

The Bored Room: How to turn meetings into powerful tools

Thanks to the COVID-19 crisis and the move to mass remote working, meetings are now a very different experience. Think about the last few meetings you attended. Were they well organized? Did the meeting start on time, have an agenda and conclude with practical actions?

For many, meetings have become a drain on their time and resources. Has this changed as businesses embrace virtual meetings? Research from CV-Library of 2,000 UK workers revealed 34% had excused themselves from virtual meetings that had become boring. A massive 81% of men and 68% of women stating virtual meeting are a waste of time.

“We know that more people are working from home right now than ever before and it’s definitely taking some getting used to. While it’s great to keep the momentum going and connect with colleagues via conference calls or video chats, there is an

argument that these can sometimes be counter-productive – especially if they’re filling up your entire day or nothing positive ever comes out of them.” – Lee Biggins, founder and CEO of CV-Library

The culture of meetings has become engrained in business processes. Often allowed to run out of control, the cost of unnecessary meetings can be high: Figures generated by eShare – a governance and board management software company claim UK businesses alone, lose £191B a year holding meetings that could be avoided.

“The fundamental mistake in how meetings are managed is that the leader of the meeting often starts off with the wrong intentions; to talk rather than to listen,” Johnny Warström, CEO and co-founder of interactive presentation platform Mentimeter told Maddyness. “This kind of mindset actually inhibits the efficiency and productivity of the meeting by hindering the leader’s ability to set a clear agenda and engage with people. It also treats the meeting participants as a mere audience, rather than contributors, which therefore impedes on their ability to voice their opinions.”

Connecting with colleagues and clients is vital, of course, but how these communications are achieved must be approached with care. Meetings still have their place; it’s re-engaging with meetings using new technologies that may be unfamiliar that can cause anxiety and even apathy when a meeting is called.

“If meetings are fewer but better called and better prepared for, and afterwards, people actually get a follow-up of what has been discussed and decided and implemented as continuity of the meeting, this feeling of time-wasting in a meeting will soon disappear. People will understand that whenever they are called for a meeting, real things are coming

up, they will start to take meetings really seriously and value this moment of exchange.” – Virginia Drummond, Associate professor at EMLYON Business School

Making meetings count

According to research from Asana that quizzed workers from the UK, America, Japan, Australia and Germany, meetings have been impacted with 34% having fewer meetings, a third had the same amount and, just over a quarter (26%) have more meetings.

The use of more collaborative tools has rapidly expanded across all the regions Asana analyzed. By readily embracing collaboration technology, nearly one third (29%) of Australians reported holding fewer meetings while working remotely. Also, Australia had the highest number of survey respondents (51%) state their productivity had increased under remote protocols.

Also, the Japanese workforce took advantage of greater flexibility during the working day. More than half (57%) took more breaks and 43%—more than any other country—had fewer meetings. In fact, only 14% had more meetings since working remotely. The flexible approach workers are now taking also impacts on their approach to calling, hosting and actioning agreed steps after meetings conclude.

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Dr Marion Festing, Professor of HRM and Intercultural leadership, ESCP Business School, commented: “I do think that the coronavirus pandemic has definitely improved employees’ competencies in terms of virtual teamwork and collaboration. Thus, international business meetings might be more likely to be conducted virtually than before the COVID-19 pandemic, as it is way more time

and cost-efficient.”

Festing concluded: “However, offline meetings will definitely still be conducted, as the quality of these meetings is different and has unique advantages for creating personal relationships and trust. You can communicate virtually, but as social animals, immediate face-to-face contact is important to us and the existing technology, right now, is not a substitute for that contact.”

Speaking to Maddyne about her own direct experiences, Daisy Wolfenden, managing director, [Visibilis](#) – a full-service digital agency said her company will certainly be continuing with their use of virtual meetings: “For us, returning to normal means continuing to use virtual meetings. We can meet international clients and prospects with ease, so it’s enabled us to expand our reach and speed up conversations that usually would have taken weeks or even months to book in.”

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Your meeting checklist

As the meeting as we knew them have disappeared, how can we embrace new technologies and, evolve the meeting to become a powerful business tool? Follow the steps below to transform your meetings today!

Should a meeting be called?

Meeting sprawl had become somewhat of a scourge within businesses. Only when it is essential and where the meeting has clear goals to achieve, should the meeting be called. Wrike published a useful infographic that can help you make the right decision.

Creating the agenda

Meetings are often branded as a waste of time simply because they had no agenda steering them to useful and actionable conclusions. Circulate a preliminary agenda to all attendees well in advance to gain their feedback.

Hone the agenda to its salient points, which then form the core of the meeting when it takes place.

Watch the clock

At all costs avoid meetings that meander on for what can feel like hours. Thirty minutes is the optimum length to ensure everyone's attention is maintained. It's the meeting's host to keep to a strict timeline and pull any speakers back from long speeches that have no value.

Use visual materials

One of the significant advantages when using virtual meeting platforms is their ability to use supporting materials. Digital whiteboards, screen sharing etc. can all be used as visual support for a point on the agenda as its being discussed.

Check your technology

Before a meeting gets underway, check that the microphones and/or video cameras are working. You don't want to spend precious time doing technical support while the other attendees wait for the meeting to start.

Actionable outcomes

All meetings should be called for a well-defined purpose. The agenda provides a framework for discussion, but the discussion must always end with an agreed action, to be taken by a specific person or persons, by a specific time.

As the general consensus is that remote working will become the norm and not the exception for millions of workers, using the available tools effectively will be a skill everyone will have to acquire. The meeting has often been labelled as an unproductive waste of time and resources. In reality, meetings still have their place, as they move increasingly to the virtual space.

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