Guidelines for Having Conversations Around Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

The Power of Conversation

We gain information about people from many sources. We can read, do research, hold interviews and issue surveys, just to name a few. One of the most powerful tools for learning about others though, is through interactive conversation. Unlike other data gathering techniques, conversations tend to progress fluidly, are less scripted and more unpredictable, and focus on what is relevant in the moment. People are more likely to be open and honest in a genuine conversation where they feel safe sharing their thoughts and beliefs. Conversations provide the opportunity for back-and-forth sharing, for exploring all sides of a topic, and for expanding on moments of discovery and enlightenment.

A true desire to learn about someone is a great start for a conversation. You can begin by exploring topics that are common to all of us or with which the participants are likely to have variety of experiences. For example, we all have a story of family. Simple questions like "Do you have any siblings?", "Do you have pets?", "What are some of your happy memories?" can open a dialogue that establishes a sense of interest and caring about another person. You can connect over common experiences and gain new perspectives from different ones. These are simple conversations to have. They don't require a lot of time or preparation, and they can establish an environment of trust and caring that set a strong groundwork for more complex conversations to come.

Why should our chorus have conversations about Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)?

Look around your chorus the next time you're all in the same room. What are the similarities and differences between your riser mates? Take time to allow yourself to just observe. People come in all shapes, sizes, energies. You will be able to see certain traits, physical features and how they present themselves. One always wears long sleeves, another changes hair color every month. You may be able to infer another level of traits through body language or repeated observation. Someone is outgoing, another shy.

Now think about the individual personalities behind these appearances. What have you learned about your riser mates since you first saw them? Think of the stories of their life they have told you that begin to give a more complete picture of who they are, like puzzle pieces coming together. Do you know everything about them, or is there more still to learn? Could you walk up to a riser mate and ask a question that fills in another puzzle piece?

People have a varied combination of traits that make each of us unique. All of those traits enrich the individual, and in turn, enrich the community. Any time we add a member to a chorus, the overall sound of the ensemble changes. Similarly, any time we grow in membership, the dynamic and character of the group changes slightly.

Sometimes we absorb these changes easily and we feel immediately comfortable. Sometimes though, a change might create questions or even friction, most often due to uncertainty around the change. It may seem like the change could threaten tradition or present conflict. When it feels like such threats are present, we can acknowledge our fear and reframe the scenario as an opportunity for communication and learning. In this way, we can address our fear and prevent it from intensifying and interfering with sound decision-making and progress.

Acknowledging individual traits which change the whole, and exploring how they affect the community, are critical steps to understanding both the community in its entirety and the individuals within it. It is through discussion that we explore change, mitigate fears, and build a more open and accepting chorus environment.

What are obstacles to discussing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, and what can we do about them?

1. Confusion about what Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion mean

When people think of "diversity," many perceive it as a buzzword without truly understanding its meaning. Based on our background and personal experiences, we may see it in terms of meeting quotas of specific types of people or political correctness in disguise. People of a majority trait or identity might feel they're being replaced or losing something, while people of a minority trait or identity could feel tokenized.

