# THE VIRTUAL COFFEE EXPERIENCE

**52**

**formats for meaningful connections in teams**

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# FOREWORD: THE ORIGINS OF THE BOOK

After working with a team of agile coaches for two years, my farewell was approaching faster than I would have liked. Time passed so quickly, particularly given the fact that we worked from home most of that time. I was amazed at the strong bond the team had created in the first 3 months of working together and I realised what a challenge it was for the team, in particular for the Scrum Master and Lead, to keep the team together. One of the interventions introduced by them was a weekly virtual coffee where we could chat and share stories, insights and learnings. In the next section you can read The Origins of the Virtual Coffee by Marielle Roozemond.

Another custom we had established was our farewell to colleagues. With my own pending farewell I was asked what I would like to receive as a gift from the team. My colleague, Carola Harteveld, had already asked me on several occasions but I could not think of anything original. Sure, I could have asked for a good whiskey or nice wine, but that would not have lasted very long with me. Besides, I am not a big fan of run of the mill gifts either. They lie around the house until, at some point, they end up in a cupboard never to be seen again. So, what should I ask for?

After being hounded for a few weeks, I woke up on a cold and windy December morning with a Eureka moment. I knew what I wanted, but it did not exist yet!

I thought: We have held virtual coffees for almost two years now with brilliant formats and hosted by my great colleagues. Wouldn't it be nice to have all these formats bundled? A token of collaboration and something helpful for many of us. Did I dare ask for something like that? It would mean having the opportunity of working together beyond the duration of my assignment and of working with colleagues who had already left the building and were working on new assignments. To my surprise, fellow team members embraced the idea unanimously. Now, almost one year later, I am so pleased we managed to collaborate on our first Minimum Viable Product of our virtual coffee booklet. "52 Working Formats - How to Engage and Connect Team Members" is a gift that can help many people but it is first and foremost a memory shared by a fantastic team of ING Agile Coaches. A gift for all of us by all of us. True teamwork.

I am grateful for everyone who helped to make this virtual coffee book a success and would love to see the initial booklet taken a step further. My ultimate dream was for it to be a full size hard copy book, with great pictures in full colour; a book that people want on their table from which they can draw ideas to work on with their team. Now that you have this book in your hand, that dream has come true, as a work of reference or a wonderful reminder of the good times at ING. Let's see what the future brings.

**Arno Delhij**

# FOREWORD: THE VIRTUAL COFFEE ORIGINS

Since the beginning of 2020, there had been growing unrest about the Covid-19 virus, which had been spreading rapidly across the globe. Then in March, the Prime Minister called on the people of the Netherlands to work from home and the country went into its first lockdown. As scrum master of a team of strong-willed agile coaches, I was uneasy. How could I safeguard the effectiveness of the weekly team meeting if it was online? The goal of this weekly meeting was to stay connected with each other and then split up into small teams to develop new material for our internal clients.

That 'connected with each other' was already a daunting task when our meetings were physical and we met in a conference room. Some members talked endlessly during check ins, while others just uttered the words 'checked in' then continued to eat their lunchtime salad. Right after lockdown, I downloaded Lisette Sutherland's book: Work Together Anywhere. It is full of tips for coping with this new reality in which we found ourselves. And there in that book I read the words virtual coffee. I believed that was exactly the online boost our team needed!

So I pitched the how and what of virtual coffee to Catharina Adriaans, our Center of Expertise lead, and then it was time to prepare the first one. In a WhatsApp group for the participants, they were asked: Take a picture of the view from your home office and post it in the WhatsApp group when the sign is given in our meeting. Tell us what we are seeing in your photo, introduce us to your daily view.

That first experience was great. It was fun and entertaining to be given a peek into each other's daily lives. It also paved the way for a second team assignment a week later. Grab your favourite coffee mug and show it to your colleagues and tell them how you got it. The stories were moving, some mugs were Father's Day gifts, others evoked memories of a grandmother, and some were holiday souvenirs.

However, just like with the first meeting, some team members were present in the call but did not contribute. It was time to set the first ground rule: everyone present in the call should also speak during the call. But it's not enough to establish a rule, you have to make sure it is followed.

And that's where the team lead comes in; it is their job to nudge the team members in the right direction here. We were fortunate that our CoE lead saw the importance of virtual coffees for team bonding. She has years of experience in the world of Agile working and knows and understands the results of the Google Aristotle study that highlight the importance of psychological safety within any team. One of the defining factors in a psychologically safe team is that team members take roughly equal speaking time during team meetings: no one dominates the conversation and no one quietly takes a back seat.

Our CoE lead monitored who appeared in the call but did not participate. With a warm invitation, she tried to persuade these team members. She would, for example, send them a personal WhatsApp message

during the virtual coffee: "I'm so curious about your contribution." Or she would come back to it in another personal conversation. And so our virtual coffee culture was born, where the bottom line is: if you show up, you actively participate.

Another challenge was to properly distribute scarce time among participants. There are those who naturally talk at length and there are those who make short and concise statements. It is the task of the virtual coffee facilitator to limit the long talkers and encourage the short talkers to say more. However, it is also the responsibility of an entire team to make sure that everyone is heard within the timebox of the meeting. To keep social hygiene high on this point, it was necessary to stress this explicitly a few times.

