Meeting load paradox: Balancing the benefits and burdens of work meetings

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Abstract Work meetings are a significant part of professional life and have increasingly become a vehicle for organizations to get work accomplished. Recently, virtual meetings have become a more prominent feature of employees' work lives, and scholarly attention to the changing nature of work-meeting dynamics has increased in tandem. Unsurprisingly, these circumstances have increased the number of meetings individuals participate in and the number of mediums through which these meetings occur. In this article, we introduce the meeting load paradox: increased meetings allow employees to better contribute to their organizations while consuming more of their personal resources. As such, an increased meeting load is only effective up to a certain threshold. To demonstrate this empirically, we conducted a field study with 199 full-time employees, providing initial evidence of one manifestation of the meeting load paradox (i.e., meeting participation, engagement, and creative performance increase as meeting load increases curvilinearly, creating an inverted U-shape effect). We find that a virtual medium increases the curvilinear effect while employee conscientiousness flattens the curvilinear effect. We discuss the important implications of these findings and ways employees and managers can navigate the meeting load paradox to thrive amid the proliferation of workplace meetings.

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1. Introduction

Meetings are ubiquitous in employees' and work leaders' daily lives (Rogelberg et al., 2007). On any

given day, much of the work encompassing organizational life is accomplished via meetings. As such, leaders spend 23 hours of their workweek attending meetings (Perlow et al., 2017), while employees can spend as much as 85% of their time at work in meetings (Laker et al., 2022). Defined as "communicative event[s] involving three or more people who agree to assemble for a purpose ostensibly related to the functioning of an organization or group" (Schwartzman, 1989, p. 7), meetings have captured the attention of practitioners, while the science of meetings has interested scholars for more than three decades (Lindquist et al., 2020; Schwartzman, 1986). This vast amalgamation of practitioner-oriented and scientific knowledge has identified important guidelines and crucial antecedents such as the medium, time, and the role of leaders in ensuring meeting effectiveness (e.g., Haynes, 1998; Leach et al., 2009; Nixon & Littlepage, 1992; Rogelberg et al., 2006; Streibel, 2007). While this previous work has significantly improved our understanding of workplace meetings, open questions remain regarding the ability of individuals and organizations to truly thrive amidst the proliferation of meetings in our contemporary world (Goh et al., 2021).

As the nature of work has changed, and remote work has emerged as a common work arrangement, virtual meetings have become an increasingly common aspect of individuals' work lives (K. Reed & Allen, 2021). Among other factors, the COVID-19 pandemic was one of the key catalysts for these changes, dramatically increasing the number of people relying on virtual meetings to conduct their work at home, as they could not physically attend work (Chong et al., 2020). As organizations and their leaders adapted to the COVID-19 pandemic, the mode of work meetings completely flipped. For example, before October 2019, about 80% of work meetings that leaders attended or led were face-to-face, only 4% were completely virtual, and 13% were hybrid. By the middle of 2020, 60% of work meetings were virtual, and only 11% were face-to-face (K. Reed & Allen, 2021). And while the pandemic's end has launched the beginnings of a shift toward more face-to-face meetings—at least among some occupations—most work meetings will likely retain a virtual element in which some people attend remotely (Spataro, 2020). Like face-to-face meetings, virtual meetings and their antecedents and outcomes are unique in their effect on employees' personal lives. The new work arrangements ushered in by the pandemic have necessitated that employees and their partners perform work and family roles simultaneously in

the same physical space, initiating unique demands on employees and their partners (Shockley et al., 2021).

In addition to changes in the format of meetings, the number of meetings employees participate in has increased, causing some scholars to refer to the burgeoning number of meetings employees participate in as "meeting madness" (Perlow et al., 2017). Organizational madness about meetings can certainly enable greater coordination, information exchange, and task execution as meetings are a primary vehicle for productivity and contribution. Still, meetings can also exact severe personal costs, including stress, boredom, and burnout (Lehmann-Willenbrock et al., 2016). This state of affairs challenges employees and leaders of meetings and creates a paradox of sorts. In this article, we label this the *meeting load paradox*: the more meetings employees and leaders attend, the greater opportunity they have to contribute to their organization yet the less personal resources and motivation they have to draw upon for their contributions. The work lives of most individuals include a long list of meetings to attend and or lead. This article is intended to introduce this paradox and demonstrate the curvilinear influence that meeting load has on employee participation, engagement, and creativity. In doing so, we address the following research question: Is the influence of meeting load on employee participation, engagement, and creativity nonlinear?

