



The Webcam Survey Exhausted or Engaged?

Meeting on Camera During the Pandemic

April 2021

VIRTIRA

The Webcam Survey - Exhausted or Engaged?

Meeting on Camera During the Pandemic

Introduction	3
The Study.....	4
Key Findings	4
The Rise of the Webcam.....	5
The Rise of “Zoom Fatigue”	5
Who We Surveyed.....	6
The Extent of Exhaustion	6
Extroverts vs. Introverts Impacted by Being on Camera During Meetings	6
Age and Reaction to Being on Camera	7
Commuting Status and Video Exhaustion	7
Why is the Webcam On?	8
How Often is the Video Camera on During Meetings?	9
Team Connection and Engagement.....	10
The Rise in Meetings.....	11
Productivity, Distraction, and Multi-Tasking	12
The Multi-Tasking Issue.....	13
Does Being on Camera Help With Loneliness?	13
What This Means For Businesses	14
Recommendations.....	14
Methodology and Survey Response.....	15

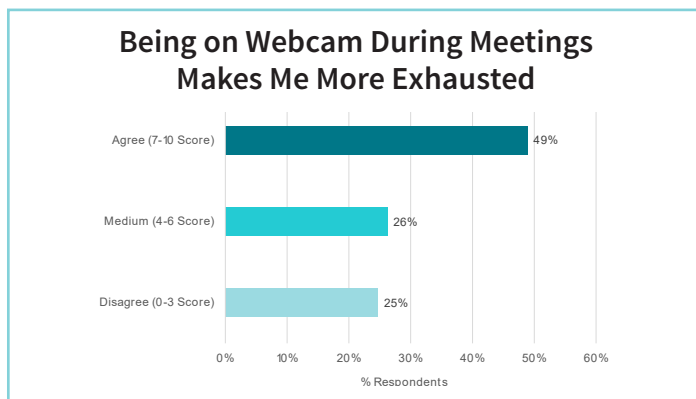
The Webcam Survey - Exhausted or Engaged?

Meeting on Camera During the Pandemic

Introduction

Since early into the pandemic, “Zoom” has morphed into a generic term synonymous with “meeting online with a camera”. Beginning in April in 2020, stories of “Zoom fatigue” began to circulate, with a lot of speculation about cause, but not a lot of substantive data. This study seeks to understand why. Is it too many meetings a week, is it an introvert/extrovert issue, too many hours on-line, people working from home who would be better in an office, or too much time meeting on camera? Who is it impacting the most? Who is thriving and why?

OVER 49% of individuals report being exhausted due to being on webcam during meetings.



As we flow in and out of lockdowns, many managers and employees are in the office, back at home, and back again. Currently, estimates are that over 25 million employees, or over 40% of the workforce, are working from home² with this number expected to level out to over 15 million as the pandemic settles over the next few years.

“ I have worked for organizations (pre-pandemic) that were very con-nected via remote meetings but did not rely on video. I felt more engaged in meetings there than I do at my current organization that relies on Zoom. I find myself hyper-focused on what’s visible from my video feed/my own voice and posture or just caught up in examining every-one else’s video feeds. I don’t get any benefit from video!

(Age 25 to 34, Male, \$75k-100k, Introvert)



Especially with up to 80% of businesses³ reporting that they will move towards a fully remote or hybrid/flex model in the future, understanding what policies create effective and productive WFH and office-based employees, is going to be critical moving forward – if businesses want to increase productivity and move beyond the pandemic.

² <https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20201215005287/en/Upwork-Study-Finds-22-of-American-Workforce-Will-Be-Remote-by-2025>

³ <https://www.hrdiver.com/news/gartner-over-80-of-company-leaders-plan-to-permit-remote-work-after-pande/581744/>

The Study

This analysis provides a unique and valuable insight into the impact that company, department, and managerial policies regarding use of video during online meetings have on the wellbeing of employees. It also examines if there are other contributing factors to the high incidence of reported employee exhaustion.

To show this, the analysis uses survey data fielded between January 28th, 2021 and February 8th, 2021 of more than 1,700 employees, managers, and executives from specific areas including finance, healthcare, sales and marketing, engineering, along with a broader scope of employed individuals who currently or previously commuted to an office. In addition, the study analyzed over 1,000 comments for additional insights and sought updates from over 500 survey participants on meeting frequency.

These results provide a snapshot of what is driving reported rates of exhaustion and how widespread it is. In addition, we'll examine how company and management policies are impacting the situation. Finally, we'll look at indicators to show what solutions we can implement to improve things moving forward.

*All groups reported that being on camera caused **DISTRACTION OR INABILITY TO CONCENTRATE***

Key Findings

All groups reported that being on camera caused distraction or inability to concentrate due to the sensory input of many heads on the screen or having to look at themselves. The other most reported feeling was being self-conscious from having themselves or their home offices viewed by others.



- Over **49% of individuals report being exhausted due to being on webcam.** With current estimates of over 25 million employees working at home and a further 41 million at the office or in a flexible commuting arrangement, this means that the rate of exhaustion could exist in over 30 million people⁴.
- **Over 65% responded that being on camera is best used for team engagement and connection,** however, only **11% reported that the camera was used for team engagement purposes.**
- **Over 60% reported that the number of meetings they attend has increased significantly** since the pandemic. Most say that the ad-hoc chats they had at the office have been replaced by formal meetings, which indicates that many are not using collaboration tools for informal updates.
- Looking at personality types, **58% who self-reported as “introverts” reported that being on camera made them exhausted,** while 40% of “extroverts” indicated this.
- **61% reported that video is mandated for all meetings** they attend.
- Over **25% reported feeling peer pressure** to turn on their cameras even if this was not a requirement.

The results suggest that a shift in “on camera” policy across corporations, departments, and managers needs to hap-

⁴ <https://www.dpeaflcio.org/factsheets/the-professional-and-technical-workforce-by-the-numbers>, Reducing the reported 76M worker base by 10M to account for healthcare professionals and teaching staff. Other studies generally put the office-based US workforce at 66M.

pen to create a balanced, productive work environment for employees.

