



Employees' feelings about more meetings

Improving meetings

An overt analysis and recommendations for improving meetings

405

Joseph A. Allen, Stephanie J. Sands and Stephanie L. Mueller
Department of Psychology, Creighton University, Omaha, Nebraska, USA

Katherine A. Frear
*Department of Organizational Science,
University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Charlotte, North Carolina, USA*

Mara Mudd
Bank of America, Charlotte, North Carolina, USA, and

Steven G. Rogelberg
*Department of Organizational Science,
University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Charlotte, North Carolina, USA*

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to identify how employees feel about having more meetings and what can be done to improve employees' feelings about their work meetings.

Design/methodology/approach – Data were obtained from three samples of working adults. The first was a convenience sample recruited by undergraduate students ($n = 120$), the second was a stratified random sample from a metropolitan area in the southern USA ($n = 126$), and the third was an internet-based panel sample ($n = 402$). Constant comparative analysis of responses to open-ended questions was used to investigate the overarching research questions.

Findings – It is found that employees enjoy meetings when they have a clear objective, and when important relevant information is shared. Consistent with conservation of resources theory, most employees are unhappy with meetings when they reduce their work-related resources (e.g. meetings constrain their time, lack structure and are unproductive).

Practical implications – The data suggest that meetings appear to be both resource-draining and resource-supplying activities in the workplace. Researchers and managers should consider overtly asking about how people feel about meetings, as a means of identifying areas for future research inquiry and targets for improvement in the workplace generally.

Originality/value – The paper describes one of the few studies on meetings that ask the participants overtly what their feelings are regarding their workplace meetings. Additionally, the paper illustrates the usefulness of qualitative data analysis as a means for further understanding workplace activities viewing respondents as informants.

Keywords United States of America, Employees behaviour, Employees attitudes, Employees participation, Meetings, Meeting demands, Qualitative research, Thematic analysis

Paper type Research paper



Meetings occur everywhere. Managers in large organizations (> 500 employees) tend to spend more time preparing for, attending, and leading meetings than any other task (Van Vree, 1999; Romano and Nunamaker, 2001). Employees spend an average of

six hours per week in scheduled meetings, and those in larger organizations usually spend even more time in meetings (Rogelberg *et al.*, 2006). Meetings are a central part of the work environment that can affect many different aspects of one's job, such as job satisfaction (Rogelberg *et al.*, 2010); they also serve many purposes, including decision-making, product development, information sharing, etc. (Tracy and Dimock, 2003; McComas, 2003). According to Tracy and Dimock (2003), meetings are the primary communicative practice that organizations use to accomplish important goals, make changes, display power, and come up with new ideas. No two meetings are alike; they differ in many various ways based on the people involved, the size of the group, the tools used, management styles, and overall design of the meeting (Tracy and Dimock, 2003; Cohen *et al.*, 2011; Leach *et al.*, 2009). Given the prevalence and practical significance of meetings (Schwartzman, 1986), it is important to study the impact of meeting demands and the consequences of how they differ across different organizations and for different employees.

The present study aims to identify some ways in which these persistent meeting demands affect employees and what can be done to improve employees' feelings about their work meetings. Previous research illustrated the psychological impact of meeting demands and found that daily fatigue and subjective workload were positively related to the number of meetings attended (Luong and Rogelberg, 2005). However, this and other studies suggest that there is considerable variability in employees' reaction to having more meetings and what makes them look forward to and/or dread more meetings. Given the limited research on the effects of meeting demands on employees as well as a lack of understanding of what creates the variability around the experience of meeting demands, this study seeks to begin to fill this gap by overtly asking people to express their feelings about having more meetings and to describe what makes them look forward to and dread meetings. We argue that this overt approach to understanding the effects of meeting load on employees allows for the identification of both explanations for the negative feelings people express concerning meetings as well as some ideas of how to bring relief to employees from these negative feelings.

We begin by reviewing previous research on meeting load in an effort to illustrate the important psychological impact of work meetings. Additionally, we identify an important theoretical framework (i.e. conservation of resources theory) for understanding why and how meeting demands continue to affect employee productivity beyond the meeting setting. We then analyze qualitative data across three samples in an effort to illustrate how employees feel about meetings as well as their thoughts on what makes them look forward to and dread meetings. We conclude with a discussion of theoretical and practical implications for researchers and managers.