To answer this question, we present a field study that empirically demonstrates the paradoxical relationship between meeting load, meeting participation, and creative performance. More specifically, we find that the relationship between meeting participation, creative performance, and meeting load is curvilinear in nature. At a certain threshold, the benefits of increasing the number of meetings employees participate in the shift from an overall advantage to a burden. In the following sections, we first describe and define the meeting load paradox. Next, we examine the evidence scholars and practitioners have accumulated demonstrating the positive ways meetings contribute to our work lives (e.g., Allen et al., 2016). After this, we review the extant literature on the personal costs associated with workplace meetings (e.g., Lehmann-Willenbrock et al., 2016). We then present a field study examining the curvilinear relationship between meeting load, creative performance, and meeting participation. We discuss the implications of our findings for scholars and practitioners alike and discuss the important practical ways that employees and

managers can manage the meeting load paradox. Our article concludes with a discussion of the future of workplace meetings and how the meeting load paradox may influence it.
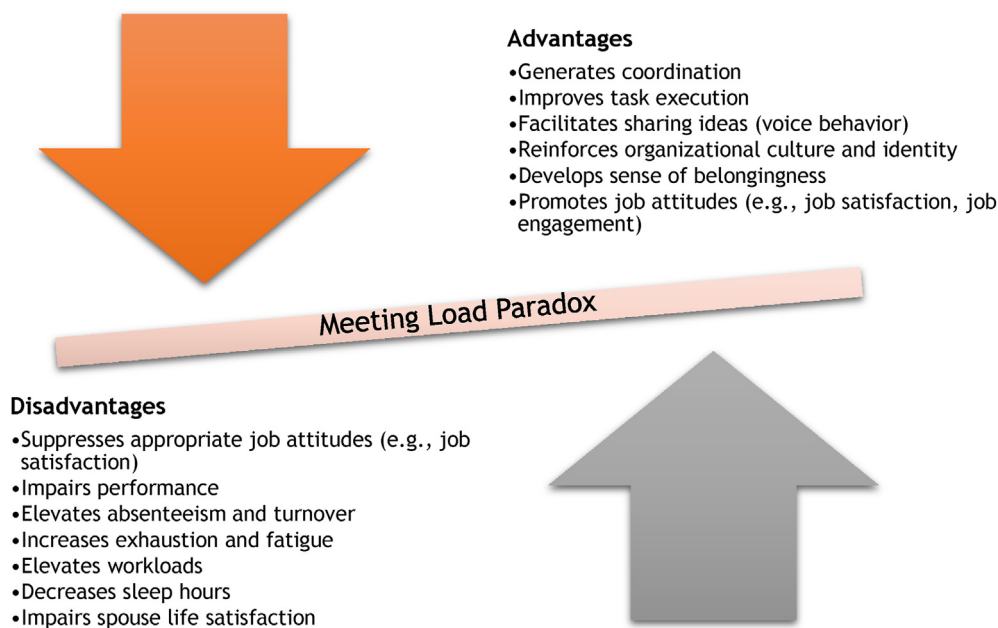
2. Meeting load paradox

Paradoxes, or "the persistent contradiction between interdependent elements" (Schad et al., 2016, p. 10), are a part of organizational life and define many of the difficulties individuals and organizations face. One group of scholars noted that "the key characteristic in paradox is the simultaneous presence of contradictory, even mutually exclusive elements" (Cameron & Quinn, 1988, p. 2). There is an interdependent, contradictory tension with increasing meeting load. While more meetings can promote greater productivity, they can also deplete personal resources. We define this interdependent contradiction of increasing meeting load as the meeting load paradox (see Figure 1). In other words, the relationship between increasing meeting load and meeting outcomes is curvilinear in nature. For employees and managers to be the most productive and happy, it is important to hold just the right number of meetings—not too few or too many. To effectively address this paradox, managers will want to promote both the organizational contributions from meetings and, at the same time, manage the costs put upon individuals.

