# Stop Managersplaining On Video Calls And Give People A Voice

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In the sudden coronavirus-fuelled upheaval that many organizations have been facing the past few weeks, many businesses have found themselves, in mere days, having to implement digital transformation strategies that would usually be introduced over a span of months or years. For non-key workers, the challenge - other than staying two yards apart - is how to best do your job while working from home in isolation from your team.



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With entire companies now widely dispersed, part of this sudden and frenzied change involves increased use of video calls, as most, if not all, internal meetings have gone digital. Pre-coronavirus, things such as video conference calls were something teams may have indulged in once or twice a week, often to talk to clients or colleagues in another state or country. However, in the current world climate, video calls are now something of a lifeline for everyone, for both internal and external communication.

Teams are having regular catch-ups from their living rooms which, although may sound fun, can actually be problematic. When everyone is in the office, even the quietest team member is likely to feel relaxed about speaking up in a meeting, simply because there's not much of a barrier holding them back. However, when everyone is behind a screen,

there is a tendency to remain quiet unless spoken to. This is primarily so as to not have overlapping speakers but often also because individuals feel that what they have to say isn't as important as what their colleagues can offer up. In general, video conferencing, for all its wonders, does very little to empower interactivity, which can be a huge hurdle for everyone stuck working at home, where collaboration and communication are now more important than ever.

### Don't Just Talk, Listen

A key element of leadership isn't always about giving orders, but knowing when to sit back and let the front-line staff guide the conversation. After all, the staff that do the job every day are often the ones best equipped to lead the organization in the direction it needs to go. As simple as it might seem, something as small as making sure to invite people to speak can go a long way during this prolonged usage period of video conferencing. Many won't volunteer their voice to a conversation but asking "what do you think?" is a sure-fire way to make sure all participants' points are being heard.

On a conference call when there can often be upwards of tens of participants at one time, a crucial element of leadership is empowering those that have views to express them. Allowing conference participants the floor to collaborate and share ideas, rather than have them sit on mute while they're spoken at, will enable a more open and positive environment for even the shyest and quietest employees to feel like their voices can be heard.

Communication outside of conference calls can also significantly influence how these meetings are run. For example, if everyone is given a role or speaking slot ahead of the meeting, it allows for people to come prepared with points and questions. This also allows for better time management within the meeting itself, so nobody feels like they're forced to butt into another person's conversation, or override someone else's points just to shoehorn their own in. Turning up a virtual meeting, knowing that you'll have 5 minutes to talk about your specific points and ask any relevant questions you have, will be incredibly freeing and will take the pressure to talk off of those who have a tendency to stay quiet until spoken to.

### Have Fun and Be Creative

When it comes down to it, the onus to keep teams engaged and interactive on video calls lies with those leading the calls. Often it's the case on conference calls that managers speak at, rather than with, their teams. This is simply because video conference calls are functional, as opposed to places you go to chat and socialize. Therefore, the best way to make sure that teams are feeling heard on these calls is to introduce levels of interactivity where possible. Many would find it surprising how, with the right techniques and tools, conference calls can actually be more interactive than a face-to-face meeting in an office.

As unprecedented and scary as these times are, people are still managing to have fun while conference calling from home. Many people are attempting new (and fun) ways to make sure they and their teams are being heard. Such exercises include activities like passing the ball, where the current speaker throws an imaginary ball to the next speaker,

saying their name and giving them the floor to speak. Others include using pre-agreed hand signals to gesture approval and disapproval of ideas, entirely removing the requirement to speak in order to express your opinion. Many video conferencing solutions can be combined with creative ways to help both large and small teams to remain engaged through live Q&As, polls, and even quizzes, all of which help to keep teams engaged and involved while working remotely.

Working from home culture is growing rapidly and video conference calls are swiftly taking over from face-to-face meetings as a business norm. As with all new things, it's important to adapt, which also means adapting to the needs of employees. Ensuring that everyone is heard on a conference call can be difficult, but not impossible, and those that are taking the time to prioritize interactivity will be the ones that flourish in this new era of self-isolation and remote working.

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### Johnny Warström

I am CEO and co-founder of Mentimeter, a Stockholm-based startup which, through an interactive software platform, makes meetings more enjoyable, engaging and productive.
I co-founded the company in 2014, by 2019 we are 60 colleagues, have reached over 50 million people in 150 countries, with customers including Microsoft, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.
Last year Mentimeter was recognized by The Next Web as the fastest-growing startup in Sweden, a country renowned for its world class startup scene (successes include Spotify, Mojang, Skype and Klarna).
Prior to Mentimeter, I co-founded two companies, worked for an independent consultancy firm and joined telecommunication group Telenor working with Global Business Development within IoT.
I studied Electrical Engineering at the esteemed KTH Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm. Outside of Mentimeter, I volunteered for NGO, 'Engineers Without Borders', working on projects in Bolivia and Tanzania.


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