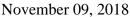# Psychological Science Can Make Your Meetings Better

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Drawing from almost 200 scientific studies on workplace meetings, a [team of psychological scientists provides recommendations](#) for making the most out of meetings before they start, as they're happening, and after they've concluded. Their [report](#) is published in *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, a journal of the [Association for Psychological Science](#).

Meetings are a near-ubiquitous aspect of today's professional workplace and there is abundant trade wisdom and written guidance about how meetings should be run. But, as researchers Joseph Mroz and Joseph Allen (University of Nebraska Omaha) and Dana Verhoeven and Marissa Shuffler (Clemson University) point out, very little of this guidance is informed by the available science.

"Meetings are generally bad, but meeting science shows us there are concrete ways we can improve them," says Allen. "Leaders can be more organized, start on time, and encourage a safe sharing environment. Attendees can come prepared, be on time, and participate."

Science shows that, under the right circumstances, meetings can provide a place for creative thinking, problem solving, discussion, and idea generation. And yet, a large body of employee research suggests

that most meetings are inefficient despite the organizational resources devoted to them, including time, wages, mental resources, and technology.

Improving meetings isn't a trivial matter. According to the researchers' findings, employees average 6 hours per week in meetings, and managers spend an average of 23 hours in them. Studies suggest that employees' attitudes toward meetings can influence their overall attitudes toward work and their well-being.

In their report, Mroz, Allen, Verhoeven, and Shuffler highlight the ingredients of good meetings, including how people can prepare for meeting success, how certain aspects of meetings can make or break them, and how what happens *after* a meeting can improve team outcomes.

Before the Meeting

- **Assess current needs**: Meetings should involve problem solving, decision making, or substantive discussion. They should not be held to share routine or non-urgent information.
- **Circulate an agenda:** Having an agenda makes the meeting priorities clear to all stakeholders and allows attendees to prepare beforehand.
- **Invite the right people**: Leaders should ask what the goal of the meeting is and whose expertise can help the team get there.

During the Meeting

- **Encourage contribution**: Findings suggest that high-level performers use meetings to set goals, facilitate group understanding of work problems, and seek feedback.
- **Make space for humor**: Humor and laughter can stimulate positive meeting behaviors, encouraging participation and creative problem solving, research shows. These positive meeting behaviors predict team performance concurrently and two years later.
- **Redirect complaining**: Attendees should be aware that complaining can quickly lead to feelings of futility and hopelessness, and leaders should quell complaining as quickly as they can.
- **Keep discussions focused**: Leaders also make sure the purpose of the meeting and the agenda are followed. Leaders should be ready to identify dysfunctional behaviors and intervene to refocus the meeting.

After the Meeting

- **Share minutes**: Sending meeting minutes serves as a record of the decisions that were made, a plan of action for next steps, and an outline of designated roles and responsibilities. This step also loops in people who weren't able to attend the meeting but need the information.
- **Seek feedback**: Feedback can inform the structure and content of future meetings. In particular, leaders can identify meeting problems to increase attendee satisfaction.
- **Look ahead**: To build on progress made during the meeting, stakeholders should think about future actions, follow-through, and immediate and long-term outcomes of the meeting.

Mroz, Allen, Verhoeven, and Shuffler note that video, audio, and motion-tracking technology is allowing for better video and audio analysis of meetings. These improvements could help researchers

analyze behaviors rather than attitudes and self-reports after the fact. They point out that "tele-meetings" and video conferences need more study, as they may present their own dynamics, advantages, or challenges.