Meeting load

Meeting load refers to the frequency and time spent in meetings (Luong and Rogelberg, 2005). In one of the few studies on meeting load, Luong and Rogelberg (2005) use the theory of activity regulation to help explain why meeting load is related to daily fatigue and subjective workload. According to activity regulation theory the execution of work tasks is a goal-directed activity, in which actions are produced by executing one's own cognitive schemes. Cognitive schemes, or schemas, are the way people organize and interpret knowledge about particular concepts (Sims and Lorenzi, 1992). When an interruption occurs, such as a meeting, the regulation of activity and cognitive schemes

is disrupted because the person must modify his or her action plans. (Zijlstra *et al.*, 1999). Luong and Rogelberg (2005) explain that in addition, interruptions put an additional demand on the resources needed for action execution as well as regulation of all activities. Taking this approach, they found a significant positive relationship between number of meetings and daily fatigue and subjective workload. Thus, employees who have more meetings appear to become more drained at the end of the workday and feel they have more work to do generally.

Building off of this previous research on meeting load, Rogelberg *et al.* (2006) apply the same theory of activity regulation to further explain how meeting demands interrupt workflow thus disrupting work processes and potentially driving down employee well-being. Although many events in the workplace can disrupt employees, meetings are an especially unique form of interruption. According to Rogelberg *et al.* (2006), what makes meeting interruptions demanding is not simply the change of activity (e.g. going to a meeting) but rather the fact that the accompanying thought processes are affected. For example, when employees are at meetings their minds might be focused on the task they just left or what they need to get done after the meeting. Rogelberg *et al.* (2006) explains that other tasks have to be kept in memory in order to resume work once the interruption has ended. Across two samples, Rogelberg *et al.* (2006) found that, under certain circumstances, meetings disrupt the achievement of work goals, and individuals feel worse about their work experiences. They found that perceived meeting effectiveness moderated the relationship between meeting time demands and job-attitudes and well-being, such that meeting time demands negatively impact employees' attitudes and well-being when meeting effectiveness is low. Thus, meeting effectiveness may serve as a buffer to the negative effects of meeting demands. This suggests that looking for ways to improve meeting effectiveness may help mitigate issues with meeting time demands thus supporting the premise of the current study.

Conservation of resources theory and meeting demands

Although activity regulation theory provides an important explanation for previous research, another theory provides additional explanation for why the growing meeting demands may further impact employee well-being for good or ill: conservation of resource theory. Conservation of resource (COR) theory predicts that resource loss is the principal ingredient in the stress process (Hobfoll, 2001). Hobfoll (1989) developed a stress model which suggests that people strive to retain, protect, and build resources and that a potential or actual loss of those valued resources is a threat to their well-being. According to Hobfoll (1989), psychological stress is defined as a reaction to the environment in which there is the threat of a loss of resources, an actual loss of the resources, or a lack of resources. Hobfoll described resources as objects, personal characteristics, conditions, or energies that are valued in their own right or that are valued because they act as means to the achievement or protection of valued resources (Hobfoll, 1989; Diener and Fujita, 1995).

In meetings, people can experience a threat of a loss of resources (e.g. meetings that might run long), an actual loss of resources (e.g. time in meetings), or a lack of resources (e.g. they never get the time in meetings back). In other words, meetings absorb an important finite resource of employees and managers, time. When people are required to attend more and more meetings, they have less time to do other important parts of their job, and may feel stressed to get their other work done on time. They not only experience

a perceived loss of time but an actual loss of time. Hobfoll (1989) would classify the loss of time as a loss of energy. However, the loss of this specific resource (time) may affect certain employees or even organizations differently than others because how resources are ranked and valued is a reflection of the organizational culture (Hobfoll, 2001).

Yet, even as meetings drain resources from employees and managers, they may also provide resources. For example, meetings may provide a forum for answering questions that help facilitate work activities. Managers in meetings may redistribute or provide important organizational resources to employees. In meetings, plans are made, problems are solved, and important organizational processes take place (Cohen *et al.*, 2011). Thus, following conservation of resources theory, meetings can sap resources or they can provide resources. Thus, in this study we expect that employees will express concerns about resources they lose (e.g. time) as well as express gratitude for resources gained through their work meetings.

