

The State of Meetings Report:

The new rules of engagement

North America
Online survey
4,000 adults in
U.S. and Canada.

Business leaders
ranging from Managers
and Team Leads to
CEOs and Presidents.

With representatives
from Sales, Marketing,
Finance, Legal, HR,
Operations, and more.

Baby Boomers to Gen Z,
Coast to coast.

Introduction

Our relationship with meetings has been on the rocks recently. Meetings are as much a central feature of the work lives of 1 billion knowledge workers around the world now as they have ever been, and yet it feels like our relationship with meetings has never been in a worse place.

Once a common in-person experience, meetings are now frequently held either fully remotely or hybrid. The frequency and length of meetings has ballooned, while simultaneously they have never felt less productive. In fact, many of us seem to regard meetings as just a bad use of our time. Period.

So where are we going wrong? What do we really think about meetings? And importantly, how can we fix this?

In recent years, our expectations of meetings have undergone rapid and fundamental change. In this report, we aim

to cut through the cliches and memes to better understand our love/hate relationship with meetings. From Managers and Team Leads to CEOs and Presidents across a broad spectrum of industries, we ask the important questions about what pet peeves leaders have in meetings, bad habits we have all developed, and much more, seeking to understand their potential from the inside, and—crucially—how we can make it better.



CHAPTER 1

Are meetings dead?

CHAPTER 2

Mind the engagement gap

CHAPTER 3

Higher engagement = Increased productivity?

CHAPTER 4

Talk less, listen more

CHAPTER 5

So what can we do about it?

CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

Are meetings dead?

...no, but they may be on life support

Despite a prevailing mood of dislike - even mockery - of meetings in popular culture, (and as reactionary business leaders are campaigning for an all-out ban on meetings), business leaders actually have a rosier view of meetings than you might think.

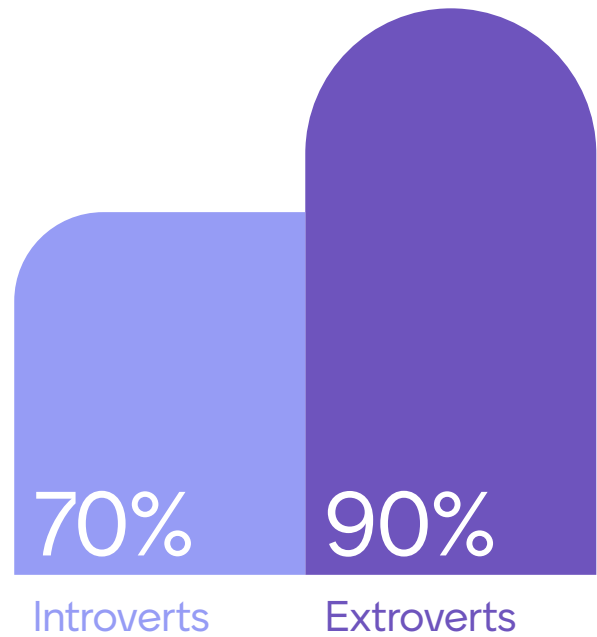
When we asked respondents whether they think meetings are dead, their response was a pretty firm "No". **Seventy-two percent** said they did not think meetings were dead, with many expressing overwhelmingly positive feelings about meetings.

When asked whether their meetings are effective, **85%** of respondents said they were, with **94%** agreeing that meetings as a format are generally a productive way to move work forward.

85%

of North American business leaders think they run effective meetings.

"The meetings I attend are effective"



That said, when it comes to effectiveness, interestingly, there were notable differences in responses between those who identify as introverts vs. those who identify as extroverts. **Ninety percent** of extroverts agreed that meetings are effective, in comparison to just **70%** of those who identified as introverts.

This **20%** difference illustrates how traditional meeting styles may not be as effective for all types of workers. If we make a cultural assumption that managers are more likely to be extroverts than individual contributors, what proportion of workers are more often than not sitting through meetings that they don't think are an effective use of their time?

