Team 3 | IMT 570

Pilot Research and Analysis for GENuine case study

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5th June 2022

Table of contents

Executive Summary

GENuine has moved to a fully remote work model and its employees need to be able to communicate effectively while working from home. The use of video calling tools for meetings, specifically when keeping one's video on, leads to increased stress and potentially burnout. Stress can reduce productivity and increase attrition at GENuine. Our goal was to study the impact of people's camera behavior during video calls through qualitative and quantitative analysis and suggest ways in which GENuine can help employees reduce the stress caused by video meetings.

We used affinity mapping, regression, correlation and t-tests on both primary and secondary data to perform our analysis and provide data-backed recommendations. We found that turning on one's camera during video calls has advantages (feeling more attentive, more connected and more engaged) as well as disadvantages (feeling self-conscious, anxious, hyper-focused and shy). We also found that turning on one's camera is more important in some situations than others.

Based on our findings, we came up with four recommendations. Our first recommendation is to create default company-branded virtual backgrounds for video meetings so that employees won't feel conscious about their backgrounds and won't be distracted by others' backgrounds. Our second recommendation is for those who are presenting on a call to have their video on so as to communicate with attendees more effectively and be able to connect with them. The third recommendation is to create an organization-wide communication policy that encourages following best practices like sharing the meeting agenda in advance and setting expectations about the types of meetings where it's acceptable to have one's video off. Our final recommendation is a long-term and expensive one, which is to implement a VR (Virtual Reality) technology like Horizon Workrooms for business meetings. The first three recommendations are feasible, practical, low-cost, and medium-effort. We believe that our recommendations will help reduce employee stress that is caused by virtual meetings and thereby enable GENuine to retain employees and have happy, productive employees.

Problem/Opportunity for GENuine

GENuine has recently moved to a remote work setting due to the Covid-19 pandemic, so the usage of communication and collaboration tools has increased. As GENuine navigates through this situation, it's important for GENuine employees to be able to communicate effectively. A particular aspect that we see as a potential opportunity for improvement, is the way GENuine employees use video calling software to conduct virtual meetings. Video conferencing tools have both pros and cons. Research suggests that there are certain aspects of video meetings that can lead to increased stress levels in employees. One of these aspects is whether an employee turns their camera on or not during a virtual meeting.

A Stanford research paper talks about how women report experiencing more Zoom fatigue than men do, because they feel more self-conscious on camera, especially with the self-view in video calls, thereby leading to increased cognitive load (Fauville et al., 2021). Being dissatisfied with personal facial features causes a psychological effect, also known as mirror anxiety, which in turn hampers productivity and increases the burnout rate in employees (Ratan et al., 2022). While there are various evident causes of verbal overload which could be visible, such as talking for lengthy periods and interacting with coworkers, there are also several non-verbal causes. Excessive amounts of close-up eye stare, the cognitive burden on memory, an elevated self-evaluation from staring at a video of oneself for longer periods, and constraints on one's physical activity are four such causes, according to Bailenson (Bailenson, 2021).

We wanted to further explore camera behavior on our own through not only secondary research but also primary research. By conducting this research, we wanted to be able to provide data-backed recommendations to GENuine on how they can improve their virtual meetings and reduce any added stress that employees feel due to virtual meetings.

Problem Statement

How does the camera being ON during a virtual meeting have an impact on GENuine employees?

This is an important research topic for GENuine because their data shows that there is a positive correlation between the number of meetings that a GENuine employee potentially attends and the level of stress that the employee feels. We go more into detail about this analysis in a later section.

Research Objectives

These are some of the research questions that we aim to study so as to provide actionable and valuable recommendations to GENuine:

- What factors in virtual meetings during remote work lead to burnout?
- Does gender have a role to play?
- Factors about video ON during virtual meetings that can lead to burnout in employees
- Can we frame any organizational policies around camera behavior for virtual meetings that would help with employee productivity?

An Indeed study states that 67% of their study respondents feel that burnout has increased during the pandemic (Forbes, 2021) and a study by the American Institute of Stress estimates that 40% of employee turnover happens due to stress (Ferguson, n.d.). We want to help GENuine employees by reducing the stress caused by video meetings and thereby improving their productivity and also preventing employee attrition at GENuine.

Approach and Methodology

Research Design

A mixed-methods approach was followed for our research. We first conducted exploratory quantitative analysis on data of GENuine employees, then conducted semi-structured focus groups for primary qualitative data, then analyzed qualitative data of GENuine employees, and finally, administered a survey for primary quantitative data.

Sample Selection

For this study, we were interested in having a sample set that was similar to GENuine employees in terms of sex, age, industry, remote work experience, job role, etc. We used stratified random sampling to select participants for our primary research. We conducted 2 focus groups with 4 participants each; 2 of them were male and 2 were female, by design, because we wanted to test differences between the two sexes. We had 64 respondents for our survey. Every participant had worked remotely for at least half a year. Many of our participants were MSIM students or graduates. We assumed that there would be similarities between MSIM students and GENuine employees because GENuine hires from the MSIM program.

Description of the sample:

Parameter	Focus groups	Survey
Sample size	8 participants	64 respondents
Sex	2 male and 2 female participants in each of the 2 focus groups	47% female and 53% male
Age group (in years)	6 are in their 20's and 2 are in their 30's	90% in their 20's, 7% in their 30's, 2% in their 40's, and 1% below 21
Ethnicity	7 are Asian and 1 is White	86% Asian, 8% White and 6% preferred not to say
Role	7 are individual contributors and 1 is a manager	84% individual contributors and 8% people managers

Limitations: Small sample size (72 participants) and a lack of diversity in age and ethnicity. A full-scale study should have a few hundred participants and more diversity in age and ethnicity.

Data Collection Procedures

Focus groups: Each focus group was an hour-long, with a set of fixed questions as well as ad-hoc follow-up questions. It was conducted over Zoom and recorded for later reference. The recordings were transcribed using Otter.ai and there was a dedicated note-taker for every session. The purpose of the focus groups was to identify major factors related to virtual meetings that impacted employees' stress levels and further narrow our research scope. Please see appendices A, B and C for the focus group set up and questions.

Survey: It was created using Google Forms and was sent to 100+ people via WhatsApp, MS Teams, and email. We specifically surveyed people around their camera behavior in virtual meetings to be able to provide specific recommendations to GENuine. Please see appendix D for the survey questions.

We believe that the data is quite trustworthy and credible because we chose participants who were known to us, we did not ask for personally identifiable information and the survey wasn't time-consuming to fill out.

Validity & Reliability

This study has low external validity because of the non-diverse unrepresentative sample and moderate-high internal validity because our research shows that turning one's camera on during video calls causes more stress.

The reliability of the study is high because our results from the focus groups and survey were similar.

