The state of meetings in hybrid work

Bringing people closer across changing workspaces

Contents

Introduction

For years now, hybrid work has increasingly become the new normal for millions of knowledge workers around the world. Splitting their time between the office, home, or wherever else they choose to get their work done, employees' work lives are more dynamic than ever. With increased location and time flexibility, they're finding new ways to balance home and work responsibilities, leveraging innovative technologies to increase productivity, and uncovering novel workstyles that benefit both themselves and their organizations.

Of course, this work revolution has also brought with it new challenges. While employees speak to the well-being benefits of flexible work, many leaders and managers have struggled to lead widely distributed teams. Similarly, with challenging macro-economic circumstances characterized by inflation and fears of a decline in employee productivity, many leaders have mandated a return to the office, oftentimes despite the wishes of their employees. From a cultural perspective, many younger employees who have just entered the workforce also feel that they have missed out on the in-office onboarding experience that many of their more seasoned colleagues received.

But perhaps more than anything, the way we collaborate with one another has been challenged through an increase in online and hybrid meetings. Regardless of what return-to-office movements organizations have or haven't experienced, the fact that many meetings remain online is unchanged. And the challenges haven't diminished.

Over the past three years, we've been tracking these shifts in employee sentiment and work behaviors in our Jabra Hybrid Ways of Working research. In Q1 this year, we surveyed 1,845 employees in six key markets around the world to focus on the state of meetings in hybrid work and uncover the largest barriers and opportunities for employees and organizations.

What's in this year's report?

Across our years of research on hybrid working, inclusion has consistently come up as a major concern for employees: when working from different locations, how can I be sure that I'm included in meetings and in my team? These concerns often stem from anxieties around how inclusion or exclusion may impact their relationships, work culture, and ultimately their career. And finally, they want to know what practical steps can be taken to boost inclusion in their meetings? That's why we've decided to focus on three key topics in this report: inclusion, professionalism, and meeting-room technology.

What's new in hybrid work?

Before we can dive into the state of meetings in hybrid work, we first need to understand the state of hybrid work itself. How – and where – are knowledge workers working? What role is the office playing? And which demographic trends are driving employee habits and behaviors? In this section, we look at some of the latest trends in hybrid working.

1. Employees are spending more time in the office as the return-to-office (RTO) intensifies

For the past three years, employees' work experience has largely been defined by more time in remote and home-working locations. And while these still play a role in the future of work, our latest data shows that many workers are once again returning to the office. This is seen through an increase in employees working in both hybrid and full-time office models, as well as a decrease in full-time remote work.

Why is this happening? Concerns surrounding Covid-19 – the very reason we shifted so dramatically to remote work in the first place – are largely in the rear-view mirror. In fact, in early May the World Health Organization ended its emergency designation, marking a symbolic end to the pandemic.[1] Most people simply aren't afraid of contracting the virus in the office anymore, and are choosing to go in more often.

Similarly, with an increased focus on productivity in the wake of layoffs and tight economic conditions, more employers are returning to pre-pandemic workplace policies, with some even mandating employees to be in the office five days per week. Of course, other companies who were recently fully remote are now shifting to a hybrid model to balance remote flexibility with the collaborative benefits of in-office work. All in all, these changes have led to an intensification of the global RTO trend.

Key Takeaways

Organizations should still give employees the flexibility to work in a hybrid model, while rethinking collaboration needs in the office, as more employees return to using these spaces.
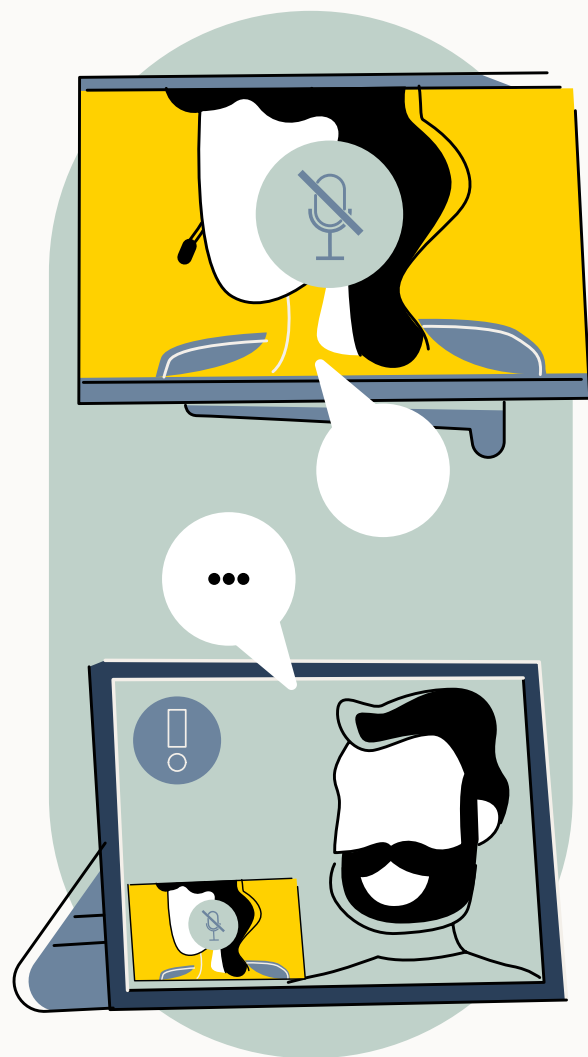
[1] Nolan, Stephanie. W.H.O. Ends Global Health Emergency Designation for Covid. (5 May 2023). The New York Times.

