

PRESSE RELEASE

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Video Conferences: Networking Skills Are Key

A study conducted by the Tübingen-based Leibniz Institut für Wissensmedien (IWM) analysed how the individual behaviour of participants attending online video conferences with strangers affects the success of the meeting. The results suggest that good networking skills and low levels of social anxiety can mitigate the potential disadvantages of prolonged remote collaboration. Companies should therefore consciously promote interaction.

The pandemic has significantly boosted mobile working arrangements. To this day, zoom or teams meetings remain the primary form of exchange in many organisations. 'Collaborating online usually works quite well within one's own team despite potential negative effects such as the so-called zoom fatigue, an exhaustion caused by frequent video conferences', says Prof. Dr Sonja Utz from the IWM. Since previous research has focused primarily on the use of videoconferencing tools in already established teams, she and her colleague Linda-Elisabeth Reimann focused on participants' active behaviour in video conferences with strangers. 'Contacts outside our own team are important. Without them, our thoughts tend to become compartmentalised, and our creativity decreases', emphasises Prof. Utz, who examined participants' individual activities. For the researchers, active behaviour entailed switching on the webcam, engaging in small talk with others and getting in touch with fellow participants after the meeting, for example via LinkedIn.

Researchers recommend interaction rules during video conferences

The results of their study, which were recently published in the journal *Social Science Computer Review*, reveal that people with higher levels of social anxiety perform worse during video conferences than those with lower levels. Moreover, networking behaviour also played a role. 'People who were generally reluctant to network with others only engaged more actively in online meetings when the majority of participants had their webcams turned on', reports Linda-Elisabeth Reimann. The researchers were surprised by the behaviour of people with strong networking skills: They were particularly active when most conference participants had their cameras switched off. 'This could be an indication that good networkers attempt to motivate others through their own active behaviour', says Prof. Utz. The psychologist is not the only one to recognise this as an important finding: A study recently published in the journal *Nature* revealed that firm-wide remote work during the pandemic strengthens employees' silo mentality. In other words, they mostly only communicate with their own team and rarely think outside the box. Establishing linkages to

people outside one's team is therefore important to avoid a long-term loss of creativity and innovation.

'Our results suggest that good networking skills and low levels of social anxiety can mitigate potential disadvantages of prolonged remote collaboration', says Linda-Elisabeth Reimann, who designed and conducted the study. However, she also stresses that organisations should pay more attention to the possibilities and challenges online environments present in terms of technology and communication. According to her, standards, rules or conventions that provide guidance to participants could improve the quality of interaction in video conferences. This includes not only activating the webcam but also encouraging an awareness of the fact that video conferences with people outside of one's team present a valuable networking opportunity that should be seized.

Link to the study: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/08944393221117456>

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Das Leibniz-Institut für Wissensmedien (IWM)

The Leibniz-Institut für Wissensmedien (IWM) in Tübingen investigates how digital media influences knowledge and communication processes. Foundational and applied research focuses not only on institutional learning fields such as schools and universities, but also on informal learning on the Internet, at the workplace, or in museums. At the IWM, researchers from various disciplines work together, with many colleagues coming from the areas of psychology, communication science, neuroscience, and computer science.