Work Meetings Are Terrible. Here's How to Make Them Better.

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When trying to understand why meetings suck so hard, it can help to use the analogy of our rapidly depleting fisheries. Fisherman don't really have any incentive to stop fishing, and countries can't quite agree on who should be responsible for which fish fall under their jurisdiction. And so, no one does very much to ameliorate the situation, in all likelihood robbing future generations of the chance to munch on the spicy tuna rolls and grilled swordfish that we enjoyed in such great abundance.

The culture surrounding workplace meetings suffers from a similar problem. While most meetings have a de-facto leader, someone running the show, it's never that person's job to 'figure out how to run good meetings.' People have also accepted the current state of things as inevitable: We know meetings suck, they've always sucked, so why waste time trying to make them better? As a result they've continued filling our schedules in a kind of workplace tragedy of the commons.

"It's a taken for granted environment," Joseph Allen, a professor of industrial and organizational psychology at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, tells *Inverse*. "We know we have to have them but we don't put much energy behind them. And unless everyone in the meeting puts in effort to make it better, then it's not going to change … and it's odd when someone tries to make them better."

As our ability to communicate with one another has improved over the years, in an ironic twist, the amount of time we spend stuck in meetings has actually swelled. Employees now spend an average of 23 hours per week in meetings, up from fewer than 10 in the 1960s. Seventy-one percent of the senior managers surveyed in a recent study cited by the *Harvard Business Review* said they found meetings inefficient and unproductive. Nearly as many said meetings also kept them from getting their work done. Allen, who along with some colleagues at Clemson University recently completed a comprehensive review of nearly 200 research papers about meetings, says that's too many hours. Their findings were recently published in the journal *Current Directions in Psychological Science*.