After the first quarter of the corona pandemic, it became clear that we would continue to work from home for the time being. Virtual coffee became a regular part of our work week. Increasingly for me as scrum master, it also became a weekly 'thing'. What was I supposed to come up with next? What did this require in terms of preparation? How could I make sure we would stick to the time constraints?

In the run-up to the summer vacation, I consulted with a number of colleagues about replacing me as facilitator during my absence. Hesitantly, they each agreed to take over one virtual coffee. This went so well that the desire arose spontaneously in the team to make the virtual coffee something for the whole team, with a rotating facilitator.

A fantastic idea! It gave us, as coaches, a shared stage where we could put new ideas to the test in a safe environment, and it provided inspiration for adding to our own collection of icebreakers and facilitation formats.
Gradually, the virtual coffee became a constant value in our collaboration as a team. New team members were assimilated quickly and easily began to feel like acquaintances, since participants learned many non-work-related things about each other. The virtual coffee was also where we said goodbye to team members who were leaving. Each team member made the effort to contribute something personal in a warm and unique way.

Even though we no longer exist as a Center of Expertise, we still feel a strong bond with each other. We still get together to cluster our virtual coffees and that alone is proof of our connection. One could argue that the physical distance of the lockdown forced us to seek psychological proximity with each other. The virtual coffee proved to be a risk-free yet cast-iron tool.

With this book, we hope to offer you a starting point for discovering for yourself what a routine virtual coffee can do for you and your teams. Hopefully, it will prove to be as rewarding for you as it was for us. But above all: have fun while sipping your virtual coffees.

**Mariëlle Roozemond**

# ABOUT THIS BOOK

## Why is this topic important

"Virtual Coffees – 52 Formats for Meaningful Connections in Teams" offers you invaluable tools and insights.

Masses of scientific evidence tells us how important it is to create a friendly and safe team environment that gets people engaged and working well together. When we have a relaxed and personal atmosphere, it helps us build stronger relationships and makes our interactions more powerful compared to traditional workplaces. Since organisations, products, and teams are always changing, it's extremely important for both new and established colleagues to work smoothly together. We can use proven team-building activities to bring about positive changes in how we behave, helping us to form tight-knit teams.

## What can you achieve with this book?

This book offers readers a comprehensive guide to enhancing their virtual coffee experiences. By embracing the book's 52 formats, readers can overcome the limitations of physical distance and connect with people worldwide, fostering a global sense of community.

The book emphasises moving beyond transactional interactions and embracing vulnerability and authenticity. It encourages readers to delve deeper into conversations, fostering personal growth and empathy through a better understanding of oneself and others.
The book also focuses on enhancing communication skills. Through effective listening, insightful questioning, and clear articulation, readers can become more confident and persuasive communicators in all aspects of life, with the formats provided in the book serving as valuable tools for daily practice.
"Virtual Coffees – 52 Formats for Meaningful Connections in Teams" empowers readers to unlock the potential of virtual interactions, encourages them to step outside their comfort zones and embrace diverse perspectives. Engaging in virtual coffees that expose them to different cultures and backgrounds helps participants broaden horizons, challenge preconceptions, and cultivate inclusivity. It equips them with a range of conversation formats for nurturing personal relationships and fostering professional growth.

In a world where physical proximity is not always feasible, virtual coffees become a bridge to forge meaningful connections. Using this book, readers can embark on a transformative journey of exploration, growth, and genuine connection. So grab a virtual cup of coffee, open the book, and embark on an adventure of connection and discovery.

## How is this book structured?

The first part of the book provides you with some background on virtual coffees and how to facilitate them. The second part, the bulk of the book, provides you with 52 formats. One to inspire you every week of the year. At the end of this book you will find an index with all your virtual coffees in alphabetical order.

We use icons to support clarity on the topics and help you understand what the section is about. Your brain understands images faster than it does words. It is able to process images faster than verbal or written information. Scientists believe that the brain is able to process images approximately 60,000 times faster than it processes a similar amount of written information!

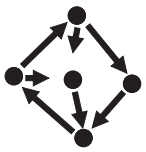
The icons explain the specific topic, which could be based on the four previously mentioned themes (Bonding, Welcome & Goodbye, Opening Up and Fun Energizers) and could also be related to paragraphs in the format.

All formats are shared including a reference to a team dynamic phase for which that format is specifically valuable to apply. The team dynamic phases we used are based on Tuckman's 5 stages for team development: 'forming–storming–norming–performing-adjourning'. More background information can be found on Youtube and via a search engine.

### Forming stage

The team meets and learns about the opportunities and challenges, and then agrees on goals and begins to tackle the tasks. Team members tend to behave quite independently.

### Storming stage



This 2nd phase where the group starts to sort itself out and gains each others' trust often starts when they voice their opinions. Conflict may arise between team members as power and status are assigned.

### Norming stage

In this stage, all team members take responsibility and have the ambition to work for the success of the team's goals. They start tolerating the whims and fancies of the other team members.