It's important to have a shared definition of diversity so everyone starts on the same page. While we can all still have differing opinions of how diversity relates to our lived experiences, it shouldn't be an abstract concept in and of itself.
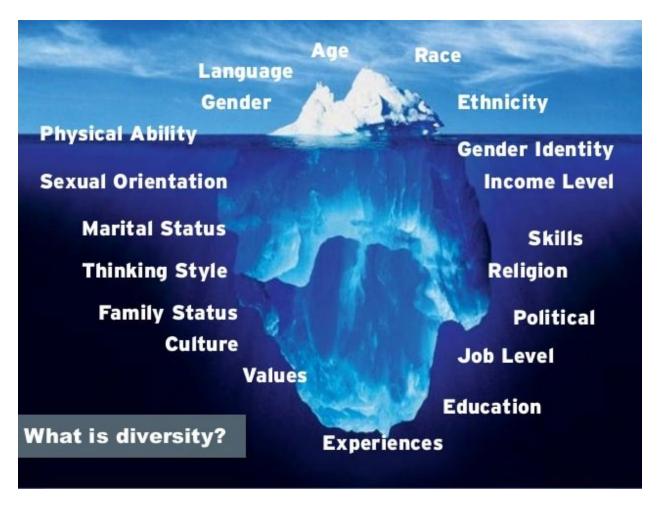
Diversity is a descriptor of a group, not of an individual. One element of diversity is the extent to which a group represents the demographics of its larger community. More simply, diversity means there are many types of differences within a group of people ([Miranda-Wolff](#)). A chorus might be socioeconomically diverse, but they may not represent the racial diversity of their area. Or, a chorus might have many people who identify as LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning), but they may have only able-bodied members. The degree of diversity in a group expands based on the extent of the differences among the group. For example, even if a chorus were to statistically represent an area's demographics, they can continue to strive to include more and more examples of differing backgrounds and identities.

When it comes to **equity**, we are referring to our policies, processes, and practices, and how they provide consistent access and accessibility. Equity is focused on removing barriers or providing resources to ensure that everyone has the same opportunities. An excellent example in our organization is related to the level of musical background each person brings with them when they join. We have individuals who have never had access to musical instruction, members who have doctorates in musical education, and everything in between. Part of our approach to equity in this case can be seen in the multiple strategies choruses provide to their singers to learn their music — sheet music, learning tracks, sectional rehearsals, and in some cases, very personalized support. The important thing is that all chorus members have the support they need to perform at their very best! Beyond the chorus strategies, there are educational offerings at all levels of the organization so that any singer can progress in their

musical knowledge should they want to advance their skills to a level where they might pursue a role as a musical leader position or become an arranger.

The individual aspects of ourselves that together make for a diverse community can be extremely personal. We can think of **inclusion** as the degree to which our differences, backgrounds and identities are welcomed and accepted. Sweet Adelines calls this a *Culture of Belonging* in the organization's Guiding Principles. Because many of our differences can be very personal, talking about them may be difficult. What's commonplace for one person may be extremely personal or intimate for another. It's important to remember that inclusion is defined by each individual person's experience. Each person experiences inclusion or exclusion, and we cannot speak for the sense of belonging another feels, though we do all have the capacity to contribute to how thoroughly they are included.

Take hair, for example. Some people color their hair, others don't. Some are particular about style while others don't seem to care. Some people cover their hair and some choose to shave their head. With each of these options, the result is visible, but the personal connection to those options may not be. In some cases, the state of their hair might be incredibly personal due to health, religion, race, past experiences, or future hopes. For others, the state of their hair is inconsequential, merely a facet of their existence with little bearing on how they go about their day. Quite likely, their full relationship with hair, both theirs and others, will vary depending on the situation.

As you can see from the examples above, diversity, equity, and inclusion are much more complex than they might first appear. Some aspects are visible and obvious to outsiders and others are not outwardly evident and very personal to the individual. Efforts in the area of diversity, equity, and inclusion are focused on recognizing and respecting the many facets of each individual.

2. Lack of trust among participants

Trying to understand if a subject is personal for someone can help remove obstacles when connecting with them. If you treat something as too casual, you risk minimizing how important it is to someone. If you dive into a personal topic without establishing trust, people may withdraw and pull away. It takes trust to open up to people about certain subjects, and it takes trust to listen to a personal subject from someone else. Building trust is a process of varying speed for different people, but the common factor is that it cannot be forced.

While you cannot control all of the factors that impact someone's degree of trust in you, here are some techniques that can help to establish you as genuinely trustworthy:
- Be truthful.
- Admit when you don't know something.
- Admit and take accountability when you are wrong.
- If you say you will do something, or it is expected of your role, do it.
- Share your thought processes.
- Include and extend your trust to others.
- Be aware of your reactions and responses.
- Allow others to talk and listen with intent.
- Be receptive to feedback.

