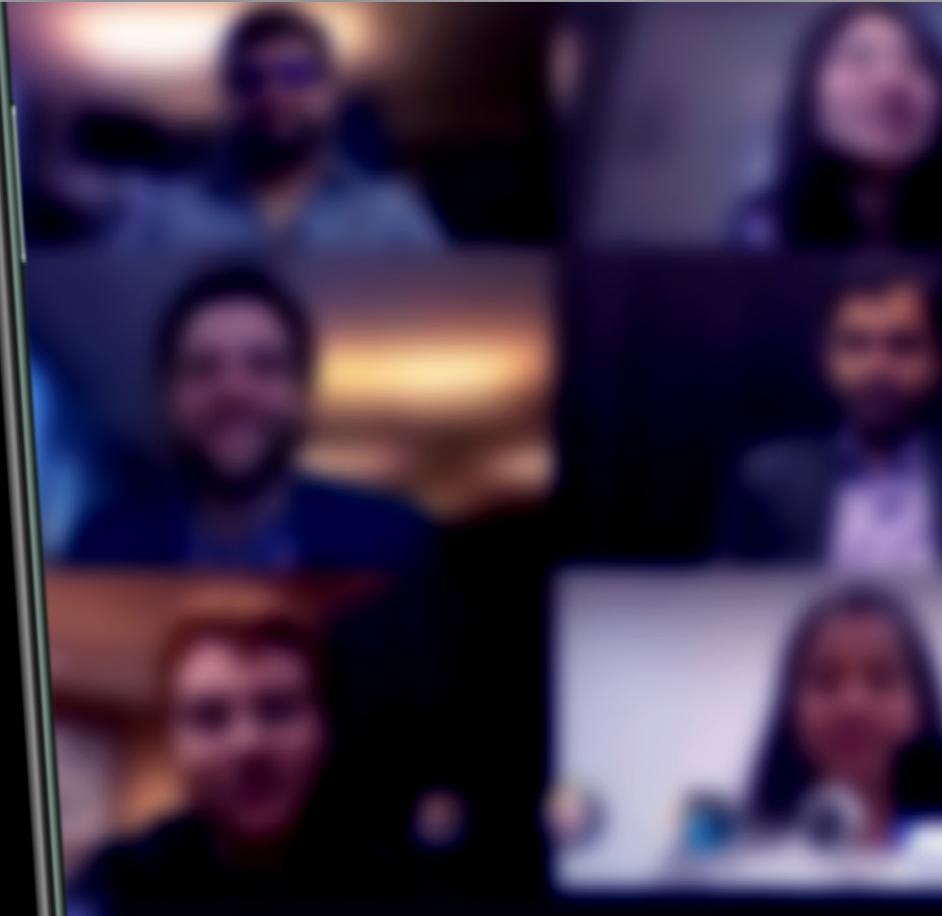# ACHIEVING INTERACTIVE AGILITY: WORK FROM HOME, THE OFFICE, OR ANYWHERE WITH MICROSOFT TEAMS

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n March 2020, the need to work from home was thrust upon us and corporations all over the world worked magic in enabling many employees to stay safe at home and still connect with the resources and other people in their company.

Meetings were transformed. Instead of assembling around a table in a conference room, we became one of many tiles in a checkerboard on a screen interacting with many others. We developed new etiquette and new protocols for conferencing without talking over each other. We utilized tools such as screen sharing, shared files and documents, and recordings and reactions that enabled us to actively collaborate. We also showed off our personalities—carefully choosing our virtual backgrounds, and curating our physical workspace. We achieved greater efficiency, greater productivity—all working from our homes across the collaborative platforms—than we may have ever dreamt possible. Many executives and managers found themselves intrigued by the observation that many employees were starting their workday when they would previously have begun their commute and working past the traditional "quitting time" until they would have arrived back home. Employees realized the benefit of having more control over their time—being able to schedule meetings at their preferred time and not wasting time on a commute.

THEN WE STARTED TALKING ABOUT RETURNING TO THE WORKPLACE

Some companies, like Twitter, announced that all of their employees would be working from home full time from now on, and they did so early in the pandemic. Many other companies followed.

However, it had become clear that working from home was, perhaps, a better way to work for only some as many struggled with poor internet connectivity, lack of private at-home workspaces, and general job functions not conducive to an out-of-the-office environment.

Planning for the return will now call for many decisions that few thought we would ever want to consider. Who actually returns to the office full-time? Who works from home full-time? Would some benefit from having a "hybrid workplace" in which they work from the office sometimes and from home at others?

KEEPING THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

We now find ourselves with a new kind of hybrid workforce. It's no longer a given that everyone will be at the office, or should be expected to be.

With this new hybrid work model, what happens when there is a meeting?

WHAT WILL BE REQUIRED IS THAT WE DEVELOP A NEW "INTERACTIVE AGILITY" THAT ENABLES EVERYONE TO DO LITERALLY EVERYTHING FROM WHEREVER THEY ARE WITHOUT FORCING ANYONE TO ALTER THEIR DAILY ROUTINE JUST TO HOLD MEETINGS.

