

The future of meetings

Global whitepaper



Introduction

In 2018, we published a whitepaper exploring 'Five Steps to the Perfect Meeting'. This whitepaper looked at people's frustrations and how to make better use of time spent in meetings.

It's a real problem which needs solving. According to Gartner, 1.55m meetings take place in the US alone every day, costing \$1.4tn a year, which is 8% of GDP or 15% of the total budget for employees. Of course, some of these meetings are good meetings – however many are not, and the cost of bad meetings is estimated at \$250bn per year.

The key finding from 'Five Steps to the Perfect Meeting'? Technology emerged as the critical enabler of the perfect meeting. But in an era of fast-paced technological development with artificial intelligence, augmented reality, virtual reality etc. on the rise, what do people expect from technology in meetings?

Intrigued, we wanted to take this a step further and take a more detailed look at how meetings are changing. Given its importance to the perfect meeting, we wanted to explore people's attitudes to technology and their expectations for how it will transform meetings. In short, we wanted to uncover 'The Future of Meetings'.

Working together with independent research experts Savanta, we have created this report, based on a survey of more than 1,500 white-collar professionals across Europe, the US, China, India and the Pacific. The sample included Senior Managers, Heads of Department, Directors and C-Level executives aged between 21 and 65.

The findings tell a clear story. Technology has made meetings better. Technology helps us have shorter meetings. And crucially, technology will continue to revolutionize meetings in the future.

Meetings are not in and of themselves problematic. Meetings are essential to teams and organizations.


What we need to rid ourselves of are bad meetings, wasted time in meetings, and unnecessary meetings.

Dr. Steven G Rogelberg
Author of 'The Surprising Science of Meetings'

We've certainly come a long way from the days where the most sophisticated technology found in a meeting room was a telephone and slide projector! Across the next three chapters, we see how technology has impacted the modern-day meeting, and will continue to do so going forwards:

- 1. Technology is at the heart of great meetings**
- 2. Meetings are changing**
- 3. New technology will revolutionize meetings**

In this whitepaper, we reveal our Global findings. Region-specific whitepapers for Europe, the US, China, India and the Pacific are also available. We hope you find this whitepaper stimulating and helpful as you plan the future of meetings in your organization.



A meeting is an event
where minutes are taken
and hours wasted.

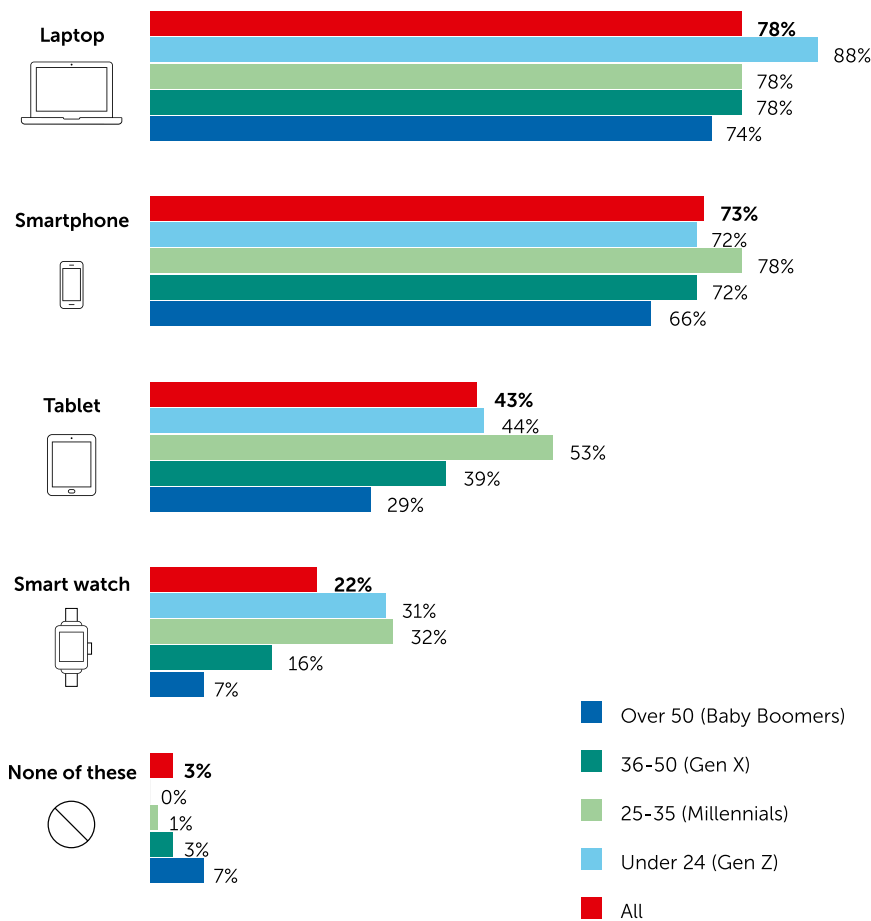
Henry Herman Albers, Author of
'Organized Executive Action: Decision-
making, Communication, and Leadership'

Technology is at the heart of great meetings

72% of us take at least two devices to a meeting
10% of us take four

In 2019, technology has a central role in most meetings. Only 3% of employees will arrive at a meeting without a device. Even amongst the older Baby Boomer generation, those not bringing tech to meetings remains at a mere 7%.