Elements of a culture of trust include:
- Ability for all involved to speak openly on the topic at hand
- Accepting accountability for one's statements and actions
- An environment of learning and growth
- Honesty and candidness
- Respect for confidentiality
- Focus on a person's actions and words
- Equal opportunity for each participant to contribute
- Ability to explore different viewpoints with openness and respect

Elements of a culture of trust do _not_ include:
- Freedom from consequences of one's words
- Expectations of 100% agreement at all times
- Prioritizing comfort or niceness above truth
- Prioritizing some voices over others
- Ridicule, disdain, or dismissal

Sometimes, conversations need to happen even when trust between individuals has not been established — or even when distrust is the reason for the discussion itself. In this case, leaders are responsible for creating an atmosphere so participants may trust the process even when they may not have full trust in other participants (Oxfam). Participants need to be assured that any friction during conversations will be addressed during the discussion and that conflict does

not need to be a sign of disaster; in fact, it may be a sign of progress. See below for more information about creating a space for discussions where participants feel trust and emotional comfort.

3. Personal discomfort

Many people are hesitant to have conversations around diversity, equity, and inclusion. The personal nature of these topics and the fact that they can address topics at the very core of a person's identity create the potential for strong emotional responses. Even when we have established trust with an individual, it can be hard to put ourselves in situations where we are called to be vulnerable. Having trust can help us assume others' good intentions, but it may not protect us from their impacts. In other words, even when we know another chorus member would never actively cause us harm, they may say something which we perceive as a threat or an attack. The fear of this scenario is enough to discourage some people from engaging in a conversation about diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Talking about diversity can be uncomfortable even when we purposefully engage, but it can be especially challenging when a subject is thrust upon us without warning or preparation. It can bring up uncomfortable or "negative" emotions such as anger, chagrin, embarrassment, fear, frustration, guilt, suspicion, etc. Managing those emotions can be difficult and take a lot of effort, and sometimes it takes a lot of dedicated time. In a group setting, it is important to give people time to prepare for discussions, to provide background information, make expectations of participation and outcomes clear, and establish and adhere to discussion protocols.

Feelings of discomfort, while valid, should not be a reason to avoid having conversations about diversity, equity, and inclusion. In fact, acknowledging discomfort can often be a great way to open these discussions: "How many of us are feeling a bit apprehensive right now? Let's talk about that! What are your fears around having these conversations?" Bringing the discomfort into the room, naming it, and giving people a chance to address it head-on can help calm some people. Leaders don't need to feel pressured to assuage members' fears; this exercise is more about giving voice to those discomforts than eliminating them. Often times, the apprehension and fear about the conversation cause more discomfort than the conversations themselves and they frequently will lessen organically as the conversation proceeds.

4. Lack of time or deprioritizing the discussions

We have a limited time during rehearsal, and members come to sing. There can be a lack of interest or buy-in about the necessity of having these discussions. Some members and leaders may want to focus on other things such as competition, events, or fundraising. Perhaps they don't even believe there are problems with diversity, equity, and inclusion that require addressing. But focusing on all the administrative aspects of chorus leadership without addressing diversity, equity, and inclusion is, in a way, like bailing out a boat without plugging the leak. It's a short-term solution to a long-term challenge.

Not taking the time to discuss deeper, interpersonal topics can have dire consequences. In a chorus culture where these conversations are understood to be necessary, individuals with concerns about inclusion can bring them up with the expectation that the resulting discussion will be respectful and productive, and the conversations can be managed in a way that fits in efficiently with chorus and rehearsal planning.

In a chorus culture resistant to such conversations, any attempts will likely be perceived as onerous and are far less likely to be effective in addressing individuals' concerns or grievances. In these cases, members may feel the only options they have are to ignore the grievance or to leave. If we can welcome and seek out these conversations, we can be assured that everyone on the risers has a true sense of belonging there. While we can understand and accept that there will be times when a chorus culture may not fit an individual, open and honest dialog can help us avoid losing members who find it necessary to leave because of unacknowledged and unaddressed issues.