Especially as we see an acceleration in the already upward trend of greater remote work post-pandemic, insights into what impacts employee wellbeing during the workday should result in lower stress, increase productivity and positively impact engagement.

The Rise of the Webcam

Remote work, although promising greater productivity and flexibility for employers and employees, has not evolved as expected, primarily due to an about shift by major tech companies such as Best Buy, Yahoo, and IBM from 2012 to 2017⁵. The percent of the workforce that worked fully remotely before the pandemic was still very small. Around 7% of the US workforce⁶ had the “option” to work from home and 5% reported teleworking in 2019⁷. Also, nearly half of businesses reported that none of their managers performed a significant portion of their job remotely and only 2.3% of managers had fully remote teams⁸.

There are few studies prior to the pandemic that measure the use of the webcam for remote or distance work before COVID-19, because being on camera wasn’t a feature of most remote work meetings. Most long-term remote employees rarely used webcams during calls unless it was necessary for a presentation or a sales call.

That flipped in 2020, with the move home of 95% of the workforce in the initial lockdowns⁹. Managers who had not previously communicated virtually with their direct reports now found themselves with completely remote teams. The “Zoom” revolution began. There were reports of post-work bar games, pizza parties, and eating together online, along with reports of employees who worked together on camera all day¹⁰.

The Rise of “Zoom Fatigue”

As early as April 2020, there began to be reports of “Zoom Fatigue”, and although there was much online commentary on the subject, there were few studies to try to explain this phenomenon, or how widespread it was. Why are employees reporting being exhausted? Is it only from being on camera during calls, too many meetings, or are there other factors?

To answer this question, Virtira Consulting surveyed over 1,700 managers and employees who were commuting, working from home or back and forth to the office to understand exactly what the situation is.

What we found is that over **49% of individuals report being exhausted due to being on webcam for meetings**. With current estimates of over 66 million people who work in office-based, flex, or home-based jobs, this means that the rate of exhaustion could be impacting up to 32 million people.



⁵ <https://www.pgi.com/blog/2017/07/why-remote-work-policies-fail-some-employers/>

⁶ <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/03/working-from-home-coronavirus-workers-future-of-work>

⁷ <https://www.newgeography.com/content/006810-us-commuting-2019-the-last-normal-year>

⁸ https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3638597

⁹ https://www.epw.senate.gov/public/_cache/files/1/e/1ecbb35b-7621-4fa6-9139-9c401683cbb9/DF0C7207C814710DE75FE8A7B1DA59A1.kate-lister-senate-testimony-07.29.2020.pdf

¹⁰ <https://www.businessinsider.com/work-from-home-sneek-webcam-picture-5-minutes-monitor-video-2020-3>

¹¹ <https://hbr.org/2020/04/how-to-combat-zoom-fatigue>

Who We Surveyed

We surveyed a range of commuting styles and worker types. In addition to the usual demographics questions, we surveyed how participants viewed themselves regarding introversion or extroversion. We also wanted to understand how their work-life had changed from before the pandemic.

The responses include a satisfactory range of age, income, and managerial levels¹². For more details on the study demographics, see the Methodology section towards the end of this report.

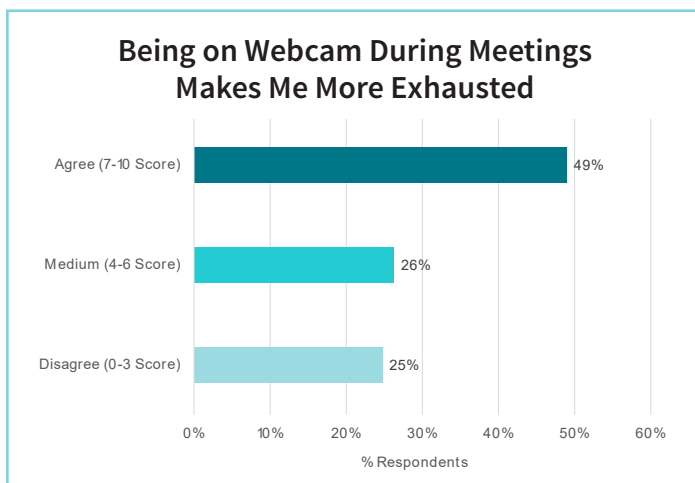
“As an introvert I feel very self-conscious on camera. The extroverts seem to love it.”

(Age 45 to 54, Female, 150k, Introvert)

The Extent of Exhaustion

As mentioned, just under 50% of survey responses indicated that being on webcam during meetings caused them to be exhausted. While there was a direct link to introverted personalities, there was also a strong correlation with age. The younger the survey responder, the higher the degree of reported exhaustion.

“Being on webcam during an online business meeting makes me more exhausted than if I hadn’t been on webcam.”



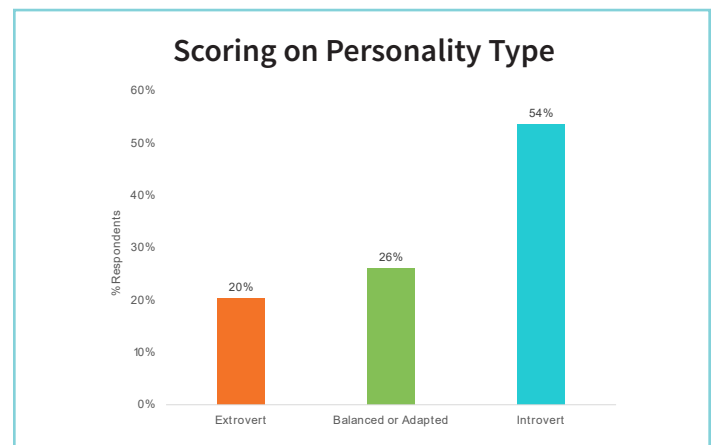
“In my opinion, it distracts from the meeting’s objective. As soon as someone moves, your eyes go there to see what they are doing.”

(Age 55 to 64, Female, \$50k-\$75k, Extrovert)

Extroverts vs. Introverts Impacted by Being on Camera During Meetings

We suspected that one of the key components of exhaustion might be sensory overload, especially for introverts. Prior studies showing sensory inputs and introversion suggested that overload and exhaustion might result from needing to focus the eyes on a very busy screen full of heads versus just having an audio feed¹³.