**What does your current
work week look like?**

2022

2023

**Full-time
remote**

19%

10%

9% decrease
in full-time remote

Hybrid

45%

48%

3% increase
in hybrid

**Full-time
in-office**

37%

42%

5% increase
in full-time
in-office
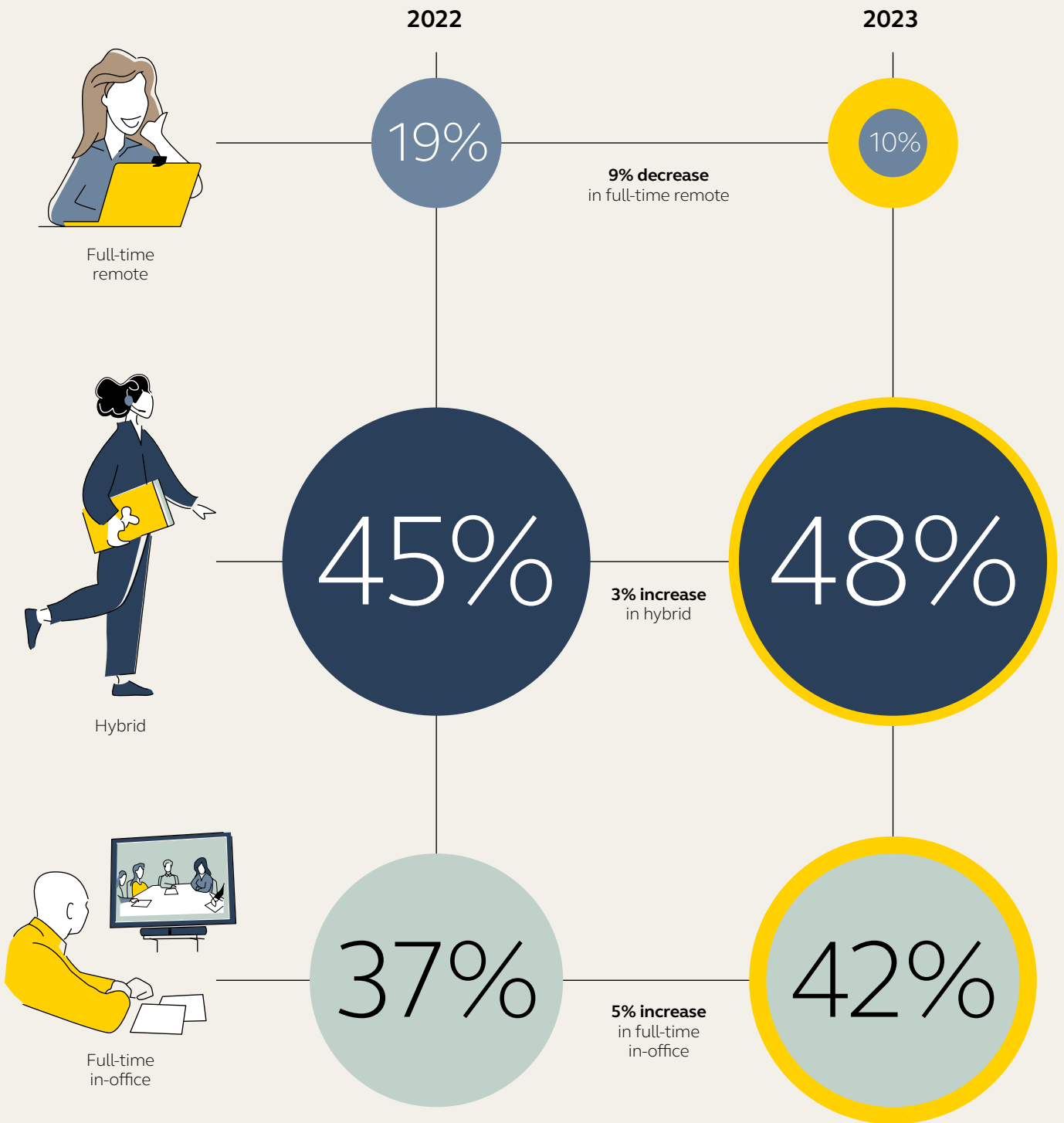
2. RTO is driving an RTMR (return-to-meeting-room)

Returning to the office has many implications. Employees have once again begun packing lunches, commuting, and making office small talk. But more critically, they've also started returning to meeting rooms. In fact, 62% of all meetings are now taking place in meeting rooms – roughly half of which also involve online participants.

Prior to the pandemic, most meeting rooms were geared to in-person collaboration only – and our data shows that this is still the case. However, with the rapid increase in online and hybrid meetings, most meetings now have at least one person joining from a remote location. As the RTO intensifies, the need for upgrading meeting rooms with technology that can include all participants equally will also intensify.

This means that leaders, IT managers, and facilities teams will need to give meeting spaces and technology a renewed focus and think about ways to optimize them for hybrid meetings. For more on this, jump to section three.

Which is the most common form of meeting you have participated in over the past 12 months?

2022   52%   28%   20%

2023   38%   28%   34%

Fully virtual   Hybrid   Fully in-office
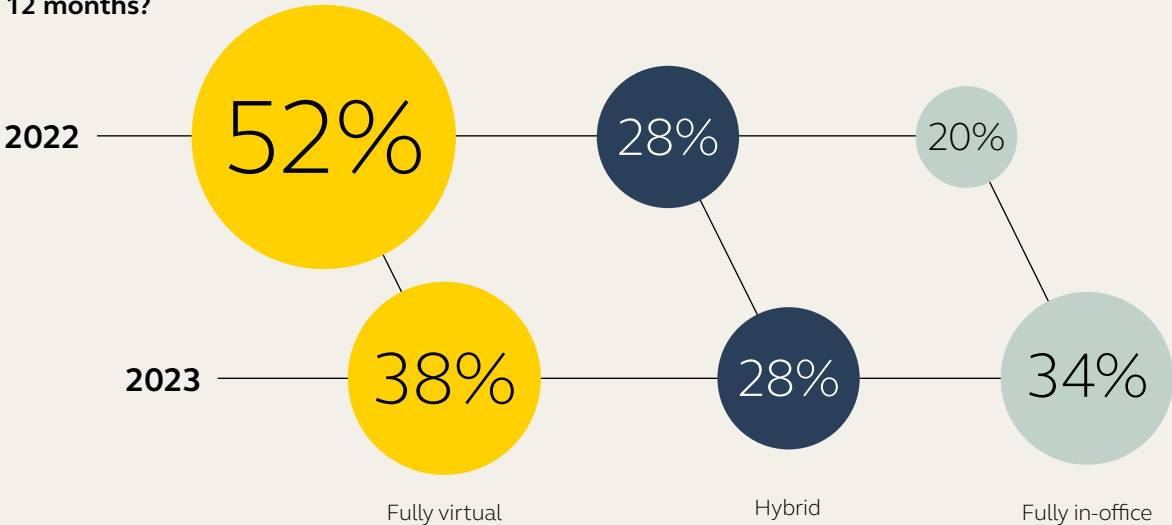
3. The shift from online to in-person is changing how employees think about meetings

When employees began full-time remote work during the pandemic, any interaction with a colleague was considered a meeting. Even for a 10-minute catch up, a meeting invite was sent, and time was booked in the calendar. In the eyes of the participants, this was a textbook meeting. But now that employees are increasingly back in the office, our data shows that overall time spent in meetings has decreased.

In fact, in our 2022 hybrid working report, we found that 35% of employees spent more than a quarter of their time in meetings.[2] But in 2023, we can see that the number of these "high collaborators" has decreased to 23%.

But is this because the actual time spent interacting with others has decreased? Or because that 10-minute chat at the coffee machine was never booked in the calendar like a virtual meeting would've been? In both scenarios, the same work objective could be achieved. However, we'd typically never consider the coffee chat a "meeting" in the same sense as we would a meeting with an official calendar invite. As employees continue to return to the office, this begs the question: what constitutes a meeting?

Key Takeaways

The return to office is reducing calendar congestion of traditional meetings, as ad-hoc office catch ups increase communication flows.

[2] Jabra Hybrid Ways of Working 2022 Global Report

The state of meetings in hybrid work

What characterizes a "good" meeting? In our research over the past three years, a few elements have been shown to have an outsized impact on the meeting experience for employees. The first one – inclusion, or that feeling of being part of the conversation and that your opinions are welcomed and appreciated – is an especially common issue in the age of online and hybrid meetings. Many feel left out for a range of reasons, many of which we will explore here.

Whether we feel included in meetings also impacts the way others perceive us. In other words, it impacts our professionalism. As professionals, we all want to be able to communicate our competence and engagement to others as effectively as possible. This helps us build relationships based on trust and mutual respect. However, as the traditional handshakes and room-reading have become less frequent, we've had to relearn a new virtual etiquette of professionalism.