It's clear that leaders need to make a change.

We asked respondents what irritates them most about their meeting experience right now. By far and away the biggest pet peeve is when participants do not speak up, engage or provide input. In fact, **52%** of respondents identified lack of or low engagement as their biggest pain point.

According to the survey results, engagement is the leading issue for people leading meetings in 2023. In comparison, the next three biggest pet peeves are poor planning (**41%**), one person talking for too long (**36%**), and technology not working (**31%**).

52%

of North American business leaders identify their team not engaging, speaking up, or providing input as their biggest challenge in meetings.

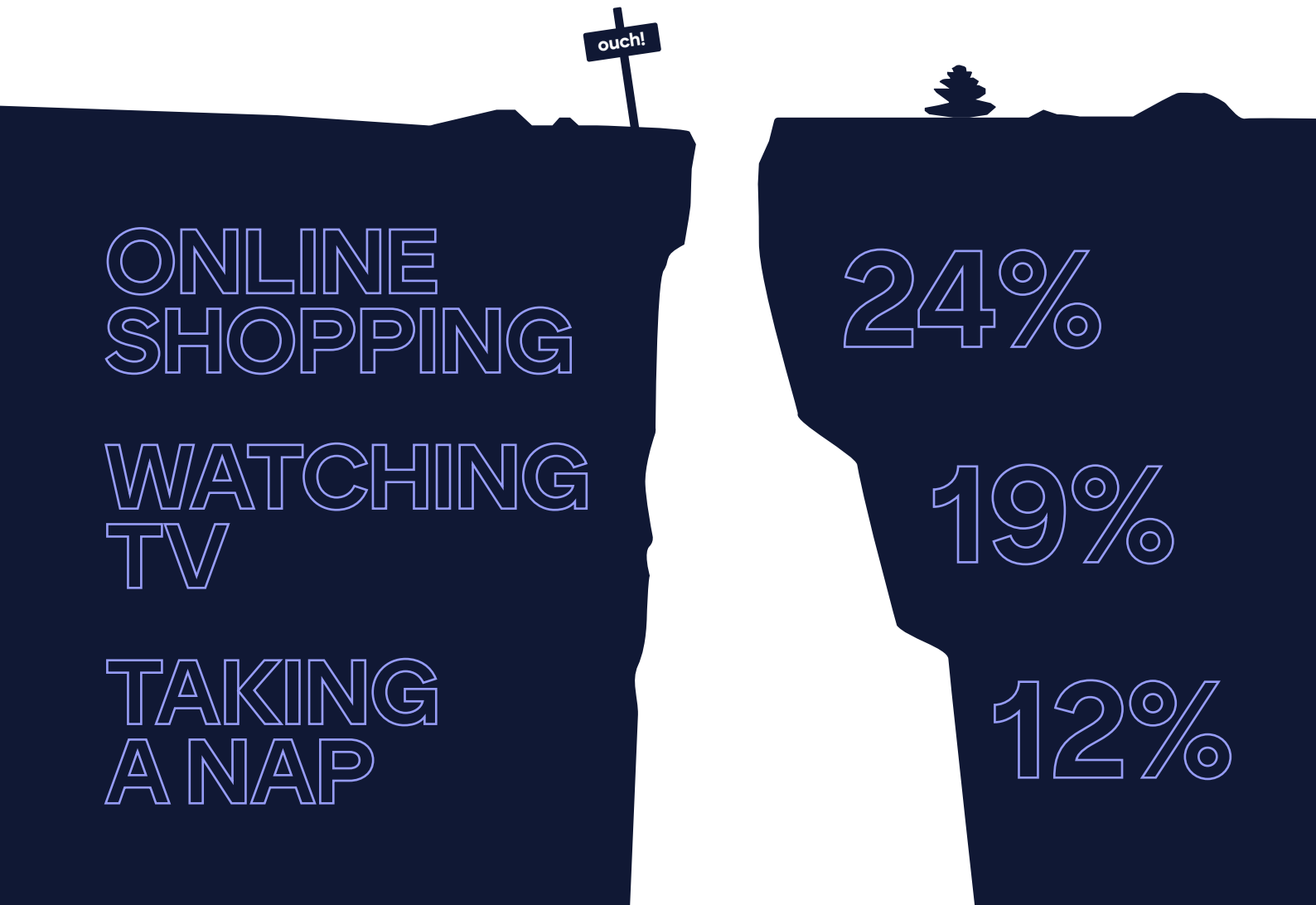


Mind the engagement gap

This crisis in engagement may be a hangover from the pandemic years. Especially for hybrid and remote meetings, we all developed bad meeting habits that we are finding difficult to shake - and managers are no exception.

When we asked our respondents whether they had developed any bad meeting habits since the pandemic, more than half (61%) admitted that they had.

About 1 in 3 said they are prone to checking social media (39%) or texting (38%) during work meetings. Others admitted to online shopping (24%), watching TV (19%), and even taking a nap (12%) during meetings.



Higher engagement = Increased productivity?

As we might expect, there is a strong relationship between engaging meetings and higher levels of productivity. But is the link between the two as strong as it should be?

(participation) all move in a positive direction when employee engagement is high.