“On a scale of 1 to 100, in social situations, where 1 is a “very extroverted, chatty social animal” and 100 is a “very introverted quiet listener”, how would you rate yourself?”



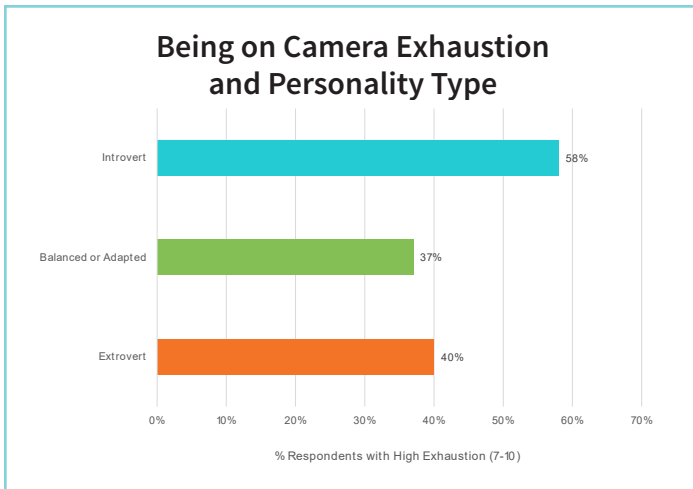
“I understand that people are used to talking to faces in person, so they feel using webcams will bring us closer to that experience as much as possible, but I still feel self-conscious of myself when I have to turn on my webcam.”

(Age 18 to 24, Female, 50k-75k, Introvert)

¹² Sourced from secondary survey follow ups.

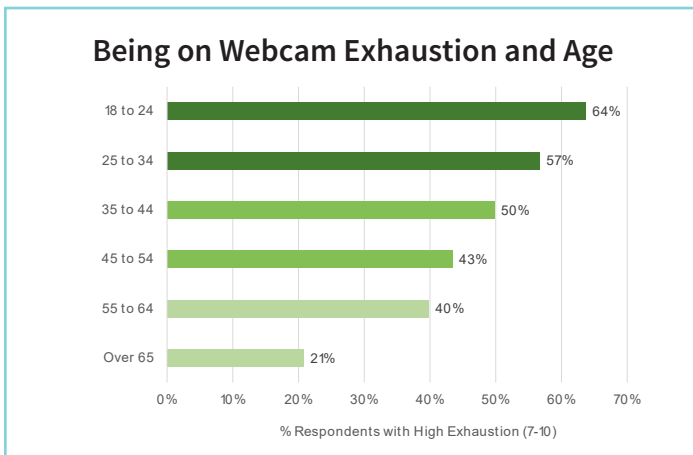
¹³ http://www.hsperson.com/pdf/JSPSP_Aron_and_Aron_97_Sensitivity_vs_I_and_N.pdf

Although the largest group overloaded by being on camera during meetings were introverts, 40% of extroverts also indicated they were exhausted due to the same reason.



Age and Reaction to Being on Camera

There is a **significant correlation between younger age and exhaustion**. This may be because the younger groups tend to spend more time online, but we don't have additional data to understand the cause of this issue. The younger the worker, the more being on camera tends to overload them. Comments suggest that they don't like people seeing them online – or they don't like looking at themselves.



I'd rather not do it, it makes me self-conscious and it makes me distracted, looking at my coworkers.

(Age 45-54, \$50K - \$75K/yr, Female, Extrovert)

I feel like it's no point to have to get all dressed up, do your hair, some females do make-up and other people make sure they have their coffee every day, we have many different routines of things to do before we go to work. All I'm saying is that if it's something that can be said through just voice then don't require a camera when the same message could have been told without it.

(Age 18 to 24, Female, \$25k/Year, Introvert)

There is a SIGNIFICANT CORRELATION BETWEEN YOUNGER AGE AND EXHAUSTION.

This may be because the younger groups tend to spend more time online

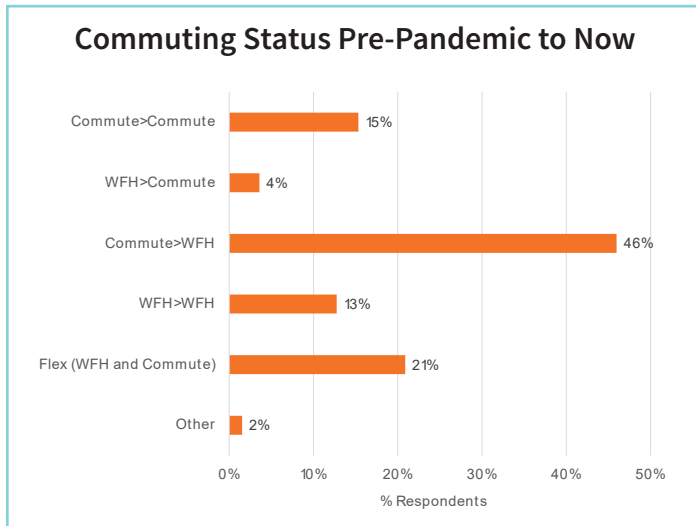
Commuting Status and Video Exhaustion

We wanted to test if exhaustion was due to people for whom working from home was not a fit for themselves or their managers.

Video usage has the highest impact on those who are still commuting to an office (53%) – or have gone from commuting to working from home since the pandemic (51%).

A large number of our respondents were people who had previously commuted who now work from home (46%). 28% of respondents did not change their work styles and either continued working from home (13%) or commuting (15%).

“Have you started to work from home in the past year?”



Why is the Webcam On?