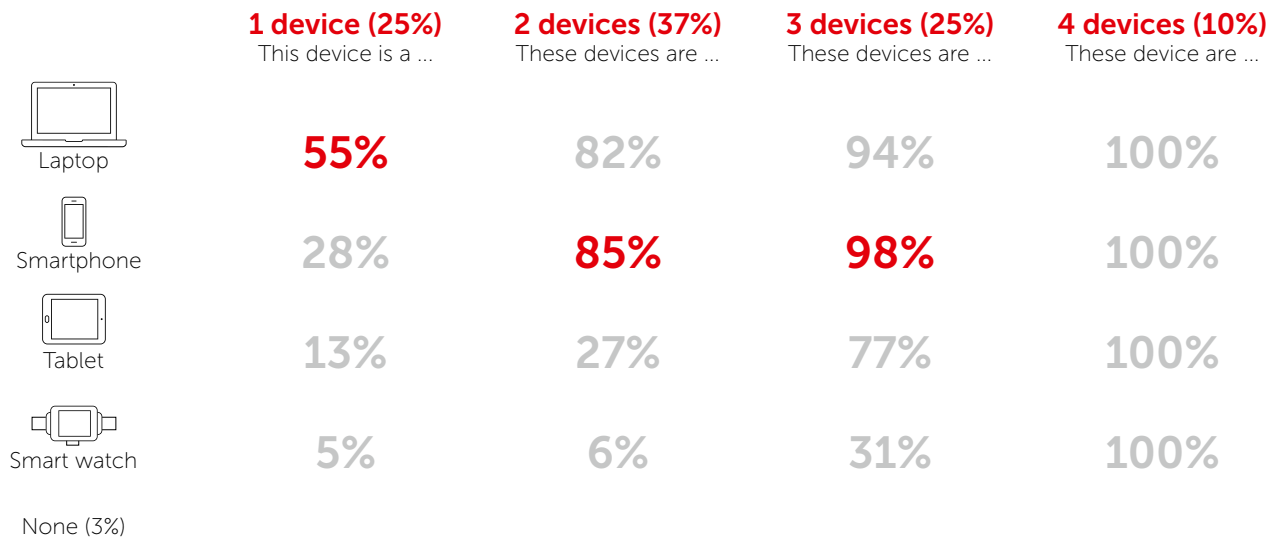
Technology typically taken to meetings by attendees



We like to take technology to meetings

Perhaps unsurprisingly the laptop dominates: 78% take their laptop with them into meetings. But the laptop is not alone. Also highly prevalent is the smartphone, with 73% taking this to meetings with them, whilst two in five also bring a tablet (43%) and one in five a smart watch (22%).

More recent technologies are more frequently brought into meetings by younger generations in the workforce. Whilst only 7% of Baby Boomers will typically have a smart watch on them, this rises to nearly one in three amongst Gen Z (31%) and Millennials (32%). As these younger generations increasingly dominate the workforce, we expect to see the growing influence of new technology in meeting environments.



Number and type of devices taken to meetings¹

We like to take a lot of technology to meetings

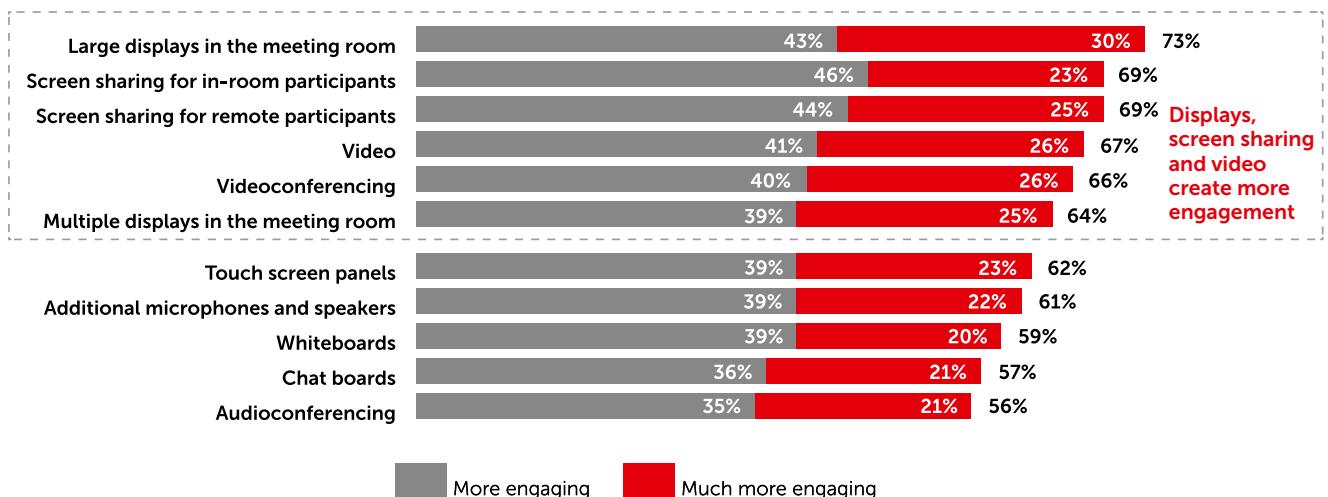
Another interesting way to view this trend is by exploring the total number of tech devices meeting participants bring with them. Nearly three quarters of attendees (72%) will have a minimum of two devices (generally a laptop and a smartphone). And it doesn't stop there. A third (35%) will take at least three devices with them, and one in ten (10%) typically turn up with four – a laptop, smartphone, tablet and smart watch!