Meeting load and productivity

Focusing on the resources potentially lost in meetings, studies have shown that many meetings are unproductive and wasteful (Romano and Nunamaker, 2001). However, most researchers and managers agree that meetings are a necessary and important part of most organizations. When meetings are not successful, managers and workers alike are dissatisfied with the process as well as the outcomes; generally job productivity is decreased (Romano and Nunamaker, 2001). Furthermore, a poorly run meeting could be quite costly to an organization (Allen *et al.*, 2008). In fact, Romano and Nunamaker (2001) have compiled research that estimates meeting expenses ranging from costs of \$30 million to over \$100 million per year to losses between \$54 million and 3.7 billion dollars annually. Additionally, Elsayed-Elkhouly *et al.* (1997) found that 8 percent of respondents of their survey said that over 50 percent of time spent in meetings was unproductive. Five years later, 35 percent of managers in the same field reported meetings being a waste of time and unproductive.

It is important to recognize that these studies do not promote the removal of meetings themselves, but instead the removal of ineffective or inefficient meetings. Time wasted in meetings is one of the biggest problems for managers (Tobia and Becker, 1990), but there are ways to address this predicament. Meeting leaders can learn to effectively use meetings in a way that improves employee well-being and potentially improves meeting effectiveness (Cohen *et al.*, 2011). Nixon and Littlepage (1992) found that several procedural characteristics of meetings are related to meeting effectiveness including open communication, focus on tasks, and agenda integrity. Taken together, frequent bad meetings are likely to have lasting psychological effects on employees and understanding how employees feel about these meetings as well as their recommendations for improvement seems important.

Current study

Although previous research demonstrates the importance of meetings and meeting demands, there is a general lack of understanding about what people overtly feel about meetings. Rather than focusing on a particular aspect of meeting demands, using constant comparative analysis we seek to discover the sources of employees' concerns about having more meetings as well as what they suggest concerning how to improve meetings generally (Lindlof and Taylor, 2002). Across three samples, we use qualitative

methods to discover the range of reasons people feel better or worse about having more meetings in their workday. In our final sample, we attempt to discover how managers can effectively use meetings by helping their employees look forward to, rather than dread, their work meetings. Thus, more formally stated, we seek to answer the following research questions:

RQ1. How do employees feel about having more meetings?

RQ2. What makes employees look forward to their work meetings?

RQ3. What makes employees dread their work meetings?

Methods

Samples and procedures

We asked the same question concerning individuals' feelings about having more meetings across three unique samples, thus enhancing generalizability. Sample 1, a convenience sample, consisted of 120 working adults. Students in an undergraduate course recruited working adults to complete the survey. The sample was 51 percent female and the average age of participants was approximately 30 years. Sample 2 was a stratified random sample of 126 working adults in a metropolitan area in the Southern USA. The sample was 49 percent female and the average age of participants was 41 years ($SD = 10.4$). Sample 3 was an internet-based panel sample of 402 working adults across the USA. The sample was 50 percent female and the average age of participants was 37 years ($SD = 10.7$).

Instruments

"Feelings about more meetings" was assessed in a two-part question utilized with all three samples. The first part was a closed-ended question asking which of three statements best represents their outlook on meetings (i.e. "The more meetings I have, the better I feel", "The more meetings I have, the worse feel", "The more meetings I have, neither make me feel better nor worse"). For the purpose of this study, we focus on the people who indicate having more meetings makes them feel worse or better. Thus, we deliberately make comparisons of those who appear to enjoy meetings and those who appear to loath them. This is similar to research that uses split-group or extreme-groups analysis to see the effects of a phenomenon on a sample (Preacher *et al.*, 2005). The second part was an open-ended question asking respondents to explain why they feel that way (e.g. better or worse) about having more meetings.

"Dread a meeting" was assessed only in the third sample using an open-ended question that stated, "I dread a meeting when [...]".

"Look forward to a meeting" was assessed only in the third sample using an open-ended question that stated, "I look forward to a meeting when [...]".

Analysis and development of categories

We used constant comparative analysis to analyze the open-ended responses to each of the questions, which allowed us to produce categories/themes that are more grounded in data (Glaser, 1965). Glaser (1965) originally developed constant comparative analysis – systematic analysis of qualitative data through thematic open-coding focused on the development of theory – in an effort to bring additional rigor to qualitative research. Further, we employ open-coding which involves "the process of breaking

down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data” (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Independent coders were utilized to ensure that previous research by the authors did not overtly impact the development of the themes or the coding process.