3. Contributing through work meetings

Workplace meetings provide an avenue for employees to contribute to their teams and organizations (Kauffeld & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2012). From a leader's perspective, participation in workplace meetings provides an opportunity to coordinate work (Wodak et al., 2011), reinforce the culture and identity of an organization (Djordjilovic, 2012), and provide timely correction and praise for employees (Malouff et al., 2012). From an employee's perspective, meeting participation enables employees to share their creative ideas (Kauffeld & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2012), develop a sense of belonging (Persson et al., 2021), and experience increased feelings of motivation (Allen & Rogelberg, 2013). Furthermore, meetings can help promote appropriate job satisfaction, engagement, and performance (Rogelberg et al., 2010).

In a seminal study of the importance of workplace meetings, Rogelberg et al. (2010) explored the influence that meetings had on employees' perceptions of job satisfaction. Many theories and models of job satisfaction include satisfaction with one's boss and coworkers (Aldag & Brief, 1978; Hulin & Smith, 1965). Most of the meetings employees participate in are with their peers and their direct supervisor, so one might assume that their satisfaction with these individuals likely captures much or even all of their meeting

Figure 1. Summary of meeting load paradox

Advantages
- Generates coordination
- Improves task execution
- Facilitates sharing ideas (voice behavior)
- Reinforces organizational culture and identity
- Develops sense of belongingness
- Promotes job attitudes (e.g., job satisfaction, job engagement)

Meeting Load Paradox

Disadvantages
- Suppresses appropriate job attitudes (e.g., job satisfaction)
- Impairs performance
- Elevates absenteeism and turnover
- Increases exhaustion and fatigue
- Elevates workloads
- Decreases sleep hours
- Impairs spouse life satisfaction

satisfaction. Rogelberg et al. (2010) performed two studies of working adults and showed, empirically, that even when accounting for these components of job satisfaction (i.e., satisfaction with coworkers and boss), meeting satisfaction remained a significant positive antecedent to overall job satisfaction. This suggests that meetings wield a unique influence on employee perceptions of job satisfaction—an influence that is not solely attributable to the interaction employees have with their bosses and peers. Rather, the influence meetings have on job satisfaction goes beyond the social interaction they provide. In a recent article, Flinchum et al. (2022) argued that one-on-one meetings provide a unique opportunity for managers and direct reports to coordinate and ensure effective performance in their work.

Allen and Rogelberg (2013) followed up on this study to ascertain the influence that meeting effectiveness has on employee engagement. The authors argued that when managers lead and manage meetings effectively, they can create an environment for their subordinates in which the psychological conditions for engagement (e.g., meaningfulness) could emerge (Kahn, 1990). In support of their predictions, the authors found that the psychological conditions for engagement emerge, and overall employee engagement occurred when meetings were relevant to employees, time efficient (e.g., start and end on time), and provided employees opportunities to express themselves. Given that employee engagement has a strong positive relationship with overall employee performance (Anitha, 2014), these findings demonstrate the meaningful contribution that meetings may have in promoting individual performance and organizational success. Taken together, meetings increase the satisfaction, engagement, and voice that employees contribute to their organizations. In this way, more meetings can yield positive benefits.