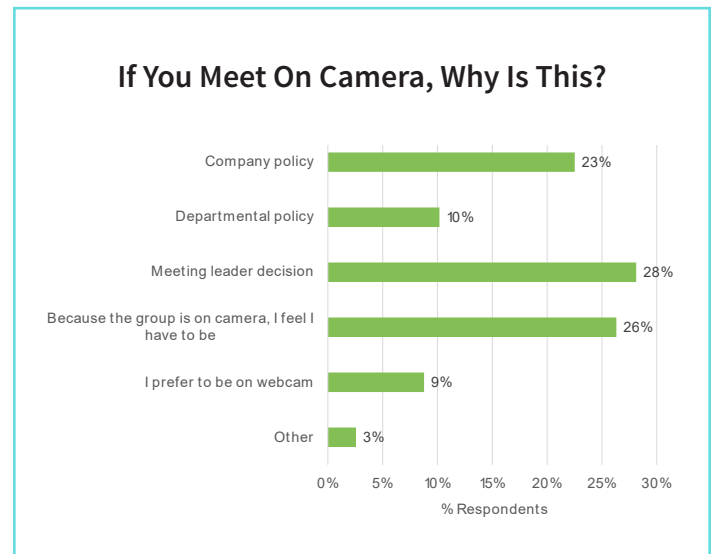
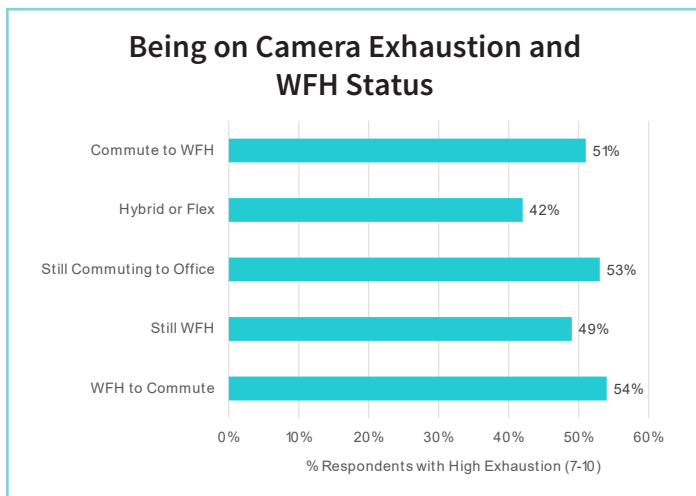
We wanted to understand, if the video is on, why is this. How many companies are mandating its use during all meetings, how many departments, or is somewhat undefined? From our discussions with numerous company leaders, many of whom believed all meetings should be on camera, we wanted to find out how this was impacting workers.

33% reported that it was company or departmental policy that cameras be on for all meetings and a further **28% reported that it was up to the meeting leader**. The most surprising result was the number of people who feel compelled to be on camera due to peer pressure.

“If you do use a webcam during an online business meeting, why is this?”

PLEASE LET ME GO BACK TO THE OFFICE!!
(Age 25 to 34, Male, \$50-75k, Introvert)

The least impacted group are those who work from home and still commute to the office (42%).



“ I like that we can still do meetings even working from home, but I don’t feel as engaged as when meeting in person at the office. I think doing Zoom meetings for long periods at a time is stressful, and the webcam requirement felt somewhat intrusive at first.

(Age 25 to 34, Male, \$50k-75k, Introvert)

“ There are issues with using technology while at home. One is that sometimes, connectivity can be bad or limited and it is really annoying and mentally draining if I, or others on the call are breaking up or the voice quality is pretty bad. There is also the sense that we are doing it only because the company wants us to do it and at times it is a way for senior management to “check in” on employees to make sure that they are actually working. And there are lots of distractions, whether a child (or children) come on screen because they want something, or a pet making noises or ambient noise because of construction or other external sound.

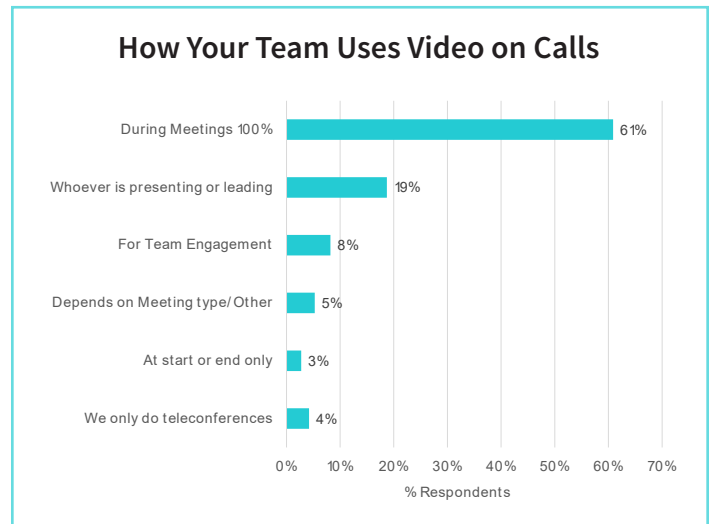
(Age 45 to 54, Male, \$150k+, Medium/Adapted)

26% reported that even if there was no company, department, or meeting leader mandate if the rest of the team is on camera, **they feel pressured that they need to as well.** Responses from those under 25 years old, indicated they are more influenced by **peer pressure (40%) to be on webcam** as opposed to the rest of the respondents.

How Often is the Video Camera on During Meetings?

61% of the survey reported that 100% of meetings are conducted with the webcam on for the entire meeting for all participants. 19% indicated that only those presenting or leading were on camera.

“What is your team policy on using webcams during a meeting?”



“ Sometimes you feel social or peer pressure to switch on the webcam, I prefer to have it off.

