

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-06718-9 - The Cambridge Handbook of Meeting Science

Edited by Joseph A. Allen, Nale Lehmann-Willenbrock and Steven G. Rogelberg

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## PART I

# Introduction

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# 1 An Introduction to *The Cambridge Handbook of Meeting Science*

## Why Now?

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Meetings are an integral part of employees' everyday workplace experiences. In the workplace, people meet to generate ideas, talk about problems, develop solutions, and make decisions (e.g., Romano & Nunamaker, 2001; Van Vree, 2011). What happens in workplace meetings has implications for individual employee attitudes such as work engagement, as well as for team and organizational performance (Allen & Rogelberg, 2013; Kauffeld & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2012). Today, there are more than 25 million meetings per day in the United States alone (Newlund, 2012). On average, employees of today's organizations spend 6 hours per week sitting in meetings (e.g., Rogelberg, Leach, Warr, & Burnfield, 2006; Schell, 2010).

The work lives of employees in managerial positions are even more driven by meetings. A study with senior managers showed that these managers were sitting in meetings for 23 hours a week on average and were expected to have even more meetings in the future (Rogelberg, Scott, & Kello, 2007). The majority of a manager's workday is often spent preparing for meetings, sitting in meetings, or processing meeting results (e.g., Van Vree, 2011). It is likely that most managers spend more of their time on meeting-related activities than on any other activity in their work lives.

These figures illustrate a key point: Meetings are ubiquitous and time-intensive workplace events. Practitioners have long recognized this and have built entire consulting practices around organizational meetings. An Amazon search in July 2014 for advice books on how to run meetings yielded 475 hits on topics ranging from planning and leading engaging meetings (e.g., *Harvard Business Review*, 2014) to collaborating in meetings (e.g., Canfield & Smith, 2011) to when to abandon meetings altogether (e.g., Ressler & Thompson, 2008). Astonishingly, however, a scientific look at meetings as a focal topic remains largely elusive. Granted, research certainly exists that examines constructs/events relevant to meetings and meeting attendees. For example, a body of research on teams and leadership exists, and this literature is certainly highly relevant to meetings – but it does not feature the study of meetings per se.

Given that meetings are essential feature of organizations, the development of a meeting science is of paramount importance. Meeting science is the study of what happens before, during, and after meetings in the workplace. It is a look at the psychological, sociological, and anthropological underpinnings and consequences of meetings at work. It examines meetings not only as a mechanism/tool for communication and work but also as an activity that defines an employee's experience of work, of people, and of time. Rather than a purely applied discipline, meeting science uses the scientific method and seeks to understand how and why meetings function the way that they do, as well as the impact of those meeting factors on individuals, groups, teams, organizations, and society. Although meeting science often provides insights related to the improvement of meeting processes and outcomes, this improvement is not necessarily the aim of any single research project or stream. However, the practice of running effective meetings often benefits from scientific study (see Chapter 30).

Perhaps the first milestone in the science of workplace meetings is Helen Schwartzman's seminal work, *The Meeting: Gatherings in Organizations and Communities* (1989), which highlights the functions and the impact of meetings. However, it would take almost 20 years until meeting science truly emerged as a mainstream research topic. Today, we feel confident in stating that meetings have evolved as a research subject in their own. What happens before, during, and after meetings is being examined by researchers from multiple disciplines, including industrial and organizational psychology, communication studies, management, organizational behavior, marketing, anthropology, and sociology.

The purpose of this book is to present the current state of the scientific study of meetings at work. It is not a practice-oriented, self-help book; instead every chapter offers perspectives that are based on or offers new empirical/theoretical findings. Each chapter focuses on specific activities before, during, or after meetings that have a meaningful impact on the lives of the people inside and outside the meeting context. This volume is the first contemporary book to take a scientific look at meetings at work.

### Defining Meetings

Meeting scholars and researchers continue to grapple with how to define meetings. In an early scholarly treatment, Schwartzman (1986) defined meetings as prearranged gatherings of two or more individuals for the purpose of work-related interaction. More recently, Rogelberg et al. (2006) defined them as purposeful work-related interactions occurring between at least two individuals that have more structure than a simple chat, but less than a lecture. Meetings are typically scheduled in advance, last 30 to 60 minutes on average, and can be conducted face to face, in distributed settings (e.g., conference calls), or as a combination of the two modes. These are the working definitions that many scholars in various disciplines use for operationalizing the meeting. As helpful as these definitions are, however, they fail to capture the depth and breadth of meetings in general. In other words, the definitions help us identify what is and is not a meeting, but they do not capture its underlying intangible essence. For example, Van Vree (2011) pointed out that meetings are

the social action through which organizational members produce and reproduce the vision, mission, and achieve the aims of the organization (Boden, 1994).