People may state, when asked, that of course they're open to hearing about grievances or ways to improve. "Please tell me, I wouldn't want to hurt anyone!" is a reasonable response to discovering that our actions or words may have harmed someone or caused them discomfort. It is important that this is followed up with intention to address the root cause rather than just change a specific behavior. As an example, let's go back to our hair discussion. If I think that someone doesn't pay enough attention to how they wear their hair, I might make a judgment about that person that they are too lazy or don't care enough about the rest of the people in the chorus to 'make themselves presentable.' If I have made a remark specifically related to their hair, I may correct that and not mention their hair again, but if I continue to make a value judgment about that person based on that element of their outward appearance, I may invalidly discount them as a candidate for a role in the chorus based on that judgment. In this case, it is a change in my underlying understanding and mindset that is needed, not just a reactive change in behavior.

Change can be difficult, both for individuals and communities. Members may feel the chorus is already a cohesive unit with a comfortable culture. They may not want to seek out members who don't conform to their view of the chorus. Or, they may fear that conversations about diversity, equity, and inclusion will highlight differences and cause division in a previously unified chorus. It is important that any changes with the chorus culture remain consistent with the mission, vision, guiding principles, standing rules, bylaws, statement of inclusion, and any other formative documents or proposals which establish the purpose or direction of a chorus.

But just as the "I don't see color" sentiment is counterproductive to addressing racism and racial tension ([Why The 'I Don't See Color' Mantra Is Hurting Your Diversity and Inclusion Efforts, Forbes](#) provides insight into this concept), ignoring differences among chorus members is likely to hide or add more conflict or friction than it solves. If diversity is the friction itself, conversations are the salve that soothes its rawness ([Wayman](#)). Understanding that other people have different experiences is essential to recognizing how our actions may unintentionally impact others.

With any issue that needs discussion, the sooner it can be addressed, the more likely it is that it can be effectively resolved and the less likely it is that it will escalate beyond resolution. When time to resolve is added as a further element, it becomes more and more difficult to effectively address the original issue, and without identified corrective action, the negative outcomes can multiply. Furthermore, when leaders are held back because of their own discomfort, they tend to wait longer and longer to embark on the discussions. Hesitancy can breed hesitancy. If we are waiting for the "right" time to have difficult conversations, that time may never come. In other words, make now the "right" time!

5. Assumption of universal experiences

The golden rule states to treat others how you would wish to be treated, and this is good as a starting point. But we are not all the same. The platinum rule states to treat others how they wish to be treated. In order to determine how others wish to be treated, we need to first accept that people are different and that we need to make an effort to fully understand them.

Imagine two people — they may already exist in your chorus — where one is precise and professional in their interactions and the other is more flexible and casual. The person who is more professional may think, "I value interactions with a baseline of restraint which allows me to build connection and affection on a foundation of respect. Therefore, I will be professional in my interactions with my chorus mates." The other may think "I like to be casual with my friends to show them that I can relax around them and that we are building a connection from a place of genuine self. Therefore, I will be casual in my interactions with my chorus mates." When these two interact, the casualness comes across as overly familiar and disingenuous, whereas professionalism comes across as aloof and impersonal.

Neither of these personal interaction methods is wrong; they are simply how each of these people express themselves. But you can see how utilizing the golden rule results in a disconnect. In order to form a better connection, these two need to understand that how they view and interact with the world is not universal. They may need to discuss their differences, bringing them into the open so that each can understand the other. Will they fully change to interact with the other in a way that feels completely unnatural to them but is received positively? Most likely not, as that would inhibit their side of the connection while prioritizing the other's method of communication, which is not the goal. Hopefully, there is a middle ground that they can agree on. Knowing that they have that shared awareness of the other, and making an effort to smooth out their mismatches, will go a long way to deepening and sustaining their connection.

This example can be extrapolated to other situations. If the concept of "I respect you and want to treat you as a friend" can have such a disconnect between how the message is sent and received, in what other ways are we assuming our worldview applies to others?

