

The Ticking Clock

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You're sitting at your computer in the middle of a busy work day, merrily tapping away at your keyboard, when all of a sudden you look up at your clock, and panic strikes. That meeting you should have been in started 10 minutes ago! As you rush to join your colleagues you may wonder, *What does my tardiness say about me as an employee? Will my colleagues think less of me? I hope I'm not the only one who's late.*

So what does meeting lateness actually say about us as employees? Unfortunately, little research has specifically examined the definition, correlates, and implications of meeting lateness. However, in an article recently published in the [*European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*](#), a team led by APS Fellow Steven Rogelberg of the University of North Carolina at Charlotte tries to fill in our knowledge gaps by taking a closer look at the organizational and personal implications of meeting lateness.

In the first of two concurrently run studies, the authors examined the nature of meeting lateness by conducting an Internet survey. Six hundred sixty-five participants from a wide range of occupations answered an open-ended question asking what they classified as lateness. Then, the participants imagined themselves in several scenarios and indicated whether they would consider themselves late in each. Participants were also asked to describe what meeting lateness looked like at their own organization.

Of the participants surveyed, 20% defined lateness in objective terms (i.e., arriving after a specific scheduled time), while another 20% indicated there was a sort of "grace" period at the beginning of meetings before one is seen as being late. Others defined lateness as arriving after the meeting has actually started (32%). The rest of participants said people are late if they have missed or interrupted the flow of information, or if they are not "ready to go" when a meeting starts. Participants' responses to the scenarios mirrored the qualitative data. Although there was variation in what actions participants considered to constitute lateness, many considered lateness to mean arriving once the meeting was underway.

In the second study, the researchers examined the rates, consequences, and correlates of meeting lateness. One hundred ninety-five participants indicated the percentage of time they arrived after the scheduled start time of a meeting, their job satisfaction, perceptions of meeting quality/value, intentions to quit their jobs, affective organizational commitments, job levels, and perceptions of the consequences of meeting lateness.

Participants reported being late to meetings 5% of the time, and meeting lateness was negatively correlated with job satisfaction, intention to quit, meeting satisfaction, conscientiousness, and age. Organizational commitment, job level, and meeting load were not related to meeting lateness. Participants generally indicated that they respond negatively to people who are late to a meeting, feeling disrespected, upset, frustrated, and disappointed. They also perceived the late person as rude and admitted passing judgment on latecomers.

These findings tell us that while there is some variation in what people consider “lateness,” tardiness is generally viewed as arriving after a meeting is underway. Meeting lateness is related to several personal factors, such as job satisfaction and conscientiousness, and generally elicits negative responses from colleagues who have arrived at the meeting on time.

So next time an important meeting makes it onto your agenda, represent yourself the right way. Set a reminder, let your punctuality convey your good qualities, and win the goodwill of your colleagues.

Reference

Rogelberg, S. G., Scott, C. W., Agypt, B., Williams, J., Kello, J. E., McCausland, T., & Olien, J. L. (2013). Lateness to meetings: Examination of an unexplored temporal phenomenon, *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*. doi: 10.1080/1359432X.2012.745988