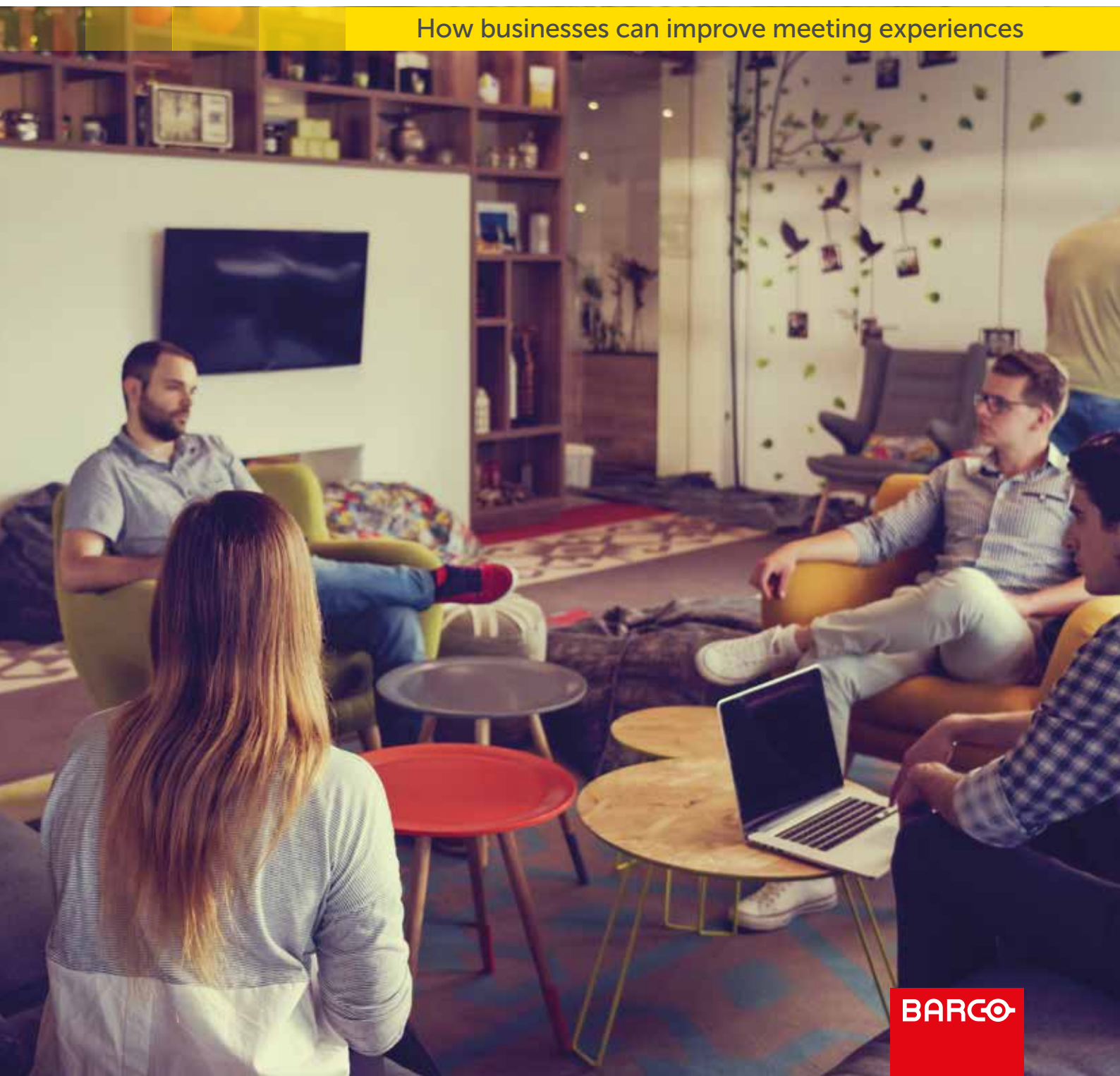


Five steps to the perfect meeting

US report

How businesses can improve meeting experiences



Introduction

Making meetings matter again



If you had to identify, in one word, the reason why the human race has not achieved, and never will achieve, its full potential, that word would be 'meetings'.