The prior experience of gathering in the nearest conference room or huddle space will have some team leaders assuming they will go back to that. But some of their people are not there. How will we integrate those team members in the office with those who are not?

What will be required is that we develop a new "interactive agility" that enables everyone to do literally everything from wherever they are without forcing anyone to alter their daily routine just to hold meetings. After all, we've all learned how to collaborate remotely. We've even found it a superior way to work for several situations.

Imagine a meeting being called of a team in which half the members are in the office and half are working from home. Since the best way for everyone to connect is by using a collaboration platform like Microsoft Teams (which continues to add innovations useful to a work-from-home workforce including session management enhancements, noise reduction, breakout rooms, mobile polls, and more) will we find everyone in the office attending meetings from their desks? Seems a shame and a waste since half of them are in the same place and capable of attending in-person.

Those who are in the office will lose out on the opportunity to congregate with each other and enjoy much needed social interaction.

Many companies feel the pain of such a scenario even more deeply due to their significant investments in room audio/visual conferencing systems, some costing hundreds of thousands of dollars. Will these simply remain unused? Will such high-value investment end up being wasted?

These investments were originally made, prior to the pandemic, as part of a strategy to bring whole groups of employees, clients, suppliers, advisors, and other associates together across multiple locations, expanding the virtual conference room to enhance collaboration.

As we begin to look forward, conference rooms will take on a new meaning for organizations adopting hybrid work. With people returning to the office once the widespread danger of infection is overcome, we can once again take advantage of the conference room systems to enhance collaboration among team members spread across different locations—whether they are working from a remote location or sitting in the office for the day.

ENTER CLOUD VIDEO INTEROP (CVI) AND THE BLUEJEANS TEAMS GATEWAY

The BlueJeans Gateway for Microsoft Teams is a Microsoft Certified Cloud Video Interop (CVI) solution that enables meeting rooms equipped with standards-based room videoconferencing systems such as those available from Poly, Cisco, Pexip, or Lifesize to join Microsoft Teams Meetings.

Those employees working from home will join the meeting as usual, using the Microsoft Teams client running on their own laptop, tablet, or other device.

Everyone who is in the office gathers at the designated conference room where BlueJeans Gateway has been deployed to make the connection between them and their home-located colleagues.

The conferencing monitor displays the normal matrix of windows, each containing a remote participant, as well as all the rich online content including audio, video, and content sharing. The remote Teams users see the roomful of colleagues along with all other remote participants on their laptop or mobile device.

CONFIGURATION CHOICES

CVI eases the task of connecting users in room systems to the Teams Meeting. Administrators have a choice on what approach to take for how CVI is deployed in their environment.

Those desiring faster time-to-deployment and simpler operation may choose to have CVI software delivered in a SaaS model. As with all SaaS applications, no additional hardware infrastructure or software is required. The entire CVI solution, infrastructure, and administration are all delivered as part of the service. A pure SaaS CVI solution takes just a few hours to fully deploy.

NOW CUSTOMERS CAN MEET WITH WHOLE CONFERENCE ROOMS OF TEAM MEMBERS, INCLUDING THOSE CONNECTING REMOTELY FROM WHEREVER THEY ARE.

Those seeking more control over where their CVI service operates and which infrastructure-as-a-service (IaaS) provider they use may choose hybrid cloud delivery. A more significant investment in time, infrastructure, and configuration complexity should be anticipated.

INTERACTIVE AGILITY ACHIEVED!

As standards-based conference room systems get connected to Teams Meetings with CVI, employees have more options and an easier process to participate in Teams meetings from wherever they are, in the office, at home, or on the road as travel becomes safer.

And not just employees.

Many companies show commitment to customers by having several of their people attend meetings with them. Now customers can meet with whole conference rooms of team members, including those connecting remotely from wherever they are. It's a great way to make customers feel included, and special.

Even external contractors can join Teams Meetings to collaborate using their SIP and H.323 room endpoints. Design teams can now bring in their graphic artists, layout specialists, content developers, and others without forcing anyone to invest time in travel. Executive teams can include financial and legal advisers in their meetings. Local school boards can invite parents, teachers, and other educators to participate in their decision-making processes.

RE-IMAGINING AND RE-INVENTING WORK

It's becoming obvious that we will not be returning from the "new normal" to the traditional way of working. We'll be moving on to a new normal in which unproductive time and costs are vastly reduced or eliminated. We'll have more flexibility in choosing where we need to be and what we're able to do. We'll enjoy our new comfort with interacting across networks and use it to our advantage.

It's time to start planning for the return. Start re-imagining how productive and enjoyable work can be and choose to re-invent rather than return to the old.

For more information on BlueJeans, visit https://www.bluejeans.com/products/microsoft-teams-gateway.

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