Finally, the red thread tying all these together is meeting technology, or the devices we use to actually join our online meetings. In order to make sure everyone is included and can perform at their best, employees must be equipped and empowered to navigate this new virtual-first world of work. But not all technology is the same, and our data shows that without the right devices, employees can quickly fall behind and feel left out. In the remainder of the report, we dive into these three elements to uncover the latest trends in the state of meetings and propose solutions for a more inclusive, professional, and tech-enabled future.

Inclusion

In recent years, inclusion has moved higher on the agenda for business leaders. Increasingly, organizations are becoming aware of the emotional experience of work, that feeling you're part of something as an employee is directly linked to well-being, performance, and commitment to the company. Here, we explore how meetings are making (and possibly breaking) that experience.

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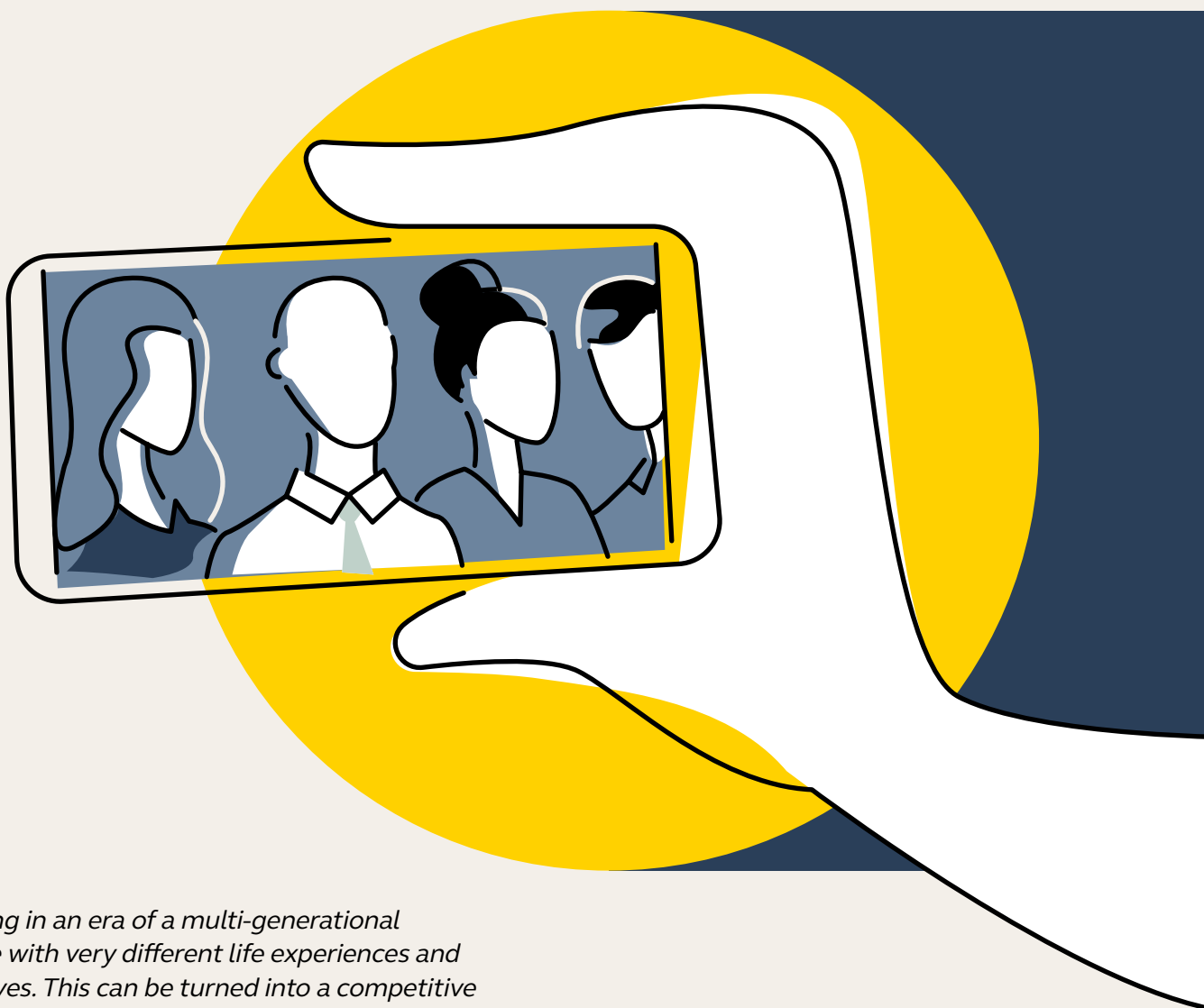
We're living in an era of a multi-generational workforce with very different life experiences and perspectives. This can be turned into a competitive advantage if leaders do everything to ensure everyone feels included regardless of their age or experience."

Kelly Nagel
President and GM, North America

1. Everyone thinks differently. Enabling inclusive hybrid meetings will boost creativity and innovation

Collaboration is still a central part of employees' work lives. And this is a good thing: 59% of employees say that working together with colleagues (whether on video or in-person) energizes them. These daily interactions with colleagues give them that sense of purpose and engagement they need to feel motivated and included at work.

However, we also find that not everyone connects the same way. In fact, one-third of all employees say they feel more comfortable expressing their ideas and opinions on video, while a quarter say that they feel more comfortable in-person. Open expression of ideas and opinions is the root of creativity and innovation in organizations, so giving employees an outlet for that expression should be a top concern for leaders. Creating an inclusive hybrid meeting culture means that organizations can spark fresh ideas and allow every employee to show up in a way that allows them to put their best foot forward. The risk is that organizations which require innovation are stifling their ability to generate ideas based on meeting operating practices.

This reinforces the importance of giving employees the autonomy to choose where and when to do their job. Our Hybrid Ways of Working 2022 Global Report found that when employees had the full ability to determine this on their own, they reported higher levels of productivity, motivation, belonging, trust, and well-being. Of course, this is contingent upon ensuring that they have the right technology to collaborate from anywhere. Moving forward, it's essential that leaders give employees the tools they need and allow them to join the meeting from where it best suits them. This will instill trust, empower them to take decisions, and allow the best ideas to rise to the top.

59%

of employees say that working together with colleagues (whether on video or in person) energizes them

