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Video-first at work



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On April 17, 2010, John Guide, an engineer at BP, emailed his boss, David Sims, to complain about safety measures on oil rigs in the Gulf of Mexico. His message was long and rambling.

It jumped from topic to topic, from genuine technical concerns to informal questions about career progression. It read like a casual moan about myriad common business problems rather than a high-priority safety warning. Sims treated it as such. He brushed off the complaint and promised to discuss the matter at a later date.

Almost exactly two years later, one of BP's drilling rigs, Deepwater Horizon, failed and exploded. Without the drilling rig in place, the oil well began spewing crude oil into the Gulf of Mexico. BP struggled to contain the leak and the disaster quickly escalated. When engineers finally sealed the leak two months later, the well had already released 3 million barrels of oil into the delicate ecosystem. It was one of the worst oil spills in history.

The Deepwater Horizon oil spill is a good reminder of many things—the importance of industrial safety, the fragility of an ecosystem, the real cost of oil. One of the more surprising, and subtle, reminders in this story is the importance of *communication*.



Guide wrapped his genuine concerns in a rambling email and Sims duly brushed him off. That miscommunication, on top of slipping safety standards in the Gulf of Mexico contributed, ultimately, to the catastrophic environmental disaster.

The communication could have been better.

We know enough about the way humans communicate to design smarter messaging systems that convey exactly what we mean. Whether we are highlighting slipping safety standards on an oil drilling platform or sending out a company-wide memo, delivering the message is incredibly important.

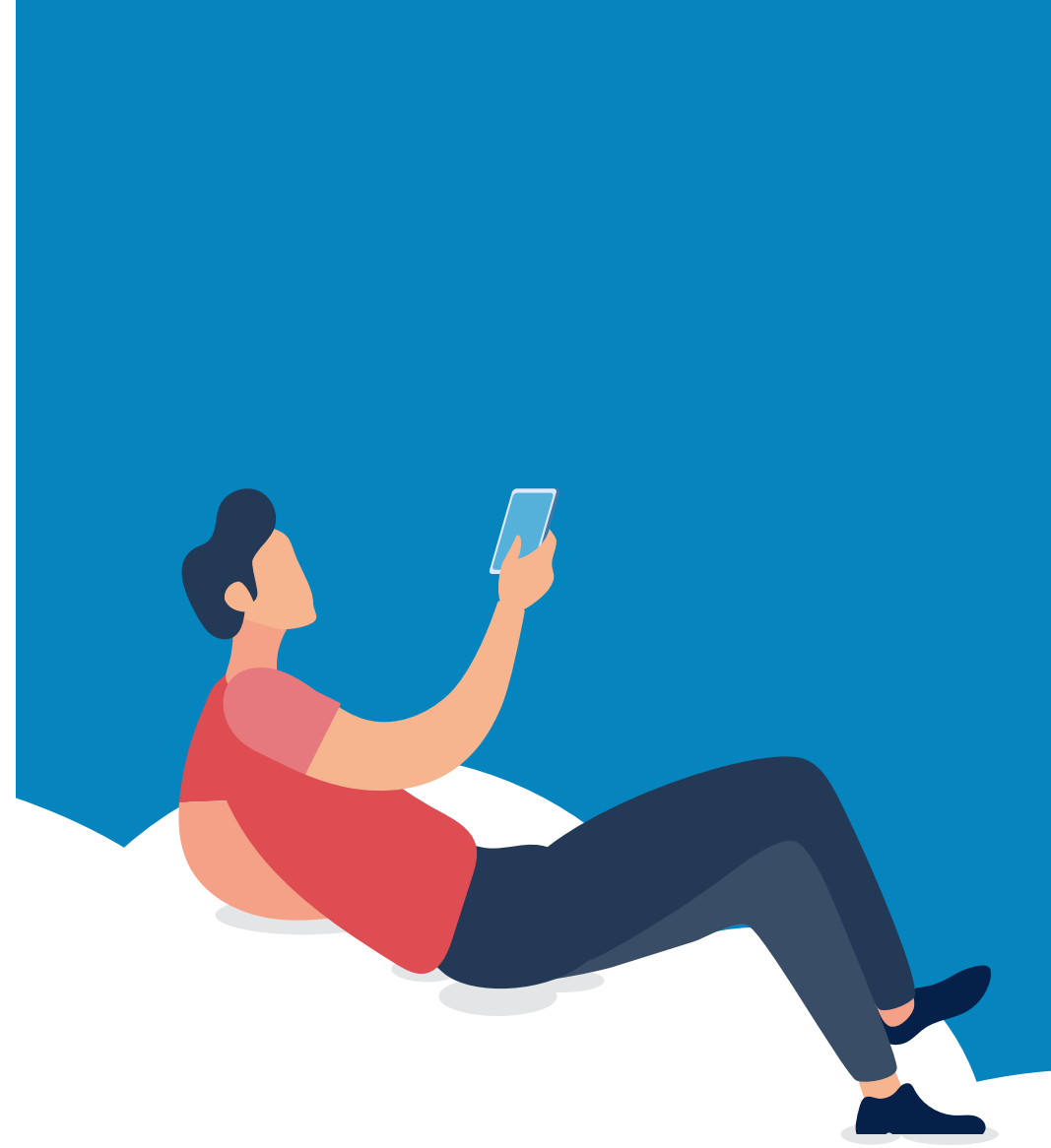
In this eBook, you'll learn about how human communication works, why video communication is more effective than other communication channels, and how to best integrate video into your existing communication systems to build a video-first workplace.



