

Research on Meetings: The Good, The Bad, and The Flip



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The Research on Meetings

A meeting can be described as a situation where two or more people come together to discuss one or more topics. Though this definition is broad, it generally summarizes what many of us regularly experience in our jobs. In the workplace, a meeting may look like a formal, company-wide presentation, or it may be a simple, unscheduled conversation with a coworker about an upcoming deadline. Meetings have become such a standard part of work that we typically do not give them much thought; we just expect meetings to be part of the job.

The Good

The majority of organizations, be they non-profit, for-profit, or government-based, have meetings. These meetings can be used to share work progress and insights, aid in problem solving, and generate new ideas (Tracy & Dimock, 2003). Meetings are a great tool for connecting with others. Many believe that meetings can be useful for disseminating information and exchanging ideas, but they can also go beyond just the conversation, helping teams maintain commitment to goals and to the organization (Geimer, Leach, DeSimone, Rogelberg, & Warr, 2015).

The Bad

Meetings are time consuming and not always for good reason (Fox, 2015). Many managers in large organizations spend more time preparing for and attending meetings than any other task (Romano & Nunamaker, 2001). There are some reports that employees spend anywhere from 6 to 9 hours per week in meetings (Clarizen Survey, 2015; Rogelberg, Leach, Warr, & Burnfield, 2006). One study estimated that a regular weekly executive meeting took over 300,000 work hours a year, across all employees in the organization (Mankins, 2014).

Unfortunately, it is not only that organizations are spending lots of time on meetings – employees report that many meetings are ineffective and are a waste of time (Allen, Sands, Mueller, Frear, Mudd, & Rogelberg, 2012; Geimer et al., 2015; Rogelberg, Shanock, & Scott, 2012). These negative feelings about meetings should cause concern, as research suggests that unnecessary meetings and poorly run meetings can affect different aspects of an employee's work life, such as job satisfaction (Rogelberg, Allen, Shanock, Scott, & Shuffler, 2010), delays and disruptions to other work tasks (Jett & George, 2003), and feeling worse about one's job (Allen et al., 2012).

There are many reasons why a meeting may be perceived as ineffective and/or too time consuming. Meetings lacking an agenda, unfocused discussion/conversation, general lack of structure, inviting the wrong people, lack of opportunities for sharing thoughts/feedback, and not starting/ending on time are some of the commonly cited issues (Allen et al., 2012; Rogelberg et al., 2010; Geimer et al., 2015).

The Flip

The FLIP Meeting is a scalable method that can enhance any meeting, allowing an organization to maximize the benefits of meetings (e.g., collaboration) while minimizing or eliminating some of the drawbacks (e.g., inefficiency). The basic premise is the meeting presenter creates a video presentation of the information that needs to be shared. This video is sent to meeting attendees prior to the meeting or the attendees can watch the video together at the start of the meeting. The bulk of meeting time is then spent on collaboration and discussion.

This concept may sound too simple to be effective, but consider the effects of recording and sharing meeting information. A lack of structure in meetings is cited as a frustration for many employees (Geimer et al., 2015). With a FLIP Meeting, the presenter will need to think about the information he/she wants to share with coworkers, prior to creating the video presentation. The presenter must organize the information in a coherent way, which means the presentation itself is more structured. Additionally, research from the education field suggests a video presentation is 25% - 75% shorter than a live presentation of the same information (McCammon & Parker, 2014); with less time spent on sharing information, the presenter must also consider how meeting time will be used (e.g., taking questions, idea generation), adding even more structure.

With shorter presentations, more of the meeting time can be focused on collaboration and discussion. Many employees reported thinking meetings were bad when they don't allow opportunities to share thoughts/ideas or when the conversation is off-topic (Geimer et al., 2015). If the video presentation is shared prior to the meeting, attendees will know what to expect and will be able to come prepared with questions and discussion points. This increased meeting structure and opportunities for discussion may improve employee job satisfaction, given the link between meetings and job satisfaction (Rogelberg et al., 2010).

This method may even help reduce the number of actual face-to-face meetings. If the presenter thinks, "I have no idea what I would say if I had to create a video for an upcoming meeting," that may be an indication that a meeting is not necessary. If the presenter realizes that he/she is only creating a presentation to keep others informed, and does not need to facilitate a discussion, the video presentation may replace the need for an in-person meeting.

The FLIP Meeting also has the added benefit of helping employees improve their communication skills, as they relate to presenting, organization, and thinking critically about information. The presenter should be encouraged to evaluate and reflect on the strength of his/her presentation by simply watching the video. As team members record and reflect on more and more video presentations, their communication skills will grow stronger. And with more meeting time spent on collaboration and discussion, team members will also have more opportunities to improve face-to-face conversation skills, continue to build team cohesion and alignment, and think more critically about the topics at hand. FLIP the Meeting and start a spark that can move any team or organization down the path of being a well-oiled meeting machine.

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