For each open-ended question, qualitative analysis techniques (i.e. open-coding, Strauss and Corbin, 1990), similar to those found in other published studies (Plowman *et al.*, 2007), were followed in the development of categories. First, two coders independently reviewed all responses to develop an initial set of coding categories. The coders focused on what they considered the main comment within each open-ended response as the basis for the category development. This step required coders to look for common themes repeated in the response set and sort themes into higher-order categories. See Tables I and II for a complete list of codes. The two coders then used the categories to independently code a selected portion of the response data for each question across the samples. Because of high initial agreement (95, 91.3, and 97 percent, respectively), no further revisions to the coding scheme were deemed necessary. The coders then completed the independent coding of all responses across each of the three open-ended questions and compared results. Inter-rater agreement was estimated by calculating percent agreement and Cohen’s Kappa statistics. For “Feelings about more meetings”, across the three samples percent agreement was high (89 percent) and Cohen’s Kappa ($\kappa = 0.82$) was adequately high so as to suggest the categories were understood and applied similarly. Initial agreement was also adequately high for both “dread a meeting” (86 percent, $\kappa = 0.74$) and for “look forward to a meeting” (80 percent, $\kappa = 0.71$). In all cases, when responses were coded differently between coders, the differences were discussed until resolved.

Results and discussion

The results from the analysis of employees’ feelings about meetings are presented in Table I. Table I shows that 10 percent of respondents said that meetings make them feel better about their job. In contrast, 30 percent of respondents felt worse about their job because of more meetings. Thus, three times as many respondents indicated that more meetings make them feel worse, suggesting a general emphasis on the negative effects of meeting load. Within the group who felt better about having more meetings, the majority, 35.3 percent, reported that meetings allow for more information sharing. In this group, 24.6 percent said that meetings help them reach goals and objectives, while 16.9 percent said meetings allow for collaboration, bringing people together to solve problems and enable communication. Nixon and Littlepage (1992) found that open communication is also a major process that led to effective meetings. Their research has suggested many other factors that contribute to the overall meeting effectiveness such as focus on tasks, thorough explorations of options, analysis of decision consequences, action planning, temporal integrity, agenda integrity, and leader impartiality.

For the group who felt worse about having more meetings, their largest complaint was related to time. It is interesting that only a small percentage of individuals mentioned meetings as negatively interrupting their work day (6.1 percent). A much greater proportion of the “worse” group indicated that meetings constrain their time (40.9 percent) or are a waste of time (13.1 percent). Consistent with COR theory, people view meetings as taking away from a limited valuable resource—their time. Additionally, this suggests that viewing meeting demands exclusively from an

Item	Group	Category of response	Study 1 ^a (%)	Study 2 ^b (%)	Study 3 ^c (%)	Overall ^d (%)	Sample comments
More meetings make me feel [...] Why do you feel that way?	Better		18.3	11.9	6.9	10	
		The quality of the meeting matters; it depends on the meeting	4.5	–	–	1.5	It is the quality of the meetings not the quantity
		Meetings are productive	9.1	–	3.6	4.6	They are productive. I feel like I got something done
		Meetings are a positive interruption	9.1	6.7	3.6	6.1	Often meetings provide a welcome reprieve from my day
		Meetings allow for collaboration	9.1	13.3	25	16.9	Bringing people together to solve problems and enable communication
		Meetings have a social aspect to them	4.5	13.3	7.1	7.7	Like meeting b/c it brings about social setting
		Meetings help achieve goals and objectives	36.4	20	17.9	24.6	Then I know what my goals are for the day
		Meetings allow for information sharing	22.7	46.7	39.3	35.3	Because helps in organization and information on what is going on in the company
More meetings make me feel [...] Why do you feel that way?	Worse		36.7	31.7	28.4	30.5	
		Meetings are a waste of time	15.9	15	11.4	13.1	They are a waste of time most of the time
		The quality of the meeting matters; it depends on the meeting	2.3	2.5	1.8	2	Because quantity should not prevail. Quality is more important
		Meetings are not productive	18.2	25	5.3	12.1	Most meetings attended are unproductive
		Meetings are a negative interruption	2.3	7.5	7	6.1	Meetings disrupt the flow of the work day
		Meeting length matters	4.5	–	–	1	Most of the time they last longer than they need to

Table I.
Feelings about having more meetings and reasons why
(continued)

Item	Group	Category of response	Study 1 ^a (%)	Study 2 ^b (%)	Study 3 ^c (%)	Overall ^d (%)	Sample comments
		Bad news is presented in meetings	4.5	2.5	1.8	2.5	It is usually about bad things
		Meetings are overwhelming or stressful	4.5	–	8.8	6.1	Meetings are draining and time consuming
		I do not like meetings	4.5	2.5	5.3	1.5	I just do not like attending meetings
		There are too many meeting	2.3	5	3.5	3.5	Have too many meetings
		Meetings are not relevant	–	–	0.9	0.5	My meetings usually are not related to my particular job
		Meetings constrain my time	38.6	35	43.9	40.9	Take up too much time where I could be getting my work done
		Meetings add to my workload or day	–	–	8.8	5.1	At each meeting, I get more responsibility added to my day/ time
		Meetings are redundant	2.3	5	–	1.5	The meetings are the same every time, redundancy

Table I.

