

Consideration on remote operation <Part 5>

Adaptation to the ‘normal’ and tools for remote operation

After the spread of COVID-19, the daily operating procedure of technical cooperation had to be reconsidered to accommodate the new circumstances. As a result we saw the evolution of a new operating paradigm and now combining remote operation with field work has become mainstream. Given the restrictions in movement and behavior, maximizing the effect of implementation with flexible thinking is required more than ever before.

Because we have been undertaking a continuous process of trial and error under the difficult conditions in developing countries, it is crucial to look at the subject of adapting positively to meet new global challenges to work in the face of an epidemic of infectious disease that has left no corner of the world untouched. This article discusses the characteristics of, and impressions made by, several remote tools frequently used in the recent daily operation of technical cooperation in the ‘new normal’.

1. Messenger and Chat Function of Social Networking Services (SNS)

Messenger Apps including Skype, Microsoft Messenger, LINE and WhatsApp are frequently used nowadays as an alternative to e-mail. In terms of sending text messages there is no difference with conventional e-mail, however user impression of communication speed is quite different when it comes to messenger Apps. The use of such SNS messengers for the purpose of communicating with counter-parts (CPs) and national staff members (NSs) has noticeably increased, although e-mail is still utilized.

It is difficult to confirm whether the sent e-mail messages have already been read or are as yet unread, and it generally takes some time to receive replies to messages. By contrast the messenger and chat function of SNS allows us to make interactive communication at the time one is connected. Sharing information and ideas among the group members and moving on-line calls when the need arises are easily made by messenger and chat functions of SNS. The chat function is particularly attractive to CPs and NSs who have difficulties in reading and writing English because it facilitates quick and easy clarification of requests through live conversation, rather than having to boot the e-mail application and send messages later on.

This said, messenger is not suitable for sending long texts and it tends to cause rough and careless information sharing among the members. This author feels it has poor recordability and preservative qualities compared to e-mail, but there is a room for improvement with a little ingenuity.

2. Video Conference

Since the staff of AAI are generally engaged in their work in different countries, regular video conferences have regularly been held. Skype was used even before Covid for company meetings but because the number of video conferences with external partners has increased since last year, eZoom and Microsoft Teams are also now used.

Although there are differences between these Apps in terms of sound and picture quality all have enhanced and convenient information sharing and recording functions compared to previous physical meetings. Although there are some differences between the Apps in terms of sound quality and data communication capacity, including speed, each one of those video conference applications comes with convenient functions including the shared screen and recording meeting sessions, therefore video conferencing is useful for the record of proceedings and preservation of references compared to “real face-to-face meetings.”

3. Video Teaching Materials

The experiences gained in on-line presentations at the university and remote lectures for the JICA training program have also been applied and replicated increasingly frequently in current domestic operations. There are several ways of implementation including showing presentation slides on-line and making explanations via live broadcasting, in addition to streaming lecture slide videos previously prepared with direct sound recording or remote narration editing.

Mis-statement in verbal explanation and typographical errors on presentation slides were often overlooked in past conventional live presentations and lectures, however these errors are noticeably recorded in the video teaching materials. That is why recording and reading text in manuscript must be made with more care when video teaching materials are to be the final product.