While we did not properly test validity and reliability in this pilot study, it should certainly be done in a full-scale study.

Ethical Considerations

Concern	How did we address it?
Focus group call recordings for analysis	Written consent from participants
Participants did not want to reveal their identities	Avoided asking for personal information in survey questions and restricted access to data
Being aware of how one's data will be used	Explained the purpose of the study and how findings would be used
Bias in questions	Framed questions carefully to avoid ambiguity and did not ask leading questions
Data modifications for analysis	No modifications were done on Qualitative data and Quantitative data

In a full-scale study, any personal biases can be reduced by recruiting a diverse set of participants whom the researchers do not personally know.

Findings and Analysis

Quantitative Analysis: GENuine Data (Secondary Data)

For quantitative analysis on data provided by GENuine, we used **visualization techniques** especially bar charts, correlation plots, and linear regression.

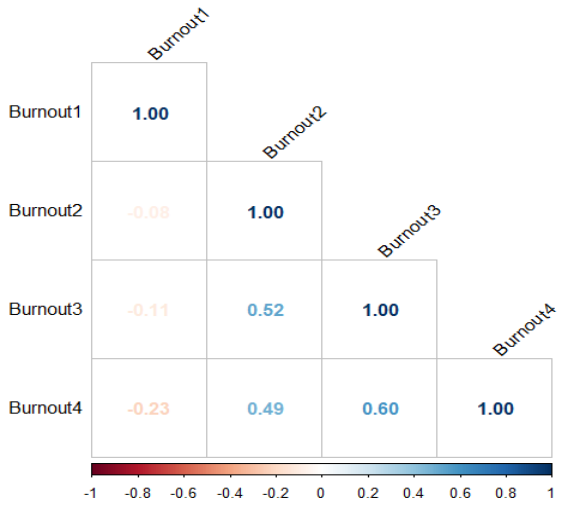


Image 1

Correlation plots primarily to discover the relationship between different variables of video meetings and burnout.

Burnout 1: “When I work I usually feel energized”
Burnout 2: “There are days when I feel tired before I start working”
Burnout 3: “After work, I tend to need more time than in the past in order to relax and feel better”
Burnout 4: “During my work, I often feel emotionally drained”

Looking at the matrix (Image 1), we found that burnout variable 4 is highly correlated to the other burnout variables. Owing to that, we decided to consider only that variable for the purpose of our analyses.

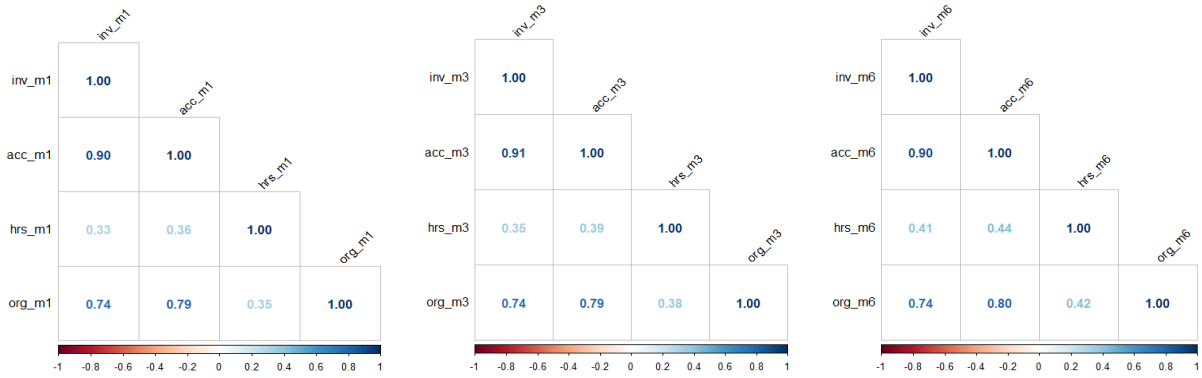


Image 2

Among the meeting variables, we chose to go ahead with the variable of meetings accepted for two reasons. First, there is a high correlation between the meeting accepted variables (m1, m3, m6) with all the other meeting variables (Image 2). Secondly, we are assuming that meetings accepted are synonymous with meetings attended, which is what our research and analysis focus on. We assumed that "meetings" here refer to *virtual* meetings since GENuine employees work remotely.

Based on the variables we decided on, we created a **linear regression graph** to understand how the relationship varies based on each gender. The reason for splitting our findings based on gender was evidence we found during our literature review readings that suggested that males and females react differently during video meetings.

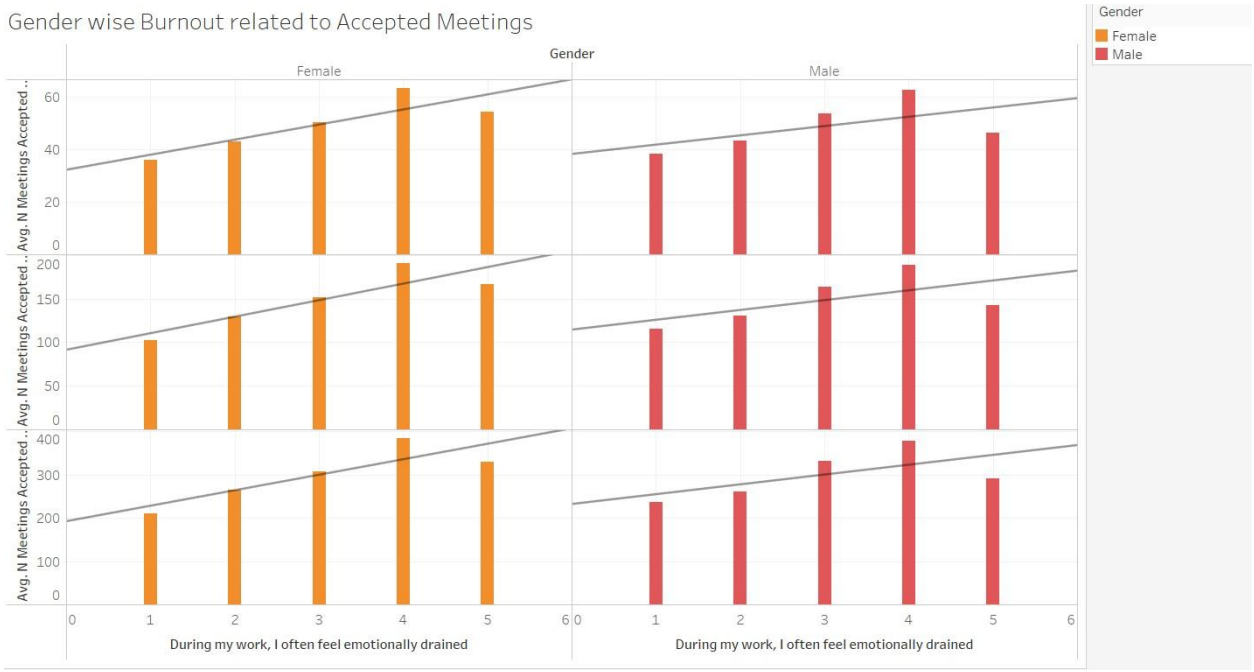


Image 3

Female: R-squared value = 0.774, P-value = 0.049
Male: R-squared value = 0.389, P-value = 0.261

Qualitative Analysis

For a better understanding of the underlying themes in our qualitative data, we dug deeper into the focus group transcripts as well as the qualitative dataset provided by GENuine.