Dave Barry, author and columnist

Meetings have a bad reputation. At some point in the 20th century, meetings went from being something people wanted to be involved in – because 'only important people were invited to meetings' – to something people wanted to avoid. Today, meetings are often seen as inconvenient distractions, and their very mention can cause frustration or induce eye-rolling apathy.

However, some meetings are essential. Organized collaboration is vital for success in the working world, so businesses cannot operate without meetings entirely. This means we must make the most of them. We must not accept 'inconvenient distractions' and 'eye-rolling apathy' being the norm. We must challenge meetings and make them better.

To find out why meetings have fallen out of favor, and what can be done to turn the situation around, we joined forces with Circle Research to survey nearly 3,000 white-collar workers in the USA, Europe, Pacific, China and India. The sample included workers aged between 21 and 65, who on average attend at least five meetings per week, and represent a wide range of organization sizes, industries, job roles and job seniority.

In this whitepaper, we'll reveal our findings from the USA, where we surveyed 782 employees.

The research identified five key themes for creating more engaging, collaborative and purposeful meetings:

- **Chapter 1: Why are we here?** – Give meetings reason and relevance
- **Chapter 2: Not another meeting!** – Hold fewer and shorter meetings
- **Chapter 3: We'll bring our own devices** – Make secure sharing a habit
- **Chapter 4: Where are we going?** – Enable remote and flexible working
- **Chapter 5: OK, let's huddle** – Help enable collaboration

This whitepaper explores each area, offering tangible ways for businesses to re-engage their workers, and make meetings matter again.

Chapter One

Why are we here?

Give meetings reason and relevance

Meetings are frequently frustrating, but – on many occasions – they're also necessary. How else would we collaborate and make decisions?

Employees across the USA think the appropriate amount of time they should spend in meetings per week is 8.7 hours. Whilst millennials' expectations are slightly lower than their non-millennial counterparts, the appreciation of meetings as a necessary part of the working world looks set to remain.

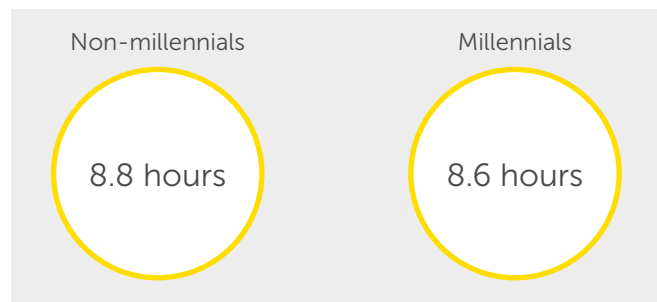
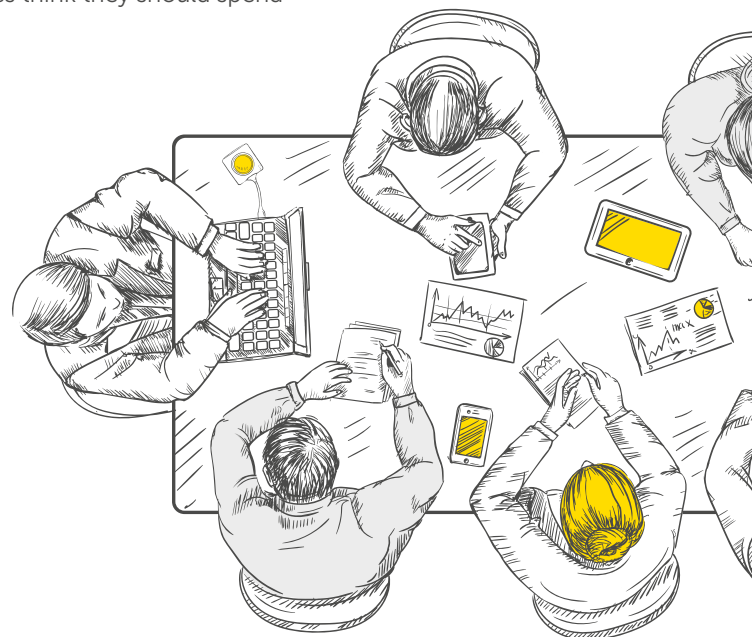


Figure 1. Time per week that USA employees think they should spend in meetings

People who enjoy meetings should not be in charge of anything.