WHAT'S IN A CONVERSATION?

In 1967, Dr. Albert Mehrabian, a professor of psychology at the University of California, conducted two studies on human communication. He was particularly interested in the role of nonverbal communication—our gestures, facial expressions, tone of voice, body language, eye contact, and so on—and how it affected our conversations.

Mehrabian discovered that, in some conversations, just 7% of our meaning is conveyed through the words we use. An additional 38% comes from vocal elements like tone of voice. And the remaining 55% through nonverbal elements like body language. Mehrabian's theory quickly became known as the 7-38-55% rule and it revolutionized communication.



To see how the rule works in practice, consider a conversation between two colleagues, Jane and Alice, who are discussing a new marketing strategy. Jane spends five minutes presenting her idea, running through the theory, execution, and predicted results. When she is finished, she asks Alice what she thinks. After a short pause, Alice says, “I love your idea.”

With just Alice’s words, we must assume that she does genuinely like Jane’s idea. After all, she said exactly that. But what about if she said it with a sarcastic tone of voice? Clearly, that would convey the exact opposite message. What if she said it hesitantly, while avoiding eye contact? That could suggest that Alice wasn’t entirely convinced but didn’t want to cause a problem.

Whatever Alice’s actual meaning, it’s clear that her words alone did not convey the full story. To understand what Alice means—and, more generally, what anyone truly means when they say something—most of us need to both see and hear her.

Even though we’ve known about the importance of vocal elements and nonverbal signals in communication for decades, businesses still prioritize communication channels that miss out on huge swathes of our meaning.

Email and intranet still dominate internal communications. Both are predominantly text-based and simply don’t show the speaker’s tone of voice or body language. While phone and VoIP calls do grant an insight into someone’s voice, nonverbal elements are still hidden.

[But there is a better alternative: video.](#)

SAY IT WITH VIDEO

Because video allows participants to both see and be seen, it completely changes the feel of a meeting. Participants will exhibit virtual eye-contact, which helps build stronger relationships, and will stay more engaged for longer. But the headline benefit of video is improved comprehension.

Video calls allow participants to hear the words people say, listen to how they say them, and read their nonverbal cues. Unlike email, team messaging, or voice, video supports a holistic conversation that delivers greater clarity and, ultimately, understanding. Research supports this notion, showing significant differences in how participants process visual information. [Researchers](#) from Brigham and Women's Hospital and Harvard Medical School have shown that people recall information far better when they engage with it visually.



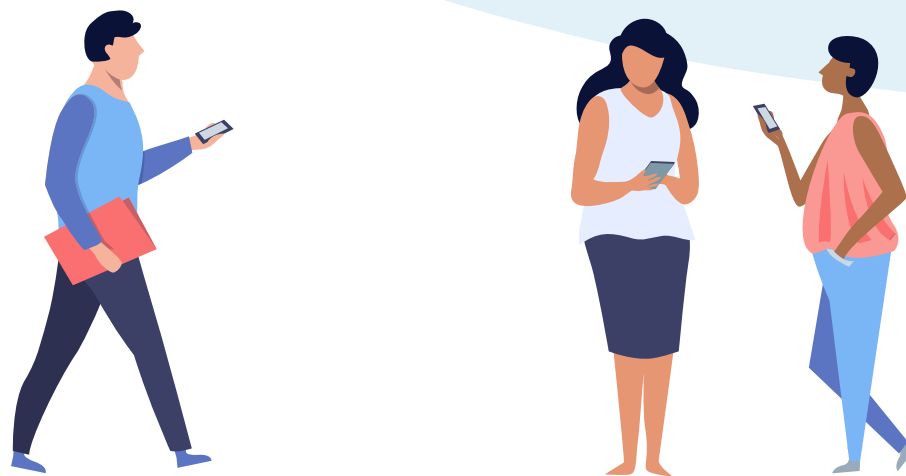
“It is clear from these results,” wrote the researchers, “that auditory recognition memory performance is markedly inferior to visual recognition memory.”

