

Reducing video meeting (and conference room) fatigue



With many people working remotely during the pandemic, online meetings have become common. Zoom, one of the most common platforms, jumped from 10 million daily users in March 2020¹ to more than 300 million daily users in April 2021.²

All that time on screen is causing some employees to feel burned out. Yet the problem of being overscheduled in meetings has been around for far longer. So, whether you're on screen or in a conference room, it may be time to rethink when, how and why those meetings are being scheduled.

Consider these quick stats:

17%

of senior executives said their meetings are "**generally productive** uses of group and individual time."³

65%

of workers said **meetings keep them from getting their work done.**³

After a meeting, we need **25 minutes** to get our concentration back.⁴

An estimated

\$37 BILLION

is **lost every year** in the U.S. alone due to unproductive meetings.⁵

Rethinking meetings and attendees

If you're thinking about scheduling a meeting or were invited to one, start by asking yourself these questions:⁶

- **Is the meeting necessary?**
 - Could the material be covered by sending out an email instead?
 - Is an in-person or video meeting necessary, or would a quick phone call be sufficient?
- **Who really needs to attend?**
 - Can you keep the attendee list to the 6–8 maximum recommended?
 - Could you (or others) just read a summary of the meeting instead?
- **How long does the meeting need to be?**
 - Instead of 30 minutes, would 20 work? Instead of an hour, would 40 minutes work?

Making meetings work better

Once you've decided a meeting is essential, try these tips for making the most of the time.

Be clear about the goals. Let attendees know ahead of time why the meeting has been set. It might be to gather ideas, assign tasks, check in on a project's status or accomplish another goal. Also, tell attendees what prework is expected, so everyone arrives prepared.⁷

Create an agenda. Having an agenda set ahead of time can help the group stay on task. Also, be sure there's a clear meeting facilitator who can help keep the meeting moving. This may help prevent one attendee from dominating the conversation.^{5,8}

Start and end on time. Waiting for an attendee who's late to show up doesn't just waste time; it also conveys to others that their time isn't as valuable.⁸ Also, be sure to end on time. If your meeting runs long, you may be making attendees late for their next meeting and inconveniencing others. Even better, end a little early when possible. People need a moment to use the bathroom, grab a glass of water or simply clear their minds between tasks.⁹

Invite the right people. At a time when depression and anxiety rates are high, it's important to pay attention to whether we're overburdening someone.³ If you're inviting people who don't feel they need to be there, they're likely to multitask. Seeing others on their phones can reduce team morale.³ It can also waste time if people need to repeat themselves because someone wasn't listening.¹⁰ Some meeting planners recommend a "no tech" rule to help people stay focused.¹⁰

Decide if cameras will be on for virtual meetings. Set your expectations ahead of time, including whether you expect cameras to be on for video calls.^{2,10} Some people like using video so they can stay focused and see others' expressions. Others find them stressful when they're dealing with background interruptions like kids and dogs. Also, video meetings can be tough because there's no direct eye contact. People may worry about their appearance or wonder if others are paying attention.²

Consider the timing — and no-meeting days. For international teams that need to work around time zones, early-morning or evening meetings can interrupt family or personal time.³ Also, remember that millions of people have increased caregiving responsibilities during the pandemic. Flexible schedules have become more important, and meetings make them tough.¹¹ Some companies are trying to help employees get the time they need to focus on projects by instituting no-meeting days. Companies often choose Wednesdays or Fridays. Google executives have even instituted some no-meeting weeks at their company.¹²

While meetings will likely always be part of the workday for many people, they don't have to be a waste of time. So the next time an invitation pops up on your calendar, take a moment to consider whether it's necessary. Or, if you're considering sending one to others, ask yourself the same question. And, if the meeting is necessary, think about how you can make the best use of everyone's time.

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