Notes: ^an = 120; ^bn = 126; ^cn = 402; ^dn = 648

interruptions perspective may be limited. However, it does highlight the importance of time and how meetings keep employees from their other work tasks. In contrast, it may be that those in the worse group would feel better about more meetings if some of the explanations provided by the better group were incorporated in their meetings (e.g. information sharing, achievement of goals, allowing collaboration, etc.).

Dread a meeting when [...]

The thematic analysis of the “dread a meeting when” and “look forward to a meeting when” provide some general prescriptions for how to improve meetings and how to avoid meeting loathing (Table II). Furthermore, through analysis of these two questions we can begin to understand how meetings provide for or reduce finite resources within organizations, and the effects or outcomes of those gains or losses. The respondents indicated that meetings are more dreadful when lateness is an issue (12.3 percent) (e.g. “I dread a meeting when it starts late”) and when the meeting lacks structure or organization (12.3 percent) (e.g. “I dread a meeting when it is going to be unstructured and badly or not documented”). The group who feels better about having more meetings dreads meetings the most when they or others arrive late (38.9 percent).

Item	Category of response	“Better” group ^a (%)	“Worse” group ^b (%)	Overall ^c (%)	Sample comments
I dread a meeting when [...]	Myself or others arrive late	38.9	6.4	12.3	The main person is late or does not show up
	I am unprepared	16.7	6.4	8	I have not prepared
	Others are unprepared	0	0	1.1	Participants are not prepared
	There is insufficient organization or structure	5.6	13.8	12.3	I know it is going to be unstructured and badly or not documented
	The meeting begins late	0	1.1	2.2	It starts late
	Attendees have a negative attitude	5.6	5.3	4.7	The one who called it sounds pissed or angry
	The meeting is unproductive	0	13.8	11.2	Nothing gets to be done
	Bad news is given or received	11.1	8.5	12.3	I know we are going to be scolded for something
	The meeting is irrelevant to me or in general	5.6	6.4	6.5	Very little of it pertains to my job
	I have other more pressing work tasks to do	0	8.5	5.8	Taking valuable time away from your projects
I look forward to a meeting when [...]	Certain people are in attendance	0	14.9	9.4	It involved people I dislike
	The meeting content is not interesting or enjoyable	5.6	3.2	3.6	The topic is boring
	The meeting is too long	11.1	11.7	10.5	It seems to drone on forever
	The meeting is productive	0	15.6	16.2	Something is being accomplished
	The meeting is run efficiently	0	4.6	3.7	I know it will be short and to the point with everything being solved efficiently
	The meeting is timely or punctual	16.7	11	6.4	It starts on time and ends on time
	I am prepared for the meeting	5.6	5.5	6.1	When I am well prepared
	Others are prepared for the meeting	16.7	1.8	3.4	Everyone is prepared
	The meeting is well organized	0	13.8	12.8	Everything is well planned
	The information is relevant and/or important	22.2	22	18.5	Subject matter concerns my job
	The information is interesting and enjoyable	11.1	6.4	9.1	Its about something I am passionate about
	Good news is given or received	0	3.7	7.1	There are positive points to address
	The interaction between members is constructive	5.6	4.6	4.7	When all members work as team with one common goal
	The meeting is informal	0	2.8	1.3	It is an informal meeting
	I am the facilitator or meeting leader	5.6	2.8	3	When I am in charge of it
	Certain people are in attendance	5.6	3.7	5.7	I know that likeminded people will attend
	There is food	11.1	1.8	2	There is food offered

Notes: ^an = 30; ^bn = 125; ^cn = 402

Table II.
Reasons for dreading or looking forward to a meeting

Likewise, 16.7 percent of the same group looks forward to a meeting when they are timely or punctual (e.g. "I look forward to a meeting when it starts on time and ends on time").

