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An introduction to the science of meetings at work

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published in
The Cambridge Handbook of Meeting Science
2015

Link to publication in VU Research Portal

citation for published version (APA)
Allen, J. A., Lehmann-Willenbrock, N. K., & Rogelberg, S. G. (2015). An introduction to the science of meetings at work. In J. A. Allen, N. Lehmann-Willenbrock, & S. G. Rogelberg (Eds.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Meeting Science* (pp. 3-11). Cambridge.

An introduction to the Cambridge handbook of meeting science: Why now?

CHAPTER · JULY 2015

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Chapter 1

An Introduction to *The Cambridge Handbook Meeting Science:*

Why Now?

Joseph A. Allen, Nale Lehmann-Willenbrock, & Steven G. Rogelberg

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 six 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 expected to have even more meetings in the future (Rogelberg, Scott, & Kello, 2007). The majority of a manager's work day is often spent on preparing meetings, sitting in meetings, or processing meeting results (e.g., Van Vree, 2011). It is likely that most

management spend more of their time on meeting related activities than any other singular 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 for advice books on how to run meetings (July, 2014) yields 475 hits. Topics range from planning and leading engaging meetings (e.g., Harvard Business Review, 2014) to collaborating in meetings (e.g., Canfield, 2011) to abandoning meetings altogether (e.g., Ressler & Thompson, 2008). Astonishingly however, a scientific look at meetings as a focal topic remains largely elusive. Granted, science certainly exists that examines constructs/events relevant to meetings and meeting attendees. For example, a body of research on teams and leadership exists – 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 paramount. Meeting science is the study of what happens before, during, and after meetings in the workplace. It is a look at the psychological, sociological, anthropological underpinnings and consequences of meetings at work. It not only examines meetings as a mechanism/tool for communication and work, but 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 is not necessarily the aim of any single

research project or stream. However, the practice of running effective meetings often benefits from the scientific study thereof (see Chapter 30).

Perhaps the first milestone in the science of workplace meetings can be located in Helen Schwartzman's seminal work, "The meeting: gatherings in organizations and communities" (1989), which highlighted 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 provide the current state of the field, in terms of the scientific study of meetings at work. Rather than a practice-oriented, self-help book, all chapters in this volume offer perspectives and are based on or offer new empirical/theoretical findings. Each chapter is focused on specific activities before, during, or after meetings that meaningfully impact 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.

Defining Meetings

Meeting scholars and researchers continue to grapple with defining meetings generally. In an early scholarly treatment of meetings, Schwartzman (1986) defined them as prearranged gatherings of two or more individuals for the purpose of work-related interaction. Consistently, and more recently, Rogelberg et al. (2006) defined meetings as purposeful work-related interactions occurring between at least two individuals that have more structure than a simple

chat, but less than a lecture. Rogelberg et al. (2006) continue, 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 a combination. In essence, these are the working definitions that many scholars in various disciplines use for operationalizing the meeting. As helpful as these definitions are, they struggle 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 the underlying intangible essence of a meeting. For example, Van Vree (2011) pointed out 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 rather new area of research inquiry. Though practitioners and managers identified meetings as important target for improvement initiatives as early as the 1950's (see Strauss and Strauss 1951), Helen B. Schwartzman (1989) was arguably the first to take a scientific approach to the study of meetings in and of themselves as a focal target of inquiry as mentioned above. In her book she compared and contrasted meetings in an American mental health organization with meetings that occur in non-Western societies. Through this she examined the significance of meetings in American 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. Initially, Schwartzman followed the 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 additional element to the importance in studying workplace meetings by tracing the development of the modern meeting form through the historical development of Western civilization. However, in the early 2000s a turning point for meetings research seemed to occur where scholars started investigating the phenomenon in and of itself (and not just a contextual factor or container of sorts to study teams) from a variety of perspectives and using various methods and techniques. These studies include investigating 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 & Seidle, 2008), meeting effectiveness (Luong & Rogelberg, 2005), and so on. These studies continue to serve the basis for the more recent expansion of meetings research, including the study of team meetings and team processes (see Chapter 2 for further treatment of this). In fact, given the slow start to meetings research generally, the last few years have brought quite a bit of attention, including special issues in journals 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 have 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 have grouped the different chapters according to their specific scientific focus. Following three introductory chapters (part I) that open up the scientific field of studying meetings at work, our framework for meeting science distinguishes four consecutive sections: Setting the meeting stage, in terms of the activities and events that precede a meeting (part II); the meeting itself, in terms of the communicative and emotional dynamics that comprise within meetings 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 or 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 was helpful for organizing the different contributions with their specific approaches and research foci within the area of meeting science. However, the framework should not be viewed as static. Meetings are rarely isolated events, and the different sections in the book may be interconnected. For example, what happens in terms of setting the stage for the meeting will very likely impact the meeting itself. Setting up meeting design characteristics or training meeting leaders will affect what happens in the meeting. As another example, the way meeting attendees feel after leaving a meeting will likely impact the way they enter their next meeting with the same group of attendees. After attending a pleasant meeting, there may be more pre-meeting talk with this meeting attendee group leading up to their next meeting. There may also be carryover effects in terms of the processes in one group meeting leading 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 following we provide an overview of the different parts of the book and their constituent sections an individual chapter contributions. It is our hope that this overview will provide a guide to readers which will allow them to target specific chapters that could peak their interest in terms of how their own meetings occur as well as their potential research questions concerning meetings in general.