Thomas Sowell, economist and social theorist



We try to be clear about our goal when we sit down for a meeting — are we in the room to make a decision or to have a discussion?

Sheryl Sandberg, COO, Facebook¹

So meetings are here to stay, but what makes one meeting better than another?

The starting point for a productive meeting is simple: a clear purpose. To transform a meeting from a time-trap to a valuable use of your day, it needs to achieve an essential objective.

And importantly, this objective needs to be agreed before the meeting. Without a clear objective to work towards, how can a meeting be worthwhile?

Why are we here? What are we trying to achieve? What does success look like from this meeting?

Failure to plan is planning to fail. Nearly three-quarters (72%) of employees in the USA agree that not only should meetings have a clear objective, **but as soon as this is achieved the meeting should end.**

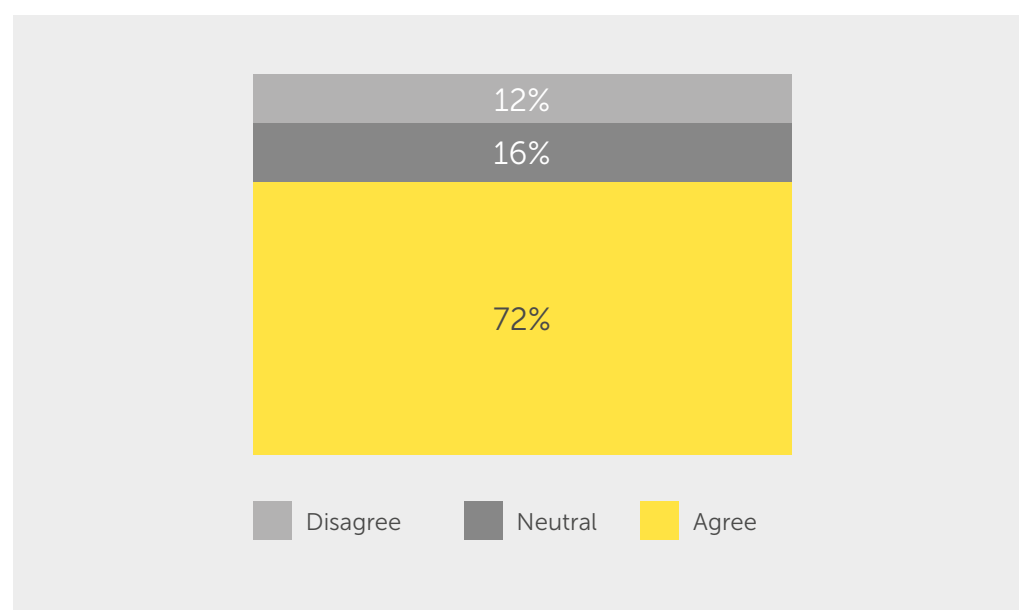


Figure 2.

USA employees agreeing with the statement that 'meetings should have one clear objective, and the meeting should end as soon as it is achieved'

¹ <http://uk.businessinsider.com/mark-zuckerberg-sheryl-sandberg-meeting-2017-7>

Simple? You'd think so. But what's extraordinary is that the majority of employees in the USA (52%) say they regularly attend meetings not knowing what the end goal is:

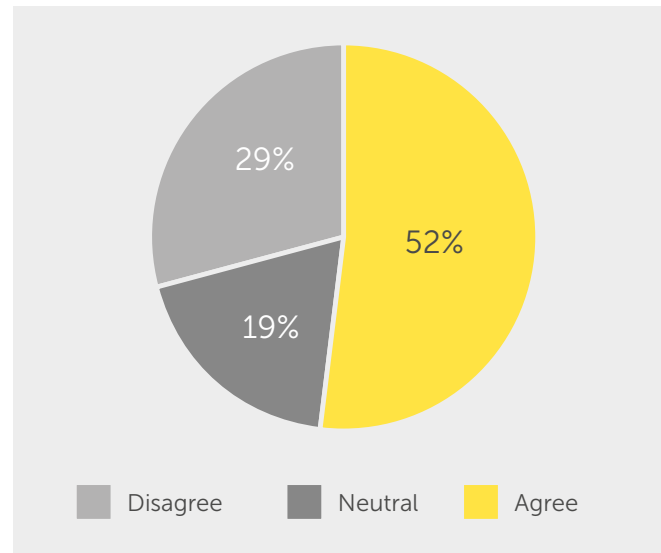


Figure 3. USA employees' agreement with the statement 'it is often unclear what we are trying to achieve in a meeting'

Meetings must have clear objectives. And all effort must then be focused on achieving this objective. 57% of employees across the USA believe that, if it becomes clear that the meeting's objective cannot be met, the meeting should end immediately. Let's stop wasting time chasing lost causes.