Technology improves engagement in meetings

What does this abundance of technology mean for today's meetings – is the meeting experience improving thanks to technology? The answer is an overwhelming 'yes'. The vast majority agree that the presence of technology makes meetings more engaging. In particular, our findings reveal that large displays, coupled with screen sharing and video, lead to much more engaging meetings.

It's clear that technology has already established a central role in meetings. And this role will increase in importance as younger tech-savvy generations become more prevalent in the workplace.

Impact of technology on meeting engagement

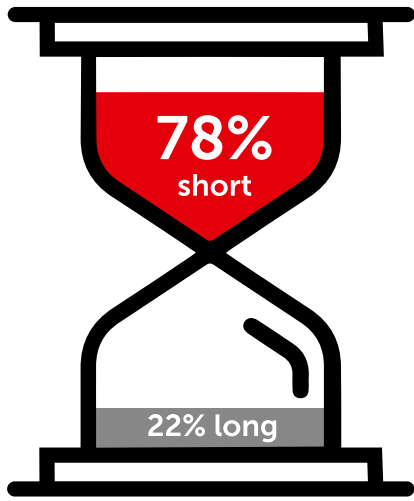


¹ Percentages may not appear to add up to total, due to rounding to nearest whole number

Meetings are changing

72% of us say meetings are better or much better than they were 5 years ago

How long does your average meeting last? One hour? Longer? How much of this time is valuable? How much is actually spent productively? The answer: probably not much (see our 2018 whitepaper on how The Perfect Meeting could be as short as 21 minutes).



Preferred duration for meetings

We prefer short meetings

Most professionals would rather have shorter meetings. Nearly four in five (78%) say they prefer short meetings over long meetings. This is especially true in China (85%) and the Pacific (87%). Meetings need to be focused and to the point.

We prefer small meetings

We would also rather be in meetings with just a small, select group of people, rather than ones with large attendee lists. Three quarters (74%) prefer meetings with just a few people.



74%

with only a few people



26%

with lots of people

Preferred size of meetings

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.

Dr. Margaret Mead,
Cultural anthropologist



	2-4 people	5-9 people	10+ people
Presentation	32 minutes	43 minutes	54 minutes
Decision-making	31 minutes	43 minutes	57 minutes
Brainstorming	35 minutes	47 minutes	61 minutes

Ideal length in minutes of different meetings

30-60 minutes is ideal

As you might expect, the more people taking part in meetings, the longer they are expected to last. When asking how long different types of meeting should ideally last, given the number of participants and the content of the meeting, our survey showed that the 'content' has little impact. Regardless of whether it's a presentation, a decision-making meeting or a brainstorm, the overwhelming determining factor is the number of attendees. More attendees means more time spent in meetings.

Professionals around the world state that a meeting involving 2-4 participants should only last for around half an hour, but this increases to three quarters of an hour if 5-9 attendees are present, and a whole hour for meetings with 10+ attendees.

Meetings are getting better

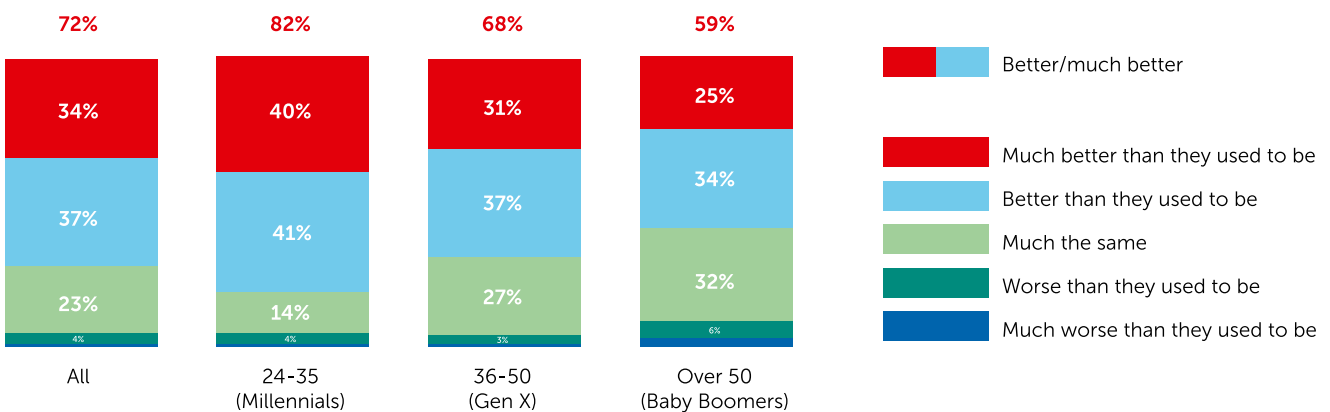
To achieve these ambitions for meeting length, the use of good technology is crucial. In the 2018 Five Steps to The Perfect Meeting research, we found that people are spending 12% of the meeting length setting up technology – a painful waste of time.