I. Introducing the science of workplace meetings

This introductory chapter is followed by two contributions 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

Following the introduction chapters, the next section focuses on contextual factors at various levels that set the stage for the meeting. These include pre-meeting activities such as meeting design and meeting leadership training, the composition of meeting attendees, the organizational and cultural context surrounding a meeting, and pre-meeting communication.

Contextual factors that set the meeting stage can be found at several levels. At the micro or individual level, Isabelle Odermatt, Cornelius König, and Martin Kleinmann (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 (chapter 5). At the meso or group level, two chapters focus on the composition of meeting attendee groups. 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 will affect meeting processes and outcomes (chapter 6). 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 (chapter 7).

In terms of the macro meeting context, Wendelien van Eerde and Claudia Buengeler take a descriptive-comparative approach and examine how the national cultural context impacts the ways in which work meetings are structured and perceived (chapter 8). Moving to the organizational level, Jared Hansen and Joe Allen discuss how organizational policies, procedures, and practices can promote meetings and present a measure of firm meeting orientation (chapter 9). In chapter 10, Martin Duffy and Brendan O'Rourke discuss how meetings systemically manifest, contribute to, and sustain collective mind over time in organizations.

The meeting stage section rounds off with a contribution by Michael Yoerger, Kyle Francis, and Joe Allen highlighting the role of pre-meeting talk, in terms of the verbal communication that occurs before a meeting begins, in individual perceptions of meeting effectiveness (chapter 11).

III. The meeting itself

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

Capturing and understanding dynamics within meetings

In terms of the conversational dynamics in meetings, the first theoretical perspective on meeting processes is offered 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 (chapter 12). Next, Birte Asmuß describes meeting interaction from a multimodal perspective and applies conversation analysis to the study of multimodal strategy meetings (chapter 13). In chapter 14, Steve Beck, Emily Paskewitz, and Joann Keyton review the interdisciplinary meetings 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 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 (chapter 15). Nils Sauer,

Annika Meinecke, and Simone Kauffeld argue that responses among meeting participants can be understood as ties in an interaction network and show how social network analysis can be applied for examining meeting interaction data (chapter 16). Next, Marcella Hoogeboom and Celeste Wilderom explore leader behaviors during organizational staff meetings and compare surveyed prototypical leader perceptions with actual leader behavioral data (chapter 17). A further methodological contribution is offered 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 (chapter 18).

In terms of the emotional rather than the conversational dynamics within the meeting itself, two chapters focus on individual as well as group-level emotional experiences in meetings. Focusing on the within-meeting experience of individual meeting attendants, Jane Thomas and Joe Allen consider meetings as emotion regulation episodes and construct a multilevel conceptual model of emotion regulation in workplace meetings (chapter 19). Moving to the team level, 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 (chapter 20).

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

with the development of a theory-based meeting process model that is practically applicable for navigating the complexities of different meeting phases (chapter 22).

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 discusses how meeting effectiveness can be enhanced when member expertise is effectively utilized and offers recommendations for improving information utilization during meetings (chapter 23). Christoph Haug focuses on consensus as a meeting output and differentiates consensus practices in decision-making meetings (chapter 24). This section is concluded by Roni Reiter-Palmon and Stephanie Sands, who review findings and offer recommendations for facilitating creative performance as a focal meeting outcome (chapter 25).

IV. Special types of meetings

The fourth part of our book focuses on very specific meeting purposes, or special cases of organizational meetings. The first two contributions in this section focus on post event 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 contribution on special types of meetings focus on virtual meeting contexts. Brooke Allison, Marissa Shuffler-Porter, and Allison Wallace review the evidence and develop guidelines for facilitating virtual meetings (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 (ch. 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 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 (ch. 30). Finally, Helen Schwartzman finishes the book by synthesizing key ideas presented and reflecting upon the progress made since starting the scientific investigation of meetings (ch. 31).

Closing remarks

The purpose of this book is to provide the current state of the field in terms of the scientific study of meetings. Rather than a practice-oriented, self-help book per se, this edited volume comprises theoretically and empirically based chapters focused on the activities before, during, and after meetings that meaningfully impact 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. The book 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 meetings 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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