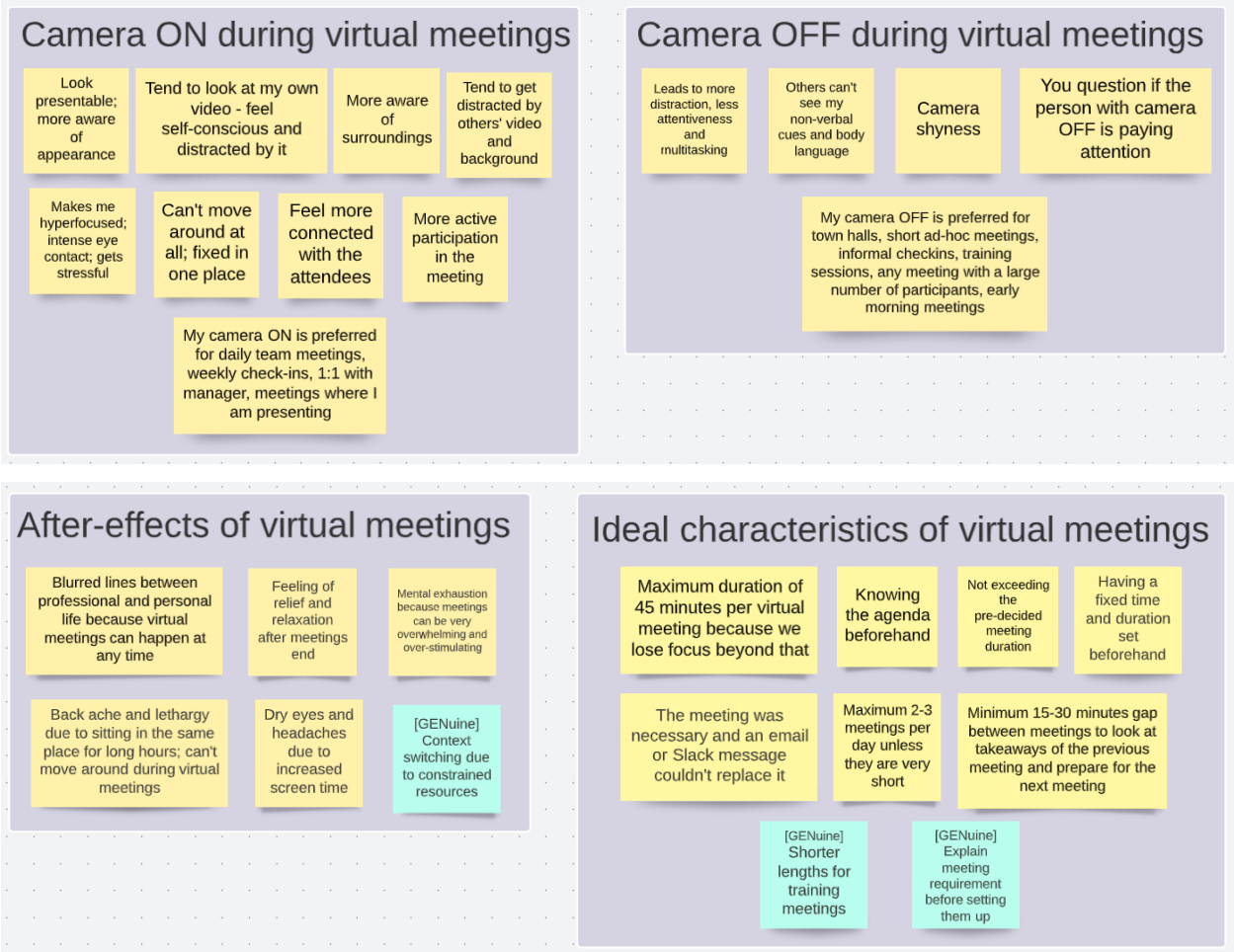
We began with thematic analysis to find patterns in our qualitative research data. We used a mixture of deductive and inductive approaches to come up with codes and themes.

After finalizing the codes with examples from both data sources, we created an **affinity diagram and grouped the codes into their respective themes**. Affinity diagrams helped us easily summarize key insights in the data. We used LucidSpark to do the affinity mapping. The process for this was as follows:

- Note all the relevant points that came up on individual sticky notes
- Put ideas that seem related in some way and place them side by side
- Group the ideas and name the themed clusters

This process helped in organizing the qualitative data which could help in further analysis and recommendations.

The affinity diagram below (Image 4) is based on feedback received from focus groups conducted by our team as well as GENuine employees' qualitative data.



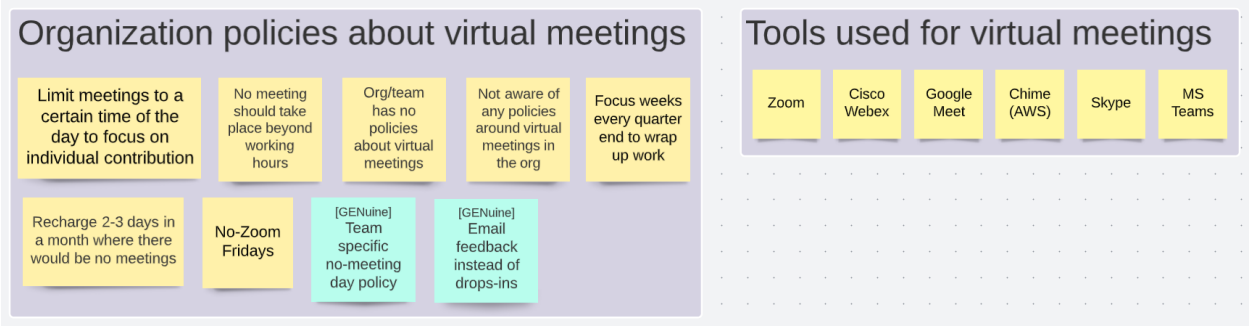


Image 4

Quantitative Analysis: Survey Responses (Primary Data)

From our survey findings where the female to male split is 47% to 53%, we conducted a **T-Test** on the responses received on 5 questions which asked about how the person felt with the video ON/OFF during a virtual meet. The p-value for the questions were as follow:

A. When I keep my video ON, I tend to be more focused/attentive (p-value=0.63)

B. When other people have their video ON, I tend to get distracted (p-value=0.50)

C. When I keep my video ON, I am more conscious about my personal appearance and surroundings (p-value=0.18)

D. When I keep my video ON, I tend to communicate more effectively (p-value=0.38)

E. When I keep my video ON, I tend to feel relieved after the meeting ends (p-value=0.81)

The high p-values along with the bar charts suggested that there was not a significant difference between the responses based on gender (Image 5). Therefore, we chose to generalize our results and provide the same recommendations across all demographics.