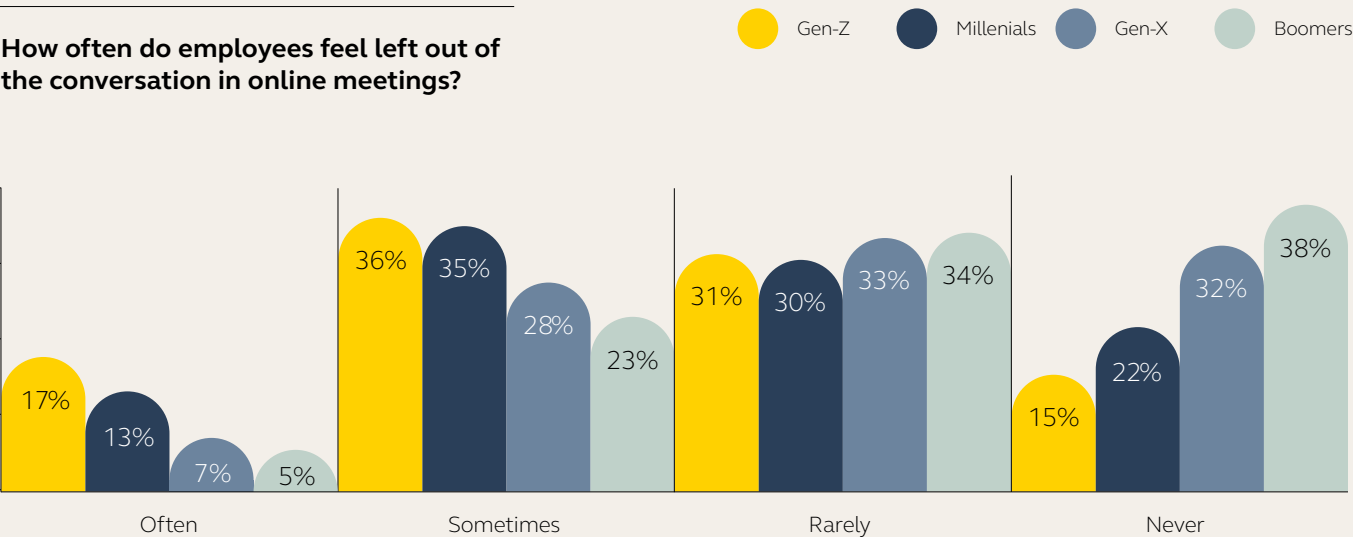# 2. Gen Z and Millennials are still feeling left out in online meetings

Technology and autonomy will go a long way in creating inclusive, productive, and creative meetings. But for managers and leaders, the buck doesn't stop there. There are still other dynamics to look out for in meetings, which can cause people to feel left out. And one of the most prominent drivers of inclusion (or exclusion) we found in our data is age.

When we asked employees how often they feel left out of the conversation in online meetings, we found stark differences along generational lines: Gen Z and Millennials were 2-3x as likely as Gen X and Boomers to say they often felt left out in online meetings. Similarly, Gen X and Boomers were roughly 2x as likely to say they never feel left out.

This shows that we shouldn't jump to conclusions about Gen Z and Millennials' comfort in virtual environments. Yes, they're digital natives, but they're also the youngest

and least experienced employees in the workforce (especially Gen Z). Because of this, they may feel uncomfortable speaking up in meetings, or feel passed over when colleagues ask for feedback.

Meeting technology can help everyone enter a meeting in a way that's most comfortable for them, but if managers and leaders aren't on the lookout for these intergenerational dynamics, it might all be for nothing. Technology functions best when supported by empathetic and attentive leadership.

How often do employees feel left out of the conversation in online meetings?

Legend: ● Gen-Z ● Millenials ● Gen-X ● Boomers

	Gen-Z	Millenials	Gen-X	Boomers
Often	17%	13%	7%	5%
Sometimes	36%	35%	28%	23%
Rarely	31%	30%	33%	34%
Never	15%	22%	32%	38%

3. Getting audio and video right can help boost employee trust

Trust is the foundation of successful teams and organizations. Researchers have found that when compared to low-trust companies, employees at high-trust companies report 74% less stress, 50% higher productivity, 13% fewer sick days, 76% more engagement, and 40% less burnout.[3] Another study by the same research team found that employee performance improves when people intentionally build social ties with their colleagues.[4] With benefits like that, every good leader should be asking what they can do to boost trust within their organization.

Both leaders and employees acknowledged that many relationships withered during the pandemic period of remote work. As such, much of the initial drive to get people back into the office was to ensure that people can build strong networks and relationships within their organization. However, the truth is simply that in a world of hybrid and online meetings, building those social ties with colleagues happens through our audio and video experience. This emphasizes why it's so important to get these two elements right: high-quality video and clear audio create that lifelike connection that we need to strengthen trust in our relationships.

Key Takeaways

The majority of meetings are still taking place online, where having the right technology can accelerate trust for more productive collaboration amongst employees.

64%

of employees say that being able to see and hear their colleagues makes it easier to trust them

[3] Zak, Paul, J. (2017). The Neuroscience of Trust. Harvard Business Review.   [4] Zak & Barraza (2013). The neurobiology of collective action. Frontiers in Neuroscience. 7: 211.

Employees see video as a major avenue for inclusion. In fact, when working remotely, only 2 in 10 colleagues said they don't feel that video helps them feel as involved as when they're in the office. But rather than pressuring employees to turn their cameras on – which we will see in section two is a very real problem for many – leaders should focus on improving the quality of employees' online interactions with one another through higher-quality video and less wasted time in meetings.

"When I'm working remotely, being on video helps counter the feeling of not being as involved as when I'm physically in the office."

22%
Disagree

37%
Neither agree nor disagree

41%
Agree
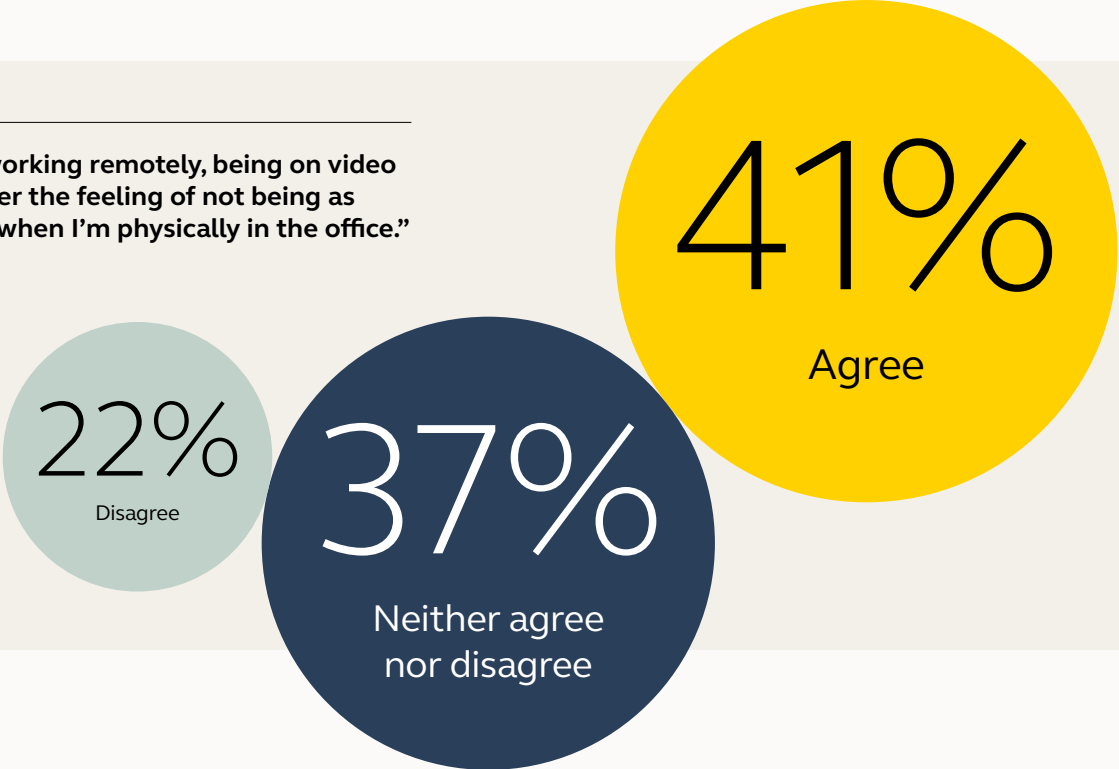
Professionalism

What does it mean to be professional? In a recent blog post by Indeed, a leading job search and career development site, career coach Jennifer Herrity describes a professional as an excellent communicator and a dependable team player with a strong work ethic.[5] In almost every way, being professional is about how we present ourselves to others. In this section, we'll look at how professionalism is shaped in modern meetings and how the technology we use to access those virtual environments plays a hidden role.