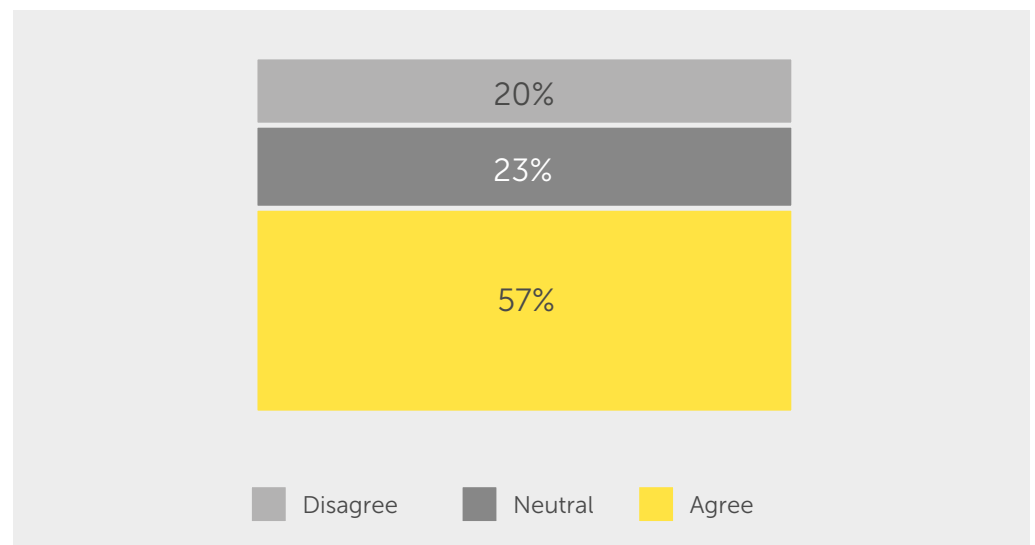


Figure 4. USA employees agreeing with the statement that 'if it becomes clear that the meeting's objective cannot be met, the meeting should be ended immediately'

The most senior employees – C-suite and directors (73%) – are even more adamant that meetings should end as soon as it becomes clear that an objective cannot be reached. The support is there, now we just need to follow through.

How many times have you found yourself in a meeting which turned out to be irrelevant to you? You're not alone. Nearly two-thirds (64%) of employees in the USA say they regularly attend meetings irrelevant to them – markedly more than the global average of 51%.