4. Personal costs of more meetings

Given the productive potential that more meetings afford individuals and organizations, one might conclude that we should have more meetings and not fewer. While increasing the meeting load can yield many positive outcomes, the relative increase in productivity that more meetings may produce can inadvertently exact personal costs on meeting attendees themselves. For example, in a classic ethnographic study within a product development team, Leslie Perlow (1997) found that too many meetings and interruptions disrupted the productivity of the team because the type of deep knowledge work that engineers needed to think through complex issues was impossible with no quiet time. The organization decided to institute a period of time from 9 am—12 pm, 3 days a week, in which no meetings or interruptions could occur. With this change in place, productivity improved. While previous research and theory suggest that meetings can inspire employees, most meetings fall short of accomplishing this (Mroz, Allen, et al., 2018), as more than half of all meetings are negatively rated by meeting attendees (K. Reed & Allen, 2021). In addition, research on workplace meetings found that meetings harm job attitudes and well-being, particularly when people feel that meetings interrupt their workflow throughout the day (Rogelberg et al., 2006). Allen et al. (2012) found that when employees were asked how they felt about having more meetings, their explanations indicated that they saw more meetings as a time constraint, making it increasingly difficult to progress on the tasks they needed to accomplish. Other employees explained that more meetings increased redundancy and added to their workload. In short, increasing the meeting load employees bear can sap employees' personal resources, incurring real personal costs and causing fatigue (Luong & Rogelberg, 2005) and exhaustion (Allen et al., 2022). The personal costs may be especially acute for employees working remotely who participate in virtual meetings as the boundaries between their work and home lives are increasingly blurred (Shockley et al., 2021).

Furthermore, recent work by Laker et al. (2022) found remarkable results for organizations that instituted meeting-free days. Specifically, among the 76 companies surveyed (Laker et al, 2022):

> When meetings were reduced by 40% (the equivalent of two days), we found that productivity increased by 71% because employees felt more independent and self-reliant. They stopped feeling cornered by their schedules, they had their own to-do lists prepared, they felt responsible for their execution, and this consequently increased their satisfaction by 52%.

However, the authors also found that completely eliminating meetings altogether also decreased employee productivity, engagement, and satisfaction. Given these paradoxical outcomes, we suggest that the relationship between meeting load and important meeting outcomes is curvilinear in nature. To address our research question

and empirically examine the meeting load paradox, we carried out a field study to explore the curvilinear relationship between meeting load, meeting participation, engagement, and creative performance. We also examine how employees' personality characteristics and the medium of meetings might moderate this relationship.

5. Field study

To empirically examine the curvilinear nature of the relationship between meeting load, employee participation, engagement, and creativity—one manifestation of the meeting load paradox—we conducted a field study with 199 full-time employees on the Prolific platform. The basic characteristics of the sample respondents and a summary of the study results are presented in Table 1.

5.1. Measures

In the survey, we asked participants about the relationship between three important outcomes associated with meeting load: meeting participation, engagement, and creative performance. We measured meeting load by asking participants to report the number of meetings they typically attend in a week and how many of their weekly meetings were held virtually. We include the other

questions we asked supervisors and their respective scale reliabilities in Table 2.

5.2. Analysis

To statistically analyze the curvilinear nature of the relationship between meeting load, meeting participation, engagement, and creative performance, we conducted hierarchical linear regression. Our analysis uncovered a positive relationship between meeting load and employees' creative performance, work engagement, and active participation in meetings. However, we also found that the relationship between meeting load and creative performance, as well as meeting participation, was curvilinear in nature (Figures 2 and 3). Specifically, the relationship between meeting load, creative performance, and participation took an inverted U-shape, indicating that once the number of meetings exceeds a certain threshold, both creative performance and participation rates significantly decline.

We also investigated the factors that could influence the nonlinear relationship between meeting load, creative performance, and participation. Our results revealed that employees who are conscientious and mindful tend to maintain their engagement in a higher number of meetings. In addition, we found that employees who experience better sleep quality are more likely to

Table 1.   Correlations, means, and standard deviations of key study variables

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Independent variable									
1. Number of meetings attend per week	7.00	5.87							
Dependent variables									
2. Creative performance	4.88	1.24	0.23**						
3. Meeting participation	4.90	1.29	0.37***	0.57**					
4. Employee engagement	4.47	1.36	0.15*	0.57***	0.41***				
Moderating variables									
5. Managerial Liking	4.98	1.40	0.17*	0.31***	0.31***	0.45***			
6. Virtual Meeting	4.15	2.20	0.30***	−0.05	0.02	−0.02	0.17*		
7. Conscientiousness	4.66	1.25	−0.04	0.14*	0.19**	0.23**	0.09	−0.00	