> "
>
> *For most of us, the rules of professionalism have changed. Suits and firm handshakes have been replaced by digital competence and virtual relationship-building. In a world of online meetings, the quality of our technology can impact the quality of our relationships."*

Holger Reisinger,
SVP, Large Enterprise Solutions, Jabra

[5] Herrity, Jennifer. What does it mean to be professional? (10 March 2023) Indeed
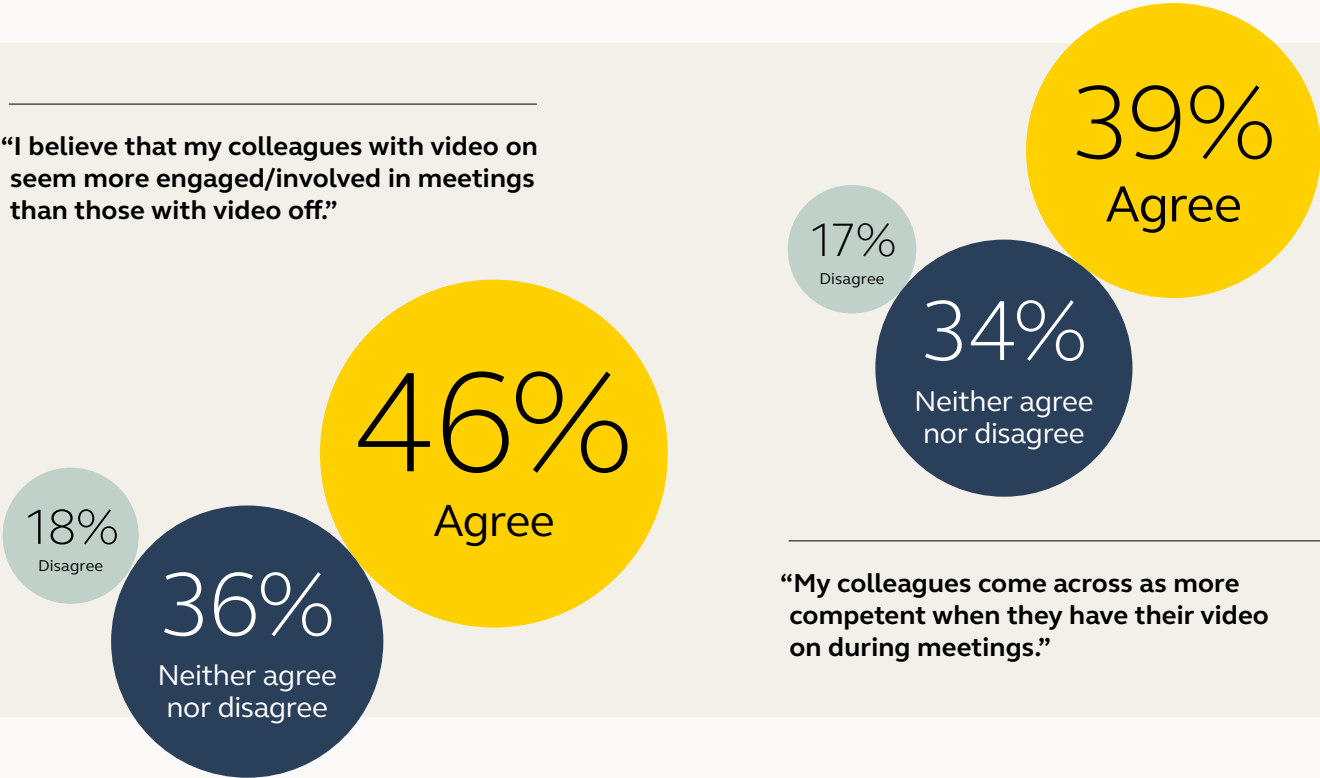
1. Using video can have a positive and empowering impact on your career

Should you have cameras on or off in an online meeting? For years, teams have been debating this exact question. Many who want cameras on claim that it boosts communication through better understanding of facial expressions and body language, while many who prefer cameras off find that thinking about how they're seen on camera distracts them from actually focusing on the work. However, when it comes to presenting ourselves as professionals in online environments, the verdict from employees is clear: using video can have a positive and empowering impact on your career.

In our survey, employees overwhelmingly agreed that using video has an impact on how they perceive their colleagues in online meetings. More specifically, they agreed that their colleagues using video seem more competent and more engaged in meetings than those who don't use video.

We all want to be seen as active contributors on the team, and simply turning your camera on can go a long way in doing that. When you do, the data shows that your colleagues will take you more seriously and see you as more engaged in the conversation.

"I believe that my colleagues with video on seem more engaged/involved in meetings than those with video off."

18% Disagree

46% Agree

36% Neither agree nor disagree

17% Disagree

39% Agree

34% Neither agree nor disagree

"My colleagues come across as more competent when they have their video on during meetings."

2. Where you're at in your career can impact when – and whether – you use video
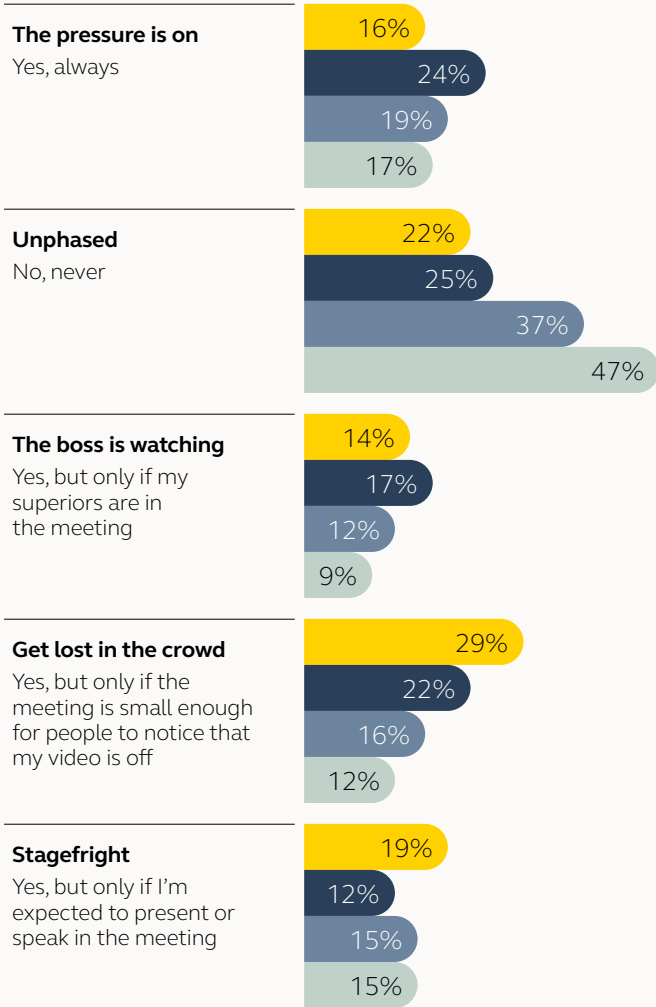
This all begs the question: what are the biggest drivers of whether we have cameras on or off in online meetings? And similar to the way Gen Z and Millennials are feeling left out in online meetings, they're also feeling the most pressure to turn their video on. When we give them options to express why this is, we begin to see a picture of unequal social dynamics within teams.