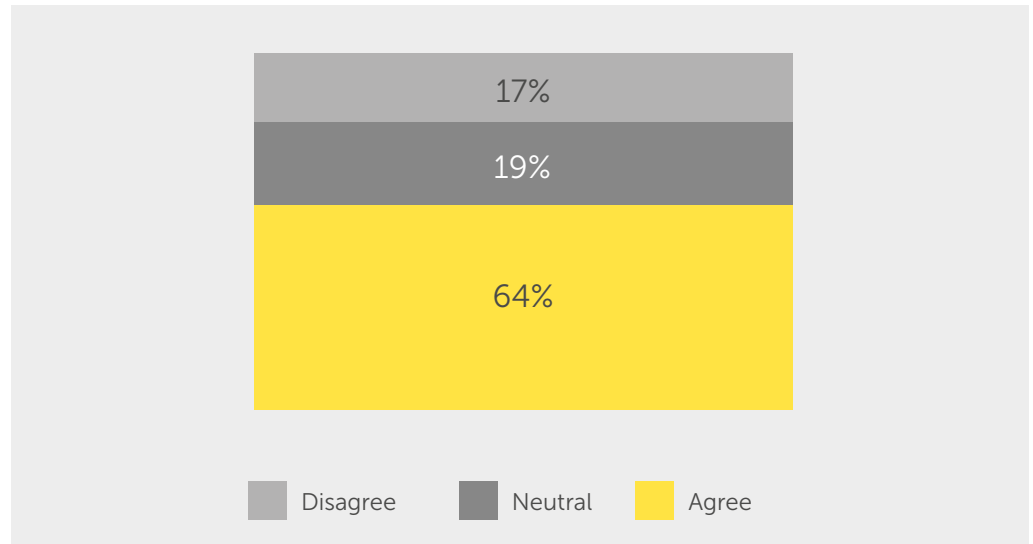
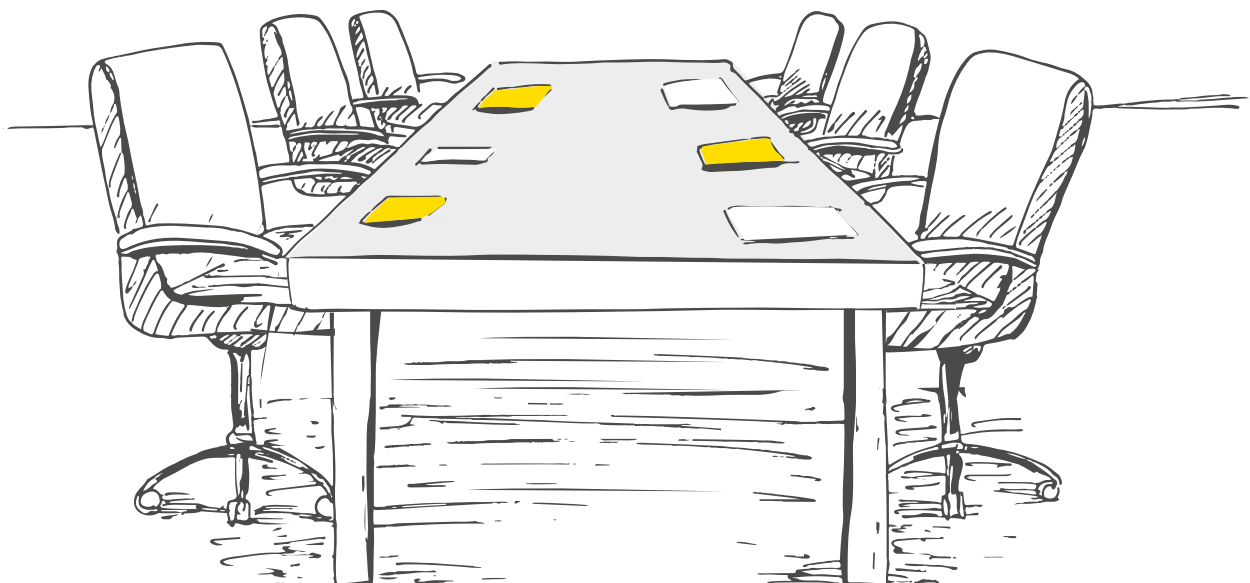


Figure 5. USA employees agreeing with the statement that 'I often attend meetings which turn out to be irrelevant to me'



Have you ever felt tempted to walk out of a meeting, but worried about the judgement from your colleagues and seniors?

Well, nearly half of the workforce – 45% of employees in the USA – believe that staff should leave a meeting if they find it irrelevant. Imagine if this became the status quo – how much wasted time could businesses save?



Figure 6.
USA employees' attitudes towards wasted time in meetings

The most senior staff – C-suite and directors (62%) – are most likely to advocate leaving a meeting if they find it to be irrelevant.

What's clear is that objectives are critical. Knowing what you're trying to achieve is key to successful meetings. But just knowing what you're trying to achieve doesn't guarantee success.

Our survey discovered that surprisingly little time in meetings is actually spent focused on valuable meeting activities, i.e. achieving the meeting’s objective – assuming it was set in the first place – or discussing next steps based on the achieved objective.

Less than half (42%) of time spent in meetings is spent working towards the objective or discussing the next steps.

The remaining time (58% of meetings) is lost on activities like setting up technology and waiting for latecomers.