$***p < 0.001$, $**p < 0.01$, $*p < 0.05$.
Note. 199 full-time employees completed the surveys. The average age of participants is 36.54 years ($SD = 10.81$); 43% of them are male; with 7.07 years ($SD = 7.04$); and 56% of them had a supervisory role. Results indicated the inverted U-shape association of number of meetings and 1) creativity ($B = −0.537$, $SE = 0.184$; $p = 0.004$); 2) Participation ($B = −0.381$, $SE = 0.170$; $p = 0.025$), but not 3) Engagement ($p = 0.116$). Conscientiousness ($B = −0.675$, $SE = 0.241$, p = 0.005), sleep quality ($B = −0.345$, $SE = 0.136$, $p = 0.011$), and managerial liking ($B = −0.752$, $SE = 0.331$, $p = 0.023$) moderate the curvilinear relationship between meeting load and participation. Virtual meetings amplify the inverted U-shape relationship between the number of meetings and creativity ($B = 0.267$, $SE = 0.130$, $p = 0.040$), and flatten the relationship between the number of meetings and participation ($B = −0.267$, $SE = 0.130$, $p = 0.040$).

sustain their engagement in a larger number of meetings. Moreover, employees' affinity for their managers played a role in sustaining the positive relationship between meeting load and work participation, as those with a positive opinion of their managers tended to stay engaged in more

Construct	Items	Reliability
Meeting participation (Yoerger et al., 2015)	I contribute to meetings.	($\alpha = 0.89$)
	I speak often during meetings.	
	I provide at least one valuable insight in meetings.	
	I am an important member in meetings.	
	Meetings cannot be successful without me.	
Creativity (Sacramento et al., 2013)	I suggest many ideas.	($\alpha = 0.94$)
	I suggest new possibilities for the project.	
	I suggest new ideas concerning varied aspects of the project.	
	I suggest very diverse ideas.	
	I suggest feasible ideas for the project.	
	I generate novel but operable work-related ideas.	
	I demonstrate originality in my work.	
Engagement (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003)	When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work.	($\alpha = 0.93$)
	I feel happy when I am working intensely.	
	At my work, I feel bursting with energy.	
	At my job, I feel strong and vigorous.	
	I am immersed in my work.	
	My job inspires me.	
	I am enthusiastic about my job.	
	I am proud of the work that I do.	
	I get carried away when I am working.	
Conscientiousness (Donnellan et al., 2006)	Get chores done right away.	($\alpha = 0.75$)
	Forget to put things back in their proper place. (R)	
	Like order.	
	Make a mess of things. (R)	

Table 2. Survey items

Figure 2. Curvilinear relationship between meeting load and creativity
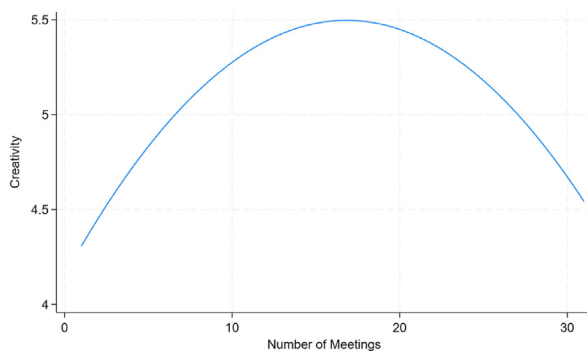
Figure 3. Curvilinear relationship between meeting load and employee participation
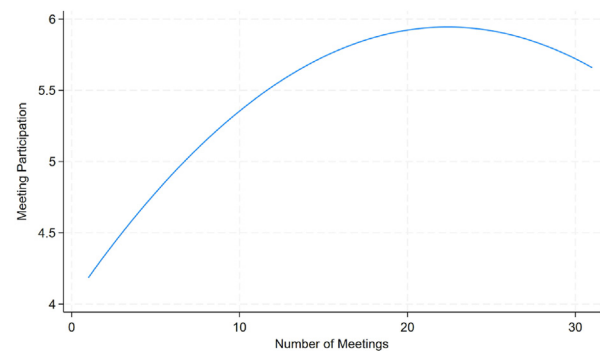
meetings. Finally, we observed that the meeting format (i.e., virtual vs. in-person) can impact these nonlinear relationships. More virtual meetings led to increased meeting participation for a greater number of meetings but resulted in decreased creativity levels for a smaller number of meetings.