Once again, Gen Z and Millennials are feeling an outsized social pressure in online meetings. We already know that when people can't join a meeting in a way that works best for them – remotely or in-person – it stifles creativity. And if certain groups systematically feel excluded or alienated, building organizational trust is going to be a challenge.

Before leaders and managers create video-use policies or recommendations, it's essential that they understand the various ways that those policies could exacerbate existing inequalities and negative social dynamics within their teams. It's also important to know that not all meetings are the same, and using video in some may be more exclusionary than in others.

Key Takeaways

Consider creating clearer guidelines for more than one type of meeting scenario, to try and make video considerations more navigable and less stressful for a multi-generation workforce.

The pressure is on
Yes, always
- 16%
- 24%
- 19%
- 17%

Unphased
No, never
- 22%
- 25%
- 37%
- 47%

The boss is watching
Yes, but only if my superiors are in the meeting
- 14%
- 17%
- 12%
- 9%

Get lost in the crowd
Yes, but only if the meeting is small enough for people to notice that my video is off
- 29%
- 22%
- 16%
- 12%

Stagefright
Yes, but only if I'm expected to present or speak in the meeting
- 19%
- 12%
- 15%
- 15%

Legend: Gen-Z · Millenials · Gen-X · Boomers

3. Low collaborators should look to high collaborators for lessons on meeting effectiveness

The more we do something, the better we get at it. But true experts also begin to understand the barriers to success and look for ways to overcome them. This is especially true at work, where our professionalism often translates into stronger relationships and better results.

Our data shows that low collaborators – those spending 25% or less of their time in meetings – are 5x more likely to turn their video off in online meetings than high collaborators. To the contrary, the more meetings employees have, the more they see the benefits of using video – especially a dedicated external webcam – in their online meetings. This is why high collaborators are roughly twice as likely to use an external webcam for their meetings. Even if all employees on a team are knowledge workers, they can have widely different jobs. For IT teams looking to outfit teams with tech to upgrade the meeting experience, it can be helpful to create a map of the different types of roles and which tools those roles truly require to be successful.

Using video in meetings

● **High collaboraters**
More than 25% time spent in meeting

● **Low collaboraters**
Up to 25% time spent in meetings

External webcam

32%

17%

65%

Built-in laptop camera

68%

3%

15%

Video off
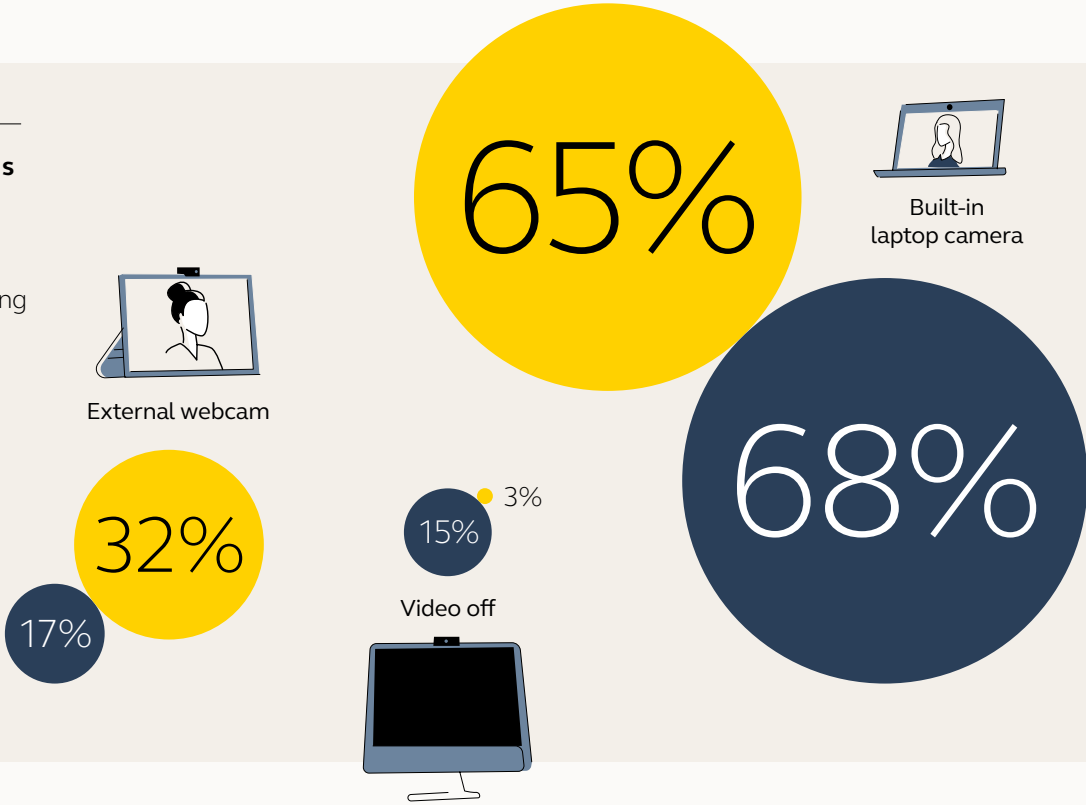
Adoption

So far, we've seen how the state of meetings shapes inclusion in organizations, as well as the way we communicate and portray ourselves to colleagues. In this final section, we zoom in on how leaders, IT managers, and facilities teams can leverage well designed and properly equipped meeting rooms to strengthen the hybrid-working experience.

Supplying your teams with innovative meeting technologies is only half the battle. To welcome them to a new era of meetings, you also need to provide them with comprehensive training and support."

Aurangzeb Khan,
SVP, Collaboration, Jabra

1. Employees aren't yet comfortable with meeting room technology. It's time to help them

At the beginning of the pandemic, employees all over the world were forced to adapt overnight to fully remote meetings. And though there was an adjustment period as we learned how to send meeting invites, mute ourselves, and share our screens, most employees are now competent online meeting hosts and participants. This doesn't mean that everything is perfect (as a workforce, we still collectively lose millions of minutes due to technical meeting issues), but we've certainly come a long way in this journey to better online meetings.

The return to the office, however, has not been as abrupt as the remote work transition. Employees have trickled slowly back to their workplaces over months or even years, and because of this, there hasn't been a pressing need to learn how to use meeting room technology.

Today, 1 in 10 rooms are equipped with some kind of video technology, but without proper training, most people find it a roadblock to more productive meetings and prefer to use what they are more comfortable with.[6]

In fact, we know from our Hybrid Ways of Working 2022 Global Report that many high collaborators are simply more likely to work from home because they're more comfortable with their home-working setup.

30%

of employees say they're hesitant to take meetings from a meeting room because they're less comfortable with the technology compared to just using their own laptop

[6] Frost & Sullivan, 2021

As IT and facilities teams around the world continue to upgrade their organization's meeting rooms for a better hybrid-meeting experience, it's essential that this be accompanied by comprehensive training and guidance for employees on how – and when – to use the new technology. We recommend a two-pronged approach.