### Performing stage

By this time, the team is motivated and knowledgeable. The team members are now competent, autonomous and able to handle the decision-making process without supervision and alignment in the team.

### Adjourning stage

Adjourning: In the late 70s the adjourning phase was added by Tuckman & Jensen which involves completing the teams task and breaking up the team.

### Other icons

for groupsize

for materials needed

for duration

# UNDERSTANDING VIRTUAL COFFEES

Now you've read about the importance of consciously and intentionally building relationships in virtual teams and how the virtual coffees are a great idea as an approach, we would like to take you along the virtual coffees themselves.

- What are we actually talking about when we say a virtual coffee?
- What are important characteristics?
- What is the best way to prepare and facilitate them?

In this chapter you will learn to understand the virtual coffees in more detail.

## What is a Virtual Coffee?

A virtual coffee is not simply a beverage shared over a video call; it's a ritual for connection that transcends physical boundaries. It's the online equivalent of gathering around a cosy café table, sipping steaming cups of java, and engaging in meaningful conversations with colleagues, friends, or even newfound acquaintances from around the globe.

*"Virtual Coffees: A Caffeinated Escape"*

## Characteristics of a Virtual Coffee

The virtual coffees ideas as described in this book, have four main characteristics:

1. Virtual coffees are **shared moments for teams**. Just like sharing a physical space in a coffee shop, virtual coffees offer an opportunity to share experiences, stories, and ideas. It's a time to bond over common interests, discuss projects, or even explore personal aspirations.
2. Virtual coffees are f**lexible and convenient.** Unlike face-to-face meetings, virtual coffees eliminate the constraints of physical distance and time zones. You can schedule a virtual coffee with someone on the other side of the world without worrying about travel or accommodation. It's a convenient way to connect and collaborate, even when circumstances keep team members apart.
3. Virtual coffees are i**nformal and welcoming**. Picture yourself in your comfiest clothes, sipping coffee from your treasured mug, and engaging in light-hearted banter with fellow coffee enthusiasts. Virtual coffees are all about creating an informal and relaxed atmosphere that fosters genuine connections.
4. Virtual coffees require **strong facilitation skills** and a set of guidelines or process steps to make sure everyone has the opportunity to speak while also respecting the timebox. In this book the tips for facilitation are taken into account as well.

Virtual coffees are like magical portals that bridge the gaps between individuals, teams, and communities. They provide a much-needed escape from the confines of our screens, offering an avenue to connect on a deeper level. So, as you take the last sip of your coffee and close this chapter, get ready to explore the art of brewing meaningful connections in the digital age. Your next virtual coffee adventure awaits!

## The Art of Preparation

In the realm of virtual coffee, preparation is the secret ingredient that transforms a simple interaction into a cherished memory. It shows your guest that you value their time, their presence, and their stories. Preparation is an art not everyone has mastered. Yet, the success of virtual coffees as an idea for building relationships and connections for virtual teams stands or falls on how well you prepare.

Here's what we know about the art of preparation in relation to virtual coffees:

## Step 1: Understand the Purpose of Virtual Coffees

Virtual coffees provide an opportunity to connect with others, build relationships, and exchange ideas. They are a chance to get to know people on a more personal level, which can lead to increased collaboration and trust. Virtual coffees can also be used to discuss important topics, share knowledge, and brainstorm solutions.

## Step 2: Review the Formats

Take some time to review the 52 different formats in this book. Each format is designed to achieve a specific outcome or objective. We have grouped the formats in four themes to make it easier for you to choose which of the virtual coffee formats are best suited to your team's situation and needs.

**1. Bonding a Team**

Virtual coffee formats in the theme 'Bonding' provide uncomplicated and pleasant virtual coffees. The formats allow team members to stay within their own comfort zone when it comes to sharing details of their personal lives. These work in teams where members need to get to know each other better.

**2. Warm welcome and goodbye**

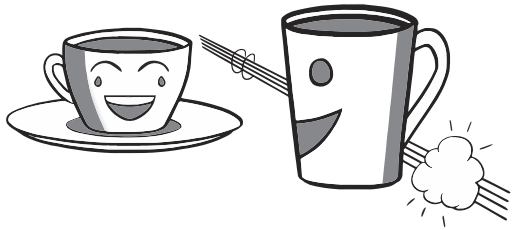
The 'Welcome and Goodbye' virtual coffees are all designed to welcome a new team member in a way that actually helps to remember something about your new colleagues when introduced to them all at once. And when a colleague is leaving the team you will find appropriate waving goodbye templates in this category.

**3. Opening up**

Up close and personal for next level bonding as a team. The virtual coffee formats in this category reveal a lot about the personalities and experiences of you and your fellow team members..

**4. Fun energizers**

Need to bring some energy and fun into the team meetings? Get inspired by the formats in this category. Some virtual coffees involve physical activity, others will have you bursting into fits laughter. Whatever it takes for a vibrant virtual team meeting.