As noted earlier, the scientific study of workplace meetings can only be traced back a few decades, making it a new area of research inquiry. Although practitioners and managers identified meetings as important target for improvement initiatives as early as the 1950s (see Strauss & Strauss, 1951), Schwartzman (1989) was the first to take a scientific approach to the study of meetings in and of themselves as a focal target of inquiry, as mentioned earlier. In her 1989 book she compared and contrasted meetings in an American mental health organization with meetings in non-Western societies, thereby examining the significance of meetings in U.S. society. Specifically, she expanded the general view that meetings are tools for making decisions, solving problems, and resolving conflicts to include the idea that meetings are a mechanism by which organizational leaders present the organization – its function, design, and aims – to organizational members.

Following her groundbreaking work, meetings slowly began to be studied. Schwartzman followed her book with an article lamenting the taken-for-granted nature of meetings in society/organizations, as well as discussing the routine and institutionalized nature of meetings in organizations (Schwartzman & Berman, 1994). A few years later, Van Vree (1999) added an element to the study of workplace meetings by tracing the evolution of the modern meeting form through the development of Western civilization. In the early 2000s a turning point for meeting research occurred when scholars started investigating the phenomenon in and of itself (and not just as a contextual factor or a container of sorts to study teams) from a variety of perspectives and using various methods and techniques. These studies investigated information sharing in meetings (McComas, 2003), brainstorming in meetings (Reinig & Schin, 2003), meetings as organizational memory (Ballard & Gomez, 2006), problem solving in meetings (McComas, Tuit, Waks, & Sherman, 2007), meetings as interruptions (Rogelberg et al., 2006), strategic meeting interaction (Beck & Keyton, 2009), the social practice of meetings (Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2008), and meeting effectiveness (Luong & Rogelberg, 2005), among other topics. These studies continue to serve as the basis for the more recent expansion of meeting research, including the study of team meetings and team processes (see Chapter 2 for further treatment of this topic). In fact, given the slow start of meeting research generally, the last few years have generated quite a bit of work, including special journal issues on the topic and culminating in the current handbook.

### Meeting Science Today: An Overview of This Volume

This volume unites meetings scientists from different disciplines and highlights current thinking and empirical activities in the field of meeting science. Scholars who contributed to this volume are based in industrial/organizational psychology, communication science, social psychology, business administration, marketing, sociology, and anthropology. By bridging national, disciplinary, and methodological borders, this volume showcases different approaches, theories, and methods for advancing our understanding of meetings in the workplace.

We grouped the chapters according to their specific scientific focus. After three introductory chapters (Part I) that examine the scientific field of studying meetings at work, our framework for meeting science encompasses four sections: setting the meeting stage in terms of the activities and events that precede a meeting (Part II); the meeting itself, in terms of communicative and emotional dynamics as well as meeting processes that can promote meeting effectiveness (Part III); special types of meetings, such as debrief meetings intended to learn from prior events and virtual meetings (Part IV); and conclusions to be drawn for both meeting practice and the science of meetings at work (Part V).

Although each chapter focuses on a unique aspect of workplace meetings, this framework is helpful for organizing the different contributions with their specific approaches and research foci within the field of meeting science. However, the framework should not be viewed as static. Meetings are rarely isolated events, and the sections in the book are interconnected. For example, what happens while setting the stage for the meeting will very likely have an impact on the meeting itself. Establishing the meeting design or how to train meeting leaders will affect what happens in the meeting. As another example, the way that meeting attendees feel after leaving a meeting will likely influence the way they enter their next meeting with the same group of attendees. After attending a pleasant meeting, the participants may engage in more premeeting talk leading up to their next meeting. There may also be carryover effects: The processes in one group meeting may lead to similar processes in other group meetings within the same organization or comprising members of related groups/teams. Additionally, the type of meeting could enable or constrain the kinds of design characteristics needed or wanted, as well as the stereotypical processes in the meeting (e.g., decision-making processes in a decision-making meeting).