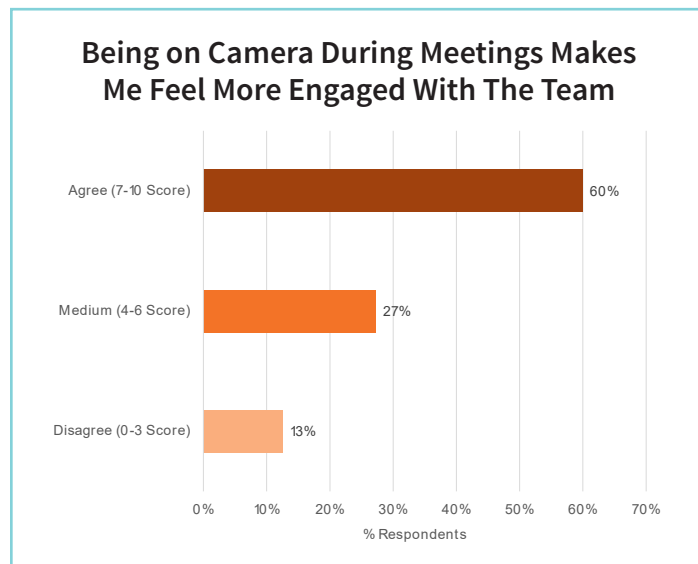
(Age 45 to 54, Male, \$100k-150k, Introvert)



“My boss and the others at my work prefer that everyone be on camera during a meeting in order to see everyone and get a sense of community. At first, I was excited to see people, but as we go on nearly a YEAR of doing this, it does tend to get exhausting. It’s harder to multi-task when you know you’re on camera, and it’s hard to keep those eye rolls and annoyed looks to yourself when the camera is on. Sometimes I will walk away and claim I need to blow my nose in order to get some facial emotions out so I don’t do it on screen. I am not really an introvert or an extrovert, I lay in the middle. While I like being able to see my colleagues and bosses, sometimes it gets to be a lot when you’re on camera for 2-3 hours a day.

(Age 35 to 44, Female, \$100k-150k, Medium/Adapted)

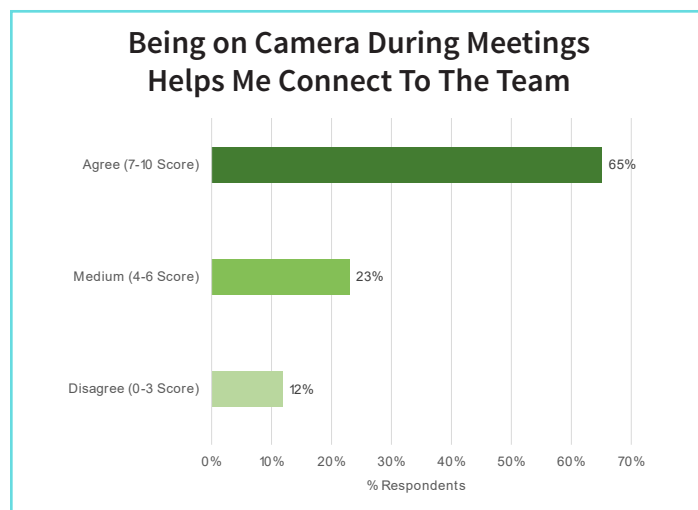
“Everyone being on webcam during an online business meeting helps me feel more engaged with the rest of the team.”



“Level of engagement depends on size of meeting. When there are more people than fit on the participant grid, it feels a bit much.

(Age, 35 to 44, Male, \$150k+, Medium/Adapted)

“Being on webcam helps me connect with the rest of the team during an online business meeting.”



ONLY 11% reported that the camera was used team engagement purposes.

Team Connection and Engagement

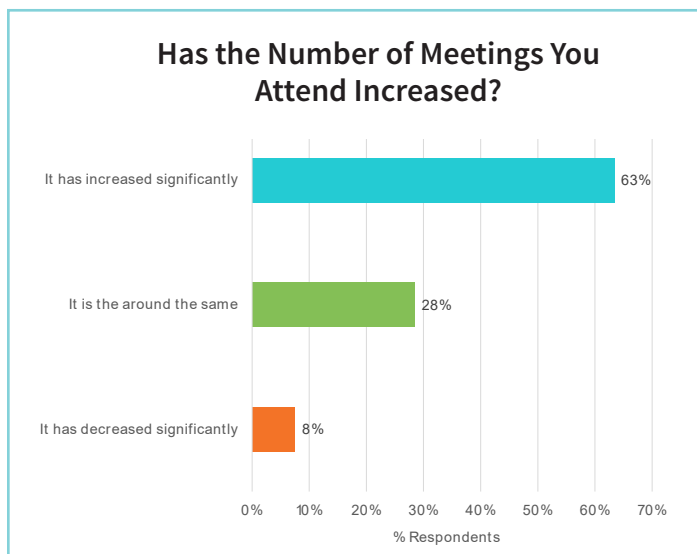
Over 65% of responses indicate that the camera is best used for team engagement and connection, however as we saw above, only 11% reported that the camera was used for team engagement purposes - or to connect with the team for the first 2-3 minutes for the team to connect.



The Rise in Meetings

Before the pandemic, one survey indicated that 50% of people working in an office really disliked impromptu meetings¹⁴, which interrupt the flow of a workday. Drawing from this analysis, a surprising number of the comments indicated that the reason for increased meetings during the pandemic is that an office quick chat or impromptu get-together, now had to be scheduled. This indicates that companies are not making use of, or training employees in, collaborative technologies that can replicate these “quick chats and updates”.

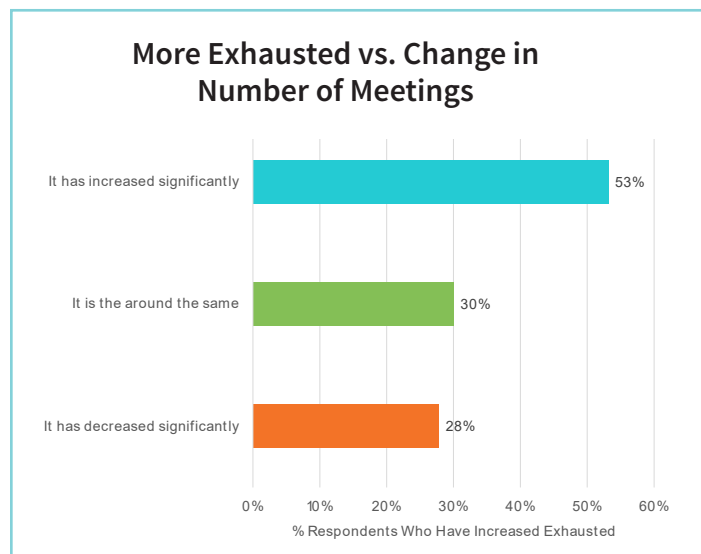
“Has the number of meetings you attend changed from before the pandemic?”