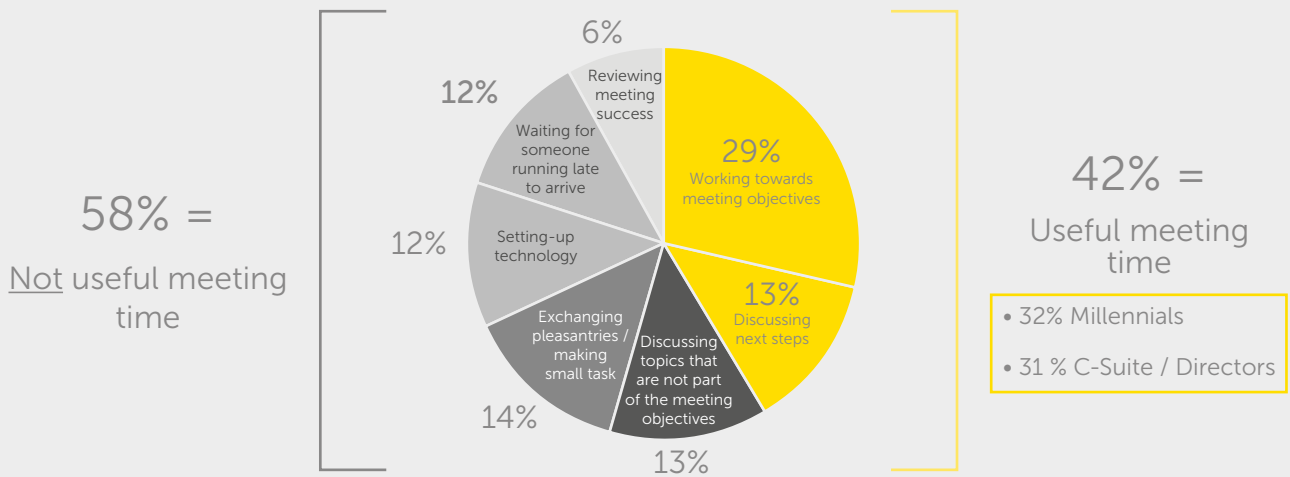


Figure 7.
How USA employees use time in meetings

Millennials are more dismissive of the focus in meetings – saying only 32% of time is spent usefully.

Left unchallenged, the absence of objective setting coupled with the lack of focus risks consigning meetings to the ‘eye-rolling apathy’ bin. Let’s tackle the problem head-on. Ensure every meeting has an objective and continuously ask yourself if the meeting is working towards that aim. If not, be brutal. End the meeting immediately. Walk out and leave. Make a stand for successful meetings.

Actions:

- Give each meeting relevance and a reason for taking place
- Set – and ideally circulate – a clear objective before the meeting
- Stop meetings immediately if they aren’t working
- Walk out of meetings if you find them irrelevant

Chapter Two

Not another meeting?

Hold fewer and shorter meetings

Aside from lacking in purpose, there are two other common complaints about meetings: how many there are, and how long they last.

Let's start with the first one. Do you feel like you attend more than your fair share of meetings? Across the whole white collar workforce in the USA, 15% attend 5-9 meetings per week, 6% go to 10-19 per week and 4% attend 20 or more meetings per week. That's a lot of meetings.

Why do we attend so many meetings? Is there a recurring, weekly team catch-up in your diary? Does this add value and result in everyone taking actions away? If not, then it's probably not entirely necessary. The solution: cancel it.

Now let's look at how long these meetings last. The average meeting for employees in the USA lasts 45 minutes, slightly below the global average of 48 minutes, but still a significant amount of time.