Think again about John Guide, the BP engineer. Guide did his best to convey his concerns but, at the end of the day, he’s an engineer not a writer. His email was long and rambling, and ineffectually conveyed his point. But what would have happened if he had used video? If Guide had used video, Sims may have seen the worry in his face and heard the concern in his voice. That would have suggested that his concerns were more than a minor gripe or moan. Given that information, Sims could have correctly triaged Guide’s message as a serious concern over operational safety—and that could have averted a disaster.

Although Guide’s story is an extreme example, every business can benefit from clearer communications. Despite its benefits, video remains seldom used by businesses. But this might be changing.

With video-call technology and Internet connectivity rapidly improving, people are becoming more accustomed to making video calls with friends and family. Communication services such as Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp, and FaceTime collectively facilitate tens of millions of video calls every day. And with video calling becoming commonplace in our personal lives, it’s starting to spread to the workplace, too.

Even five years ago, video conferencing was very rare in the business world. Now, more than **86%** of companies report using video calls in their communication strategies. If handled correctly, that behavioral swing could usher in a new era of supercharged productivity.



THE IMPORTANCE OF COLLABORATION

In 2017, the [Institute for Corporate Productivity](#) and [Rob Cross](#), the Edward A. Madden Professor of Global Leadership at Babson College, ran a study on the link between collaboration and corporate performance. The researchers examined more than 1,000 companies, many of which purported to promote collaborative work environments. In high-collaboration companies, they found that information flowed freely and transparently throughout the organization, decisions were made collectively, and employees were individually rewarded for collaborative work.

After grading the effectiveness of each collaboration culture, they investigated each company's commercial performance. They discovered that businesses that promoted collaborative working were five times more likely to be high performing. Collaboration is so powerful that even the *perception* of collaborative working can motivate people to work [longer and harder](#).



In today's knowledge economy, improved collaboration is the simplest route to increased productivity. By pooling a group's ideas and resources, organizations can achieve far more than if they asked each employee to work individually. But successful collaboration must be built on effective communication.

Take MIT's Building 20. It was a makeshift building thrown up during World War II for scientific researchers. Although MIT's original plan was to tear the building down after the war, planners seemed to forget about it and hordes of academics quickly moved in. Inside, they found a ramshackle assemblage of offices and meandering corridors. Even people who knew where they were going often got lost or disoriented. While that might not seem conducive to a collaborative working environment, it was.

As people fumbled their way through Building 20's tight, twisting thoroughfares, they bumped into dozens of colleagues. Each accidental meeting was a chance to discuss research, share ideas, and work together. And each meeting helped researchers get to know one another. That opportunity for ad hoc collaboration and intimacy turned Building 20 into a research hotbed.

In Building 20, researchers invented the first atomic clock, high-speed photography, gravitational wave detectors, and single-antenna radar. In just 20 years, nine Nobel Prize winners passed through Building 20's ramshackle doors.

But with today's increasingly distributed teams, meandering corridors aren't overly effective. Individuals in different locations can't work together if they can't communicate with each other. If an employee can't ask for help, solicit feedback, or give criticism, their work stays siloed and they work as an individual cog.

We need a way to unite people in different offices, cities, and even countries. And across all available communication channels, video is the best option to effectively engage a large distributed team, especially because it allows colleagues to see each other, read their body language, and build strong emotional bonds.

BUILDING A VIDEO-FIRST WORKPLACE

Creating an effective video-first workplace starts with the basics. A video service needs to facilitate the type of communication that made Building 20 special—and more. Your video service needs to support a variety of conversations, including both scheduled meetings and ad hoc discussions.

On a practical note, your employees need a service that's easy to set up and manage. After all, if you want video to become the default communication channel, it can't be more complicated than email, team messaging, or voice. Your service should also support one-to-one, one-to-many, and group conversations, with effective participant management features for larger calls.



Quality is obviously important, too. Both your video and audio streams must be high-quality and, perhaps more importantly, consistent. If your audio keeps clipping or your video keeps cutting out, your call participants will end up more frustrated and confused than they were beforehand.