With employees bringing their own devices to meetings, it's ever more vital that technology in meeting environments is intuitive, easy to use and highly compatible.

When this technology works well, the impact is significant. Nearly three quarters (72%) say that meetings are now better than they were five years ago. Amongst Millennials this rises to 82%.

Our preference for short, small meetings shows that efficiency in meetings is key – and this is where technology has a major role to play.

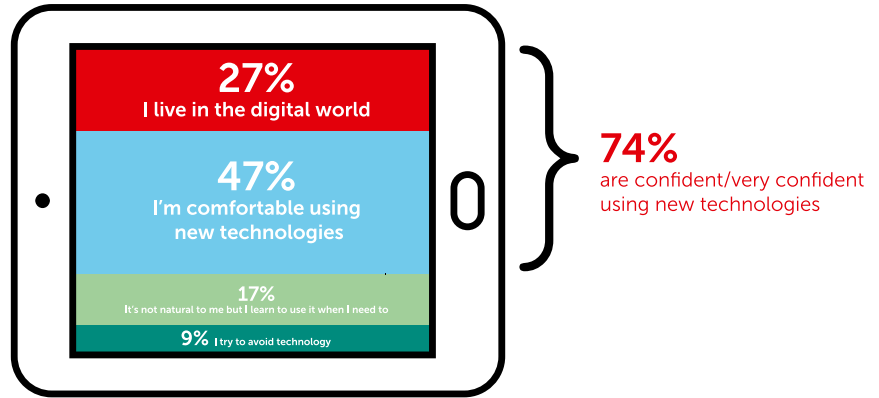
Compared to 5 years ago, do you think meetings are?



People are now confident using technology

All across the world we have welcomed technology into our personal lives with open arms. When asked to describe their confidence using digital technologies, three quarters (74%) feel at least 'comfortable' using digital technology. One in four (27%) go so far as to say they 'live in the digital world'.

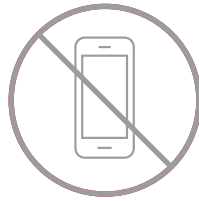
And this isn't a 'younger generation fad'. Despite many commentators observing a lack of tech-savviness amongst older generations, we found that nearly four in five Baby Boomers (79%) say they are comfortable using new technologies. The stereotype of technophobic older generations is a thing of the past.



How respondents would best describe their confidence using digital technologies



86%
using technology



14%
not using technology

Preferred use of technology in meetings

We prefer meetings where technology is used

We live side by side with technology. We've seen how it can change our lives. We increasingly expect to use technology in all our interactions. It should come as little surprise therefore that the vast majority (86%) prefer meetings that embrace technology:

It's true in all sizes of organization

This clear preference for technology becomes even starker as the size of organization increases:

Preferred use of technology in meetings by organization size

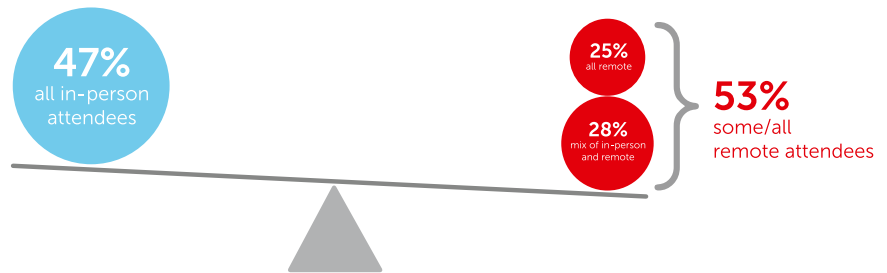


67% of us now regularly use video in meetings, rising to four in five Millennials (79%).