Leadership Preparation for Conversations

It is very likely that many small conversations about diversity, equity, and inclusion are already taking place among our chorus members. Before making a concerted effort to have these conversations on a chorus-wide level, it's important for leadership teams, both administrative and music, to be on the same page about priorities and goals related to DEI.

They should discuss DEI policies in every realm of chorus culture, including:
- Chorus standing rules and/or other governance documents
- Rehearsal accessibility (physical, i.e., wheelchair accommodation, bus access, vocal amplification for chorus director/speakers, etc.)
- Rehearsal accessibility (mental, i.e., accommodating different learning styles and providing opportunities for questions, etc.)
- Membership recruitment and retention, including factors that might be barriers to membership
- Song choice, considering both cultural context of a song and lyrical elements
- Contest- and show-related procedures, including grooming (hair and makeup)

To the best of their ability, chorus leadership should be proactive in seeking education on DEI in order to better anticipate and address the needs of individual chorus members. This preparation by leadership helps protect individuals from feeling pressure or being called out, which can happen when individuals in positions of power/authority place responsibility for identifying issues on those experiencing the impacts of the issues. Conversations around individual member interactions would be beneficial. For example, people with the best of intentions often say things like, "We don't know what to fix until people tell us what's wrong." While this is true to a certain extent, and there should always be a chorus culture where members are comfortable voicing these types of issues, this type of statement places an even heavier burden on the individuals negatively impacted by the issue. If the chorus culture is not an environment in which an individual feels comfortable to voice concerns, such a demand can further alienate members who might be struggling. Leadership can 'start the ball rolling' in establishing a communicative culture by encouraging initial discussion about broader DEI topics. This will set these conversations up as important and part of a standard process that provides a platform where members with issues can bring them forward within a common chorus practice rather than something they have to initiate.

What Types of Conversation Should the Chorus Have?

Ideally, chorus conversations will be open to any issues or concerns of the membership. Topics can include any aspect of chorus culture. For example, a member might be uncomfortable with the lyrics or message of a song in the chorus repertoire. If there seems to be an overall atmosphere unwelcome to change, the member will feel inhibited to voice their concern and may experience emotional or mental strain each time the song is sung. Instead, if leadership is proactive in acknowledging dimensions of diversity and hearing a wide spectrum of concerns, the member will more likely respond by being open and no longer feel the need to disassociate with the song and eventually, the chorus. For more ideas about topics for conversations, see toolkit element 'Chapter Choices.'

How can leaders ensure DEI conversations are effective?

Effective conversations begin with chorus leadership.
1. Leaders create a space where members feel comfortable expressing their concerns.
2. Leaders provide feedback to the chorus regarding chorus changes (if any) that will be considered as a result of conversations:
    a. Whether or not any change will be made
    b. The reasons for adopting the change (or not)
    c. Implementation plans and schedules
    d. Updates on progress for changes implemented over time
    e. Support for implementation

Example: A chorus conversation results in a request that the chorus standing rules be updated to reflect inclusive pronouns.

The chorus leadership meets and votes to proceed with this change. They provide the following communication to the chorus membership:

"We recognize there are current and potential members who use pronouns other than she/her, and we want to welcome those individuals into our chorus with open arms. We feel that by changing our chorus standing rules to reflect inclusive pronouns, we acknowledge and validate members who are already in our chorus who will see their identities reflected in this revised language.

We have assigned a task force to provide the Management Team with recommended revision by the end of this fiscal period, and we will be providing the revisions to the chorus for review and discussion. A finalized version will be submitted to the chorus for vote prior to our AGM. Voting will be via evote and 2/3 affirmative vote will establish the revised standing rules as approved.

3. Leaders strive to understand their own experiences, biases, and triggers. Self-reflective openness from leadership will pave the way for others to discover the impact of their own experiences. Acknowledging these challenges will help ease the inevitable discomfort in the conversations. Members will be better equipped to listen with empathy, particularly those who identify with the majority/dominant culture.
4. There is unity among leadership on foundational aspects of chorus identity. Leadership upholds the mission, vision, guiding principles, standing rules, bylaws, statement of inclusion, and any other formative documents or proposals which establish the purpose or direction of a chorus. These are tools which can serve as a compass for discussions around DEI.

