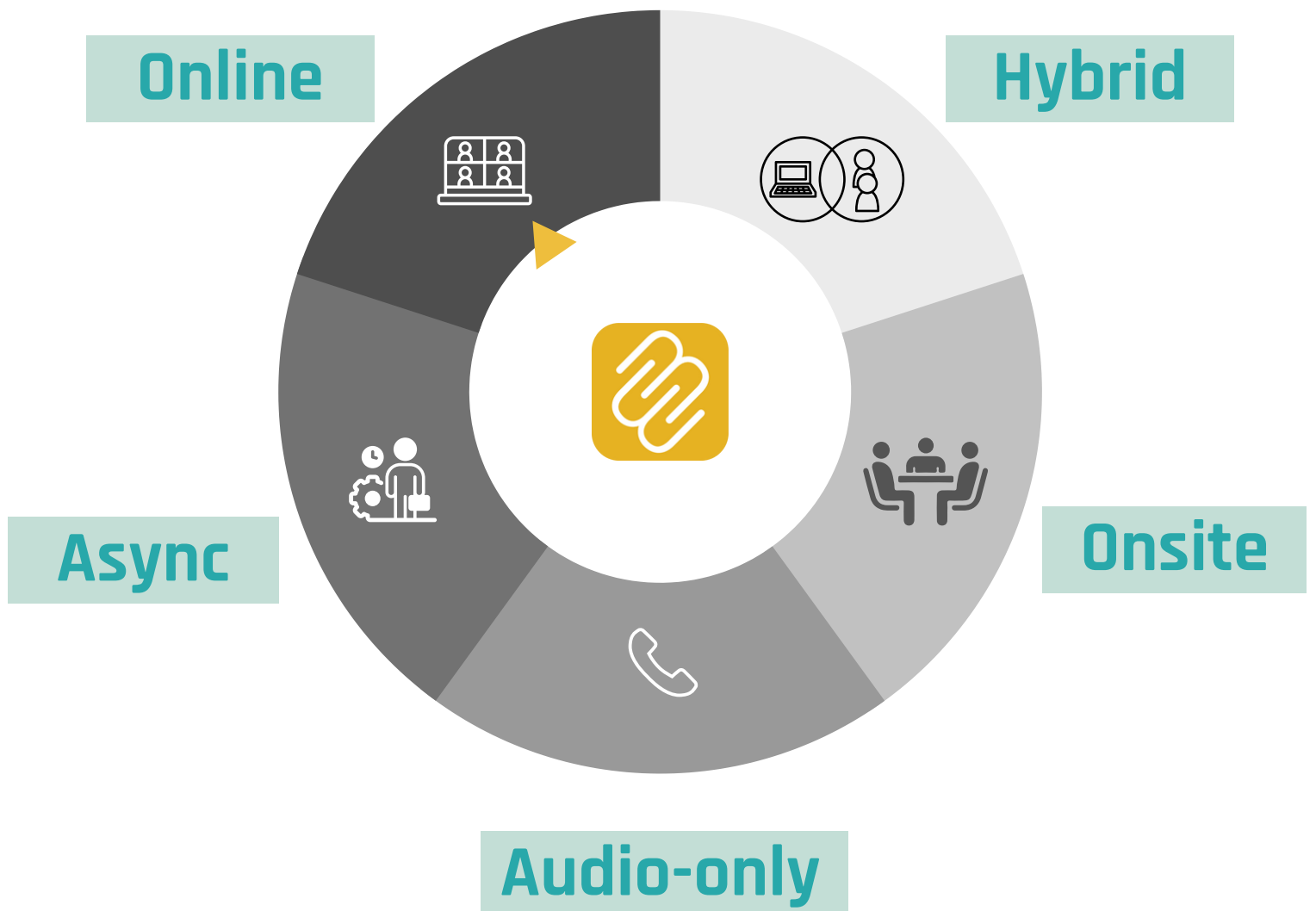


Meeting Compass

Which channel, what type of meeting, and what purpose?

