

# Effective Meetings

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Long and unstructured meetings have the same effect as a jammed printer. They paralyze the workflow and consume precious time. You can easily scale this effect by inviting more people to this kind of small talk.

by Franz Schwarenthorner

Many organizations are unsatisfied with their meetings and decision-making processes. There are many mistakes to be made. Meetings can last too long. Agendas can be overloaded with topics nobody is really working on. Meetings grow into endless discussions, often postponing decisions or trying to go for consensus for hours. Worst case: participants are unprepared or working on emails or slides. As a result, they often show an inappropriate discussion style by hopping between topics without any focus.

## An agile structure needs more meetings

This may sound like a threat to you, but as a matter of fact, agile organizations tend to hold more meetings than traditional ones. The good news is that as a result, agile organizations have developed several methods, tools and formats to overcome this dissatisfaction. Before shaping a laser-focused meeting, it may be very helpful to remind ourselves why we need this special meeting. One essential thing might be to ensure transparency of progress (How do we proceed? What is the status of goal achievement of individuals and the team? What do people need from others to fulfill their goals?). Another important function of a meeting might be to analyze and develop topics on strategic and operational level. Furthermore, meetings can be fruitful to ensure efficient and accepted decisions and to further develop your organization (adapt roles, teams, circles, etc.).

## The secret recipe of agile organizations

To make meetings and communication more efficient, agile organizations have developed a set of meeting principles. It is very important to stick to these principles. First, meetings are structured and short. Second, participation is consciously decided: Who attends re-



### Recommended reading

See how Holacracy tactical meetings work:  
[youtu.be/12KBvyJlwxA](https://youtu.be/12KBvyJlwxA)

For more details on Holacracy watch:  
[www.holacracy.org](http://www.holacracy.org)

gularly? Who is a guest? Who is not needed? Third, clear roles are defined to ensure efficiency: a host who organizes the meeting, a facilitator, a minute taker. Regarding facilitation, those meetings are much more straightforward than »conventional« ones. The facilitator is equipped with the necessary authority to act powerful (timeboxing, stopping people, dealing with one topic at a time, etc.). Agendas are reduced and focused; they usually follow a standard agenda with timeboxes for a limited number of discussion topics. As a result, people table topics with personal ambition, clear intentions and their proposals concerning how to handle them. Once applied, you will feel the gain in interest and energy. Discussions are stopped as soon as the proposers have gotten what they needed or when time is up. Decisions are not merely taken in consensus, but, e. g. in consent: the proposal is accepted unless there is an objection, the crucial question being: Do we see any reasons why adopting this proposal would cause harm or move us backward? This ensures faster decision making and supports a culture of accountability.

### Best practice examples

Looking into the practice of agile organizations, we can find many successful examples. For a start, Holacracy

or SCRUM (see page 48) are highly recommended. The developed standard formats obey the established principles and are therefore rather structured and strict. Holacracy basically differentiates among three formats: the tactical meeting, the governance meeting and the strategic meeting. The tactical meeting takes place weekly and its goals are to ensure transparency, update everyone and solve operational issues. A governance meeting is held every 4 to 12 weeks and it has the task of further developing the organization: »Looking back at the past few weeks ... did we realize tasks which are not assigned to a role? Should we adapt some roles? Should we define a new role (or skip an existing one)? Should we adapt a circle or any other element of our organization?« Compared to a »traditional organization,« these questions are asked more often than every 1 to 2 years. Adapting to the answers on a monthly or quarterly basis helps to develop an agile organization much faster. The semi-annual or annual strategic meeting helps to shape the vision of your organization (see illustration).

Interested in a better meeting structure with more promising results? The good news is, you can easily start experimenting with meeting principles or formats. You will most definitely see a difference immediately – even in a non-agile organizational environment. ●

## Tactical meeting

weekly, lasting 60 to 90 minutes