The Structure of Chorus Conversations

Identify the purpose and desired outcome(s). It is important that participants understand the **purpose** of the conversation. Are we seeking member input to song selection? Seeking to build connections with each other? Learn together? Addressing an outstanding conflict? Communicating the reason for the conversation and the desired **outcome(s)** will help all participants understand what they can (and can't) expect from the meeting and to prepare for the conversation and help the group reach its objectives.

Prepare an Agenda. It doesn't have to be overly formal or detailed, but an agenda will help participants know how the conversation will progress and will give them an opportunity to request adjustments to the planned approach. If there is any preparation required, send the expectation for that pre-work with the agenda (for example, if the purpose of the conversation is to build connections, you may want participants to prepare something to share). Provide resources for members to access prior to conversations to encourage understanding of topics prior to meeting. This preparation will avoid situations in which people from traditionally marginalized groups are put in the position of explaining well-documented concepts.

Establish Rules of Engagement. Rules of engagement will help the group stay on track and can help manage escalations during the meeting. You can start with a standard set of Rules of Engagement (see Appendix A for an example), review them with the group at the beginning of the conversation, and have the participants suggest any changes that will make the meeting more effective for them.

For difficult conversations, bringing in an experienced external facilitator can be a helpful approach. It allows for full participation of those engaged in the conversation and can create a stronger sense of balance and impartiality.

Create a Safe Space for Conversations

When we speak about a safe space for conversations, we are speaking of the concept of 'psychological safety' which refers to the belief that one will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns, or mistakes.

Recognize that the degree to which a person feels safe in a meeting setting is largely based on their previous experiences. As your group becomes more accustomed to having conversations, their experience will be impacted by the sense of safety you are able to establish. When people feel their comments will be listened to and treated with respect, they are more likely to honestly share what they are thinking. Conversations become richer when everyone is involved and feels safe enough to speak their minds.

To create psychological safety during a meeting:

- Ask the group to devote their full attention to each person who speaks. (This request can be included in rules of engagement).
- Allow each person to take their time and complete their thoughts.
- Encourage that follow-up questions are focused on gaining clarity rather than challenging.
- Share what is valuable or that you appreciate about someone's question or comment.
- Make notes and use people's names to refer back to earlier comments they've made.
- Invite people into the conversation who have not spoken.
- Answer any and all questions truthfully.
- Summarize primary points of significance and explain any actions or next steps as the meeting comes to an end.
- Acknowledge the quality of the conversation and thank the group for it.

After the conversation, follow up by:

- Completing any action items and next steps by the deadlines you set.
- Not sharing the conversation with others without permission.
- Following up with people to ensure their comments were addressed to their satisfaction.

See Appendix C for a comparison of meeting platforms for conversations.

Appendix A: Sample Rules of Engagement for Conversations

1. I will listen actively.
2. I will assume positive intent.
3. I will listen to and believe the lived experiences of others.
4. I will engage in dialogue, not debate.
5. I will be open, honest, and transparent about my thought processes.
6. I will be willing to take risks and admit mistakes.
7. I will share from my own experience rather than generalizing (speaking from 'I' not 'we').
8. I will seek to be curious about and intrigued by differences I hear.
9. I will speak respectfully, without blaming, shaming, or fixing.
10. I will continue to participate in spite of a little discomfort.

Appendix B: Conversation Exercises

1. Exercise for a conversation to build trust

    Share a story behind your name.
    1. Who gave you your name? Why?
    2. What is the origin of your name?
    3. How do you feel about your name?

2. Exercise to begin discussing DEI concepts

    1. Share an example of a place where you felt a strong sense of belonging. What was it about that environment that made you feel included and seen?
    2. Share an example of a place where you felt marginalized. Describe the specifics of the emotions and responses you felt.