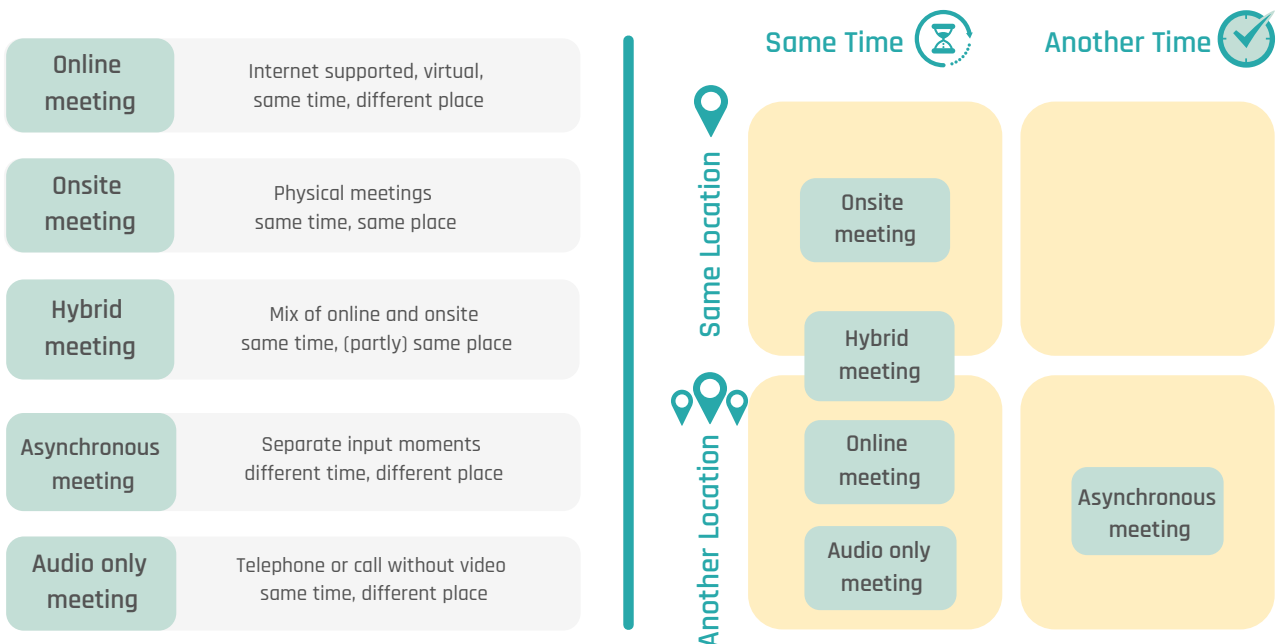


Meeting Compass

Only 20% of those who can work from home want to return to the office full-time (TNO 2022). Back to pre-COVID work procedures is not an option. And it doesn't have to be. Because over the years, we have developed a wide range of possibilities to make gatherings a success: online, onsite or hybrid.

Five channels for contact and collaboration

Today's meeting mix consists of a variety of meeting types, over five channels and with time and place as the main criteria.



Mistakenly, only onsite meetings are called 'Live' meetings. Both online and onsite meetings are 'live' because they are at the same moment. Onsite meetings are rarely 'offline' too. They just don't use online channels to see each other.

Another misunderstanding is that online work is 'homework'. The word 'remote' fits better here: working remotely, from a location other than the corporate office. This can also be a co-working location or a local pub.

Audio-only, our good old telephone conversation, adds value because of its single focus on voice. It may feel more private to not be visible. Another upside of audio-only is the fact that we can get away from the screen: exchange thoughts while walking. Good for our physical well-being, but also for our thinking; both the movement and the outdoor environment stimulate the brain to think more divergently. Note: audio-only lends itself to larger groups only with excellent moderation.

The mix of online and onsite engagement in hybrid meetings requires both the participants and the facilitator to be more professional in order to be effective. Conscious meeting planning is the starting point for success (who interacts when and how across channels). Proper technology support on location is crucial for solid communication between 'roomies' and 'zoomies', with multiple large screens, one or more good conference cams (like an 'owl'), and a well-functioning microphone & sound system. Long story short: complex hybrid meetings require more planning, more budget, and more in-meeting effort. When possible, choose onsite or online only - when necessary, be prepared to invest extra time, budget, and energy.

Choose your channel: form follows function

The discussion online versus onsite often ends in the conclusion that online meetings prevent real interpersonal connection. That is not correct. Genuine contact is also possible in virtual meetings. But, even more than with regular onsite meetings, preparation is crucial. What is the purpose of the meeting? What is the intended output? Who needs to be present and what involvement is required?