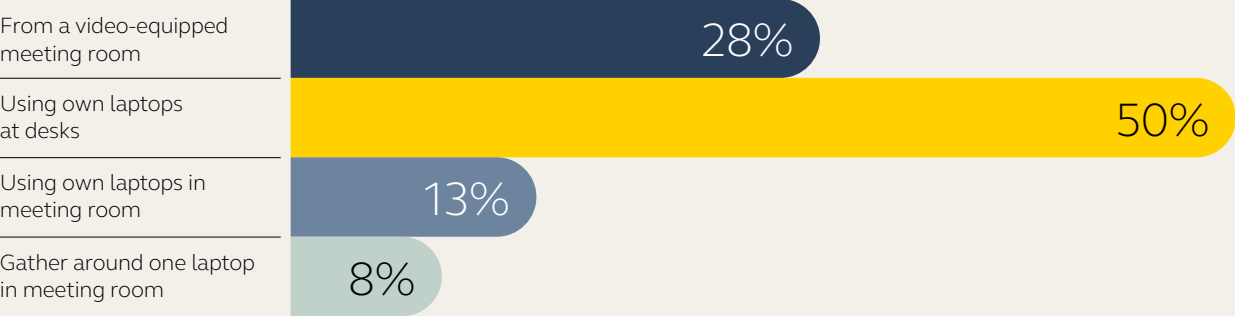## 1. Onboard all employees into the new experience

Conduct a "training day" where employees can come and learn how to use the new meeting technology. Follow up with a video explaining the new technology, features, and support channels.

2. Post "how to start your meeting" instructions in every meeting room

This is a simple nudge, but it can go a long way in relieving the fear that many employees have about hosting a meeting from a meeting room. Here we recommend either posting physical instructions in the room, or a QR code linking to instructions.
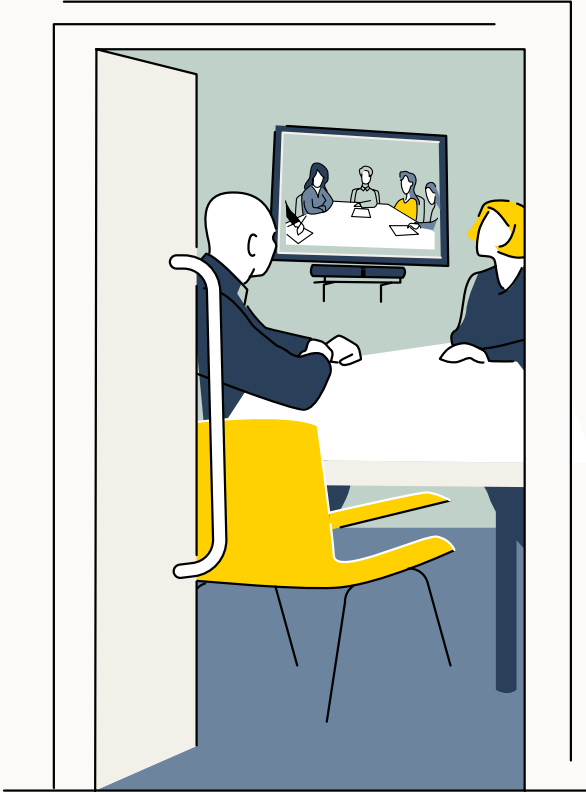
If you and two colleagues were in the office while another person was joining remotely, how would you typically take a meeting between the four of you?

From a video-equipped meeting room	28%
Using own laptops at desks	50%
Using own laptops in meeting room	13%
Gather around one laptop in meeting room	8%

2. Many employees still have limited access to video-equipped meeting rooms

While we've seen that many employees are hesitant to take meetings from meeting rooms because they're not comfortable with the technology, many more simply don't have the option. Only 15% of employees say that all of their office's meeting rooms are equipped with video cameras for online meetings. This translates to roughly 100 million meeting rooms around the world waiting to be optimized for hybrid work.

Access to video-equipped meeting rooms is one of the largest barriers that employees are currently experiencing in their return to the office. As leaders continue to iron out their strategies for addressing this, here are three key things to consider to optimize your meeting rooms:

**1. Ensure that everyone can see and be seen, as well as hear and be heard.**

Making meetings equitable for all participants – whether they're in the room or joining remotely – is the best way to boost inclusion, engagement, and participation. Does the meeting room technology bring remote participants into the room, as well as bring in-room participants into the virtual space?

2. Room layout and technology go hand-in-hand.

You can't consider one without the other. Even the best video conferencing technology won't be effective if the camera doesn't have a clear line of sight to each participant. And similarly, without a camera that maximizes field of view, you're either wasting room space or cutting people out of the frame. Be sure to consider both technology and room layout when redesigning rooms.

3. Don't just assume that employees will know how to use the technology.

We've been told that "if you build it, they will come." But this doesn't always hold true. What can you do to make each employee a hybrid-meeting expert?

15%
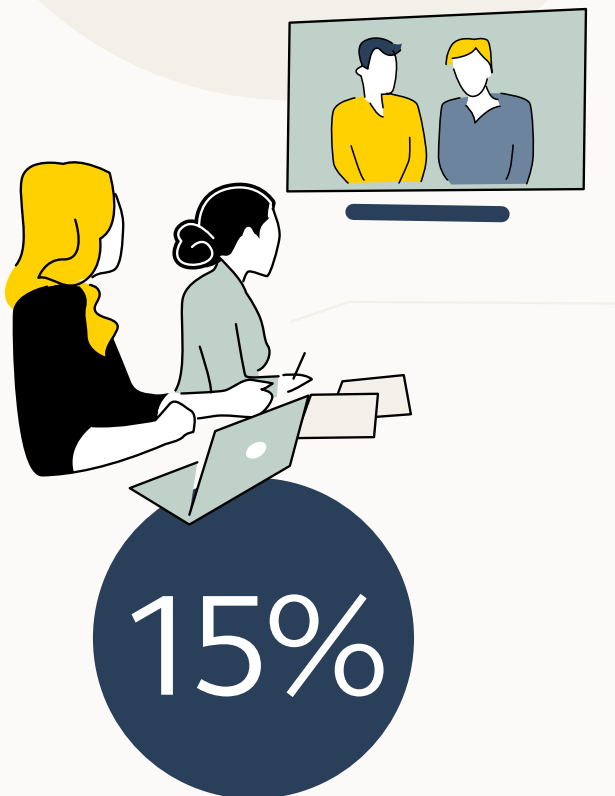
of employees say that all their office's meeting rooms are equipped with video