Taken together, our results provide initial evidence of one manifestation of the meeting load paradox, showing that the relationship between more meetings and creative performance, engagement, and participation is curvilinear, taking an inverted U-shape. With the reality of the meeting load paradox and these curvilinear effects specifically in mind, our research question then becomes: What can employees and leaders do to manage the meeting load paradox? In the following sections, we discuss several ways that employees and leaders can help organizations manage the meeting load paradox.

6. Practical applications for managing the paradox: Employees

One of the ways that employees can manage the meeting load paradox is to become meeting crafters. Research on job crafting indicates that rather than managers being the only designers of jobs, employees themselves can craft their jobs physically, relationally, or cognitively to derive more significant meaning in their work (Bakker, 2010; Letona-Ibañez et al., 2021). Likewise, participants can craft their meetings in a number of ways.

6.1. Manage meeting load

First, building upon the curvilinear findings presented, employees should overtly work to manage their individual meeting load. The findings show diminishing returns and even reductions in overall participation and creativity at high levels of meeting load. As such, employees can and should look at their calendars, evaluate the number and type of meetings, and see if there are any they can remove. For example, if they see a meeting with an unclear purpose or another in which their presence is unnecessary, they could ask the meeting leader if they could be excused from attending. Even a minor reduction in overall meeting load could push the employee back into the more positive side of the paradox.

6.2. Establish unity and understanding

Second, employees can use the meetings they attend to build unity with their colleagues and help establish common understanding (Schwartzman, 1986). This is done by simply engaging in the meeting, voicing ideas/concerns, and helping others do the same (Mroz, Allen, et al., 2018). Some of the earliest work on meetings described how they can help unify and build community. In that same way, employees can work toward coalitions of support, engage in the socialization of new colleagues, and ultimately increase the entitativity of the group as a whole via their work in meetings (Blanchard & Allen, 2022).

6.3. Learn the lay of the land

Third, employees can use the meeting to learn what they need to do or should do differently in the future. For example, one type of meeting that is becoming more common in most organizations is the after-action review or debrief (Allen et al., 2018). This meeting is about reflecting on recent activities and tasks to determine how they could be performed better. It is commonly used in military organizations, hospitals, and other high-reliability organizations (Keiser & Arthur, 2021). Such reflexivity within the group can help each member learn from what went well, what went wrong, and how things might be different in the future in a proactive manner. Every meeting can be an opportunity for employees and leaders to learn, thus facilitating continuous organizational improvement.

6.4. Stay prepared

Fourth, where possible, employees can prepare for the meeting beforehand (Odermatt et al., 2015). Meeting preparation is often as simple as knowing the purpose and giving it a minute's thought (K. M. Reed & Allen, 2022). In addition, a popular new strategy is referred to as the *silent meeting*, in which the group takes a few minutes to read a brief or memo on the topic(s) covered in a meeting before engaging in the work of a meeting (Rogelberg & Kreamer, 2019). Employees can even build such time into their schedules before meetings to ensure they are ready to share and contribute if desired. In this way, employees are also more likely to contribute during the meeting as their

understanding of the issues will be deeper and more focused.

6.5. Identify and facilitate work

Fifth, one of the least common behaviors regarding meeting characteristics is identifying and following up on action items (Cohen et al., 2011). However, an employee can take a note or two during the meeting, identify tasks they need to accomplish, and make the meeting a mechanism for goal-oriented accomplishment. By doing this, employees could begin to see meetings not as independent episodes of social interaction but as interdependent collaboration sessions (Romney et al., 2019). Most meeting leaders would likely appreciate employees holding others accountable for assignments given during the meeting, as it would help organizations build and maintain momentum toward their objectives.