Is it not alarming that a high proportion of managers seem disinterested in engagement as a productivity tool?

62%

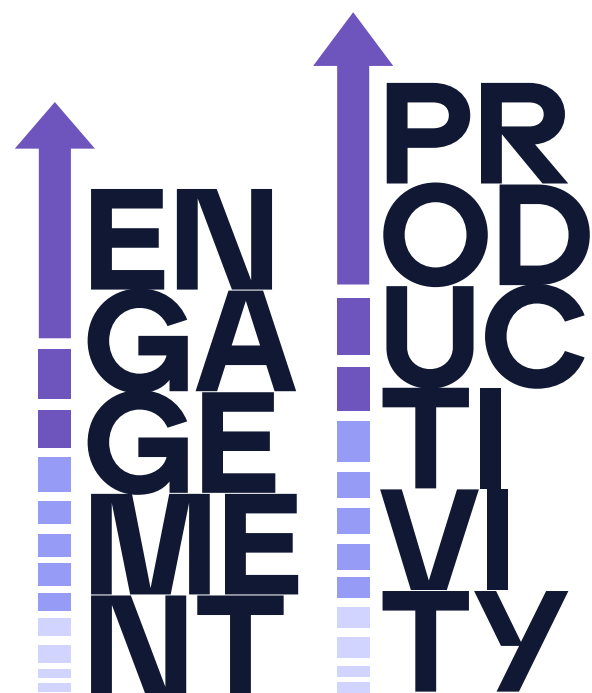
of respondents agree that engagement is a key factor in whether a meeting will be productive or not.

Furthermore, almost half (49%) of respondents thought that the phase in which a meeting is most likely to fail is in the beginning - if people don't seem engaged.

Taken together, these findings show that engagement is of some concern to business leaders in the US and Canada - but are they concerned enough?

What if we reverse our perspective on the responses? Then we can see that somewhere between one-third and half of those surveyed don't think employee engagement is such a high priority.

Research from Gallup highlights that the benefits of high employee engagement go beyond productivity. Employee turnover, absenteeism, and organizational citizenship



Talk less, listen more

A lack of attention might not be the biggest problem for managers - it may be that they are too present in meetings

It seems that when they're not distracted by social media or texting, managers are dominating the discussion in meetings. Many respondents admitted to taking up all the air in the room and dominating the discussion. That means quieter members of the team are less likely to get their voices heard - defeating the purpose of having a meeting in the first place.

More than **38%** of respondents admit to being the most talkative person in the room during meetings. When it comes to discussing solutions or brainstorming in real-time, **69%** said they are always open to this kind of meeting, with even **63%** of introverts showing an affinity for this style of problem-solving.