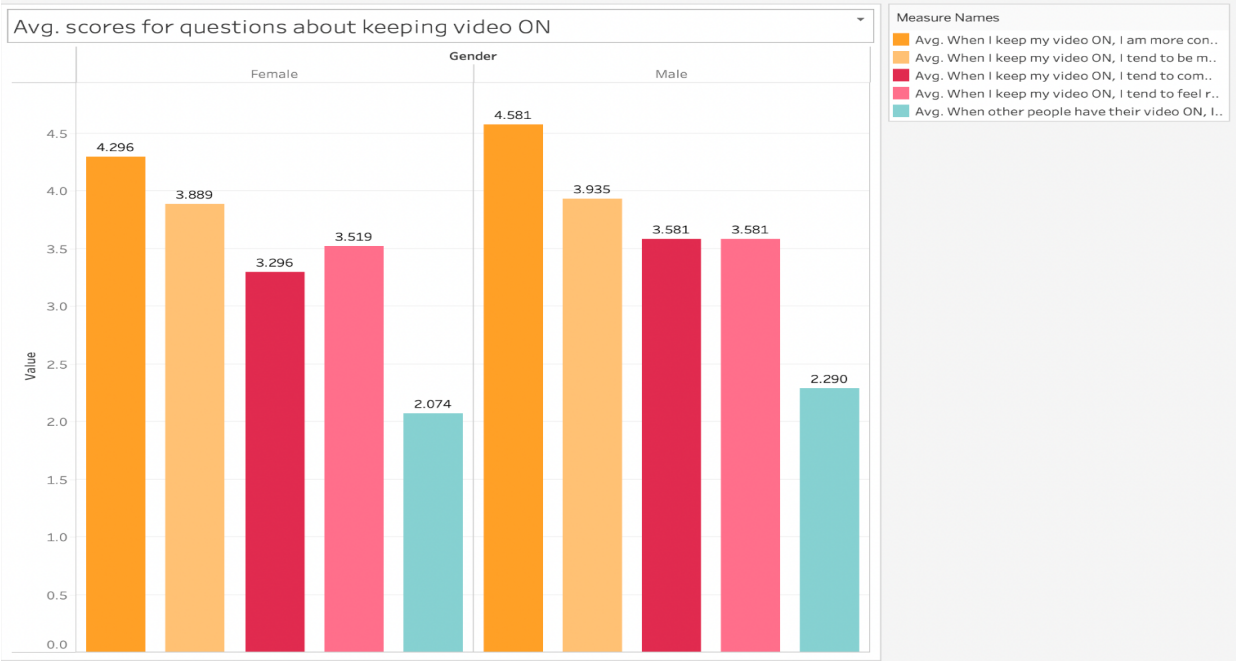


Image 5

We decided to club a certain set of findings together to better aid our reasoning for recommendations at a later stage – Meeting Type: Number of participants and length of meetings, Surroundings and Personal Appearance, Presenting and Communicating in a meeting, and finally the impact of video ON based on duration of remote work.

Meeting Type: Number of Participants and Length of Meetings

Further analyzing our survey responses, we decided to plot responses for the likelihood of a participant turning their video ON for different types of meetings such as Town Hall meetings, Daily Standups, 1:1 with their Managers, Hands-on training sessions and Weekly Check-ins. Among these we see a pronounced preference across all our data points for the former three types of meetings (Image 6).

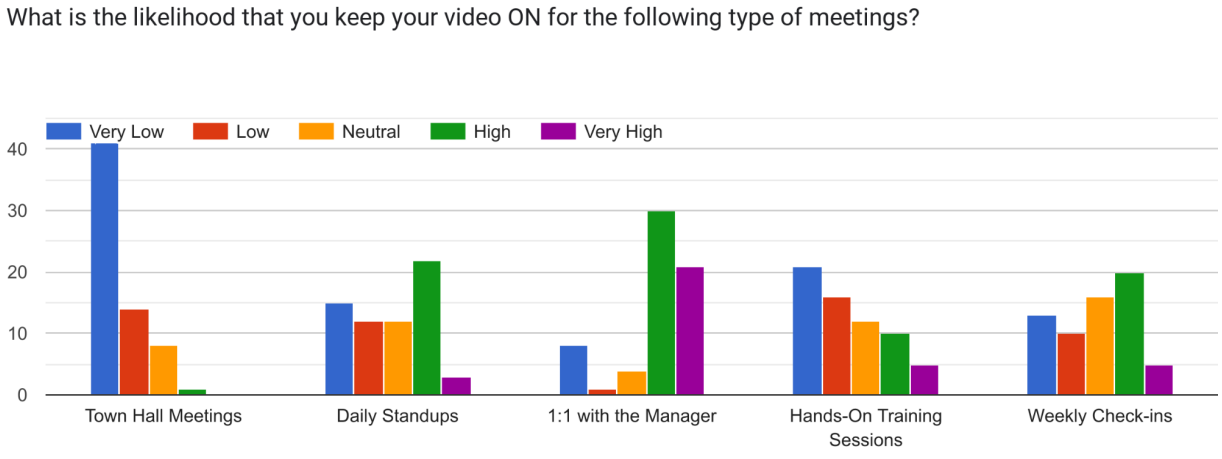


Image 6

Now, when we look at whether there is a relationship between length of meetings and number of participants on a participant turning their video ON, we see that in both cases over 50% of the participants indicated that there is. (Image 7 and Image 8)