In the rest of this chapter we provide an overview of the parts of the book and their individual chapter contributions. It is our hope that this overview will provide a guide to readers that will allow them to target specific chapters that pique their interest in what happens during their own meetings and that stimulate research questions concerning meetings in general.

## **I. Introducing the Science of Workplace Meetings**

This introductory chapter is followed by two chapters that introduce the science of workplace meetings in more detail. In Chapter 2, Jessie Olien, Steven Rogelberg, Nale Lehmann-Willenbrock, and Joe Allen elaborate on the definition of the science of meetings and answer frequently asked questions about what meeting science is and is not. Chapter 3 by Cliff Scott, Joe Allen, Steven Rogelberg, and Alex Kello introduces five theoretical lenses for framing, studying, and investigating meetings across disciplines.

## **II. The Meeting Stage**

Part II focuses on contextual factors at various levels that set the stage for the meeting. These include premeeting activities such as meeting design and meeting

leadership training, the composition of meeting attendees, the organizational and cultural context surrounding a meeting, and premeeting communication.

Contextual factors that set the meeting stage can be analyzed at several levels. Two chapters examine the meeting stage at the micro or individual level. Isabelle Odermatt, Cornelius König, and Martin Kleinmann in Chapter 4 review scientific evidence concerning meeting design characteristics and highlight the role of meeting leaders in designing and facilitating effective meetings. Feray Aksoy-Burkert and Cornelius König develop a scientifically based training concept for preparing effective meeting leaders in Chapter 5. At the meso or group level, two chapters focus on the composition of meeting attendee groups. In Chapter 6 Fabiola Gerpott and Nale Lehmann-Willenbrock develop a theoretical model and derive propositions concerning the ways in which group diversity characteristics as meeting input factors affect meeting processes and outcomes. Focusing on cultural differences among meeting attendees, Tine Köhler and Markus Gölz integrate previous findings on cross-cultural differences in meeting processes and expectations and provide a theoretical framework for cross-cultural meetings research in Chapter 7. In a subsection on premeeting communication, Chapter 8 by Michael Yoerger, Kyle Francis, and Joe Allen highlights the role of premeeting talk – the verbal and nonverbal communication that occurs before a meeting begins – in influencing individual perceptions of meeting effectiveness.

Three chapters analyze the macro meeting context. In Chapter 9 Wendelien van Eerde and Claudia Buengeler take a descriptive-comparative approach to examining how the national cultural context affects how work meetings are structured and perceived. Moving to the organizational level, Jared Hansen and Joe Allen in Chapter 10 discuss how organizational policies, procedures, and practices can promote meetings and present a measure of firm meeting orientation. In Chapter 11, Martin Duffy and Brendan O'Rourke discuss how meetings systemically manifest, contribute to, and sustain collective mind over time in organizations.

### III. The Meeting Itself

The third part of the book goes inside the meeting itself. A substantial amount of meeting research is focused on what happens within the meeting; in other words, on meeting processes. To group contributions together that address related meeting phenomena, we divide this part into two sections. The first section focuses on conversational and emotional dynamics that happen during meetings. The second section focuses on models and tools that can help facilitate within-meeting processes and improve meeting effectiveness.

#### *Capturing and Understanding Dynamics within Meetings*

The first theoretical perspective on meeting processes is offered in Chapter 12 by Joshua Raclaw and Cecilia Ford, who discuss the contributions of conversation analysis to meeting science and demonstrate how conversation analysis helps untangle the complex interactional practices that make meetings work. Next in Chapter 13, Birte Asmuß describes meeting interaction from a multimodal perspective and applies conversation analysis to the study of multimodal strategy meetings. In Chapter 14,

Steve Beck, Emily Paskewitz, and Joann Keyton review the interdisciplinary meeting literature from a communication perspective and propose a theory for strategic meeting interaction.

Several chapters highlight current empirical findings and novel methodological approaches for understanding the social dynamics that characterize workplace meetings. Zooming in on the moment-to-moment dynamics of meeting communication, Annika Meinecke and Nale Lehmann-Willenbrock in Chapter 15 show how micro-level interaction processes and social dynamics can be revealed by focusing on the observable behavioral conduct of meeting participants and by applying dynamic interaction analytical methods. Nils Sauer, Annika Meinecke, and Simone Kauffeld argue in Chapter 16 that responses among meeting participants can be understood as ties in an interaction network; they show how to apply social network analysis to examine meeting interaction data. Next in Chapter 17, Marcella Hoogeboom and Celeste Wilderom explore leader behaviors during organizational staff meetings and compare surveyed prototypical leader perceptions with actual leader behavioral data. A further methodological contribution is offered in Chapter 18 by Florian Klonek, Hilko Paulsen, and Simone Kauffeld, who discuss how meetings relate to organizational change management and present a coding instrument for measuring change-promoting and change-inhibiting talk during meetings.