This tendency to run meetings according to their own preferred style of collaboration may mean that many leaders are not getting the most out of their teams. While some leaders are still running meetings the same old way, there is a movement in modern management called "Listening Leadership".



Listening Leadership is a practice of inclusive, transparent, collaborative decision-making that harnesses the collective intelligence of the team. By making listening - rather than talking - a part of their daily routines through everyday engagement moments, Listening Leaders ensure everyone in their team feels included, valued, and challenged. A previous survey of US workers found that anonymity makes 74% of respondents more likely to make their voices heard. While 76% percent cited the benefits of polls, likes, and anonymous comments. And 80% noted the importance of having multiple ways to engage.

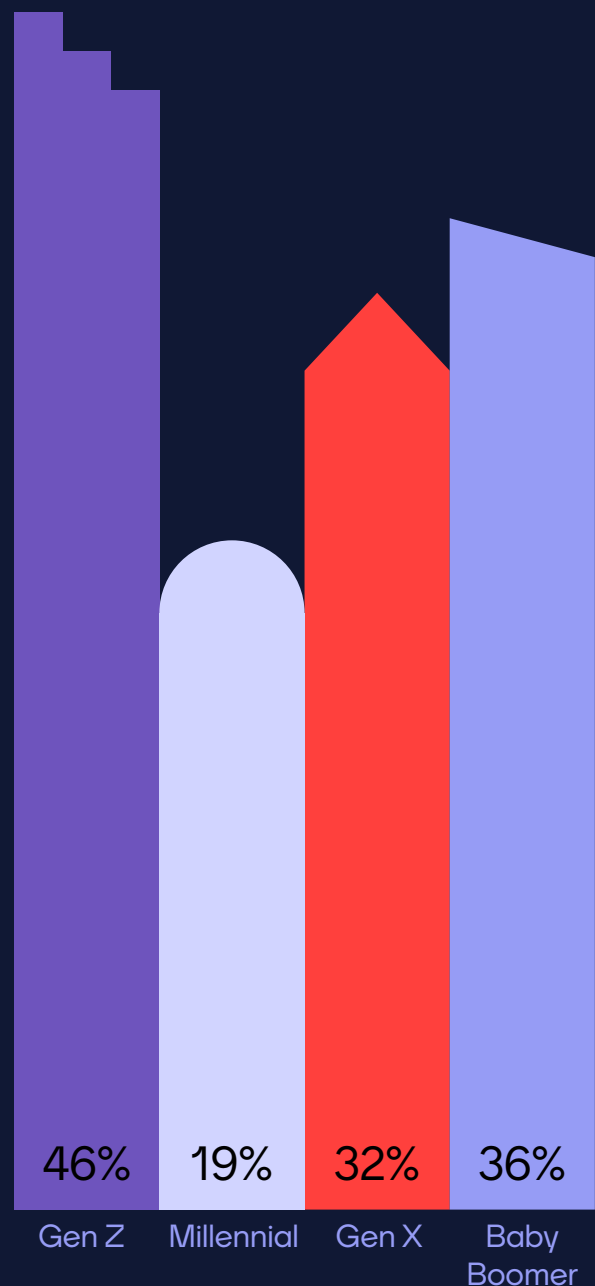
Do business leaders need to rethink their approach to collaboration in meetings to include more working styles?

Is our current way of holding meetings broken?

Different working styles might not be the only concern for leaders. As generational shifts - even among leaders themselves - show a need for a reboot.

Generation Z respondents were much more likely (46%) to identify as introverts compared to their Millennial (19%), Gen X (32%) or Baby Boomer (36%) counterparts.

Identify as Introvert



This means meetings based on in-the-moment open discussion may no longer be the way to get the most out of knowledge workers going forward.

The survey also revealed the dangers of not paying attention to these trends. Out of the generations surveyed, Generation Z was the most likely to be texting (42.7%) or checking in on social media or personal email during meetings (44.6%).

