

Optimise Your Meeting Productivity

Brought to you by Assemble You.

Today, you'll learn to optimise your meeting productivity and eliminate wasted time and inefficiency.

While teamwork and collaboration are essential aspects of business and professional development, surveys have found that meetings can be the number one time-wasting activity at work.

We'll look at ways to reduce the number of meetings you have and how you can build meetings that have actionable outcomes. You'll also learn to manage the pre-meeting preparation and post-meeting follow-up process better.

To be productive with your time, you need to optimise various processes, including meetings.

With various parties involved, it's easy for agendas to be hijacked and meetings to meander into a range of topics not agreed upon for discussion. Good people management skills are critical for optimising meeting productivity. Having a good grasp of meeting technology and audiovisual tools will also help ensure your tech is set up correctly and the meeting will run smoothly without disrupting attendees' schedules.

Mastering the skills you need for more productive meetings will be better for your business and add another vital skill that will help you achieve more in your career.

No matter your industry, it's likely that you're used to having a lot of meetings, and you may even find the number of sessions you have to attend demotivating.

As Jason Fried, founder of software company 37signals and co-author of the international bestseller *REWORK*, says [1]:

Meetings should be like salt - a spice sprinkled carefully to enhance a dish, not poured recklessly over every forkful. Too much salt destroys a dish. Too many meetings destroy morale and motivation.

The first step to optimising meeting productivity is to cut out the ones that don't need to happen in the first place. So, how do you manage the number of meetings you need each week?

According to a Clarizen/Harris poll, the average American worker spends 4.5 hours per week in general status meetings. They also spend even more time - up to 4.6 hours - merely preparing for this type of meeting.

In her YouTube video on Efficient Meetings [2], Adriana Girdler - TED Talk speaker and Chief Efficiency Officer at Cornerstone Dynamics - advises that the best way to get more productivity from meetings is to keep them strictly for when an action is required.

Status and update meetings often don't require people to gather together. Girdler advocates eliminating them and using technology for meeting updates instead. For example, that could mean emailing or using group chats to communicate team updates.

Meetings themselves are not the only problem. There's also the preparation for the meeting and the post-meeting activity. You can use a few techniques to optimise all three stages of the meeting process: Preparation, meeting, and follow-up. Here are a few tips for each phase to help you get the most out of your available time.

Meeting Preparation: Be prepared so you don't need to leave the meeting because you forgot something. It will kill momentum, and the concentration of attendees will wander. Ensure the tech is working before the meeting starts because if your meeting gets delayed, then other deadlines could be missed. Multiple people's time will be wasted waiting for it to be fixed.

To get the most out of meetings, you must be intentional about the purpose and what you are trying to achieve. As Chris Fussell, co-author of the 2015 New York Times bestseller *Team of Teams: New Rules of Engagement for a Complex World*, says [3]:

As a leader, you must consistently drive effective communication. Meetings must be deliberate and intentional - your organizational rhythm should value purpose over habit and effectiveness over efficiency.

Once you know the meeting's purpose and desired outcome, you can use that knowledge to optimise the content to get your desired result. [4]

Meeting optimisation: To optimise the meeting and ensure it stays aligned with your goals, you should create an agenda [5]. That will stop the conversation from getting

sidetracked and prevent time from being drained discussing topics different from those intended for that session.

An agenda should include the following components:

- Item
- Desired Outcome
- Priority
- Time
- Who
- How

Planning an agenda will provide a clear workflow for each item and assign responsibilities and deadlines with delivery methods. A schedule should save time for all meeting participants by providing a clear set of topics, objectives, and time frames.

Even with an agenda, people can still walk away from meetings uncertain of the action points. At the end of the meeting, it's an excellent idea to reemphasise the tasks and action points, recapping what you have agreed on and what responsibilities people are taking away to work on. Assigning a time and date deadline is an excellent way to ensure that the task is monitored and followed up upon.

Unfortunately, sometimes an agenda alone is not enough to keep the meeting participants in check and on topic. It's good practice to apply a set of meeting rules. That lets participants know what is expected of them. You can put posters up in each meeting room (or send details via email) with a list of meeting rules, expectations and etiquette.

One person should also act as the meeting facilitator and implement the agenda and the rules to ensure things run smoothly.

Meeting follow-up strategies: Post-meeting follow-ups can be time-consuming. It's a good idea to send out a summary after the meeting to other attendees so it stays fresh in their minds. To do this, you need a system to take notes and format the details of the meeting as you work through it so it becomes easy to follow up post-meeting.

Software tools can assist you in automating part of this job and increase your productivity.

For example, Microsoft Office 365 for Business lets you send meeting notes directly to attendees. You could use the meeting notes option in Outlook to take notes for yourself and share them with other attendees.

Other meeting attendees may add to your meeting notes, making it easy for your team to provide a comprehensive account of what occurred during the meeting, which you can then use to manage assigned tasks. Your staff might also appreciate that the follow-up is carried out in their preferred method. As Marillyn Hewson, strategic advisor to the CEO of aerospace and defense manufacturing company Lockheed Martin says [6]:

You can't forget that organizational success flows from the hearts and minds of the [people] you lead. Rather than treating your people as you'd like to be treated, treat them as they would like to be treated. Small gestures like opting for face-to-face meetings or sending personal notes can have an enormous impact on teams and their morale.

We've explored the challenges of managing meetings between team members. We've examined minimising discussions that don't need to happen that may harm staff morale. We've also looked at ways to optimise the preparation of meetings to avoid delays. For meeting management, we've discussed ways you can manage the flow of the meeting with an agenda and a set of rules to which all participants agree to adhere. Post-meeting follow-ups are essential and can be automated thanks to tools that increase productivity and ensure meeting participants are clear on their objectives.

This week, take some time to go away and think about the types of meetings you hold or attend each week. Does each of these meetings have a valid purpose? Do they feel deliberate? Could they be eliminated or improved for better productivity?

That's all for today. Thanks for listening.

[1] *The Two Biggest Drags On Productivity: Meetings And Managers (Or, As We Call Them, M&Ms)*, Jason Fried (2013)
<https://www.inc.com/jason-fried/excerpt-easy-on-the-mms.html>

[2] *Efficient Meetings - 7 Tips To Run an Effective Meeting*, Adriana Girdler, (2018)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xp0VAutGFyg>

[3] *The biggest career lesson this Navy SEAL learned in Iraq*, Chris Fussell (2015)
<https://fortune.com/2015/06/21/chris-fussell-productivity-at-work/>

[4] *Types of team meetings you need (and 3 you don't)*, Deanna deBara (2023)
<https://slack.com/intl/en-gb/blog/productivity/team-meetings-you-need-and-dont-need>

[5] *How and Why to Use a Meeting Agenda*, MIT
<https://hr.mit.edu/learning-topics/meetings/articles/agendas>

[6] *The 4 Traits You Need to Be a Great Leader*, Marillyn Hewson (2016)
<https://fortune.com/2016/10/18/mpw-leadership-lockheed-martin/>