As you go through the 52 formats, keep in mind the following questions, to help you get the most out of the virtual coffees in your own team:

- What is the objective of this virtual coffee format and does it resonate with the objectives of my team?
- What type of conversation or activity is involved and what does my team need?
- How many participants are required and how many team members do I have?
- What materials or tools are needed (also for preparation)?

## Step 3: Select a Format

Once you have a clear understanding of the purpose of virtual coffees and have reviewed the formats, it's time to select a format. Choose the format that best meets your objectives and the needs of your participants, the size of your group, level of engagement you are seeking, and of course the topic you want to discuss. You can also mix and match formats to create a customised virtual coffee experience.

To make this a bit easier for you as a facilitator, you could use the formats in different ways:

- in alphabetical sequence;
- randomly select a different one every week and just give it a try;
- theme based: Warm welcome and goodbye; Bonding; Opening Up; Fun Energizers.

## Step 4: Plan the Virtual Coffee

The next step is to create an agenda or outline for the meeting, and share it with participants beforehand. Be sure to mention any materials or tools that will be needed, as well as any expectations for participation. Consider using a virtual whiteboard or other collaborative tool to keep the conversation structured and engaging.

Treat virtual coffee encounters as sacred rituals. Dedicate a time slot, free from distractions, so that all participants, including you, can immerse themselves fully in the moment. Send a gentle reminder beforehand, to allow participants to prepare mentally and emotionally for the upcoming get together. A prepared mind is a receptive mind.

## Step 5: Technological harmony

Make sure your digital tools are primed for smooth interaction. Test your audio and video settings in advance, to avoid awkward hiccups that disrupt the flow of conversation. Familiarise yourself with the platform you intend to use, so you can navigate its features with ease. Technology should be your friend, not your enemy, during the virtual coffee.

## Step 6: Thoughtful prompts

The perfect virtual coffee encounter is one where both parties feel seen, heard, and valued. So, prepare a few conversation starters to spark the flame of engagement. Ask open-ended questions that encourage your guests to delve into their experiences and perspectives. Stimulate curiosity, prompt stories, and foster meaningful connections.

## Step 7: Caffeinated nourishment

Consider sending participants a small token of appreciation: for example, a virtual coffee voucher, or a personalised e-card. These gestures, no matter how small, demonstrate your genuine consideration and elevate the virtual coffee experience to new pleasing heights.

So, as you embark on your virtual coffee journey, remember the power of preparation. Craft each encounter with carefully, with total commitment to connection.

# FACILITATING ENGAGING VIRTUAL COFFEES

The success of virtual coffees rests on proper facilitation. We have extensive experience in this area. In the sections below, we share that experience in more detail, for you, as a facilitator, to apply.

## The role of the facilitator

The role of the facilitator is to provide the framework, not to provide the answers for the participants. The team members are responsible for the interaction and the type of conversation they conduct. If they want to have fun and make jokes, go with the flow. If they feel safe enough to have in-depth conversations, encourage it but also protect the level of safety in the team. If there's not enough safety yet, keep it light-hearted.

Monitor the energy level, both theirs and yours. Your own energy is generally a perfect indicator of the energy within the group.

Most virtual coffees are time bound. Make sure that every participant gets enough time to share within the time constraints set for this session.

## Setting the stage

One of the first things to keep in mind is the following: When it's time to host the virtual coffee, be sure to start on time and set clear expectations for participation. Be a brave and friendly facilitator, stay in command and encourage everyone to participate. Use the chosen format as a guide, but be flexible and adjust as needed to keep the conversation flowing. Remember to keep the conversation focused on the objective of the virtual coffee, and be open to different perspectives and ideas.

In the realm of virtual connections, the art of facilitation becomes paramount. Just as a skilled barista meticulously crafts a perfect cup of coffee we, too, must approach our virtual coffee encounters with care and intention.

As facilitators, it falls upon us to create an experience that exceeds the limitations of the digital space we are in. And it all begins with thorough preparation (see previous paragraph) and what you, as a facilitator, bring to the table.

Create a warm and welcoming virtual space. Consider the lighting, your (virtual) background and maybe play some music to build on the atmosphere you want for the topic at hand. Arrange your surroundings thoughtfully, curating a backdrop that reflects your personality and sparks curiosity. A well-placed plant, a bookshelf filled with favourite books: these small touches create an atmosphere of comfort and connection.

Tailor your virtual coffee encounter to suit participants' preferences. Find out about their interests, passions, and current projects. This knowledge will serve as the foundation for engaging conversations that leave a lasting impression. Delve into their world, be genuinely curious and open your heart.

If you want to make the most of your sessions it is important to make them as engaging as possible. One way of doing that is to vary the formats, another is to design for interaction. Both are dealt with in this book. But there is also a very important behavioural component and that is: creating psychological safety.

## Ten Considerations for Psychological Safety

Creating psychological safety in an online session is crucial for achieving the impact you want with your team and for fostering a supportive and inclusive environment where participants feel comfortable expressing themselves.

