

Why am I so tired after a day of Zoom?

Communicating via technology is...exhausting!

As many are working remotely full-time for the first time, this is one of the laments we hear most often. Why is it so tiring? It seems counter-intuitive: after all you don't have to travel, it's convenient, many people don't even get out of their workout clothes or pajamas!



On screen, the view of the face without the whole body is closer than in-person connection and distracting. It is two-dimensional. The loss of many subtle non-verbal cues means that we have to work so much harder to perceive the whole communication.

This is loss of a *sense of presence*, a core neuropsychological phenomenon stemming from an organism's capacity to locate itself in an external world according

to the action it can do in it. For humans these actions specifically include the person's capacity--even potential capacity-- to interact with another person in a shared external environment. The sense of presence enables the nervous system to recognize that one is in an environment that is outside one's self and not just a product of one's inner world (i.e. being awake, not dreaming). Presence is not the same thing as emotional engagement, absorption or the degree of technological immersion.

When communication via technology "works," it is because we have an illusion of this sense of presence. But the illusion cannot be consistently maintained. We lose the illusion of shared embodied presence when we have to narrow our focus and concentrate hard. That is why working with technology is so tiring. It is more difficult to get to those moments of evenly-suspended attention, reverie, relaxed communication. The telephone or audio-only, while one loses some visual cues, sometimes allows one to more freely move one's eyes, as in a shared environment meeting, and can be a bit easier. Right now, you may have to experiment in what works better for you and others case by case. Some people prefer the phone, others really need to hold on to their colleagues with their eyes etc.

This extreme focus and the resulting exhaustion means that moving is more important than ever between meetings. Stretching, yoga postures, running in place, going outside for some sun and a breath of fresh air-- are all crucial at this time.

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