“ We have about double the amount of meetings overall now because it is harder to get everyone on the same schedule due to many people having more meetings. It’s like a cycle.

(Age 25-34, Male, \$100K/year, Introvert)

Of this group, 51% reported being more exhausted, due to the increased number of meetings, but not specifically due to the camera being on.



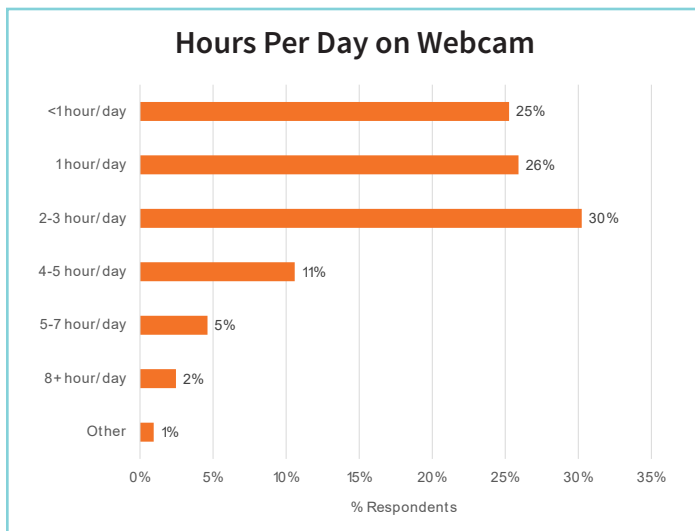
¹⁴ <https://www.smallbizgenius.net/by-the-numbers/remote-work-statistics>

“Before the pandemic, we might have quick meetings here or there, but not like “official sit-down meetings”. We would walk into each other’s offices and have a quick chat. Now, most of those meetings have to happen either over email or often over a zoom meeting. So, the number of meetings has significantly increased because we can’t just have a quick chat in an office.

(Age 35 to 44, Female, \$100k-150k, Medium/Adapted)

56% reported being on camera during meetings for 1 to 3 hours a day, with over 30% reporting in the higher ranges, up to 8 hours per day.

“On average, in a typical work week, how many hours per day do you meet online with a webcam (for business meetings, not personal calls)”

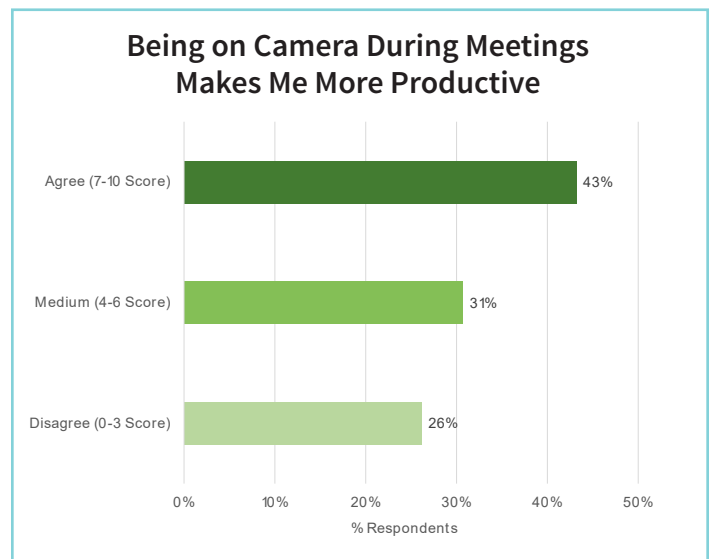


Being on camera appears to be a two-edged sword, a trade off between **PERCEIVED PRODUCTIVITY** and **FATIGUE.**

Productivity, Distraction, and Multi-Tasking

Paradoxically, being on camera appears to be a two-edged sword, a trade-off between perceived productivity and fatigue. On one hand, almost half of the respondents report that it makes them exhausted. On the other hand, 43% reported that webcams make them more productive with the bulk of the survey reporting medium (31%) or low productivity (26%).

“Being on webcam helps me be more productive during an online business meeting.”

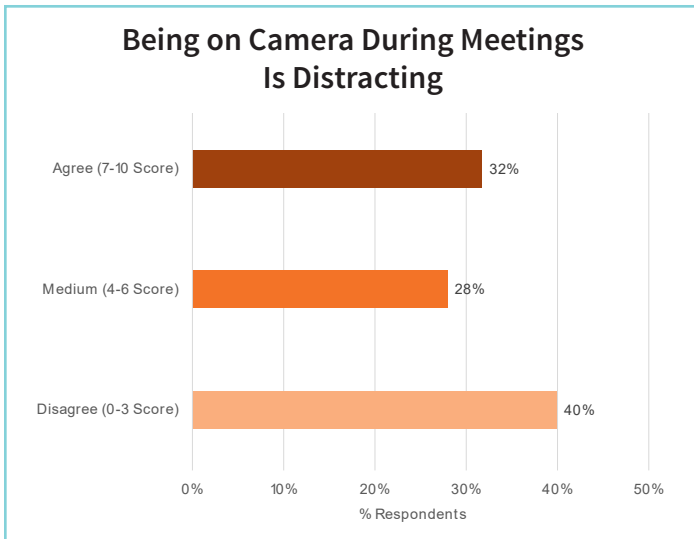


“If I could, I would never turn on my webcam. I am typically far more productive when it’s voice & screen sharing only.

(Age 35 to 44, Male, \$150k+, Introvert)

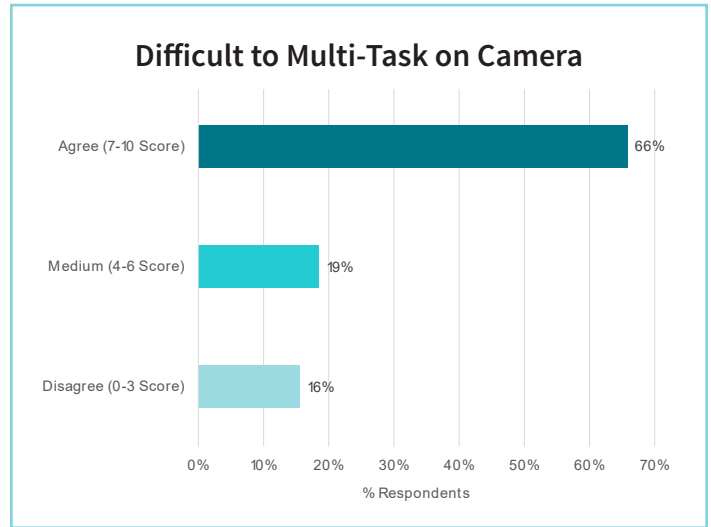
“Everyone being on webcam for business meetings is very distracting.”