Here are some strategies to help you create psychological safety in an online session:

1. **Create a welcoming environment:** Begin the session by creating a warm and welcoming atmosphere. Welcome every participant who enters the meeting individually, if possible, and acknowledge their presence. Use icebreakers or introductory activities to help participants get to know each other and build rapport.
2. **Foster a non-judgmental environment:** Encourage an atmosphere where participants feel free to express themselves without fear of criticism or ridicule. Discourage negative or derogatory comments and redirect the conversation towards constructive and supportive dialogue.
3. **Establish clear guidelines:** Set clear expectations and ground rules for participants' behaviour during the online session. Emphasise the importance of respect, active listening, and open-mindedness. Encourage participants to ask questions and to listen without judgement.
4. **Lead by example:** As the session facilitator or leader, model the behaviour you want to see from participants. Be respectful, attentive, and open to different perspectives. Encourage active participation and avoid dismissing or belittling anyone's contributions.
5. **Encourage active listening:** Active listening is vital for creating psychological safety. Encourage participants to listen attentively to each other, without interrupting or passing judgement. Use techniques such as summarising or paraphrasing others' points to show that their ideas are valued.
6. **Encourage collaboration and cooperation:** Foster a sense of teamwork and cooperation among participants. Encourage them to work together on group activities, projects, or discussions. Emphasise that everyone's input is valuable and that diverse perspectives enrich the learning experience.
7. **Emphasise confidentiality:** Align and agree with all participants explicitly that what is shared in the online session will be treated with confidentiality, unless there are concerns for safety or well-being. Emphasise that personal experiences and opinions shared during the session should be respected and not shared outside the session without consent.
8. **Respond with empathy:** Show empathy and understanding when participants share their thoughts or experiences. Respond in a supportive manner, acknowledging their feelings and

perspectives. Avoid dismissing or invalidating their emotions, even if you have a differing opinion.

9. **Regularly check in with participants:** Throughout the online session, periodically check in with participants to gauge their comfort level and address any concerns. Create opportunities for participants to provide feedback anonymously if they prefer.
10. **Reflect and adapt:** After the session, reflect on the dynamics and interactions that took place. Consider feedback from participants and make adjustments as needed to create an even safer environment in future sessions.

Remember, creating psychological safety is an ongoing process, and it may take time for participants to feel completely comfortable. Consistency, genuine care, and attention to individual needs will contribute to a more supportive online session environment.

## Overcoming Challenges as a facilitator

When you organize a virtual coffee you want it to go well and run smoothly. However, there are times that whatever can go wrong did go wrong. Let's have a closer look at some of these challenges. Here is a top five of facilitator challenges and how you can overcome them.

**Challenge #1 - Coordination & Planning**

Coordination and planning can be really a challenge when dealing with different time zones, busy calendars and time pressure. This can be largely overcome if you have a recurring meeting that always happens on the same day and time of the week. Some may miss the first opportunity but after a while everyone should be able to plan around your slot. It is also important to stress the importance and purpose of the session to people so they make it a top priority.

**Challenge #2 - Technical Infrastructure**

Some countries have different platforms and apply different technical infrastructures. Make sure you have chosen a platform that can be used by everyone. Have a test run before the actual virtual coffee, just before it starts, by leaving some room to check whether everything is working fine. Another good thing is to have a back-up plan: if technology fails, have another platform or facilitator on standby to overcome this challenge.

**Challenge #3 - Bandwidth of Communication**

In a virtual setting the communication bandwidth is always more limited than in real life where you have the full spectrum of body language available. And things get even worse if people have turned their camera off. So make sure that all members are visible and focused. As a facilitator, pay close attention to all signals that could indicate lack of focus: multi-tasking; feeling unsafe; or some other emotion. When in doubt it is best to ask specifically, for example with a check in question such as:

- What's on your mind?
- Is there something you want to share with the group?

**Challenge #4 - Flow of Communication**

Building on the questions in the previous challenge:

- How do you keep the flow of communication going when some people might be hesitant to respond or feel unsafe?
- What do you do when some people are much more vocal than others, and the introverts don't get a chance to speak up?
- How do you regain control when everyone does speak, but all at the same time, even interrupting one another?

- Good facilitation is key to resolving this. One of the techniques you can use is timeboxing for each participant. Doing so guarantees that all have a chance to say something and you can calculate a timeslot per speaker to match the overall duration of your session. We call this 'design for interaction' and most formats in this book have been designed for interaction.

**Challenge #5 - Maintaining Momentum**

Once you've had your virtual coffee it is important to maintain momentum and to make sure people will join again next time. It is a challenge to make sure that people keep joining the virtual coffee sessions. One of the most practical tips is to have a recurring meeting planned and that it is in everyone's diary. It is also important that people understand the purpose and benefits of a virtual coffee. And last but not least, request senior management make the sessions mandatory. In that case, it would be most valuable for the virtual coffee if senior management is also present and participates.

**Group size**

3 - 15 participants.

**Materials needed**

No materials are needed, but you could use a slide with examples of goals to introduce the topic and to encourage participants' creativity.

**Duration**

Take approximately

2-3 minutes per participant.

# MY PERSONAL GOAL

## Purpose/Outcome

The purpose of this exercise is to gain valuable insight into possible shared interests; that could certainly lead to engaging and enjoyable conversations. Also, the aim is to empower and support each other in our journeys toward success. The focus lies in getting to know and understand each other on a deeper level, exploring what is truly important for each individual to achieve.