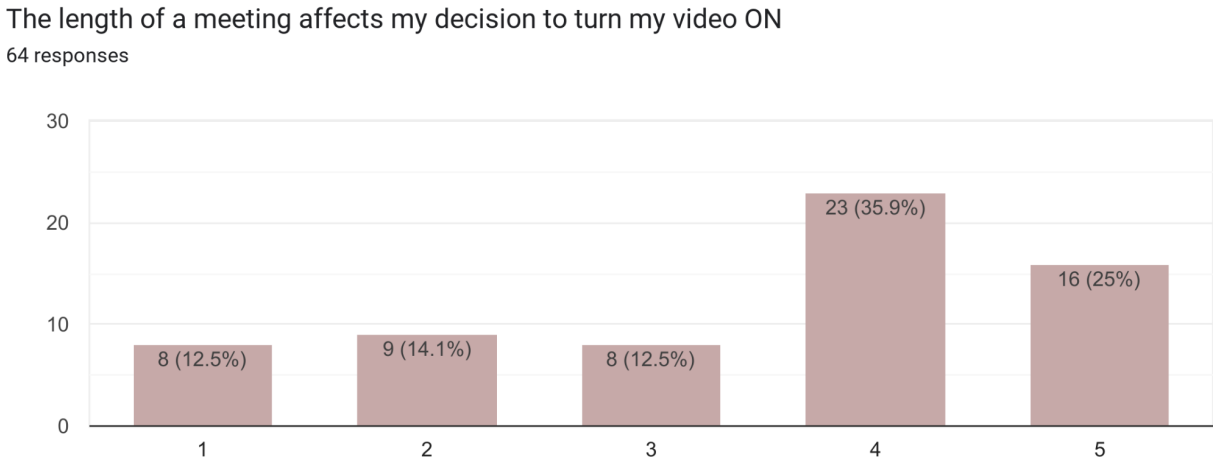


Image 7

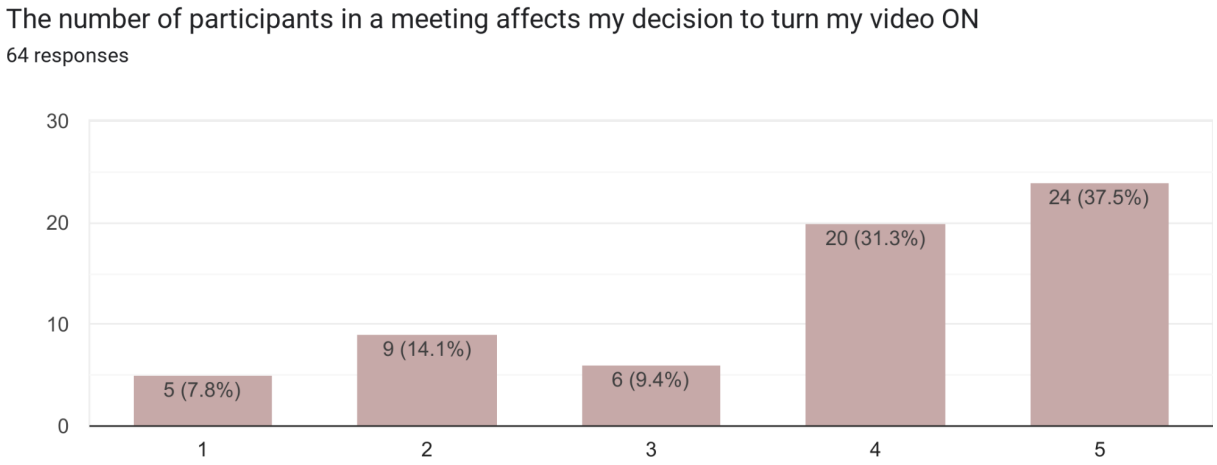


Image 8

Surroundings and Personal Appearance

Another factor that significantly affects the decision for participants to turn their video ON was their surroundings and their personal appearance as indicated by the following graphs (Image 9 and Image 10)

My surroundings affect my decision to turn my video ON

64 responses

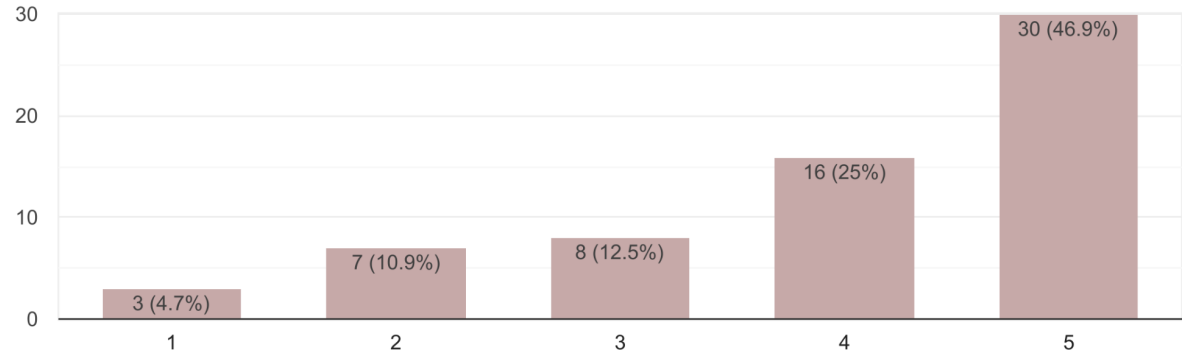


Image 9

When I keep my video ON, I am more conscious about my personal appearance and surroundings

64 responses

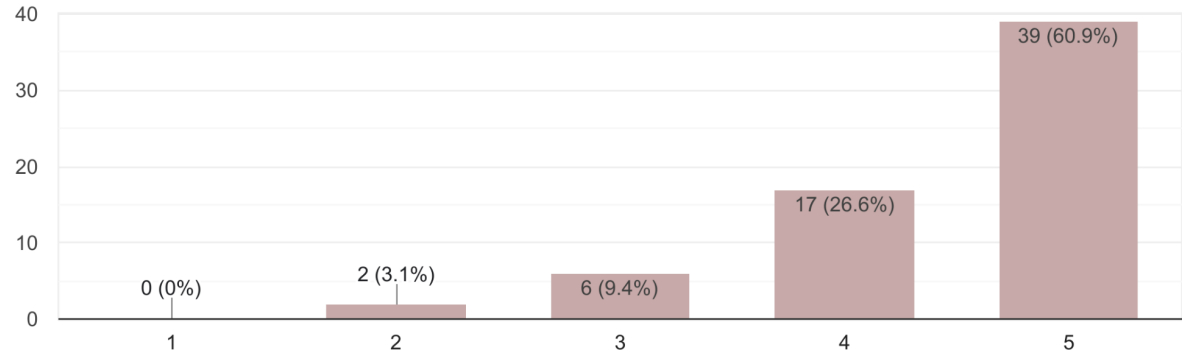


Image 10

Presenting and Communicating in a Meeting

Additionally, while presenting in a meeting, over 65% participants tend to keep their videos ON (Image 11). Around only 20% of participants feel that they communicate effectively without their video ON during a meeting (Image 12). Moreover, more than 70% of the participants said that they tend to be more focused/attentive in the meeting when they have their video ON (Image 13).