Previous literature has explained that there are many effects of lateness on meeting satisfaction and effectiveness. For example, Rogelberg *et al.* (2006) found that meeting time demands also affects general meeting effectiveness. Other research has shown how late individuals in the workplace may have negative effects on productivity and efficiency (Blau, 2004), for instance, withdrawal behavior where the employee distances or removes themselves from their duties (Hanisch, 1995). Also, poor attitudes, lack of morale and/or motivation, are likely present when some individuals are late (Jamal, 1984). Time is usually wasted when someone arrives late to a meeting and must be "caught up" or informed of what has been said. Blau (2004) explains that this is just one of the costs associated with employee lateness, along with unhappy co-workers who must "pick up the slack" and an overall loss of productivity.

If properly used, certain design characteristics may reduce the dread of meetings. Meetings provide a multitude of resources for employees. Most importantly, meetings provide a place where vital and (hopefully) relevant information is shared and many ideas are exchanged. In situations such as these, employees can learn new information that they may not have learned otherwise. This suggests that meeting design characteristics (e.g. starting on time and using an agenda) could reduce general meeting dread. If an agenda is used, following it is significantly related to meeting effectiveness (Nixon and Littlepage, 1992).

Look forward to a meeting when [..]

Most importantly, the largest proportion of people indicated that they look forward to meetings when the information shared is relevant to them (18.5 percent). Consistent with COR theory, this suggests that within meetings, if the information sharing is relevant it can provide a valuable resource for employees. Furthermore, this indicates that managers should make certain that only those who need to hear the information are present at meetings and potentially allow people to select out of attending meetings (Rogelberg *et al.*, 2007). A tool that management can use to enhance this important quality of meetings is to provide an agenda which gives structure to the meeting itself. An agenda can clarify which information is important to the specific person or group of people. Similarly, 16.2 percent look forward to meetings when they are productive. This group stressed the importance of feeling like something has been accomplished in order to feel that the meeting was productive. This is another reason why managers should only request people to attend meetings when it is likely that they will actually accomplish something meaningful.

Implications for research

This study has several key implications for theory as well as research. First, we used an overt method not typically used within the meetings research area. Constant comparative analysis of qualitative data views respondents as informants and recognizes the importance of overtly asking and seeking understanding from those in the study (Glaser, 1965; Lindlof and Taylor, 2002). Unlike most other studies, this present study asked people overtly how they felt about meetings, providing new and relevant information that can be especially important to both researchers and practitioners alike. By taking this approach, we were able to answer key research

questions that are not easily addressed using traditional data-analytic methods. Thus, the research questions drove the choice of research method, thus providing a more direct look at the questions of interest. Additionally, perhaps other researchers could use this overt approach to study other workplace phenomenon. For example, researchers who study training and development could overtly ask employees their thoughts, feelings, and ideas concerning recent experiences in these settings. Surveys could then be developed that have employees' rate specific complaints about training/development activities in the workplace to identify which are the most problematic and further focus research efforts on areas of greater interest to practitioners.

Second, this study provides implications for the application of COR theory for what meetings provide and take away from employees. Based on our findings, it appears that people dread meetings that take away their time but enjoy meetings that provide resources necessary to do their job well. Future research might consider developing rating scales concerning the resource draining and resource enhancing properties of meetings and relate these to other meaningful outcomes for employees (e.g. meeting satisfaction, job satisfaction/commitment) and the organization (e.g. performance). This variable analytic approach could further illustrate the usefulness of COR theory in understanding the effects of meetings on employees.

Third, there is a great deal of potential research activities, based on our findings, in relation to meetings and how they are effective or not effective. There should be increased focus on certain aspects of meetings that are problematic and less attention on what is already going well. For example, our study relays that process issues, like turn taking or voice, were not brought up as things that make people dread or look forward to a meeting, thus, should be disregarded in this context. Instead, there should be an increased focus on time issues.

Practical implications

The current study has several implications for practice in organizations regarding the use of meetings. First, although our sample is deliberately broad and hopefully can be generalized to other populations, managers should consider assessing their meetings overtly to identify their own unique problems (within their work meetings) that are specific to their department or organization. By using the overt technique illustrated in this study, previously unidentified problems could become evident through the voice of the employees as well as actionable suggestions on ways to improve meetings. Second, our findings show that employees feel that there is too much time wasted during their work meetings and would rather be working on other parts of their job that they find more relevant or important. Managers may want to reflect on the necessity and importance of the meetings they call and reduce meetings appropriately. Also, they may give certain employees the opportunity to opt out of meetings that are not imperative for that person's job. This can increase the employee's satisfaction in the meetings they do attend because the meetings would then be more relevant to them.

