

Teleconferences and Telephoning in International Projects

Introduction

Working in an international project means working with team members across the globe. Virtual meetings such as teleconferences or telephone calls are an important part of project communication. It is thus vital to follow certain guidelines to set up a successful meeting.

In the following, you can find topics to consider and tips that help conduct a successful teleconference. Keep in mind that it can be useful to treat a one-to-one phone call with a colleague like a teleconference as well. Many aspects discussed in the following provide useful information for an effective telephone call as well.

Planning the teleconference

- Send out an agenda before the meeting.
- Consider time zones when deciding on the meeting time. Specify start time as Greenwich Mean Time (GMT).
- Make sure to only invite people to the meeting who can help to achieve the meeting objectives and who have an interest in the topic.
- Check technology before the meeting. Does every participant have access to the equipment needed?
- Provide dial-in information in advance. Advise participants to dial in at least 5 minutes before the meeting.
- Do a sound check before you start.

During the teleconference

A teleconference should be treated and run like a face-to-face meeting. This means you need...

- ... a moderator who is responsible for the agenda.
- ... to set rules for the meeting at the beginning, e.g. for timing and interruptions.
- ... to do a role call at the beginning of the meeting.
- ... to appoint someone to take the meeting minutes.

In addition, ...

- ... it is important to remember that non-verbal communication is missing in a teleconference. Focus on what you hear.
- ..., state your name before you speak. This will make it easier for other participants to know who is talking.
- ... make an effort to explain what is happening on your end if there is longer silence.
- ... as a moderator, keep participants focused by asking them to contribute individually.
- ... keep background noise to a minimum.

... do not write e-mails or do anything else during the teleconference that can cause a distraction. If you have to make a phone call, use the mute button.

After the teleconference

- As a moderator, recap the most important decisions.
- Send out the meeting minutes shortly after the meeting.
- As a moderator, make sure to follow up on the points decided during the meeting.

General tips for a successful telephone call

Before the call:

- Be sure to have a reason for your call.
- Have all material needed available to avoid long silences and pauses during the call.
- Prepare your call: note down vocabulary that is difficult for you and decide on how you want to address a topic.
- Consider time zones when setting up the call.

During the call:

- Clarify if you do not understand what the caller is trying to tell you.
- Ask for repetition if the caller speaks too fast or is difficult to understand.
- Take notes and make sure to cover the topics prepared before the call.
- Be sensitive to signal words, e.g. 'Oh, is this the time?' means that the call will come to an end soon.

After the call:

- Send out a recap e-mail if decisions have been made or it is found important to document the content of the call.