3. Exercise to begin sharing personal DEI dimensions (dispels stereotypes)

    Participant steps:
    *   Fold a piece of paper in half.
    *   At the top of one half, write 'I am _____'.
    *   At the top of the other half, write 'I am not _____'.
    *   In between these two columns, write 'but'.
    *   Fill in the first blank with some kind of common identifier, such as their gender, race, religion, or age, and the second with a common stereotype about that group which is not true of them (whether the stereotype is positive or negative). Ask participants to try to come up with five examples.
    *   Share their statements with the group.
    *   Participate in a discussion about the concept of stereotypes.

    e.g. I am 95 years old but I am not on any medications.

NOTE: You can change the wording slightly as long as you are working to dispel stereotypes; for example, you could say 'I am 95 years old and I am still able to ice skate' or 'I work at a fast food restaurant and I have a master's degree'.

Appendix C: Conversation Platform Comparison

During the COVID-19 restrictions, we were compelled to rely heavily on virtual meeting platforms, and they have served us, and continue to serve us, extremely well. When it comes to meaningful human conversation though, we have, through thousands of years of evolution, developed instincts for communication that are most effectively activated through face-to-face, in-person interaction.

The following chart presents the advantages and disadvantages of three potential conversation platforms along with some suggestions specific to virtual conversations. For the types of conversations we encourage in this toolkit, text-based platforms and voice-only platforms are not recommended.

In Person – Physically Together	Virtual with Visual (Participants Camera On)	Virtual without Visual (Participants Camera Off)
Natural brain processes that support trust are activated	Perceived by the brain as 'almost real' – trust is based on previous knowledge and experience of participants	Brain loses visual communication cues – trust is based on previous knowledge and experience of participants
Full body language is available	Head and hands are available	No body language is available
Energy is perceived by brain through physical signals	Energy is perceived through visual and audio cues	Energy is perceived through audio cues
Technical issues are less likely	Technical issues can impact both visual and audio messages	Technical issues can impact audio messages
Participants cannot perform other tasks without detection	Participants can perform other tasks outside of camera range without detection	Participants can perform other tasks without detection
Participants can interrupt and exhibit disruptive body language	Both video and audio can be controlled by host(s)	Audio can be controlled by host
Participants must travel to be in the same location	Participants can participate via most computers from any location that has internet support	Participants can participate via most computers from any location that has internet support
Visual aids typically require additional equipment and set up	Sharing of documents and visuals is easily facilitated	Sharing of documents and visuals is easily facilitated
Leaving the meeting requires physical action to 'leave the room'	Participants can easily (and sometimes by mistake) leave the room	Participants can easily (and sometimes by mistake) leave the room
All participants can be seen in 'actual size'	Display size and number of screens can change based on number of participants	Participants without cameras or with cameras off cannot be seen
Outside interruptions are less likely and easier to control	All participants can be subject to outside interruptions	All participants can be subject to outside interruptions
Breakouts require multiple physical spaces and noise may become a factor in the quality of the breakout	Breakout rooms are 'sound proof' and allow full engagement of participants	Breakout rooms are 'sound proof' and allow full (audio) engagement of participants

The advantages (and sometimes necessity) of virtual meetings may still make them the optimum choice at times. Here are some tips for getting as much as you can out of virtual meetings:

- Keep meetings short and stay focused on the core message; once the meeting has started, avoid small talk and anything that could be perceived as irrelevant or off the subject.
- Set the duration of the meeting up front and try to end early; extend the meeting only if the listeners are actively seeking more information.
- Define the expectations and desired outcome(s) before the meeting starts.
- Start by explaining the purpose and format of the discussion, have the discussion, and close with a summary of discussion and any follow up items. Don't assume the listeners paid attention throughout the meeting.
- In virtual meetings, relationship skills are less engaged; the quality of messages, visuals, and activities is much more crucial. Invest time in designing messages, illustrations and activities to increase engagement and inspire tighter focus.