

LESSONS LEARNED FROM THREE YEARS OF ORGANIZING IPM WEBINARS

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Since October 2018 we have delivered 77 webinars for over 9,800 participants. Hereby we summarize the key points for successful webinars.

For facilitators and hosts

MAKE IT A TEAM EFFORT

There are several functional roles in preparing and delivering a webinar:

- Presenting – delivering information to the audience;
- Moderating – introducing the presenter, managing transitions, monitoring Q&A, and other on-air tasks;
- Technical support – setting up the webinar software, running tests/rehearsals, providing support during the webinar;
- Administration/marketing – scheduling, promoting the event, evaluation, reporting.

Designating these tasks to different team members helps to focus on their individual areas of responsibility.



QUALITY MATTERS

- Maximize audio quality! Invest in a high-quality microphone or headset that will make your voice clear and reduce background noise.
- Know your webinar software well – interface of administrator, presenter, and participants.
- Test each planned activity and interaction with the host and each presenter. Make sure the test is done in the settings of the real event (device, internet connection); otherwise the test may not be useful.
- Have a separate communication channel for host, technical support, and presenter(s) to address challenges without sharing with all participants. Examples are Slack, Teams chat, WhatsApp, etc.
- Shut down applications that could pop up and distract you.
- Keep in mind that smooth, uninterrupted streaming of high-resolution videos in the webinar requires high internet bandwidth.

EVALUATE AND IMPROVE

- Measure the effectiveness of your webinar event to refine your processes and identify topics for the future webinars.
- Evaluate not only the presentation, but also participants' overall experience, and effectiveness of behind the scene team.
- Share the link to your evaluation survey at the end of the webinar when participants are most likely to respond.
- Prepare report with webinar metrics and survey results, and share it with hosts, presenters, and anyone else involved in the webinar preparation and delivery.

For presenters

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

- Rehearsals are critical in achieving comfort and confidence in the presentation. An audience can easily distinguish between a presenter who is comfortable and prepared and one who struggles.
- Don't underestimate the technology – there are a lot of moving parts required to pull off a live virtual event. Make sure to familiarize yourself with the webinar interface, functions you plan to use, and how to communicate with the host, other presenters, and the audience.
- Have a backup plan in case something goes wrong – have available call-in numbers to join the webinar, printed slides, and share your presentation with the host in case of screen sharing issues.
- Identify slides near the end of your presentation that you can skip in a worst-case scenario if you are short on time.

FACILITATE LEARNING

People attend webinars to learn. Focus your presentation on the value and use of the information, not the details of research methods used.

- Keep your energy level up – use hand or arm gestures, consider presenting while standing up.
- Present with enthusiasm. Modulate your voice – vary the pitch, tone, and speed. Use appropriate humor and smile.
- Simplify your slides – less text and tables, more big images and video. Point to resources for more detailed information or provide handouts.
- Build in interactions! Include knowledge checks and polls. Don't forget to reveal the correct answer and share the results with participants! Keep in mind that pop-up windows may be blocked by the browser.
- Wrap up your presentation with best practices or actionable advice.



LET AUDIENCE PARTICIPATE

- Inform participants how to use Chat and Q&A. Unmuting participants has risks – quality of their audio, ability to formulate their thoughts and questions, potential for disruption.
- Decide ahead of time who will monitor the Chat and Q&A tool and approve/dismiss questions.
- If answering questions live, remember to read questions out loud so that the presenter(s) and participants can follow.
- Refer to the questioner by first name only, putting a personal touch on the communications without revealing excessive identifying information.

Keep participants in mind

WE ALL KNOW HOW IT WORKS... OR DO WE?

- There are many different webinar software options. Always explain to participants the basics of the webinar user interface and controls at the beginning of the webinar.
- Keep in mind that user interface and functionalities may differ depending on what device participants use to connect.
- Share a resource or webpage with troubleshooting tips.

PARTICIPANTS HAVE A LIFE

- Respect participants' time – start promptly on time and wrap up on time. If you may go over time, make it clear in the event announcement, registration page, and at start of the webinar.
- Open the virtual webinar room at least a few minutes before the announced start time, so participants can familiarize themselves with the webinar interface on their device.
- The majority of our participants prefer webinars up to 60 minutes long. For online conferences lasting several hours, include breaks at least every hour for people to get up, stretch, and take care of critical needs. Do not include any activity during these breaks.
- Don't forget registrants who did not attend – share with them the link to webinar recordings and information about the future events.

PREVENT COGNITIVE OVERLOAD

- Participants often aren't in control of their surrounding environment and focusing on a presentation may be harder than in the conference room.
- Focus on one action at a time. For example: don't talk or ask questions when participants are responding to polls or knowledge checks.
- Follow the program of the webinar as advertised; avoid last-minute changes.
- Improve accessibility and avoid issues that contribute to cognitive overload such as loud background music, too much content on screen, bad color contrast, text that is too small, chaotic graphic design.
- Allow for time for participants to reflect and absorb the information.