Third, our findings concerning employees' feelings about meetings provide several easy targets for the improvement of meetings in general. Managers should arrive on time to meetings, start them on time, end them on time, and ensure the topics discussed are relevant for attendees. Managers should also plan meetings well in advance and provide structure for the meeting (e.g. agenda). Advanced warning of meetings allows employees to plan their day and strive toward goals without experiencing unexpected

interruptions (Rogelberg *et al.*, 2006). Previous research confirms many of these design recommendations (Cohen *et al.*, 2011), thus further supporting the need for managers to simply adjust their meeting practices.

Limitations

While this study is important for practitioners and researchers alike, there are some limitations that should be addressed. First, this study is descriptive in nature (i.e. not predicting outcomes like meetings satisfaction, job satisfaction/commitment, etc.). However, by its design, this study is not subject to common method bias (Conway and Lance, 2010). Thus, although the findings provide general prescriptions for improving meetings, future studies need to further verify the effects of such meeting practices on employees' experiences in meetings. Although previous studies confirm some of the recommendations provided by employees (e.g. agenda usage, open communication, etc.; Nixon and Littlepage, 1992), future studies need to look at other recommendations not previously confirmed to be important to employees' experiences in meetings (e.g. meeting relevance, meeting time courtesy, opt-out option, etc.).

Second, future studies would also advance our understanding by taking a more predictive approach to understanding the impact of meetings on employees' attitudes and well-being. For example, the themes developed here could easily be converted into items for scales reflecting meeting practices and then used in more traditional variable analytic studies. Grounding future work in qualitative findings provided here will further validate the usefulness of the methods as well as any future findings (Lindlof and Taylor, 2002).

Third, because of the overt nature of open-ended questions, people may have felt pressure to state things in a more positive light. However, all responses were anonymous and confidential following research requirements established by ethical boards (e.g. IRB). Additionally, given the preponderance of negative responses over positive ones, it is unlikely that many people saw it necessary to place their comments in a more positive light. Also, since the pattern of results appears fairly consistent across the samples, it suggests that the anonymous and confidential nature of the three separate surveys likely confirms rather than disconfirms the likelihood that participants were candid in their responding.

Fourth, in this study, the raters who developed the themes were the same raters who coded the data. Ideally, we would have one set of raters develop the themes around the data and another set to code the data relative to the themes. This would ensure no confounding between familiarities of the data. Future research is needed to confirm the findings of this study following more rigorous processes.

Conclusion

Meetings are an undeniable part of most organizations that employees appear to love and hate. Although researchers are beginning to show interest in studying the effects of meetings on employees and the organizations they populate, there is relatively little research truly overtly focusing on how employees feel and what they recommend concerning meetings. Given the millions of meetings each day in organizations (11 million daily in the USA; MCI Inc., 1998), employees are subject matter experts and this study asked these experts their truly informed opinions. Based on the findings, we believe the unique approach taken by this study can and should be applied to other organizational phenomenon as a means to overtly understanding organizational processes and developing theory.