On top of the basics, it's essential that your service is effortless. Think about face-to-face communication. There's no obstacle to starting a conversation, you just open your mouth and start talking. Now, compare that to a basic video calling service. To have a simple conversation, you must first download the application, install the software, find the right audio and video plugins, and register for an account. During the meeting, things are often equally as frustrating. You have to work out how to present your screen, share files, open the chat, and so on. When you add up every delay, hinderance, and distraction, a simple conversation can easily take 20 or 30 minutes. But it doesn't just cost you time. As your call participants and colleagues sit around, watching you fumble through confusing settings and unintuitive features, your credibility dissolves.

Building a video-first workplace requires a friction-free service that allows colleagues to slip in and out of video calls. Video should be as easy as calling a friend. Like tapping your contact's profile on your phone to call them, you should be able to do the same for video.

And video call systems need to integrate with your calendar and other third-party services. If they don't, your employees will need to perform all the administrative work themselves—setting up events, inviting meeting attendees, and adding call information—diverting them from their actual jobs and wasting time and energy.

By making a video call as easy as an impromptu meeting in the corridor, you encourage the same level of communication as found in MIT's Building 20—and that leads to exceptional collaboration. But, picking a quality service is only the first in your evaluation process.

To build an effective video-first workplace, you need to select a service that works within your existing business systems.

CREATING CONTEXT IN YOUR CONVERSATIONS

While video calls *can* deliver the best quality communication, they have to be carefully integrated into your overall communication architecture to deliver real value. Any new tool can easily become a roadblock if not handled correctly. It's simply not good enough to tell your employees that a stand-alone video meetings app is available and to start using it.

Imagine, for example, that you receive an invite to a video call titled, "Project Retrospective." Inside the call invite, there's no information other than the "join meeting" details. You click the "join" link and land in a meeting with five of your colleagues—but you have no idea what's going on. What project are you supposed to discuss? What objectives are you focusing on? What's the goal of the meeting? Without context, you're going into the video call blind. At best, you would need to take five minutes at the start of the call to get up to speed. At worst, you'd be unable to follow the discussion for the entire duration of the call. Both options are clearly unattractive.

When integrating video, it's crucial to also integrate context. Think about the email invite above. If the sender had provided context—a link to the conversation in a team messaging group that motivated the call or a link to the project in your project management platform—you could have read through everything in advance and hit the ground running as soon as you joined the call.

Context, as you have just seen, comes from building a connected workspace. **It's the combined knowledge that lives in the documents you create and the conversations you have.** If your employees can access those documents and conversations—and, perhaps more importantly, can access them *effortlessly*—they can take supercharge their communication and productivity. Ideally, linking communication and context means unifying everything on a single platform. With your communication and context in the same place, there is no missing information.

To see how context can help a call, consider a complex planning project where there's plenty of material that needs to be understood. If you are discussing the project in a team messaging channel and realize a live discussion would be better, you can loop other people into the group. New participants can quickly scan the chat, get up to speed, then jump into the video call to discuss everything in detail. It's a simple but important consideration when implementing video. If you get it right, you can turn video conferencing from a work obstacle into a productivity asset.

Given the right access to context and the means to communicate in real-time, collaboration becomes seamless. Conversations flow, ideas germinate, and productivity skyrockets. While you may not invent the atomic clock, you might come up with a fantastic new sales strategy, marketing campaign, or product feature.

REBUILDING COMMUNICATION

From blue-chip multinationals to startups and SMBs, facilitating effective internal communication is obviously difficult. Often attempts to improve communication result in an uptick in noise—but not necessarily effective conversations. Teams struggle to find the best ways to keep everyone on the same page, while maintaining a quick pace of productivity. But, as we have discussed, it doesn't have to be this way. For decades, communication experts have understood the key elements to effective communication. What we must do now is implement communication changes that hit all of those key elements.

The solution to our communication challenge is to integrate video into our communication architecture or, better yet, select a seamlessly connected communication solution. By placing effortless video at the heart of our businesses, we can make video calls as easy as face-to-face conversations. And when we can hear and see our colleagues, we can understand their entire message.



HELP FROM RINGCENTRAL

We work with our customers to reimagine the world of business communications and collaboration. RingCentral unites the pillars of your communication ecosystem—team messaging, voice, video, and call center—into one seamlessly integrated platform. Since each channel is a core part of RingCentral, users can effortlessly switch between them without losing context or flow.

You can message with a colleague then quickly switch to a video meeting with a single click, adding new team members on the fly. For new meeting participants, they don't just join a call, they join a workspace with all the context they need already baked in.

With RingCentral's open platform, you can integrate your communication channels with your critical business apps or build your own custom integrations.

Click [here](#) to learn more about [RingCentral Video](#), our browser-based, effortless video solution.