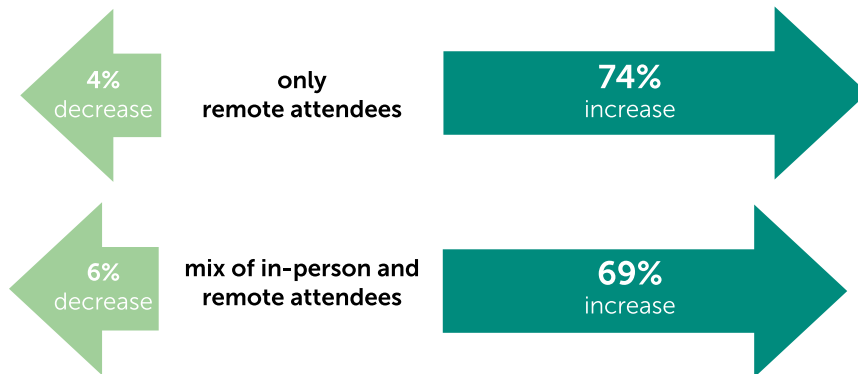
Most meetings now have remote attendees

One likely reason for employees at larger organizations stating a strong preference for technology in meetings is that theirs are more likely to include remote attendees.

Across all organization sizes though, the majority (53%) say that meetings are now remote – either partially or fully. A quarter state that the average meeting has all participants attending remotely, while 28% say they most commonly include a mix of in-person and remote attendees:



The typical attendee make-up of meetings



Expected increase in proportion of meetings involving remote attendees in 3 years' time

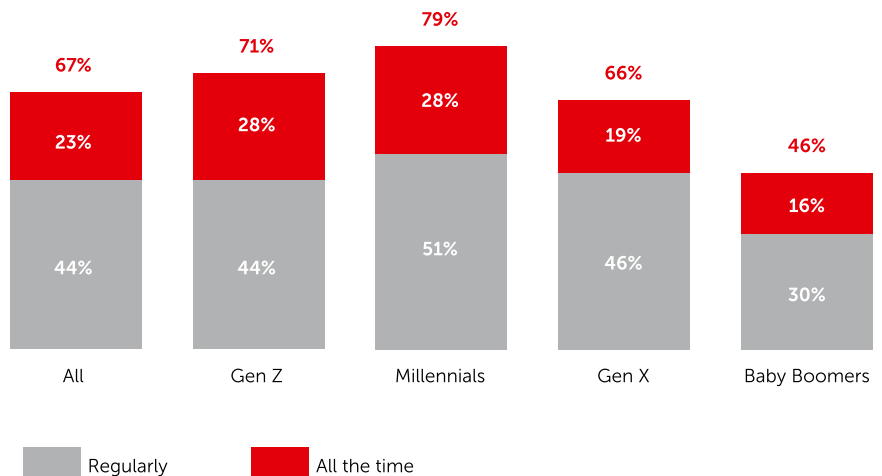
More meetings will have remote attendees in the future

This shifting balance is strongly linked to increases in flexible working, with the number of remote workers having increased 115% during the last decade. And the pace of change is expected to grow. Three quarters (74%) expect the proportion of meetings with only remote attendees to increase in the next three years. This rises to a huge 87% in India:

We use video regularly

As the popularity of remote meetings continues to grow, it becomes increasingly crucial for organizations to have a conferencing solution that everyone can work with: a solution that is conducive to enabling meetings that are both efficient and engaging. At the heart of a great conferencing solution is video.

Regularity of video usage in meetings by age

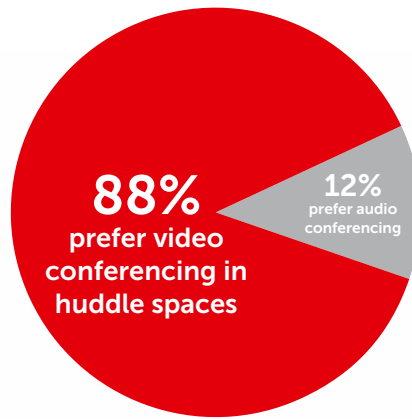


² <https://money.cnn.com/2017/06/21/pf/jobs/working-from-home/index.html>

We prefer video conferencing

Over three quarters (77%) state that video will be standard in meetings within the next three years, with India (94%) and China (91%) leading the charge.

Even when having meetings in 'huddle spaces'³⁷ – non-bookable workspaces for small, impromptu meetings – audio conferencing is no longer an acceptable option. Nearly nine in ten (88%) prefer using video over audio in huddles spaces, rising to 93% of Gen Z.



Preferred use of conferencing technology in huddle spaces

Technology is enabling the evolving nature of meetings. Employees are becoming more confident digitally, allowing them to work remotely and use video to collaborate. And the workforce isn't ready to stop here.

We want more.

Simply put:
the future of meetings
is video



New technology will revolutionize meetings

83% of us want to see voice recognition in meetings within the next two years

It can be tough to keep up with the pace of change in technology! Yet our appetite for new technology in meetings shows no signs of abating. With the technology we use in our personal lives often out-pacing the technology available in meetings, a re-balancing is essential. We expect organizations to use the latest tech trends to enhance meetings. In our survey, we asked professionals how soon they thought a range of technologies should be made available to use in meetings. The findings: get ready for voice recognition, hand gestures, video filters and avatars!

