

# Meeting Madness

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As anyone who has ever worked in the business world knows, weekly meetings can be a major source of distraction. These deadly meetings are a familiar and potentially effective forum for being real time-wasters and sources of frustration for many of the employees who attend. Most people can't help but asking, "does it have to be this way?"

## What's gone wrong with meetings?

Too frequently, meetings are held up waiting for late arrivals, run overtime because of poor time management, and bore members who sit passively because they have no role or "investment" in most of the items on the agenda.

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When asked what frustrates them most about meetings, people most frequently say:

- People don't take meetings seriously
- Meetings are too lengthy
- People waste time by straying off topic
- People aren't always honest
- Important information is missing so decisions are delayed

While one might think that the rise in email communication means less time is being spent in ineffective meetings, the opposite appears to be true. A recent study found that time spend attending ineffective meetings has tripled in recent years to an average of 2.1 hours per person per week.

## What's being done about it?

Despite these depressing statistics, there are some bright ideas that bring sanity to meeting madness. The most successful ones centre around meeting structure and strong facilitation.

Many organizations have started to insist on structuring meetings to ensure their success. They implement everything from tried-and-true measures such as mandatory agendas and "parking lots" to more high tech solutions like meeting software and real-time computer documentation. And network access means people can get data into meetings so that sound decisions can be made.

Bernard DeKoven, founder of the Institute for Better Meetings in Palo Alto, California, has found that success lies in high quality facilitation: "Good meetings aren't just about work. They're about fun -- keeping people charged up. It's more than collaboration, it's 'coliberation' -- people freeing each other up to think more creatively."

It's possible to improve the way meetings are run by focusing on structure and facilitation. By doing so, you might just eliminate the all too frequent meeting closer, "Meeting's over, let's get back to work."