If I am presenting in a meeting, I tend to keep my video ON

64 responses

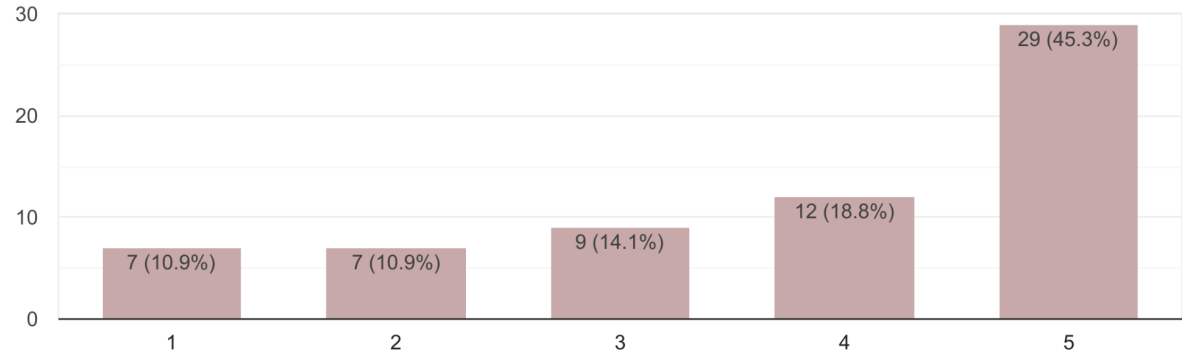


Image 11

When I keep my video ON, I tend to communicate more effectively

64 responses

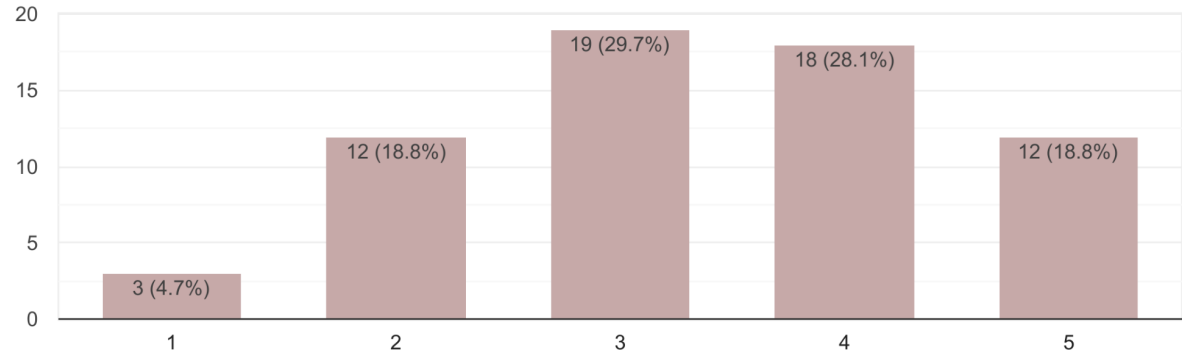


Image 12

When I keep my video ON, I tend to be more focused/attentive

64 responses

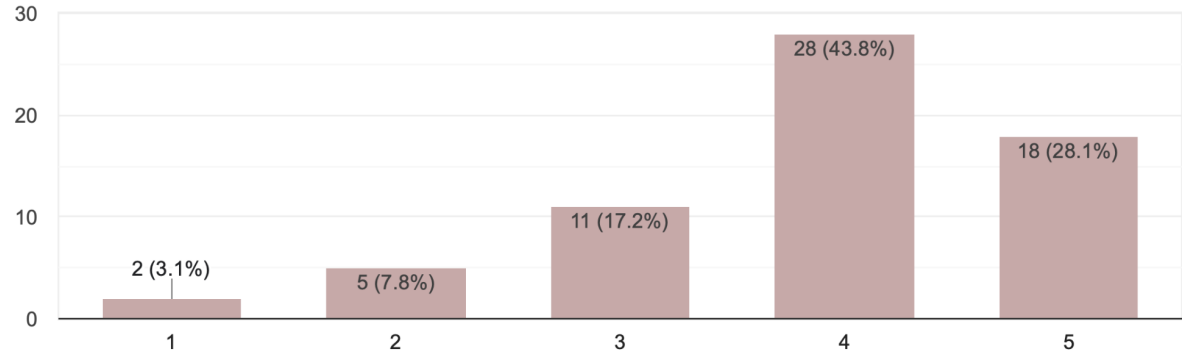


Image 13

Impact of Video ON based on the duration of Remote Work

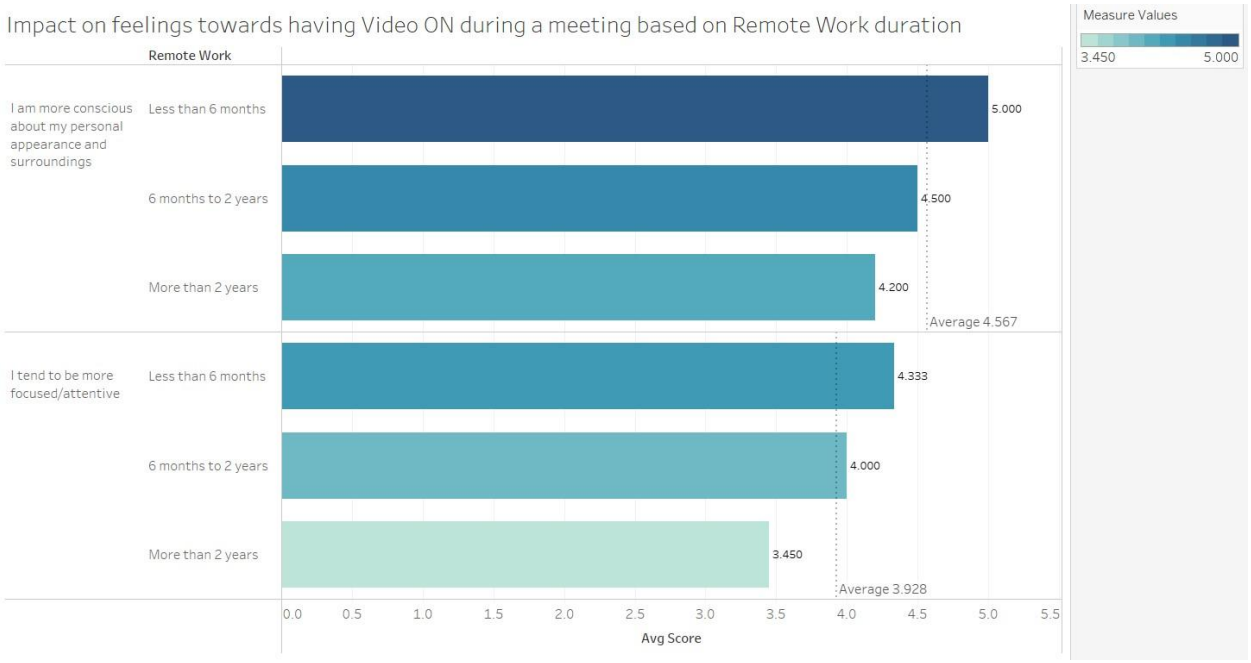


Image 14

Looking at this visualization (Image 13), the tendency of an employee to feel conscious about their personal appearance and surroundings is inversely proportional to the time they have worked remotely at a company. The same goes for their tendency to be focused/attentive in a meeting.