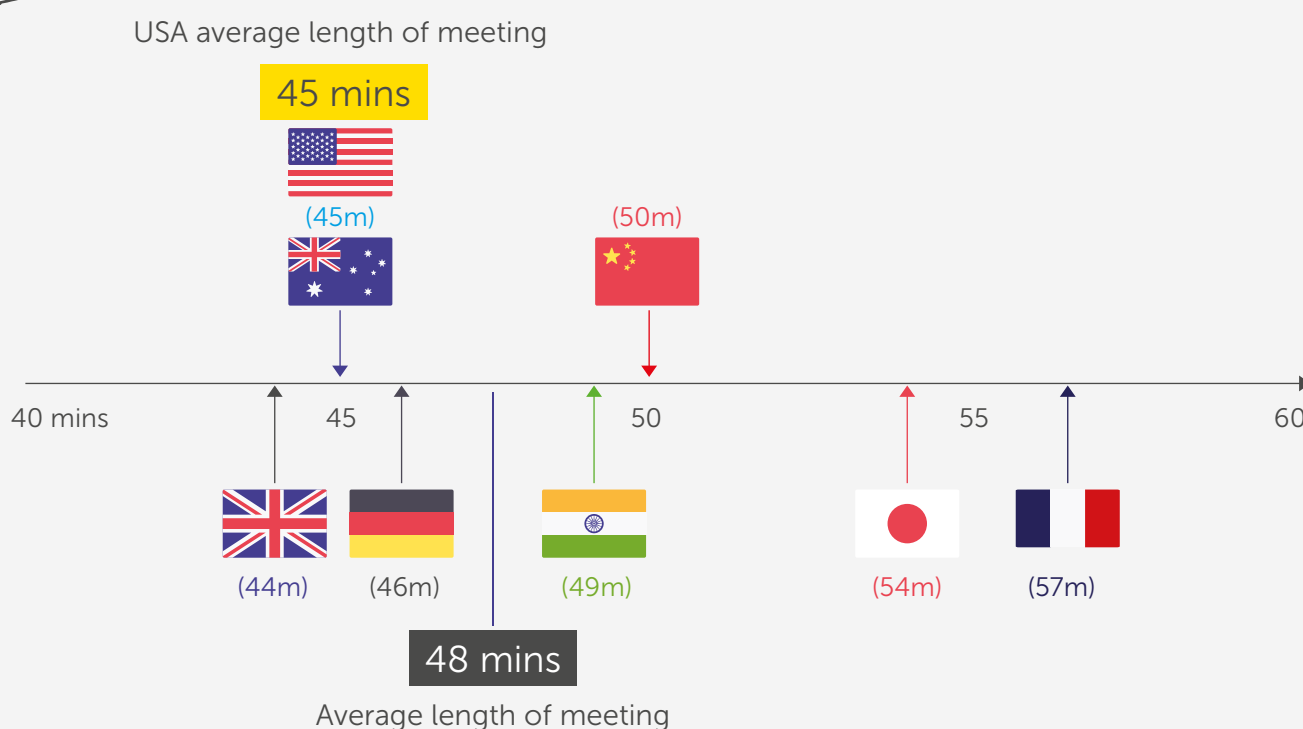
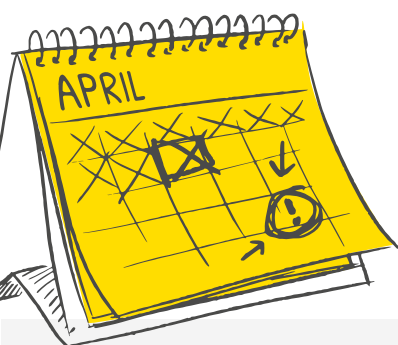


Figure 8. Average length of meeting – global comparison

Employees want their meetings to be shorter. As well as asking workers how long their meetings last currently, we also asked them how long they think meetings should last. The answer? The majority (54%) want meetings to be shorter.

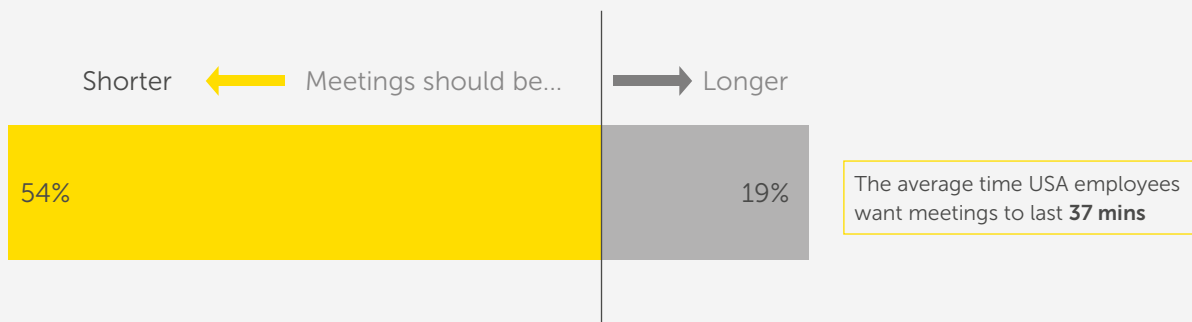


Figure 9.
Percentage of USA employees wanting shorter / longer meetings

A particularly telling statistic is that 57% of employees in the USA say they schedule hour-long meetings simply because this is the standard timeslot in their meeting booking tool. How much time is wasted by meetings being artificially extended to an hour-long timeslot?