References

- Allen, J.A., Rogelberg, S.G. and Scott, J.C. (2008), "Mind your meetings", *Quality Progress*, Vol. 41 No. 4, pp. 48-52.
- Blau, G., Tatum, D.S. and Cook, K.W. (2004), "Comparing correlates for different types of absence versus lateness behavior", *Journal of Allied Health*, Vol. 33 No. 4, pp. 238-46.
- Cohen, M.A., Rogelberg, S.G., Allen, J.A. and Luong, A. (2011), "Meeting design characteristics and attendee perceptions of staff/team meeting quality", *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice*, Vol. 15 No. 1, pp. 90-104.
- Conway, J.M. and Lance, C.E. (2010), "What reviewers should expect from authors regarding common method bias in organizational research", *Journal of Business and Psychology*, Vol. 25, pp. 325-34.
- Diener, E. and Fujita, F. (1995), "Resources, personal strivings, and subjective well-being: a nomothetic and ideographic approach", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 68, pp. 926-35.
- Elsayed-Elkhouly, S.M., Lazarus, H. and Forsythe, V. (1997), "Why is a third of your time wasted in meetings?", *Journal of Management Development*, Vol. 16, pp. 672-6.
- Glasser, B. (1965), "The constant comparative method of qualitative analysis", *Social Problems*, Vol. 12 No. 4.
- Hanisch, K.A. (1995), "Behavioral families and multiple causes: matching the complexity of responses to the complexity of antecedents", *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, Vol. 4, pp. 156-62.
- Hobfoll, S.E. (1989), "Conservation of resources: a new attempt at conceptualizing stress", *American Psychologist*, Vol. 44 No. 3, pp. 513-24.
- Hobfoll, S.E. (2001), "The influence of culture, community, and the nested-self in the stress process: advancing conservations of resources theory", *International Association for Applied Psychology*, Vol. 50 No. 3, pp. 337-421.
- Jamal, M. (1984), "Job stress and job performance controversy: an empirical assessment", *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance*, Vol. 33, pp. 1-22.
- Leach, D.J., Rogelberg, S.G., Warr, P.B. and Burnfield, J.L. (2009), "Perceived meeting effectiveness: the role of design characteristics", *Journal of Business and Psychology*, Vol. 24, pp. 65-76.
- Lindlof, T.R. and Taylor, B.C. (2002), *Qualitative Communication Research Methods*, 2nd ed., Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Luong, A. and Rogelberg, S.G. (2005), "Meetings and more meetings: the relationship between meeting load and the daily well-being of employees", *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice*, Vol. 22 No. 1, pp. 58-67.
- McComas, K.A. (2003), "Citizen satisfaction with public meetings used for risk communication", *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, Vol. 31, pp. 164-84.
- MCI Inc. (1998), "Meetings in America: I. A study of trends, costs and attitudes toward business travel, teleconferencing and their impact on productivity", available at: http://e-meetings.mci.com/meetingsinamerica/meetingsinamerica_i.php (accessed 12 May 2011).
- Nixon, C.T. and Littlepage, G.E. (1992), "Impact of meeting procedures on meeting effectiveness", *Journal of Business and Psychology*, Vol. 6 No. 3, pp. 361-9.
- Plowman, D.A., Solansky, S., Beck, T.E., Baker, L., Kulkarni, M. and Travis, D.V. (2007), "The role of leadership in emergent, self-organization", *The Leadership Quarterly*, Vol. 18, pp. 341-56.

- Preacher, K.J., Rucker, D.D., MacCallum, R.C. and Nicewander, W.A. (2005), "Use of extreme groups approach: a critical re-examination and new recommendations", *Psychological Methods*, Vol. 10 No. 2, pp. 178-92.
- Rogelberg, S.G., Scott, C. and Kello, J. (2007), "The science and fiction of meetings", *MIT Sloan Management Review*, Vol. 48, pp. 18-21.
- Rogelberg, S.G., Leach, D.J., Warr, P.B. and Burnfield, J.L. (2006), "Not another meeting! Are meeting time demands related to employee well-being?", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 91, pp. 86-96.
- Rogelberg, S.G., Allen, J.A., Shanock, L., Scott, C. and Shuffler, M. (2010), "Employee satisfaction with meetings: a contemporary facet of job satisfaction", *Human Resource Management*, Vol. 49 No. 2, pp. 149-72.
- Romano, N.C. Jr and Nunamaker, J.F. Jr (2001), "Meeting analysis: findings from research and practice", paper presented at the 34th Annual Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences, Maui, Hawaii.
- Schwartzman, H.B. (1986), "The meeting as a neglected social form in organizational studies", in Staw, B.M. and Cummings, L.L. (Eds), *Research in Organizational Behavior*, JAI Press, Greenwich, CT, pp. 233-58.
- Sims, H.P. Jr and Lorenzi, P. (1992), *The New Leadership Paradigm: Social Learning and Cognition in Organizations*, Sage, Newbury Park, CA.
- Strauss, A. and Corbin, J. (1990), *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques*, Sage, Newbury Park, CA.
- Tobia, P.M. and Becker, M.C. (1990), "Making the most of meeting time", *Training and Development Journal*, Vol. 44, pp. 34-8.
- Tracy, K. and Dimock, A. (2003), "Meetings: discursive sites for building and fragmenting community", *Communication Yearbook*, Vol. 28, pp. 127-65.
- Van Vree, W. (1999), *Meetings, Manners and Civilization: The Development of Modern Meeting Behaviour*, Leicester University Press, London.
- Zijlstra, F.R., Roe, R.A., Leonora, A.B. and Krediet, I. (1999), "Temporal factors in mental work: effects of interrupted activities", *Journal of Occupational & Organizational Psychology*, Vol. 71, pp. 163-85.

Further reading

- Zohar, D. (1999), "When things go wrong: the effect of daily work hassles on effort, exertion, and negative mood", *Journal of Occupational & Organizational Psychology*, Vol. 72, pp. 265-83.

Corresponding author

Joseph A. Allen can be contacted at: josephallen1@creighton.edu