## Description

By exchanging information and inspiring one another, we can set goals for the upcoming period, ultimately supporting and motivating each other along the way. Let's embark on this enriching experience together!

## Preparation

(15 minutes)

1. Create a slide deck with examples of goals for participants to use as inspiration.
2. Send an email to the participants and ask them to think about their individual goals in advance. These can be formulated in a simple statement, just to inspire others. Participants can also use a quote from a famous person, as long as it reflects the goal(s).
3. Alternatively: send a gentle reminder.

## Step by step approach

1. Explain the question and ask every participant to share their goals.
2. Depending on the available time, encourage other participants to ask questions or respond. As facilitator, you can ask questions to get a more in-depth discussion.
3. Ask the participants how they can help the one sharing to become successful in achieving their goal.
4. Proceed until every member had its turn.

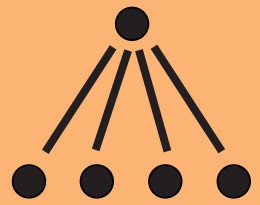
## Tips & tricks

1. Make sure everyone gets their turn to share their goal and the reason for choosing it. Make clear that this format is for individual private or individual business goals.
2. Create safety and carefully select the first participant to present his goals and set the tone for the session.
3. Set a timer and timebox per participant.

## Variations

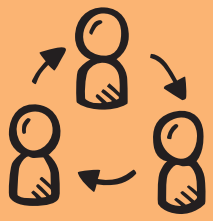
This format could also be used for work-related goals. First display the goal without revealing whose it is. See if participants can match the goal to the right contributor. Do this for the whole list.

**Norming stage**



## When to use this format

First, the team establishes a basic level of trust. Then this format can be used at the start of a new period, for example, a new year.



**Group size**

5 - 15 participants.

**Materials needed**

Slides with pictures.

**Duration**

Take 3-5 minutes per participant.

# STORYTELLING RELAY

## Purpose/Outcome

The Storytelling Relay format cultivates creative thinking and collaborative skills by collectively building a story based on visual prompts. It fosters active listening, adaptability, and the ability to build upon others' ideas. Participants develop storytelling abilities and strengthen teamwork, creating a sense of shared ownership and camaraderie. This engaging exercise unlocks collective creativity, inspiring a rewarding and enjoyable experience for the group. It strengthens teamwork, and leaves participants with a sense of accomplishment as they witness their collective imagination come to life.

## Description

The Storytelling Relay format is an engaging and interactive session that unleashes the power of imagination and collaboration. Participants embark on a creative journey as they collectively weave a story, building upon each other's ideas and storylines. Using a series of carefully selected images as prompts, participants take turns adding 2-3 sentences to the evolving narrative. The flow of the story is maintained by passing it on to the next person, ensuring a dynamic and seamless progression.

## Preparation

(60 minutes) It takes approximately an hour (one-time effort) to prepare. Since you want at least about 30-40 slides, you need to find and select the images (30 min.) and bring them into a presentation (again 30 min.).

Create a presentation with all the images you intend to use to build the storyline. This could be approximately 30-40 images for a 15-strong group.

Create 1 slide with the conversation starter below, or create one yourself… *"It was an early rainy Sunday morning. It was quiet and only the sound of an occasional distant car could be heard. Mr B was thinking out loud and before he knew it……"*

## Step by step approach

1. The facilitator starts with the conversation starter.

2. Build upon the story of the previous contributor(s).
3. Try to be as quick as possible (no thinking) (if you're blocked, pass it on to the next participant by calling their name).
4. Build 2-3 sentences.
5. Choose the next person and pass it on.

The game ends either:

- when the timebox expires or
- when team members keep passing because they have run out of ideas.

Expect to take about 5 minutes welcoming people and having a chat, and also to briefly explain the idea of your session. The longer you let the session run the more intriguing the story becomes. Running it for about 10-15 minutes is a reasonable timing, with perhaps a debrief of 5 minutes for feedback on how it was received. In total, 20 to 30 minutes is good.

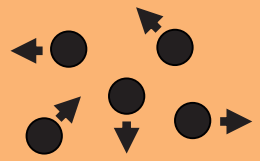
## Tips & tricks

1. Make sure the images you use are royalty free or in the public domain. Most people and companies are OK with you using the images for non-commercial, internal purposes only (look for links to free stock images).
2. One of the challenges may be that no one wants to go first. As facilitator, if you feel any hesitation in the team, be prepared to start the ball rolling. The same applies if there are a few "passes", be prepared to step in yourself to keep the story flowing, otherwise the story will stagnate.

## Variations

1. This exercise can also be done as an energizer during or before a training, a workshops or a meeting. It is a good after lunch energizer for getting the creative juices flowing.
2. Another variation is to use this format when a team member leaves. It can be a nice, positive way to say goodbye. You will need a different opening sentence, one that describes the person leaving. For example: remember when (X) joined our team in (year / date). She was (describe behaviour). Use photos that are related to positive traits and behaviours (there are also story cubes and apps for that).

