

EMBRACING THE NEW NORMAL

**Overview of what participants said about what the new normal will mean
for facilitators & engagement professionals.**

27th May 2020



Deliberately Engaging



ABOUT THIS REPORT

On the 27 May 2020 **Deliberately Engaging** and **Synthetron** hosted a one hour online interactive dialogue of facilitators and engagement professionals from New Zealand, Australia and beyond to discuss the “New Normal” and what it means for our profession and our clients. The conversation took the form of a **Zoom** webinar in conjunction with a **Synthetron** online dialogue.

The Synthetron dialogue ran for 20 minutes. It provided participants with an opportunity to share some key issues arising from the webinar and to experience the Synthetron platform. The depth and breadth of the ideas exchanged between participants was necessarily constrained by the short time available for the online discussion. Notwithstanding this, there were a range of insightful ideas raised, discussed and scored by participants. This report provides readers with an insight to the ideas shared on the day.

Deliberately Engaging & Synthetron would like to thank our partners in this event: Anne Pattillo of Pattillo Ltd; Greg Masters of Nexus Consulting; and AJ Pollard of UQ Power. You can listen to what Anne, Greg and AJ had to say at <https://www.deliberatelyengaging.com.au/embracing-the-new-normal/>

The questions asked but not answered during the session were answered by Nivek, Anne, Greg and AJ and are also available at the above webpage.

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About Synthetron

Synthetron is an online engagement platform that enables 10-1000 participants to engage in an interactive conversation in real time. Developed in Belgium, it is used globally by business, governments and not-for-profits for community, stakeholder and customer engagement; conferences or workshops; and focus groups. Synthetron allows participants to share and score opinions during a moderated discussion. Every participant is randomly allocated to a virtual table. When ideas receive support at one table, they are immediately shared with other tables to comment on and score. Synthetron’s powerful algorithms produce an “evolutionary” discussion that builds as the conversation progresses. During the Synthetron dialogue the moderator guides the discussion and can test hypotheses. At the end of the session the platform generates an instantaneous written report documenting areas of agreement and disagreement, and the main issues canvassed during the conversation. For more information about go to: <https://www.deliberatelyengaging.com.au/synthetron/>

Participation

The conversation involved 47 participants from:

- **Australia:** regional and metropolitan across every state from Stradbroke Island to Perth;
- **New Zealand:** Auckland, Marlborough, Nelson, Wellington and Whakatane;
- **Nepal;** and
- **Singapore.**

Key takeaways from presentations

There was strong agreement from participants for two key propositions raised by our presenters:

- The need to be “authentic and present” when engaging virtually; and
- That engagement in the future will be a combination of virtual and face to face with “no going back” to how engagement was done before the pandemic.

Other key takeaways identified by participants included:

- The importance of acknowledging that “we cannot lose sight of *engagement* just because we are going virtual” and that engagement “should not be a download” - the session must be “*engaging*”;
- The challenge and task of skilling up participants in digital tools, and helping them be comfortable in building connections via digital platforms;
- The challenge and task of “keeping an emotional connection” during online engagement;
- The need for facilitators and engagement professionals to “think and operate more collectively” when engaging virtually and planning better “so you can focus on *presence* in the session”;

- The need to be “more creative in the use of virtual tools” and not just rely on webinars so that the engagement is “interactive”;
- The need to acknowledge “the toll constant Zoom meetings can take on us”;
- The importance of enabling “different styles of participation – and understanding what works for participants in their context”;
- “Flexibility with a mix of f2f and virtual to best suit needs of the group”;
- The reality that “our communities and clients need us now more than ever to help them create clarity, meaning and take generative actions - so, we need to be constantly learning as facilitators to perform at the top of our license”;
- A recognition of the critical need for “*presence* - being involved online means you have to be so much more present”;
- The likelihood that online engagement will require “more planning” than F2F;
- The need to “delineate work and home time will be very important”;
- The need to “accept the new normal and adapt”;
- That the “effectiveness of virtual facilitation relies on how authentic we are and how tuned in to the participants”;
- The importance of “going back to basics - why and who you are engaging with - and designing from there”; and
- The importance of “keeping it real.”

What will the New Normal look like?

Participants were asked “What do you think the 'new normal' will look like for you?”

There was considerable agreement that the impact of the new normal will mean:

- The continuation of online webinars like this for shared learning experiences;
- Doing a lot more online work with the opportunity to engage with audiences who find F2F not practicable;
- Working more remotely.

Other key ideas shared by participants included:

- Connecting more online and more broadly than ever before;
- Embracing more of a work/life balance;
- Clients being more open to virtual engagement methods;
- Learning many new ways to engage and discovering which ones drive better outcomes;
- Providing more opportunities for people to engage;
- Finding the right virtual methods and tools to foster authentic engagement;
- Discovering opportunities for international networking;
- Spreading the message about the digital divide and the importance of doing a variety of engagement activities;
- Providing a mix of online and face to face engagements depending on purpose:
- Changing hours and days of work;
- More flexibility of being able to connect anywhere;
- More opportunity to engage with people who live in remote or regional communities;
- The challenge of finding the right balance between F2F and virtual engagement;
- Looking at how we enable those without the technology to engage;
- Opportunity to learn some new skills in the online world
- Driving increased acceptance of the need for innovation in all aspects of human endeavour including how we relate to one another and care for the environment;
- Living in a more virtually adapted social setting - work and life; and
- Overcoming “missing the energy that you feel when you are amongst a collective of people F2F”.

Key tips for virtual engagement

Some tips for virtual engagement shared by participants were:

- “Breakouts with a deep question very early on in a session helps A LOT;
- “*Humanising* as best as possible - even as we trial new things and make mistakes along the way - laughing at ourselves, being safe to be vulnerable and in so doing giving others permission to do the same”;
- “Make the tools invisible” and;
- “To be more authentic (as a facilitator), I've found it helpful to turn off my own video, so you stop looking in the mirror”.



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