

# Knowledge-sharing in a Virtual World: Helping Your Team Learn More Effectively From Each Other

Written by John Murphy and Klaus North

By John Murphy and Klaus North

Yesterday I had eight meetings that took up six hours of my day. Bad planning meant many were back-to-back. Not only is this exhausting, but it's unproductive if I then don't have time to do whatever I agreed to do in the meetings. Does any of this sound familiar?

This blog answers **how the pandemic has changed the landscape of knowledge-sharing** – and **how you might be able to enable better knowledge-sharing in your own organisation**.

The pandemic has accelerated many changes that were already on the way – the rapid rise in online retail and services for one thing, the way we work together for another. Working from home can be lonely and challenging for our mental health. If we stay at our desks all day, looking into a screen, our physical well-being can also suffer.

And what about learning at work? Popular learning models suggest that at least two-thirds of what we learn is through on-the-job experiences and informally from colleagues, line managers and so on. The key word there is 'informally'; we learn:

- by being in the same room,
- from asking quick questions,
- from listening to conversations,

- from watching body language at meetings – the list goes on.

But online we're not in the same room, so how much learning simply isn't happening? A quick question to a colleague in the office becomes much more intrusive when it involves a Zoom or Teams call – or even a phone call. And you don't overhear many useful conversations when you're not even in the same town, never mind the same room. How many quick questions aren't being asked and how much knowledge and insight isn't being passed on as a result?

This does not bode well for knowledge-sharing. After all, if even routine learning from each other isn't happening as much as before Covid, what's the likelihood of traditional, structured approaches such as peer assists, after-action reviews and lessons learnt exercises being effective?

Well, there's good news. The rapid adoption of online working – and specifically video meetings – creates opportunities that didn't previously exist. Let's look at a couple of examples.

## Job Shadowing

The first is job shadowing. When a colleague is leaving the team one of the best ways to prepare their successor is for the two to spend some time working together, the latter learning from the former. In most situations though this isn't practical, as both parties usually still have their own jobs to do. With virtual working, however, it's much easier for the successor to attend key meetings and discuss with the leaver afterwards, without adversely affecting either's work too much. There's no travel, no need to book rooms and thus much more scope for the two parties to work out their own agenda for passing on knowledge and insights through shadowing. Many teams also find it easier to involve colleagues in each other's work more, providing further insurance for the day one of them moves on.

## Team Teach-ins

This leads us to another useful by-product of virtual working: ‘team teach-ins’. We want to maintain regular contact with colleagues to ensure no one feels isolated, but we can soon run out of things to talk about if we meet several times a week. One way to maintain contact and make the meetings interesting is to encourage individuals to take the stage and talk about the detail of their work. It gives them the chance to share their insights, tell stories of successes – and failures – in a relaxed setting. For other team members this can be an excellent time to learn more about their colleagues’ work in a way that is enjoyable and engaging. Some teams

have done something similar in the past with in-person meetings, but it’s much easier in a virtual environment and has the added benefit of helping the team keep in touch.

So, job shadowing and team teach-ins are just two of the knowledge-sharing approaches that are made easier thanks to virtual working. We can also start to look at how video meetings enable us to reach wider – and much larger – audiences when we want to share. But that’s a whole topic in its own right.

*The views expressed in this blog are those of the authors and not necessarily those of EIPA.*