



How to Overcome Meeting Overload

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Do you suffer from that sinking ‘too-many-meetings’ feeling at work? Looking for a way to claim back your work day? If so, you’re not alone. Barry Pokroy explores the meeting overload phenomenon—offering practical tips and explaining how it can actually have negative impacts on work-life balance, morale, and even performance.

According to a recent *Harvard Business Review*, the average executive spends 23 hours *per week* in meetings—which amounts to more than four hours every single day. So, if you’ve found yourself suffering from that sinking, ‘too-many-meetings’ feeling, rest assured, you’re not alone.

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In theory, meetings are a key component in an organization’s ability to operate effectively, but in today’s clustered reality they also reduce the time available to *actually* get work done. In addition, meeting overload often hurts workplace morale. The more meetings employees are forced to attend, the more they are likely to perceive the relentless interfacing as a sign of organizational distrust in their abilities—resulting in the erosion of a sense of independence within the company.



While the meeting mania undoubtedly damages one's sense of balance, it's a mistake to consider it as simply a personal nuisance. Ultimately, it's a business issue with the potential to negatively impact employee performance and the company's bottom line.

Do you find yourself thinking any (or all) of the following?

- I have too many meetings
- I am running from one meeting to the next (often late)
- I have no time to do my actual work
- I have no time to process what's been communicated in a meeting
- there was no reason for me to be in that meeting
- what a waste of time
- that meeting was too long

These are statements I hear daily in my coaching practice. And it is not okay. As a coach, who loves research, I opened my trusty Google to search just how many articles there are on meeting management—the answer, 2.5 billion results.

Yet my clients are still struggling, and organizations are still struggling as well.

The meeting planner

As a result, I have created some simple checklists, from both the meeting organizer (*Fig. 1*) and participant (*Fig. 2*) perspective, that can be implemented to immediately change the recurring dynamic. Yes—this is another article to add to Google's list, but hopefully its impact eases some pressure and releases some precious hours in the day.



Fig. 1, The Meeting Organizer Checklist



Fig. 2, The Meeting Participant Checklist

Overcoming meeting overload

It's at the strategic level that the biggest strides can be made, specifically through the development of a meeting policy that defines the company's broad meeting philosophy, and, based on this, its rules of engagement.

Ironically, developing such a policy may involve a steering committee, along with series of meetings, but the returns



are significant. Given that every organization has very different interpersonal dynamics, a meetings policy creates a common language to ensure that everyone in the company understands how—and why—they should manage their meeting schedule.

Crucially, when faced with challenges staff can refer to the policy rather than the immediate situation, without fear of repercussions. This allows them to avoid emotionally charged decision making while also growing their sense of personal agency.

At the end of the day I would like my clients to take personal responsibility—when it comes to meetings, it's okay to push back, it's okay to say no and it's okay to offer an alternate approach.

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