**Forming stage**



## When to use this format

This format is particularly beneficial for teams in the storming stage, as it encourages them to embrace the joy of co-creation and strengthens their ability to work together harmoniously. However, it can be deployed at any stage; it creates a sense of camaraderie and injects a dose of fun into any gathering. Teams at the end of the storming stage can learn to have fun in co-creating the story. This format is great for teams that are tired of storming and are willing to take the next step into norming. It can be used in other stages too, just for fun!

**Group size**

5 - 15 participants.

**Materials needed**

No materials required.

**Duration**

Take 3-5 minutes per participant – make sure that each participant has a turn.

# MY SUPERPOWER

## Purpose/Outcome

Asking participants to share the superpowers they wished they had, is a great way of getting to know each other. It gives insight into each person's personality, drives, values, fantasy, humour, creativity, and their ability to tell a story. Getting to know each other builds trust and creates the foundation of a high performance team.

Have some fun, be curious, you might be surprised.

## Description

It's 1962 and we find young Peter Parker at his parent's house, all bruised and curled up, stuck in a corner of his room where walls and ceiling meet. He has just found out that the bite of a radioactive spider does actually have an effect. Apparently he has developed some special powers and has just discovered he is Spider-Man. However, he hasn't mastered his powers yet and there he is, in that corner, not too happy.

These powers include clinging to surfaces and ceilings, superhuman strength, speed, agility, sharp reflexes, stamina, and detecting danger with "spider-sense." He also can also build wrist-mounted "web-shooter" devices that shoot artificial spider-webs to fight his enemies, and he can swing on his web across the city. As Spider-Man Peter uses his spider-powers to fight crime.

After reading this, what superpower would you like to have? Why? And how would you use it?

## Preparation

(10 minutes) Ask people to find a picture that represents the superpower of their choice and be ready to share it. Ask them to prepare the answers to two questions:

- Why would you want to have this superpower?
- How would you use it?

## Step by step approach

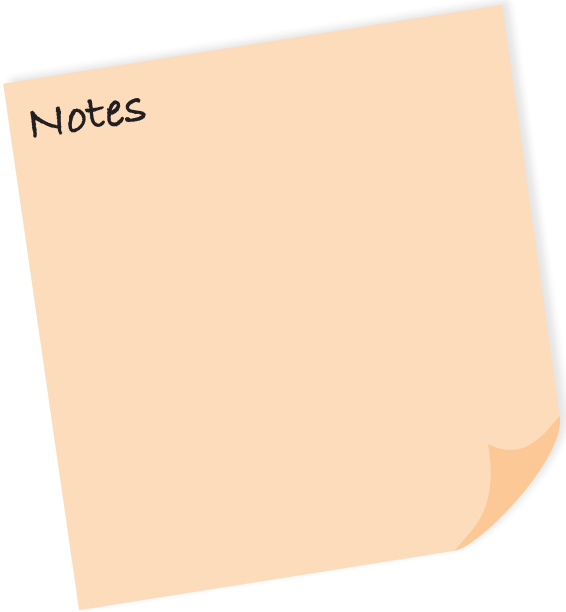
1. Introduce the theme with the Peter Parker story.
2. Ask participants one at a time, to share their story.

## Tips & tricks

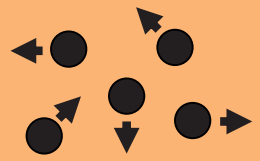
1. Keep it light-hearted and have fun.
2. Do not over-analyse it.
3. Do not judge.
4. Respectfully ask questions if team members are not very forthcoming.

## Variations

If a participant is facing a dilemma, ask what would happen if they had their superpower available and could apply it as needed.




**Forming stage**



## When to use this format

This format is ideally suited to use in the formation stage of team building. It is not only about having a bit of fun, but also about understanding each other's drives and values. Team members will remember the stories later and refer to them when the going gets tough.

**Group size**

6 - 25 participants.

**Materials needed**

No materials needed. Optionally you can use a slide to introduce the topic and the contributions made by the participants.

**Duration**

Takes approximately
1-2 minutes per participant.

# DESERT ISLAND: WHAT TO TAKE WITH ME?

## Purpose/Outcome

The purpose of this exercise is to stimulate creativity, promote teamwork and gain insights into individual strengths and values. It serves as an opportunity to foster mutual understanding, build trust, and cultivate empathy among team members.

## Description

Imagine yourself stranded on a deserted island and consider the question: "What item would you bring for survival and mental stimulation?" This exercise encourages participants to carefully select an item that reflects their priorities and personality. Will it be a practical tool like a knife, fishing rod, or water bottle? Or perhaps something that provides comfort and entertainment, like a book, hammock, or hat? Participants are encouraged to reflect on their choice and share it with the group, explaining how it contributes to survival and team bonding. It is important to emphasize that there are no right or wrong answers in this exercise. The primary goal is to foster learning, encourage collaboration, and enhance team unity through shared experiences.

## Preparation

(15 minutes) You can send the participants an email, or include the assignment in the invitation. Ask everyone to share a photo that depicts their favourite book or TV series.

