance online interactions. Kasprzak provided us with several ideas to help us stay engaged during video calls. The first step is to prepare for the meeting. One way to do that is to learn the platform that will be used. Secondly, ensuring your surroundings, including noises, and dress are not detracting from your participation will also help.<sup>10</sup> An article published by Indeed.com claims that people feel more confident to begin new projects when they dress professionally, while also helping them appear more positive and organized.<sup>11</sup> Time is also a contributing factor. Be respectful of other people's time by being clear and concise. With all of that in mind though, we must also be compassionate. Online calls often happen because someone could not come into the office which means they might be in a place where those outside forces, like noise and background, cannot be controlled. Be polite and understanding of other people's circumstances.<sup>12</sup>

Figure 2: Percentage of respondents who want to work remote



# Conclusion

Pros and cons exist in everything in life. Communication is no exception, but adjusting to the norms of the world is important no matter the cons. Right now, communicating via video meeting platforms is a fact of life in the business world, and as we all know communication is the key to success in business. Despite people believing in-person interaction is superior to online, students with a future in business must know how to do both. The world is continuing to change and to be successful we must stay on top of the change. The pandemic of 2020 forced a change in the world and the Business School has to change its curriculum in response. The Marriott School of Business is one of the most prestigious business schools in the country. Teaching their students not only how to communicate but also how to simply act on video calls will prepare their students for the industries they are about to enter.

# Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Adam Ozimek, “Future Workforce Report 2021: How Remote Work Is Changing Businesses Forever,” Upwork (Upwork, 2021), <https://www.upwork.com/research/future-workforce-report>.

<sup>2</sup> “What Is Communication?,” SkillsYouNeed, accessed June 16, 2022, <https://www.skillsyouneed.com/ips/what-is-communication.html>.

<sup>3</sup> “Why? Be a Skilled Communicator,” Chapter 1: Why?, accessed June 16, 2022, <http://mcom320.net/mcom01.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Alicea Lieberman, “Two Social Lives: How Differences between On-line and Offline Interaction Influence Social Outcomes” (Science Direct, 2020), [https://escholarship.org/content/qt94n9w8b9/qt94n9w8b9\\_noSplash\\_293949a5e051fffc8e1fdcc9ffc168c4.pdf?t=qdtezb](https://escholarship.org/content/qt94n9w8b9/qt94n9w8b9_noSplash_293949a5e051fffc8e1fdcc9ffc168c4.pdf?t=qdtezb).

<sup>5</sup> Wooll, Maggie. “Why Face-to-Face Communication Matters (Even with Remote Work).” BetterUp, January 11, 2022. <https://www.betterup.com/blog/face-to-face-communication#:~:text=Face%2Dto%2Dface%20communication%20is%20often%20more%20effective%20than%20written,us%20understand%20each%20other%20better>.

<sup>6</sup> Wooll, Maggie. “Why Face-to-Face Communication Matters (Even with Remote Work).”

<sup>7</sup> Alicea Lieberman, “Two Social Lives: How Differences between Online and Offline Interaction Influence Social Outcomes”

<sup>8</sup> Adam Ozimek, “Future Workforce Report 2021: How Remote Work Is Changing Businesses Forever,”

<sup>9</sup> Loraine Kasprzak, “Learn Video Communication Skills” (Career Connection, 2020), <https://www.aiche.org/sites/default/files/cep/20200620.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> Loraine Kasprzak, “Learn Video Communication Skills”

<sup>11</sup> Indeed Editorial Team, “The Importance of Dressing Professionally at Work,” Indeed Career Guide, October 28, 2021, <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/starting-new-job/importance-dressing-professionally-at-work#:~:text=Dressing%20professionally%20helps%20you%20present,improve%20the%20reception%20you%20receive>.

<sup>12</sup> Loraine Kasprzak, “Learn Video Communication Skills”