Although 40% disagree with this statement, over 30% agreed, meaning at any particular time, a third of your meeting participants are going to be distracted, with a possible additional 27% in the medium score range. Survey comments have “distraction” as a primary issue with camera use in meetings.



“ I feel nervous on camera, I’m not sure why since all of myco-workers know what I look like. There are also periods in the meeting that don’t apply to me and I can’t multi-task while on webcam.”

(Age 35 to 44, Male, \$50k-75k, Medium/Adapted)



The Multi-Tasking Issue

One of the primary reasons companies and managers justify camera use during meetings is to prevent multi-tasking. The survey supports this, although many people comment that many meetings they attend don’t require their attention the entire time. Pre-COVID, they used to catch up on work during meetings, and they can no longer do this.

This suggests managers are unnecessarily inviting people to calls who could potentially catch up via meeting recordings or meeting minutes, rather than participating in the live meeting.

“Being on webcam during an online business meeting makes it more difficult to multi-task than if I weren’t on webcam.”

“ I feel that they can be a distraction if too much activity is going on. I prefer that only the main speaker have their camera on. That makes it easier to focus. Too much activity on camera is distracting.”

(Age 35 to 44, Male, \$100k-150k, Extrovert)

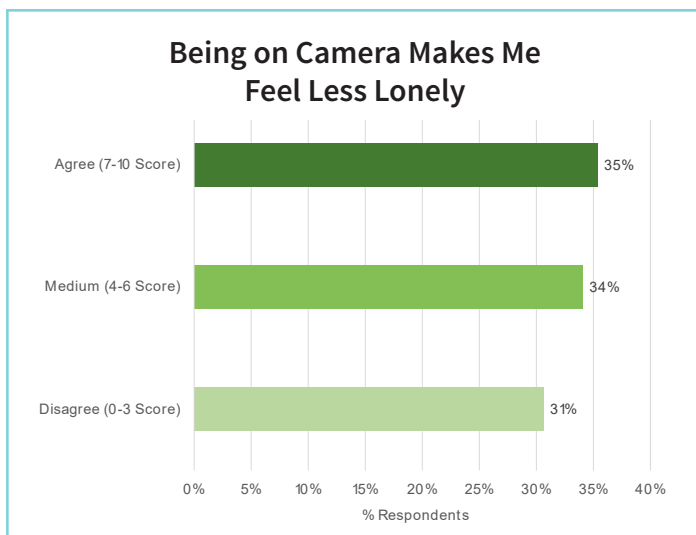
Does Being on Camera Help With Loneliness?

This study found that **37% reported that being on the camera helped them feel less lonely.** In other studies before the pandemic, loneliness was a problem for 19% of workers¹⁵.

The increased reporting of loneliness in this study indicates that many are working in a work style unsuited for them, having been forced home due to COVID-19. If employers properly assess their employees for remote suitability and place them in the situation best suited for them, issues with loneliness being experienced by employees now should abate after people return to the work styles suited to their personality.

“Being on webcam during an online business meeting makes me feel less lonely.”

¹⁵ <https://www.surepayroll.com/resources/blog/productivity-prohibitors-how-to-stop-them-in-their-tracks>



In addition, managerial training on who should attend meetings, how meetings are not a substitute for informal chats in an office setting, and paying attention especially to the wellbeing of younger workers is going to be key to increasing productivity and workplace engagement.

Recommendations

- Video is best used to connect employees in small groups, one-on-one meetings, or for the first 2-3 minutes of larger meetings for everyone to say hello. Even in this context, many people are still uncomfortable with being on video, and managers and HR should work with them to determine root cause and adjust their work situation where possible. Being on camera should be up to the employee.
- Beyond the presenter or the leader of the call, there is no indication that large meetings, with a screen of talking heads, have any advantage over audio and may increase distraction and participant anxiety.
- Recognize that peer pressure is a key driver of camera use, especially in younger workers, even where it is not required by management or the organization. Training and communications need to be introduced to make staying off-camera a personal choice when possible.
- Meetings are not a substitute for informal office chats or a “water cooler”. Businesses need to introduce and train managers and employees on the use of collaboration workspaces where informal updates can occur 24/7, synchronously, and asynchronously.
- Packing extra people into a call when they don’t need to be sucks time and productivity. Invest in good meeting notes with a meeting recording so they can quickly update themselves on what they need to know and have more uninterrupted work time.

*Current practices on the use of video during meetings have **NEGATIVE IMPACTS ON REMOTE WORKERS AND OFFICE WORKERS** -because leaders have confused engagement for productivity.*

What This Means For Businesses

To unlock the potential economic gains from remote work, businesses and professionals have to embrace policies that enable remote work, not hinder it. Data, not assumptions, should be driving remote work policies, especially with the majority of managers being new to this work style. As we’ve seen from this study, current practices on the use of video during meetings have negative impacts on remote workers and office workers. Leaders need to distinguish between drivers for engagement and drivers for productivity.

The results of the survey present an important lesson for businesses on how policies around the use of video conferencing tools are going to impact the wellbeing of employees, whether they are commuting or staying at home.