Similarly, Millennials are most likely to stream a show or sports game during a meeting (22%).

If organizations want to get the most out of their workforce, they need to be paying a lot more attention to their engagement in meetings.



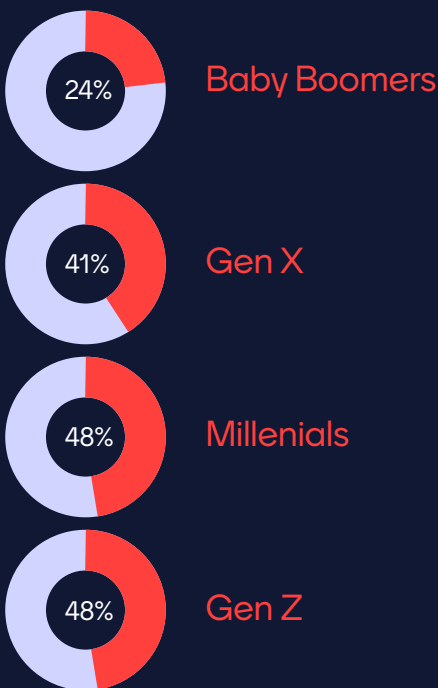
So what can we do about it?

The responses in this survey reveal a crisis in meeting engagement. A willingness to speak up and give input is a clear pain point for leaders who admit that they themselves are as distracted as their teams, with a tendency to check social media or online shop instead of focusing on the meeting.

So what can we do about it?

Firstly, leaders need to work harder to find opportunities for engagement - and digital tools could be a good solution. This should not be news, as many respondents already know what they need to do to remedy the situation.

Those who would like an anonymous way to respond



What would make meetings more effective?



Sixty-two percent said that encouraging people to contribute can help to bridge the engagement gap. Similarly, offering ways for people to engage that are not verbal (47.1%), having an anonymous way for people to react and respond to ideas and concepts (44.8%), or offering fun, interactive tools that keep people interested throughout the meeting (43.6%) were all approaches that were top of mind for respondents.

Again, we see a generational difference. When asked what would encourage greater engagement during meetings, Millennials and Generation Z most craved an anonymous way for people to react and respond (48%), while only 24% of Baby Boomers agreed.

What would drive productivity?

Again it seemed like most leaders already knew the answer.

When asked what makes meetings most productive, almost

62%

noted that when there are multiple ways for participants to engage, including comments and reactions, meeting participants seem more engaged.

The majority of respondents (about 62%) believe that meetings would be more productive if all participants engaged and offered their opinions.

58%

percent cited offering fun, interactive tools that keep people interested throughout the meeting.

53%

said having access to data after the meeting to gather feedback to better understand engagement would be a benefit.

Conclusion

So meetings are here to stay, at least if North America's business leaders have anything to say about it.

The vast majority of respondents have a positive view of meetings, with most being happy with it as a method productivity and moving work forward. And many are happy with the in-the-moment, open-discussion style that is most common in the workplace.

But there seems to be an engagement crisis in many workplaces. Lack of or low engagement is the prevailing problem for leaders in meetings. The biggest factors in this growing engagement gap are the ease of distraction of the digital workforce, leaders taking up too much space in meetings, and meetings designed to cater to only one work style.

The data shows that this challenge of maintaining focus is only going to get harder, as younger generations show the

strongest tendency to browse the internet, text, or nap than their older peers.

But there is hope too. Younger generations tend to be more introverted than their peers, which means their sympathies with working styles different from their own may be stronger.

Across the board, respondents recognized the need to improve engagement. They acknowledged the need to increase productivity by offering multiple ways to engage, anonymous contributions, and opening up to listening more and talking less.

From the survey, it's clear that leaders recognize the challenges of meetings in the modern workplace. They understand the solutions. The only thing to do now is to find the right tools, implement the fixes, and get to work solving the problem.



The end