6.6. Foster a positive experience

Sixth, by contributing to the success of meetings (e.g., arriving on time, coming prepared, voicing opinions and ideas), employees ensure that the meeting has the potential to be a good experience for everyone (K. M. Reed & Allen, 2022). How does that help with the meeting load paradox? Research has shown that one bad meeting often causes as many as three more meetings to clarify the problems caused by the bad meeting (K. Reed & Allen, 2021). Thus, the explosion in the number of meetings is partly due to so many bad meetings being held, necessitating even more meetings. Suppose these subsequent meetings are also badly planned and managed. In that case, it is not hard to imagine why the meeting load on employees has increased over time—not to mention additional factors (e.g., virtual meetings being the only way to interact with colleagues during a pandemic) that would contribute to increased meeting load for individuals.

7. Practical applications for managing the paradox: Leaders

Just as employees have the potential to manage the meeting load paradox, meeting leaders have an outsized opportunity to manage and alleviate its problematic aspects. One might argue that the meeting load paradox is primarily a function of mismanagement and ill-defined leadership responsibilities relative to meetings (Bagire et al., 2015). It is important to consider what managers can actually do to ensure the meeting load paradox does not diminish individuals' ability to thrive. We offer five ways that meeting leaders can manage the meeting load paradox and thereby improve the effectiveness of meetings for individuals and organizations.

7.1. Ask the right questions

First, leaders can pause and ask themselves two questions before proceeding to add yet another meeting to an already overloaded calendar:

1. Does the meeting have a purpose?

2. Does that purpose require collaboration?

If the leader says no to either of these questions, they should not schedule the meeting at all (K. M. Reed & Allen, 2022). Previous research on meeting load is clear that there is a limit to the efficacy of more meetings contributing to team effectiveness (Allen et al., 2022). We also know that the most common type of meeting is the information-sharing meeting (Kello & Allen, 2022), which rarely requires collaboration. If no collaboration is necessary, a leader should instead write an email or a memo or record an audio file or video and share it with whomever they intended to be part of the meeting. It is well documented that employees do not look forward to more meetings (Allen et al., 2012), and the overall meeting load increased dramatically during the COVID-19 pandemic (Shockley et al., 2021). The return on investment in meetings flips from positive to negative at a specific threshold. Thus, leaders should strive to reduce the overall meeting burden for themselves and others if they are close to or past that tipping point. Doing so may allow them to achieve more positive outcomes (e.g., increased participation in the meetings that remain).

7.2. Plan effective meetings

Second, leaders should follow simple strategies to plan and organize meetings to ensure they are effective. Mroz, Yoerger, and Allen (2018) identified a science-based list of these strategies a leader should consider before, during, and after meetings. Rather than review each of those here, we will simply say that they still apply now for all meeting modalities. Regardless of whether the meeting is face-to-face, virtual, hybrid, or teleconference, most of the best science-based behaviors for effective meetings are relevant and essential (K. M. Reed & Allen, 2022). And, unlike

bad meetings, good ones do not beget more meetings. A leader who facilitates high-quality meetings will help avoid the overload problem and likely enable the meaningful benefits of good meetings (Allen et al., 2012; Malouff et al., 2012).

7.3. Define the purpose, assignments, and takeaways

Third, to help ensure meetings are meaningful and build unity for employees, leaders must define a clear purpose and conclude with clear takeaways (Bang et al., 2010). This sounds simple, yet so many meetings do not have a defined purpose. In some organizations, as few as 10% of electronic meeting invites include an identifiable purpose. If that is the only communication regarding the meeting from the leader to the employees, how will they be able to prepare adequately? Furthermore, when a meeting is wrapping up, takeaways and assignments should be identified (Mroz, Yoerger, & Allen, 2018). Few things are as frustrating for employees as leaving a meeting not knowing what to do with the information and conversation that just occurred. By making meetings purposeful, this unfortunate experience can be avoided.