Sense of Relief after meetings end

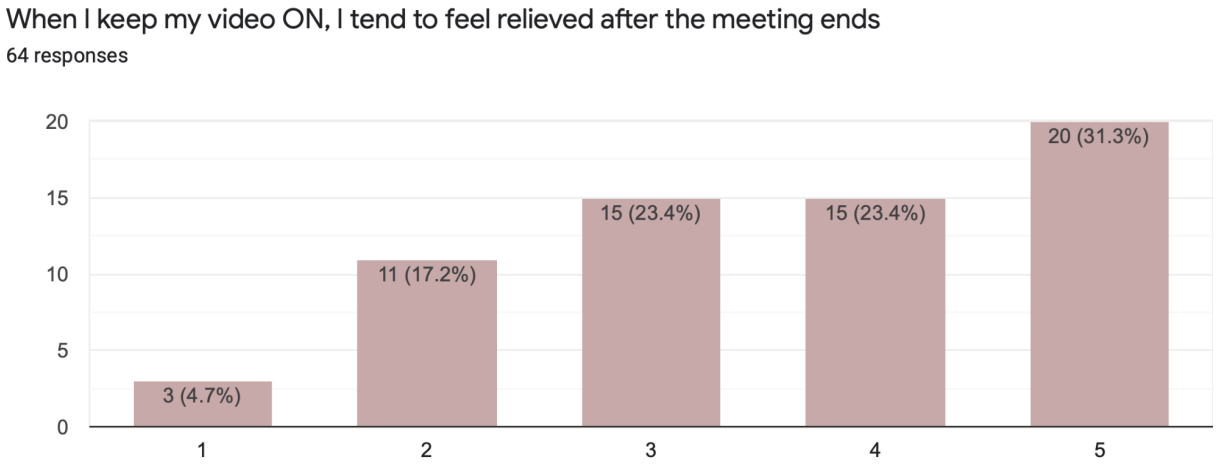


Image 14

Impact and Applications

Our literature review (Ratan et al., 2022) pointed us in the direction that males and females have different reactions about factors when they have their video ON during virtual meetings. But based on the responses in the survey rolled out by our team, we noticed no such difference. Therefore we decided to base our recommendations across all employees irrespective of gender. Upon further analyzing our survey results, we realized that there are certain components about virtual meetings that stand out the most, with regards to keeping the video ON – better communication (Image 12), being more focused/attentive in a meeting (Image 13), the surrounding and personal appearance affecting the decision to keep the video ON (Image 9 and 10).

When a company has a great communication flow set in place, the employees see an increase in productivity; they are less likely to be distracted during their working hours and get their work done efficiently and effectively. According to a McKinsey report, a well-connected team sees a productivity increase of 20-25% (Chui, M. et al, 2012). This increase, in turn, affects task work. According to CMSWire, 97% of employees believe that communication impacts their task efficiency on a daily basis (Alcala, 2015). Our findings suggest that keeping the video ON during virtual meetings does affect communication in a positive way. Therefore, our recommendations will be along similar lines to potentially enhance productivity and reduce burnout.

Our Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Company-wide default virtual background during virtual meets

In our focus groups, the point about the participants being too conscious about their personal background came up quite a bit. Participants said that they would be constantly thinking about the clutter in their background that would be visible to the other participants in the meeting. Therefore we added a couple of questions about the surroundings in the survey to gauge the response of a larger group. There too, we noticed an extremely high response to the question about participants being affected by their surroundings during virtual meetings. Therefore our recommendation for GENuine would be to have standard default backgrounds. A study shows that having nature imagery in the virtual background elicits creative thinking and has practical benefits in workplaces. A study published in The ScienceDirect shows that having nature imagery in the virtual background elicits creative thinking and has practical benefits in workplaces. It helps in reducing the psychological and physiological well-being of employees, all while reducing stress and improving cognitive functioning (Palanica, A. & Fossat, Y., 2022).

- Cost: This is anticipated to have a low cost on the company's end. GENuine would have to get a virtual background designed with company branding.
- Timeline: This is a relatively immediately implementable recommendation.

Recommendation 2: Video ON for presenters during virtual meetings

Our focus group study and survey responses show that people tend to be more attentive and focused with their video ON. Also, the communication becomes more effective while the video is ON. This will ultimately lead to less number of follow-up meetings and clarification calls.

- Cost: This is anticipated to have a low cost on the company's end. GENuine would have to publish a company-wide notice.
- Timeline: This recommendation can be implemented immediately.

Recommendation 3: Policy around keeping video ON/OFF during virtual meetings

Our survey results show that over 50% of participants feel relieved after a virtual meeting ends whenever they have their video ON (Image 15). The same was supported by our focused group participants as well.

If GENuine as a company is planning to continue working remotely, they would not want their employees to feel a sense of relief after virtual meetings (Image 15) – a very crucial part of company-wide professional communication. Instead, they would want their employees to feel motivated and have a sense of productivity in order to take on the work they have potentially discussed in the meeting. For this reason, we would encourage top management at the company to have open communication about the necessity of keeping video ON/OFF during certain types of meetings. Based on our findings, we notice that participants tend to want to keep their video OFF during long Town Hall meetings and hands-on training sessions. While for 1:1 meetings with their managers, daily stand-ups, and weekly check-ins, participants would strongly prefer keeping their video ON (Image 6). Based on these findings, we would like to recommend GENuine implement a video ON/OFF policy that would inform the employees about which type of meetings would require them to keep their video ON or when it is acceptable for them to keep their video OFF.

- Cost: This is low on the cost index as the only cost that GENuine would incur here would be time cost to ensure a company-wide policy is put in place.
- Timeline: This might take a moderate amount of time depending on whether GENuine wants to roll out a tentative policy to test on employees before setting things in stone and enforcing a permanent policy.

Recommendation 4: Implementing technology like Horizon Workrooms

Horizon Workrooms (Meta, 2021) can be a long-term solution to help overcome the challenges faced during the virtual meets wrt keeping video ON/OFF. It will enable better communication, reduce distractions, and foster in-person like collaboration.

- Cost: This will incur huge costs to the company. All employees will have to be equipped with VR headsets along with training them for its use. The technology cost would be high as well.
- Timeline: This is a long-term recommendation. Once the technology is full-proof yet, it will take time for its implementation and adoption.