## Step by Step Approach

1. Take a moment to make sure everyone is checked in.
2. Ask participants to share their picture of the one item they would like to take with them to a desert island.
3. Individuals share their story.
4. If a participant needs clarification, allow them to ask a quick question, then nominate the next person and move on.
5. Proceed until everyone has had a turn.

## Tips & tricks

It will be surprisingly funny, so it is easy to use longer than the 1-2 minutes per picture, but keep an eye on the time, especially with many participants.

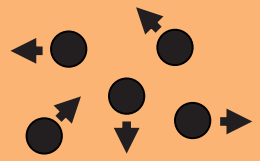
## Variations

None.

Notes

Notes

**Forming stage**



**When to use this format**

In principle, you can always use this format as a team. However it is mostly used during the forming or storming stages of team development.

# AUTHORS

The authors of this virtual coffee book are listed below, including a brief biography. They've written the virtual coffee formats in this book based on virtual coffee moments with all former colleague Agile coaches (see Acknowledgments) between March 2020 and September 2022.

As the Coach for Teams, **Annemarie Koelewijn-den Heijer** works with teams facing changes in their team, organisation or environment. For example, she coaches in SMEs, corporates, community work, education and youth care organisations. Annemarie is a pragmatic, organised and co-creative team coach, who uses structure to achieve sustainable results and build valuable relationships.

With a unique combination of skills and qualities, **Annette Heijink** brings a refreshing approach to coaching and consultancy. As a passionate and caring professional, she is committed to helping individuals and organisations achieve their full potential. With her creativity, analytical skills and agile mindset, she brings a fresh perspective and delivers true value to her clients.

**Arno Delhij** is an Agile leadership coach who helps business and educational leaders transform. With a strong people focus, he guides leadership teams towards success. Known as a no-nonsense coach, Arno has a pragmatic approach. His result-driven mindset ensures tangible outcomes for business and education. He wrote the book "Scrum in de Klas" and is the founder of Agile for Education Foundation.

**Bob Kastje** is an experienced Agile and Lean transition lead, leadership coach and senior consultant. "Let me be your Indiana Jones" is his personal mission statement, and sums up the fact he loves to guide organisations on their journey to new, powerful states. He brings flow in teams by building trust, connection, interaction and transparency.

As a lead, consultant, executive coach at ING and board member of the Agile Consortium, **Catharina Adriaans** brings a visionary perspective to Agile organisational transformations. As expert in translating strategy into successful execution, she has navigated complex corporate environments and mastered the intricacies of C-suite dynamics. She is an excellent team builder in diverse, globally distributed teams, and achieves remarkable results.

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**Fried Broekhof** is an agile leadership coach, entrepreneur, and speaker. He is passionate about driving performance improvement and is a trusted leadership coach for teams and individuals, specialising in fostering aligned autonomy. His experience spans start-ups, financials, corporates, incubators, and angel investing. He is committed to unlocking potential and driving success in diverse organisational landscapes.

**Marcel de Groot** is an experienced trainer, visual facilitator and Agile coach, who has worked for over twenty five years with (self-organising) teams. As a certified Obeya Coach, he firmly believes in the power of visualisation. His strength lies in creating and stimulating focus and energy in teams and he achieves results through fun, action learning and his genuine interest in people.

Author of Scrum in Actie (AtlasContact: 2015), Agile transformation coach, **Mariëlle Roozemond** has worked for RIVM, ING, Yacht, ICTU and many other organisations. She is also a lecturer at the University of Applied Sciences Rotterdam, preparing young professionals for future agility. Mariëlle is a board member of the Agile Consortium and founder/ chair of the Agile MarCom Consortium.

**Paul van Wijk** is an accomplished organisational psychologist and coach, specialised in assisting large corporations in navigating dynamic landscapes. Recognizing the significance of fostering meaningful connections, he endeavours to reintroduce love and compassion into the realm of corporate life. Paul's expertise empowers organisations to adapt and thrive in an ever-changing environment.

As an Agile Coach, **Ronald Schouten** helps others imagine their Frankenstein monster and bring it to life. Curious by nature, he is dedicated to helping individuals, teams and organisations find and implement Agility in a way that works for them. With an inclination for creating transparency and a drive for continuous improvement, Ronald helps guide lasting transformations in today's dynamic world.

Master of organisation transformations, **Syed Ameenuddin, Syed Niaz Ahmed** supports the digital future and its methods in banking, telecom and retail domains.
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# THE VIRTUAL COFFEE EXPERIENCE

Stay connected with your colleagues even while working remotely with *"The Virtual Coffee Experience - 52 formats for meaningful connections in teams"*. Written by former co-workers, this book contains a collection of 52 highly interactive and diverse working formats to provide the ultimate toolkit for organising successful virtual coffee sessions. With easy-to-follow instructions and best practices, learn to build meaningful relationships with your colleagues and foster collaboration, teamwork, and job satisfaction.

Discover how you can create a sense of team. Get to know each other in an online setting and join the authors on their journey of finding new and exciting ways to bond and build their dispersed team. Get ready to experience the power of virtual coffees and how they can keep you and your colleagues connected.

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