Every once in a while, a new technology, an old problem, and a big idea turn into an innovation.

Dean Kamen, US inventor and engineer

We want voice recognition

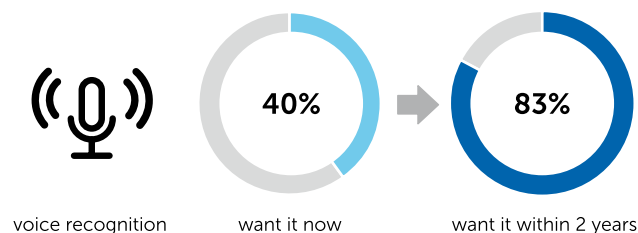
The most keenly sought-after emerging technology is voice recognition. Two in five professionals worldwide (40%) want this in meetings now, increasing to around half of professionals in India (50%), the US (49%) and China (48%), and just under half of Millennials (47%). Whilst the absence of voice recognition in meetings may be tolerated today, employees will soon be less forgiving. The vast majority (83%) want voice recognition in meetings within two years at the latest.

Should this come as a surprise? Perhaps not. Given that home ownership of voice recognition-enabled home assistants such as Amazon Echo, Google Home and Apple HomePod is expected to reach 57% in 2019⁹, it seems reasonable that employees would expect their workplaces to follow suit.

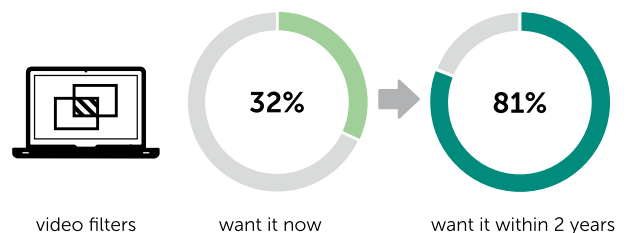
We want video filters

Video filters (similar to those available on apps like Instagram) are also in high demand. With video set to feature in the vast majority of meetings in the future, participants want to look their best!

One in three (32%) are already eager for this technology now and four in five (81%) want it within the next two years. It's easy to fall into the trap of thinking that meetings are purely rational, business exchanges. They aren't. A meeting is a show where we are on display. Confidence matters, and video filters can help to provide this.



When respondents think voice recognition should be made available in meetings



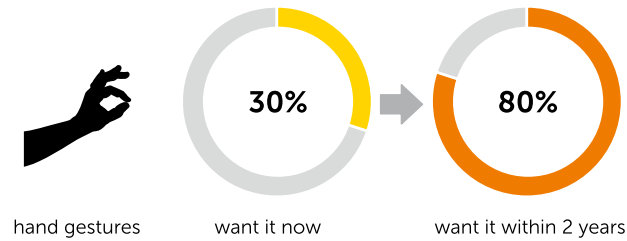
When respondents think video filters should be made available in meetings

³ <https://www.barco.com/en/news/2018-10-18-meet-the-huddle-space-small-room-big-benefits>
⁹ <https://www.mediapost.com/publications/article/321359/smart-speaker-ownership-hits-19-globally-35-in.html>

We want hand gestures

Where's the clicker? Anyone seen it? Imagine not having to worry. Instead, what if you could use hand gestures to control technology in meeting rooms, such as 'swiping' between slides or adjusting the brightness of lights by opening or closing your hand?

Similar to voice recognition, this could vastly improve efficiency and convenience in meetings – nearly a third (30%) want this now and 80% within the next two years.



