

Zoom meetings have become ubiquitous. While they offer benefits beyond email and phone calls, they also have significant pitfalls. Much of human communication is non-verbal; we pick up on and react to cues such as micro expressions and body language subconsciously. These cues are not available in a Zoom meeting in the same way because of poor bandwidth, grainy screens, lag time between speaking, individuals muting their video, and other technological issues. Unfortunately, not everyone is aware that the nonverbal cues used in communication have changed or don't know how to interpret the new cues. We end up trying to communicate in the same way as we did before Zoom but with different cues. The level and quality of communication have thus diminished. This is especially troublesome for those who rely on nonverbal cues, who may indeed be an individual with a great deal of social intelligence and/or someone who truly tries to understand what the other person is saying. I notice that those who are self-absorbed in a social sense seem to relish these types of meetings while those I would contend are good listeners and want to understand someone else's point of view really struggle.

I work at an organization that has multiple Zoom meetings each day with different groups of people, as we're involved in several projects. Every day, I sit through meetings where one or two people dominate the conversation, people interrupt each other, and people are brusque and rude. All these behaviors that are made easier by the impersonal nature of the meeting.

There can be a lack of humanity in a Zoom meeting as the person on the screen doesn't appear to our brain to be a "human" in the way it does to someone in the same physical proximity to them. I have heard things in Zoom meetings said by one person to another that I don't believe, based on previous experience with them, they would say if the person was in front of them. Perhaps given time our brains and behavior can adjust to this new way of interacting with each other but until that happens or until management understands the issues and confronts them, Zoom meetings will continue to be less than uplifting for many of the individuals in them and to the organization as a whole.