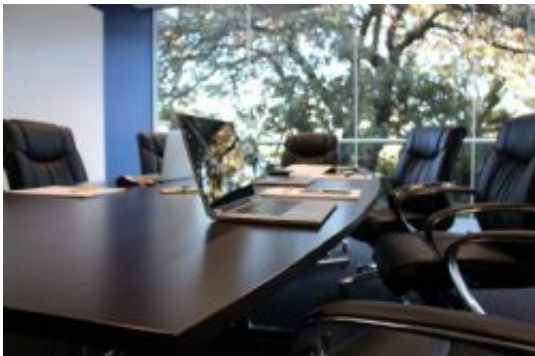


Networking in a virtual world—unlocking the potential of video conferencing

September 5 2016, by Laura Jones



The key to unlocking the true potential of video conferencing lies in recognising its limitations, according to new research.

A researcher from the University of Lincoln, UK, has found that while [video conferencing](#) has become an irreplaceable technology for innovative companies, helping to overcome the barrier of physical distance and saving time and money, it's important that technology-savvy entrepreneurs do not overlook the importance of traditional, face-to-face interactions.

Building on previous research into video conferencing in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), the study focused on the use of the technology for networking in support of open innovation – those

activities where organisations seek out external knowledge and expertise to help drive business advancements.

The findings suggest that entrepreneurs should be aware of the impact video conferencing can have on their external collaborative relationships, recognising the benefits and limitations of different communication tools at different points in the networking process.

Virtual interactions can be useful for technical discussions and moving ideas forward, but a trusting relationship and good understanding of the issue at hand must be established first. Similarly, richer forms of communication, such as face-to-face meetings, should be the preferred option when trying to convey particularly complex information or completing a business deal, the research indicated.

The study was carried out by Dr Jialin Hardwick, from the University's Lincoln International Business School, who presented her findings at the 2016 High Technology Small Firms (HTSF) Conference on Technology-based Entrepreneurship, British Academy of Management, this summer.

Data was collected from 17 business leaders from 12 biotech firms in Scotland through a combination of participant observation and in-depth interviews. All participants had experience of working with customers to develop new products.

Dr Hardwick said: "Managing inter-organisational networking and attempting to maximise virtual interactions in open innovation can be challenging to entrepreneurs, especially those in high-tech SMEs, where many have a science background.

"Networking activities at conferences or trade events provide good opportunities to meet other professionals in the industry, helping to reduce the feeling of inter-personal distance brought up by the

technology and enabling future virtual interactions.

"Furthermore, investing in collaborative relationships by following up on virtual interactions with richer face-to-face meetings could be effective in developing and maintaining a valuable relationship from a long-term perspective, even though it may be costly at the time."

Provided by University of Lincoln

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