When respondents think hand gestures should be made available in meetings

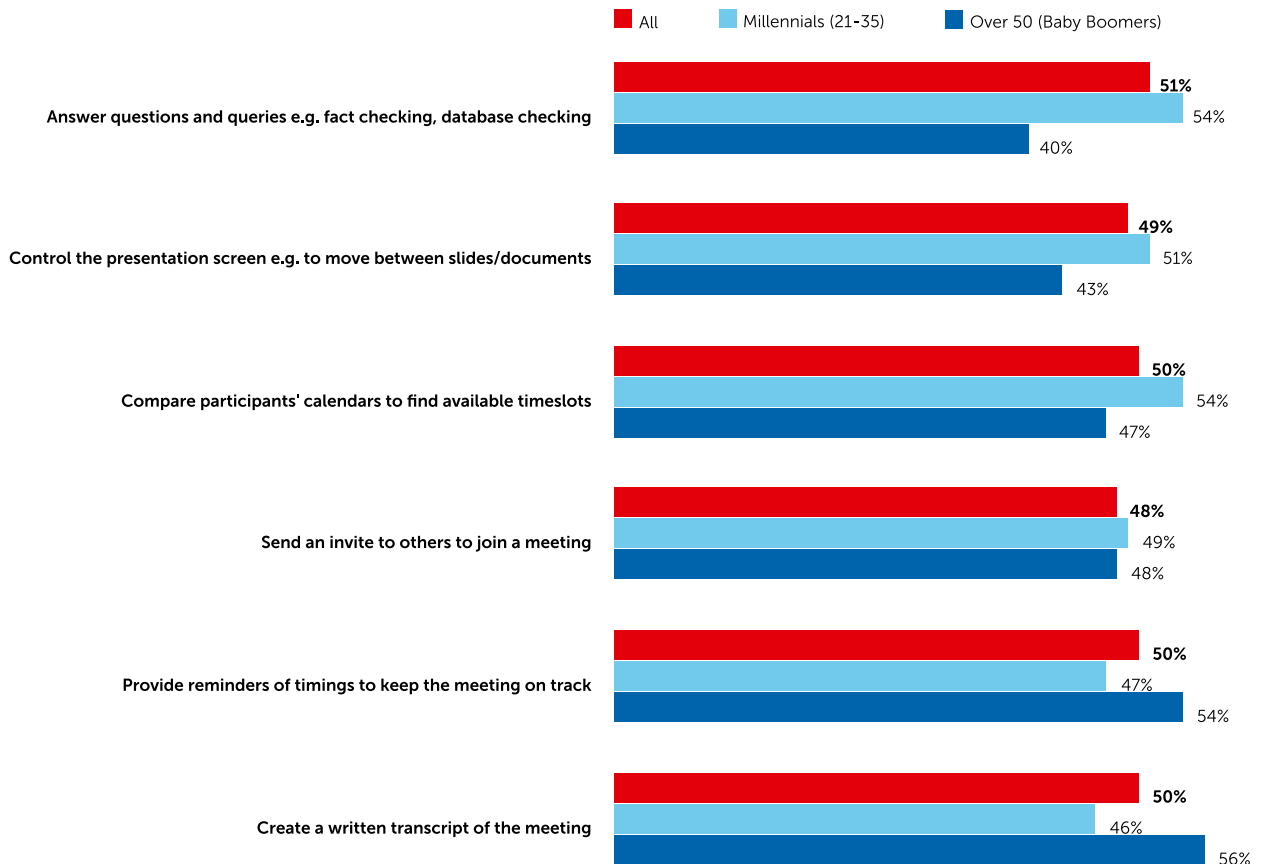
We want avatars or bots

Not long ago bots and avatars were more often seen in Hollywood movies. Now they're everywhere. There are major benefits that bots and avatars – e.g. virtual assistants – can bring to meetings.

How bots and avatars should be used though is more divisive. Baby Boomers want bots and avatars to do administrative work: creating written transcripts of meetings (56%) and providing timing reminders to help keep the meeting on track (54%). In contrast, Millennials prioritize interacting with bots and avatars to enhance the meeting, by checking facts or databases to answer questions in real time (54%), and comparing participants' calendars to find free timeslots for the next meeting (54%).

How would you use a bot or avatar to add most value to your meetings?

What respondents want avatars or bots to be able to do during a meeting

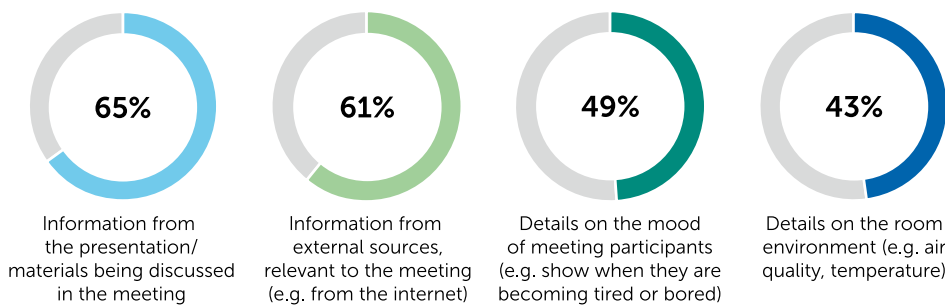


We want AR

Last, but by no means least, are Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR). Meeting attendees see significant potential from AR overlaying information in real-time (65%) – e.g. onto smart glasses. We also want AR to bring in relevant information from external sources such as internet pages (61%).

VR meanwhile is also expected to take off, with 81% expecting it to be made available for meetings in their organization within the next three years. For certain industries, it will be near ubiquitous.

Nine in ten working in Technology think their organization will make VR available to them in three years, as do 89% in Construction and Manufacturing. Soon it will be commonplace for VR to visualize construction environments in meetings, long before anything physical is built.



What respondents want AR to be able to do during a meeting

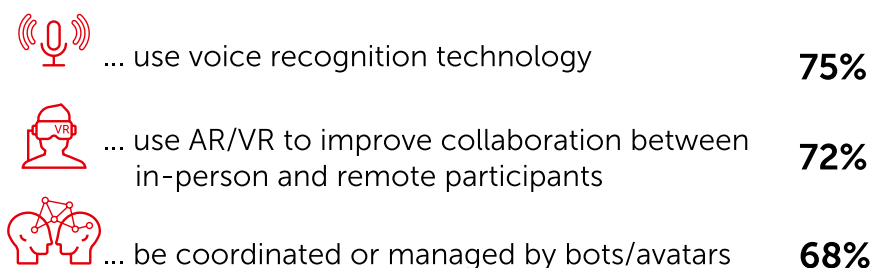
And we want it in meetings in three years' time

Given the expected influx of new technology, it follows that employees expect meetings in three years' time to look radically different. Three quarters think the typical meeting will use voice recognition technology, with 72% expecting AR and VR to improve collaboration between in-person and remote meeting attendees.