In terms of the emotional rather than conversational dynamics within the meeting itself, two chapters focus on individual and group-level emotional experiences in meetings. Focusing on the within-meeting experience of individual meeting attendants, Jane Thomas and Joe Allen in Chapter 19 consider meetings as emotion regulation episodes and construct a multilevel conceptual model of emotion regulation in workplace meetings. Moving to the team level, in Chapter 20 Zhike Lei and Nale Lehmann-Willenbrock integrate previous research and current work on affective dynamics during team meetings and identify research gaps to be tackled in this area.

### ***Tools and Models to Promote Meeting Success***

The second section within the part of our book focusing on the meeting itself is concerned with tools and models that help foster effective meeting processes and promote meeting success. In Chapter 21, David Kocsis, Geert-Jan de Vreede, and Robert Briggs show how ThinkLets technology can be used to facilitate co-creation meetings. Cheri Brodeur follows in Chapter 22 with the development of a theory-based meeting process model that is applicable for navigating the complexities of different meeting phases.

Meeting success can be captured in terms of different kinds of outcomes for individuals, teams, or organizations as a whole that can result from a meeting. Focusing on problem-solving meetings, Glenn Littlepage in Chapter 23 discusses how meeting effectiveness can be enhanced when member expertise is used effectively and offers recommendations for improving information use during meetings. Christoph Haug focuses on consensus as a meeting output and differentiates consensus practices in decision-making meetings in Chapter 24. This section concludes with Chapter 25 by Roni Reiter-Palmon and Stephanie Sands, who review findings

and offer recommendations for facilitating creative performance as a focal meeting outcome.

#### IV. Special Types of Meetings

The fourth part of our book focuses on very specific meeting purposes and special cases of organizational meetings. The first two contributions in this section focus on postevent meetings or debriefs. In Chapter 26, Christina Lacerenza, Megan Gregory, Alyssa Marshall, and Ed Salas review the literature on debrief meetings and provide recommendations for executing successful debriefs that generate learning. In Chapter 27, Cliff Scott, Alex Dunn, Eleanor Williams, and Joe Allen focus on after-action reviews as a special meeting context and develop a theoretical framework that link after-action review meetings to organizational antecedents and outcomes.

The third and fourth contributions on special types of meetings focus on virtual meeting contexts. In Chapter 28 Katarzyna Cichomska, Victoria Roe, and Desmond Leach discuss how changes in the 21st-century workplace have led to an increasing number of hybrid meetings – a combination of face-to-face and virtual attendee participation – and offer recommendations for preparing and planning those meetings. Brooke Allison, Marissa Shuffler-Porter, and Allison Wallace then review the evidence and develop guidelines for facilitating virtual meetings in Chapter 29.

#### V. Synthesis and Conclusion

The final section of the book brings the science of meetings together in two integrative chapters. Taking a practice perspective, John Kello in Chapter 30 reviews the science of meetings from the perspective of a business practitioner and introduces the various science-practice benefits gleaned from the science of meetings. In Chapter 31 Helen Schwartzman finishes the book by synthesizing key ideas presented and reflecting on the progress made since she began the scientific investigation of meetings.

### Conclusion

The purpose of this book is to present the current state of the field of the scientific study of meetings. Rather than a practice-oriented self-help book, this edited volume comprises theoretically and empirically based chapters focused on the activities before, during, and after meetings that meaningfully affect the lives of the people inside and outside the meeting context. As such, this volume is the first contemporary book to take a *scientific* look at meetings at work. It is structured around the events leading to a meeting, the processes that occur during meetings, and the outcomes of meetings for individuals, teams, and organizations as a whole. The chapters included in this first handbook of meeting science span a substantial body of empirical work and offer a number of theoretical perspectives on workplace meetings, along with the methodological innovations that are necessary for moving

the field forward. Our goal as editors has been to develop an essential reference in terms of the state of the art of meeting science. We hope that meeting scholars can use this book as a point of departure for ongoing studies and as an inspiration for future research agendas.

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