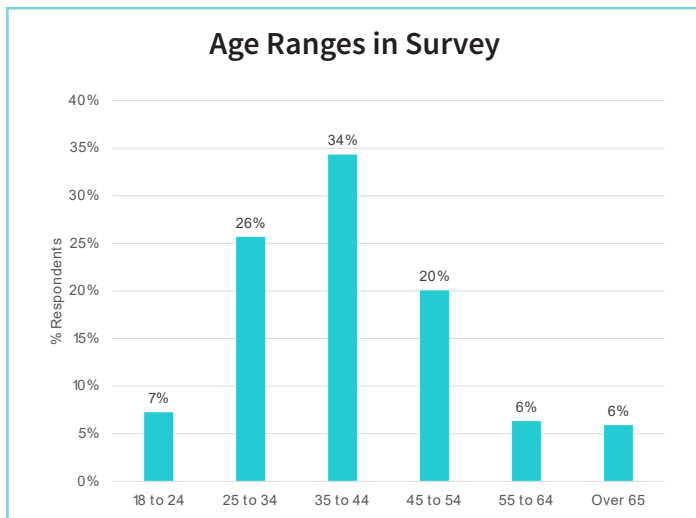
“ I originally didn’t like using a webcam but now I’m more for it because it helps us to engage as a team. It also makes you feel less lonely working through a computer screen.

(Age 18 to 24, Male, \$25k-50k/yr, Introvert)

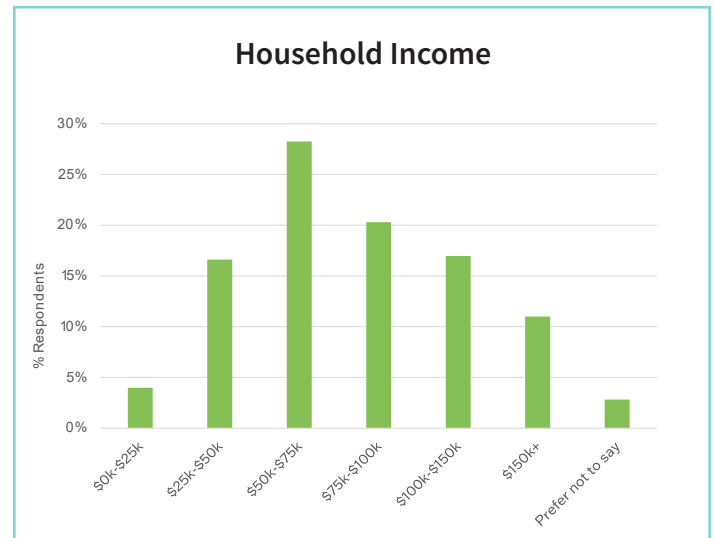
Methodology and Survey Response

Virtira Consulting Inc. surveyed over 2,500 executives, managers, and employees in various WFH, commuting, and flex work styles between January 21st and February 8th, 2021. We also tested for introversion/extroversion to understand if this is a factor. Respondents were from public and private companies across all age ranges and incomes through two-third party independent online platforms. Follow-up surveys were sent to over 500 respondents to further clarify some responses. Overall margin of error of $\pm 2.37\%$ at 95% confidence level, on the basis of 1710 net responses.

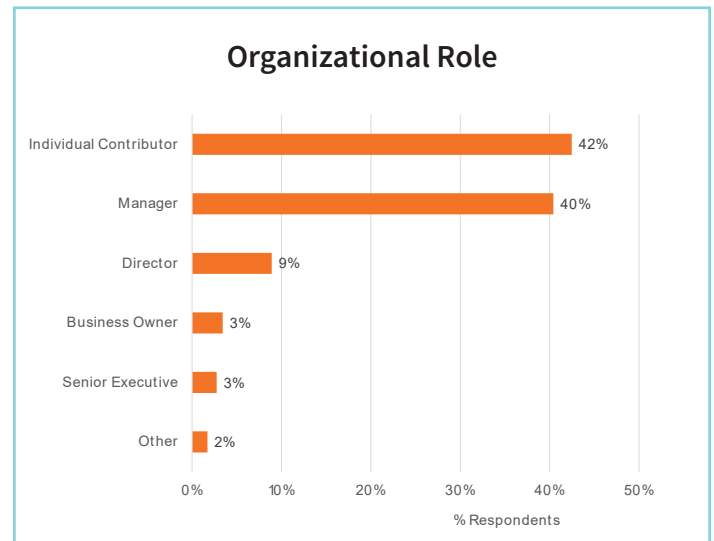
The largest group of responses came from age 35 to 44 (34%), followed by age 25 to 34 (26%) and age 45 to 54 (20%).



The largest group of responses came from the 50k-75k/year range, followed by 75k-100k/year (20%) and equal numbers of the \$25K-\$50K/year and \$100K-\$150K/year, both at 17%.



The study had a good representation of different management levels.



For more information on Vitira visit our website www.vitira.com

“ It’s good and bad. I feel like it helps us see facial expressions and body language more, and it helps make sure we’re all paying attention. But on the other hand, any movement seems to draw attention. So if I blow my nose or adjust my glasses, I feel like everyone’s focus is on me instead of the speaker. It’s also tempting to watch myself instead of watching the people speaking, so I try to minimize or hide my own window.

(Age 35 to 44, Female, \$50k-75k, Extrovert)

“ Personally, I dislike having to use a webcam. I understand that it can help people to feel more engaged, but I dislike how I look on camera.

(Age 18 to 24, Female, \$50k-75k/yr, Introvert)

“ It’s nice to connect with other teammates, but extensive use can be exhausting. I prefer it be left up to individual predisposition.

(Age 25 to 34, Male, \$50k-75k/yr, Medium/Adapted)

“ Home is my sanctuary that I do not share with people outside of family and very close friends.

(Age 45-54, Female, \$100k-150k/yr, Extrovert)

“ I hate webcams because I find it very distracting and irritating if someone’s network is not strong.

(Age 18 to 24, Male \$50k-75k, Introvert)

“ From March 2020 until about October 2020 we didn’t use our webcams. Then our manager started to insist that we do. The social aspect is nice but to me it causes new distractions and makes it impossible to multitask or you look stupid. Also I’m a smoker and when on call using my cell phone I could go out and smoke and still be on the call, now I can’t and it’s annoying as well.

(Age 35 to 44, Male, \$150k+/yr, Extrovert)

“ Feels invasive and distracting.

(Age 18 to 24, Female \$25k-50k/yr, Introvert)

March 2021

VIRTIRA