Over two thirds think a typical meeting will be coordinated or managed by bots or avatars (68%). The state of meetings is in flux. Whilst it would be understandable to say that technology has already revolutionized meetings, the real revolution is only just beginning.

Innovative technologies from voice recognition to hand gestures, and from VR to bots, will make meetings more engaging, more convenient and more informed. That is, assuming organizations can keep pace with employee expectations!

In three years' time, the typical meeting will...



Technology expected to be used in typical meetings in three years' time

Conclusion

Great technology and great meetings go hand in hand – having the right hardware and software in meetings is critical

Technology has made meetings better

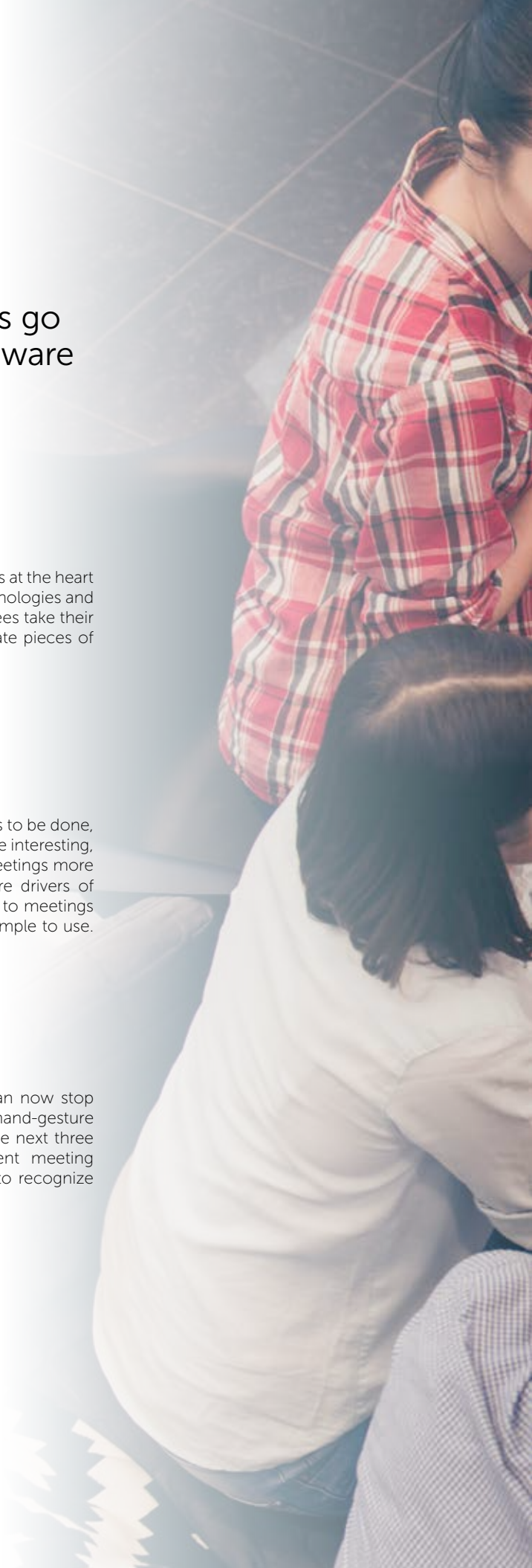
Meetings today are better than they were five years ago. And technology is at the heart of this transformation. Meeting attendees are confident using digital technologies and overwhelmingly prefer meetings that use technology. Nearly all employees take their own tech devices with them to meetings – one in ten take four separate pieces of tech. There is no such thing as a technology-free meeting.

Technology facilitates shorter, smaller meetings

Meetings should be short, with few people in them. Focus on what needs to be done, then move on. Technology is key to enabling this. It makes meetings more interesting, engaging and enjoyable for attendees. In particular, solutions making meetings more visual – such as large built-in displays, screen sharing and video – are drivers of engagement. But with so many different personal tech devices brought to meetings by attendees, in-office technology needs to be intuitive, agnostic and simple to use. Plug-and-play solutions are the future.

The pace of change is increasing!

If you thought technology has already changed meetings and they can now stop evolving... think again. Attendees want voice recognition, video filters, hand-gesture control, AR, VR and bots all to be commonplace in meetings within the next three years. This will improve remote collaboration, enable more efficient meeting management, and increase engagement. Organizations that are slow to recognize and react to these evolving employee demands risk being left behind.





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Is your organization ready
for the future of meetings?



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