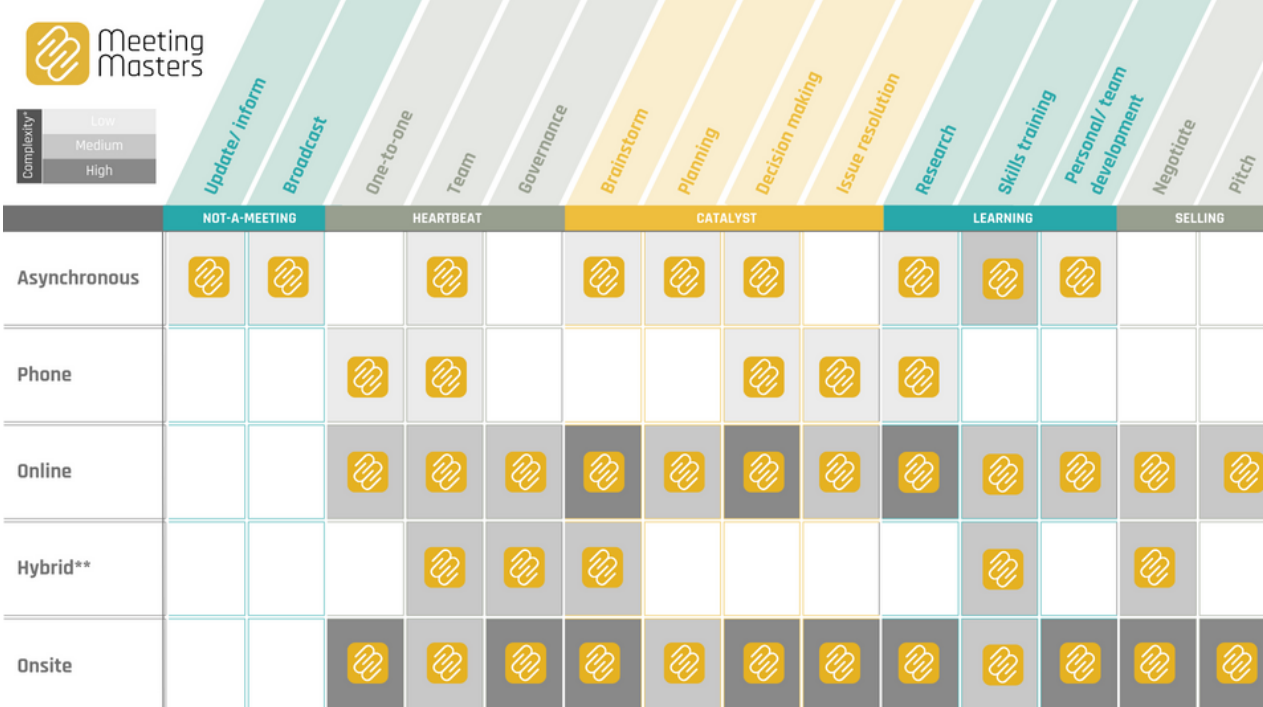
The formulation of meeting objectives is usually rational, evolving around tasks and topics. However, every meeting, without exception, has both a content-oriented, a task-oriented, and a relational component. This is true even for asynchronous meetings. The choice of channel for a meeting, whether online, onsite, or asynchronous, is therefore determined not only by the complexity of the task at hand but above all by the added relational and emotional complexity plus the complexity of interdependencies of the topics.

Some topics, complex but not interrelated, are well-suited for asynchronous meetings. Other goals, such as deciding on a coherent consideration framework for Covid-19 measures, are better served by onsite meetings, whether or not supported by asynchronous or online input.

Guide to choosing channels

After 25 years of working in international organizations and two years of intensive online cooperation, I dare to say that everything is possible, but that depending on purpose, function, and complexity, one channel is to be preferred over the other.

The model below is a meeting compass for choosing the most appropriate channel, based on the combination of functionality and complexity:



The Meeting Compass matrix maps 15 meeting types against 5 meeting channels (Asynchronous, Phone, Online, Hybrid, Onsite) across 5 complexity levels (Low, Medium, High). The meeting types are grouped into five categories: NOT-A-MEETING, HEARTBEAT, CATALYST, LEARNING, and SELLING. Meeting types are indicated by a yellow pushpin icon.

Complexity	Meeting Types														
	Update/ inform	Broadcast	One-to-one	Team	Governance	Brainstorm	Planning	Decision making	Issue resolution	Research	Skills training	Personal/ team development	Negotiate	Pitch	
	NOT-A-MEETING		HEARTBEAT		CATALYST				LEARNING			SELLING			
Asynchronous	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓			
Phone			✓	✓				✓	✓	✓					
Online			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Hybrid**				✓	✓	✓					✓		✓		
Onsite			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	

* Complexity: emotional/ relational complexity, level of interdependence of decisions, need for intervention/ prioritizing

**Hybrid: depending on level of proficiency of the facilitator, technology used & experience of the participants

Preference, cost and footprint also count

Which channel can serve which type of meeting and objective? The model above aims to help answer that question. In the end, however, the final choice for the meeting channel depends on a multitude of factors. Company policy, learning styles or personal preferences, for example.

Thanks to the structure and discipline that effective online meetings require, these are often better appreciated by introverts. Also, people who live at a distance or have a greater need for flexibility due to their private situation, might prefer online to onsite.

For those who do not have their own location, the cost of onsite meetings may be a reason to prefer online sessions.

Regardless of preference, footprint also deserves an important place in the balancing act between meeting channels. What should be onsite - and what can be done well enough online, asynchronous or audio only? Less travel time is less travel cost and ... lower CO2 emissions.

There is no single best choice. There is, however, a best trade-off.

Not everything can be done online. Not everything has to be onsite. Not all collaboration has to be simultaneous. The best meetings are those that are tailored to purpose, participants, and appropriate participation. What is appropriate is a balance between all the different issues explained in the article above.

So, dare to think creatively and make combinations. What used to be a global strategy three-day on-site meeting may now be a series of meetings combining asynchronous input with audio-only in-depth discussions, and online preparation meetings. Regional meetings may be hybridly connected, with asynchronous evaluation and online thematic follow-up.

The challenge for each program is to create a mix of different channels that adds up to the best result.

MeetingMasters Online:

Driven by the belief that genuine contact is at the basis of all development, we bring inspiration, innovation, and a human touch to the domain of meetings and events: online, offline, hybrid, and asynchronous.

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