7.4. Delegate leadership

A fourth technique is to share the burden and opportunity of leading within the meeting. Expressly, a leader can delegate portions of the meeting to others to lead, guide, direct, and support the group (Lehmann-Willenbrock et al., 2016). Via delegation, leaders not only demonstrate vulnerability—thereby strengthening trust with team members (Romney & Holland, 2023)—but team members will also be physically empowered to share their ideas and build the kind of psychological safety essential for the entitativity that groups and teams need as they collaborate in an increasingly distributed work environment (Blanchard & Allen, 2022).

7.5. Foster meaning

Finally, leaders can create meaning in meetings for their employees. Unlike a typical employee, the leader is in a position to link the purpose of the meeting to the larger, meaningful goals of the organization. When leaders do this, they become meaning creators, enhance the impact of meetings, and reconnect the group to the organization's overall mission. From a group entitativity perspective, this links individual identity to group and organizational identity, thereby enabling collaborative performance enhancements (Blanchard & Allen, 2022).

8. The future of workplace meetings

Although these strategies will help reduce the personal costs associated with overall meeting load while enabling meetings' meaningful and productive nature to flourish, the future of meetings in the workplace will continue to make the meeting load paradox an issue that leaders must monitor regularly. Rather than taking meetings for granted, organizations should assess them systematically, evaluate managers' and employees' performance in the meeting environment, and reward those who lead and engage in effective meetings (K. M. Reed & Allen, 2022). Even so, there are several near-horizon issues leaders should be mindful of when managing the meeting load paradox.

8.1. Ensure employees are well-equipped

First, technology is central to modern workplace meetings and will continue to be essential to them in the future. It is both fortunate and unfortunate that meetings can take place anytime and anywhere due to available technology. However, the key to a successful face-to-face, virtual, or hybrid meeting is ensuring all participants can be seen and heard (K. M. Reed & Allen, 2022). That requires equipping both home offices and workplaces with the right technological tools for collaboration.

8.2. Get AI-savvy

Second, technological advances will not stop with the current camera-based meeting environments for both virtual and hybrid meetings. Instead, we should be preparing for the inclusion of AI in the workplace and the meeting setting. This could take the form of an AI assistant to help monitor chat or speaking time during virtual meetings, or the AI could become a more active participant in the meeting, creating true human-machine team interactions in nearly every workplace. This will necessitate establishing a policy for recording virtual meetings that accentuates the benefits of virtual meetings while reducing the drawbacks (Carradini et al., 2023). Preparation for these types of environments will require leaders to adapt and help train their employees to adapt.

8.3. Hold DEI trainings

Third, we anticipate diversity within organizations and meetings will continue to increase (Flory et al., 2021). Although this is a positive development, it requires more sensitivity to differences and more focus on enabling a psychologically safe environment.

Rather than assuming people will be sensitive, kind, and inclusive, organizations need to train people on communication strategies that foster inclusion overtly. Telling everyone to play nice is not enough to overcome biases, which are not always conscious (Fiarman, 2016). Again, taking meetings for granted has led to more than half being rated as poor. We should not be similarly disengaged with regard to cultivating welcoming, inclusive work environments.

8.4. Foster work-life balance

Fourth, the boundaries between work and home had already blurred before the meet-anywhere-at-any-time mindset began. With virtual and hybrid meeting technologies now prevalent, it is likely that the conflict between meetings, work, and home life will not abate. We expect that these conflicts will only increase (K. M. Reed & Allen, 2022). Therefore, employees and managers will need to enact policies, procedures, and practices to safeguard their time and the time of others. In short, employees and managers must become good stewards of each other's time (Rogelberg, 2019).

9. Conclusion

The reality of organizational life in contemporary organizations involves tensions and contradictions, not the least of which we have identified as the meeting load paradox. People need meetings. Teams need meetings. However, there are costs associated with having more or fewer meetings. It is these costs that organizations, their leaders, and their employees need to consider. At what point does the meeting load become a burden to employees and managers rather than lift them to better heights? As a meeting leader, knowing when to call a meeting and when one more meeting will harm their and others' productivity is often challenging to balance. However, as leaders remain open to feedback and have a fruitful dialogue with their coworkers, they will be able to effectively balance their calendars and free up those of their employees to unlock the productive potential inherent in meetings without draining the resources required to thrive at home and at work.

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