3. Meeting preferences differ by culture. Global organizations will need to localize adoption efforts

For organizations with offices around the globe, there's one more key consideration to bring into account: meeting preferences differ by culture. While your company may have molded a distinct culture, social norms and behaviors still change from country to country. These social norms drive what is preferred or even acceptable behavior at work and in meetings.
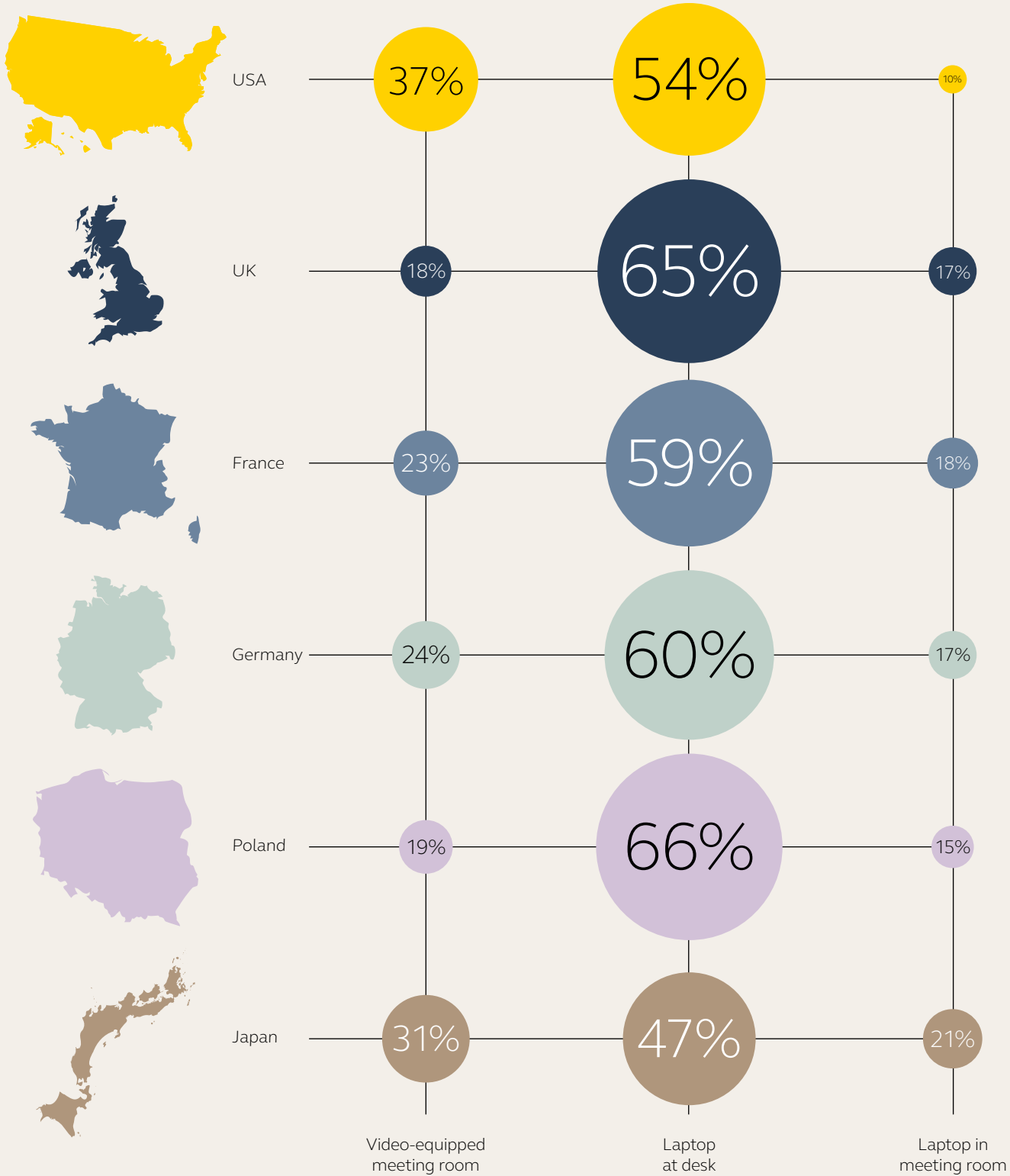
Our data showcases how some of these cultural differences manifest themselves. Japanese employees have a strong preference for taking meetings from a meeting room, both utilizing a video system in the room or simply using their own laptop. Similarly, while American employees also prefer video-equipped meeting rooms, they're the least likely to take a call from their laptop in a meeting room.

On the other hand, European employees (UK, France, Germany and Poland) are much more comfortable with taking calls from their desk in an open-office environment. These differences in meeting behaviors across countries reflect cultural values regarding privacy, discretion, and inclusion. This means that when leaders and IT teams are looking to outfit global offices with meeting technology, it's essential that they consider how local culture will impact the actual use and adoption of those new systems.

59%
of employees would prefer to take a meeting in the office from their desk

![Jabra GN logo]

At the office, would you prefer to take meetings with virtual participants from a video-equipped meeting room or from your laptop at your desk?

	Video-equipped meeting room	Laptop at desk	Laptop in meeting room
USA	37%	54%	10%
UK	18%	65%	17%
France	23%	59%	18%
Germany	24%	60%	17%
Poland	19%	66%	15%
Japan	31%	47%	21%

Moving into the future of hybrid meetings

Meetings have seen a tumultuous few years. With the rise of remote and hybrid work, we've continually encountered new challenges, and one by one, we've adapted and come back stronger than before. And now is no different. There are still major challenges to overcome in our path to inclusive and productive work, but technology and knowledge keep evolving to meet the moment.

If meetings seem to be lacking that spark, leaders should start looking at whether everyone feels they have a good outlet to contribute. Some key signs of this will be hampered creativity, low trust, and unequal share of voice (particularly across generational groups). Everyone needs an outlet where they feel they can best express themselves – whether on video or in-person – so they can bring their best ideas to the table. This will require a look both at meeting technology and the degree of autonomy employees have to join their meetings from where it suits them best.

When people are confident on video, they're able to show their most professional self. This can have major career benefits for employees, as they're able to create an impression of engagement and confidence while collaborating. However, if colleagues have their video off, we shouldn't be so quick to judge; many feel pressured to turn cameras on while others are fine leaving them off. This is oftentimes driven by who is in the meeting or what their role is within it. Instead, we must take note of these social dynamics and allow everyone to join in a way that works best for them. One action we can take is to make sure that it isn't bad technology holding people back from putting their best foot forward in meetings.

Finally, it's about time we get meeting rooms right. On the one hand, millions of employees simply don't have access to video-equipped meeting rooms, an issue causing many to join from their laptop who would rather be in a room. But on the other hand, we're seeing that many who do have access to them are uncomfortable using the technology. Together, these insights point at a need to increase access and training, where employees are enabled and empowered to use spaces designed for a hybrid-working future.

We've gotten better at hybrid work, but that doesn't mean that all the challenges are behind us. Moving forward, leaders must take a critical look at what's hindering their employees' meeting experiences and unlock the next wave of inclusive and productive collaboration.

Methodology

Find out more

**If you have any questions about Jabra products,
please contact your Jabra representative or visit Jabra.com**

WHO WE ARE

Hej. (That's 'hi' in Danish.) We're Jabra and we've been engineering technology that makes life look and sound better for over 150 years. And you? Well, you might be running a million-dollar account from your kitchen (or café, or school run, or just about anywhere really). Or running your first 5k with a pair of expertly engineered earbuds. Or running a project via video, beaming yourself from a Toronto armchair to a Tokyo boardroom. Whatever you've got going on, we've got you. With advanced, intelligent video technology. And an incredible sound quality that makes your voice and your music sound better than ever. All designed to bring life and work wonderfully in tune.

Jabra. Technology for life's new rhythm.