Limitations and Future Scope

Limitations

Our research study was limited by two main factors. Firstly, the time period of 10 weeks was not enough for us to conduct extensive research. We would have liked to spend more time reading about similar research and their results in this domain. More time would enable us to reach out to a wider audience for our qualitative and quantitative analysis. Secondly, our research was restricted to people we knew, i.e, fellow students and immediate peers. This limited our options to do further demographics-based research.

Future Scope

We want our full study to pan across a larger demographic that would enable us to reduce the limitations to a bare minimum. That would enable us to gather data that has fewer biases than our current data does.

Moreover, to measure the impact our recommendations have on GENuine and its employees, we would want to test them out with a group of employees. We would want to study the behavior of employees before and after implementing the recommendations to get the most accurate results on whether our research made an impact on GENuine in a positive way.

To further extend our study, we would love to collaborate with companies providing video meeting platforms to analyze the behavior of people keeping their video ON/OFF during a meet. This will allow us to understand the trends globally and across industries.

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Appendices

Appendix A - Focus group sign-up form

We sent out a Google Form to potential focus group participants to capture basic details, their availability, and get explicit consent for the session to be recorded.

The message is included in the form for participants to read before they fill out the form:

> Hey there!
>
> We are a bunch of graduate students at the University of Washington. We are conducting a research study as part of our coursework. For our research, we are conducting group interviews wherein we would love to know about your experiences with video conferencing, especially in a remote work environment.
>
> We will be summarizing all research findings and none of your personal information will be published. Nobody outside our research group will have access to what you said.
>
> This form is to gather your availability for the focus group and get some basic information about you. Your time and contribution is invaluable to us. Thank you so much for helping us with our study!
>
> Cheers!

Questions included in the focus group sign-up form: link

1. Your preferred name
2. Your pronouns
3. Your email ID
4. Your contact number (optional)
5. Your age group:
    a. 21-30
    b. 31-40
    c. 41-50
    d. 51-60
    e. Prefer not to answer
6. How do you identify yourself?
    a. Female
    b. Male
    c. Non-binary
    d. Prefer not to answer
7. What is/was your most recent job title?

8. What industry did/do you work most recently?
9. How long have you worked remotely?
10. Time availability
11. This focus group will be conducted on Zoom and the call will be recorded for our reference. Nobody outside our project group of 5 students will have access to it. Do you consent to the call being recorded?
    a. Yes
    b. No

Appendix B - Focus group question list

The focus group was semi-structured so we had a set of fixed questions as well as ad-hoc follow-up questions.

List of questions for the focus group:

1. What is your role and which department are you in?
2. How long have you been working remotely?
3. Have you ever worked in person?
4. Are you usually the one organizing meetings or are you usually invited to meetings?
5. What tools are you currently using for video calling?
6. On an average, how many meetings do you attend per day?
7. What is the typical length of each meeting?
8. How much of a gap do you typically have between meetings?
9. How many of the meetings you attend are ad-hoc vs scheduled? [unsure]
10. When you have meetings, do you have a preference for keeping your camera on or off? What is the reason for your preference?
11. Do you find that having the camera on in a virtual meeting is similar to meetings that happen in person? Why or why not?
12. What is your attention span like during virtual meetings? [Unsure]
13. What makes you want to actively engage in meetings? By that I mean, either listen actively or participate or in some way. What affects your attention span? [Unsure]
14. What according to you qualifies for a useful or productive meeting? (Factors like number of participants, type of meeting like standup, townhall, etc.) [unsure]
15. How do you feel after a video call ends? What are your emotions, feelings or thoughts?
16. How often do you feel like the meeting was a good use of your time?
17. For those of you who have worked in person, what do you think are some drawbacks of virtual meetings when compared to in-person meetings?
18. Comparing in-person work with remote work, did you have more or less meetings in-person?
19. Similarly, what are some advantages of virtual meetings over in-person meetings?

20. Do you feel like you need a break from these virtual meetings at some point? Why? [Unsure]
21. Do virtual meetings affect your personal life or health in any way?
22. Are you ever expected to attend virtual meetings outside of your work hours? [Unsure]
23. How well do you think you are able to manage your workload along with virtual meetings?
24. How do you feel at the end of a work day or work week? What adjectives come to mind?
25. What is your overall opinion and personal view on virtual meetings? Pros and cons?
26. For those of you who have worked in person before going remote, has your perception of video conferencing changed in any way? [Unsure]

Appendix C - Focus group feedback form

After every focus group, we promptly sent out a feedback form for participants to anonymously provide feedback to us and help us get better at facilitating focus groups.

Questions enlisted in the feedback form: link

1. What went well?
2. What could have been done better?
3. Any other comments for us?

Appendix D - Survey questions

We sent out a Google Form survey to people whom we personally knew.

The message included in the form for participants to read before they fill out the form:

> Hello, my teammates and I from the University of Washington are conducting a research study as part of our coursework. This survey is about your experience with virtual video meetings used for remote work.
> All research findings will be summarized and used solely for academic purposes.
> Thanks in advance!

List of survey questions: link

1. Age (in years)
    a. Below 21
    b. 21-30

    c. 31-40
    d. 41-50
    e. 51-60
    f. Above 60
2. How do you identify yourself?
    a. Female
    b. Male
    c. Non-binary
    d. Prefer not to answer
3. Ethnicity
4. How long have you worked remotely?
    a. Not worked remotely
    b. Less than 6 months
    c. 6 months to 2 years
    d. More than 2 years
5. How do you define your role?
    a. Individual Contributor
    b. People Manager
    c. CXO Level
    d. Other..
6. In which country have you worked remotely?

Questions about VIRTUAL MEETINGS:
(Questions 1 through 12required the participants to answer on a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest)

1. When I keep my video ON, I tend to be more focused/attentive
2. When other people have their video ON, I tend to get distracted
3. When I keep my video ON, I am more conscious about my personal appearance and surroundings
4. When I keep my video ON, I tend to communicate more effectively
5. When I keep my video ON, I tend to feel relieved after the meeting ends
6. What is the likelihood that you keep your video ON for the following type of meetings?
    a. Town Hall Meetings
    b. Daily Standups
    c. 1:1 with the Manager
    d. Hands-On Training Sessions
    e. Weekly Check-ins

7. If I am the organizer of a meeting, I tend to keep my video ON
8. If I am presenting in a meeting, I tend to keep my video ON
9. The length of a meeting affects my decision to turn my video ON
10. The number of participants in a meeting affects my decision to turn my video ON
11. The agenda of a meeting affects my decision to turn my video ON
12. My surroundings affect my decision to turn my video ON
13. Does your organization have any policy regarding video being ON/OFF during virtual meetings?
14. If yes, what is it?
15. If yes, how would you rate its effectiveness?
16. What camera policy would you like for virtual meetings and why?