Let's take some of these statistics further. If you attend 11 meetings a week (the average amongst USA employees taking our survey), each lasting on average 45 minutes, that's eight hours or a full working day spent in meetings every week. Is this absolutely necessary?

Think back to how much of the time in meetings is spent productively – only 42%. If we multiply this by the 45-minute-long average meeting, then that's only 19 minutes of productivity. Or, put another way, that's nearly five hours of your week, or 19 hours a month (over two full working days) that you could reclaim just by making the time count.

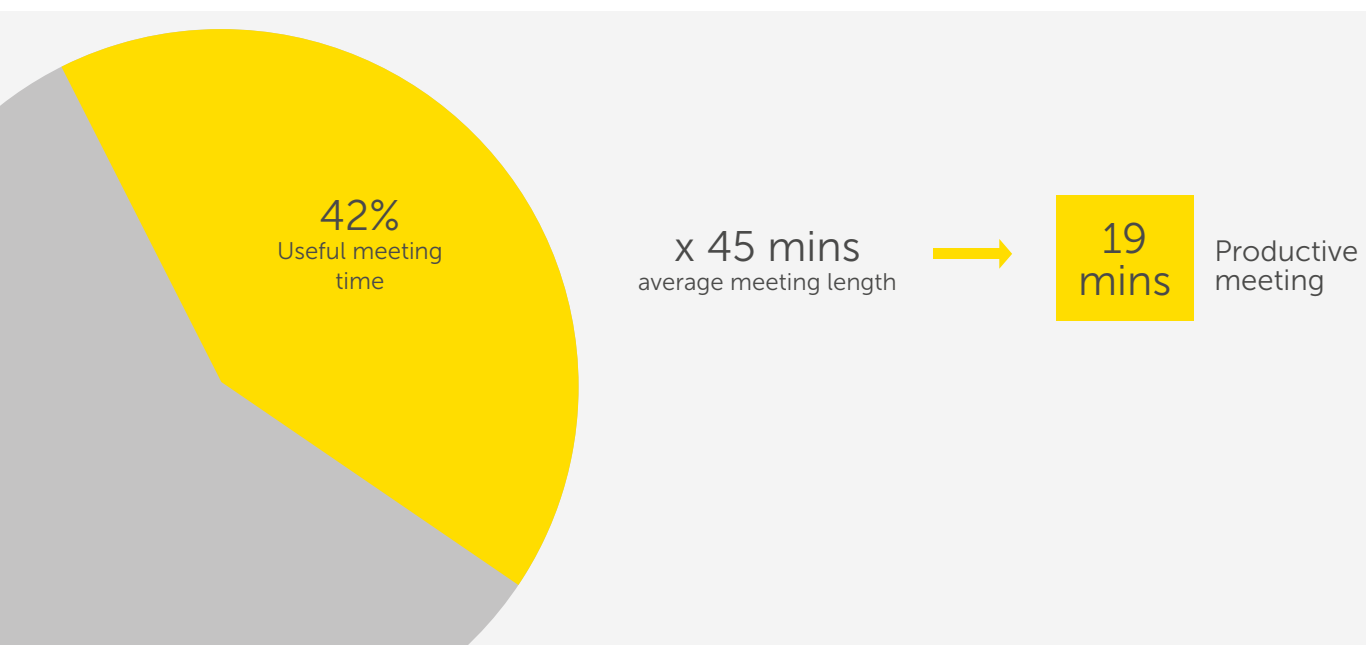


Figure 10.

Calculation of a more productive meeting based on average meeting length and time spent working towards meeting objectives

What would you do with the extra time if every meeting only lasted 19 minutes?

To achieve shorter meetings, first, we need to streamline attendees. Less is more. Only involve those people who actively need to be there. Take a leaf out of Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos' book – he has a 'two pizza rule', meaning never have a meeting where two pizzas couldn't feed the entire group. Over a quarter (26%) of employees in the USA say that most meetings they attend include people whose presence isn't necessary.

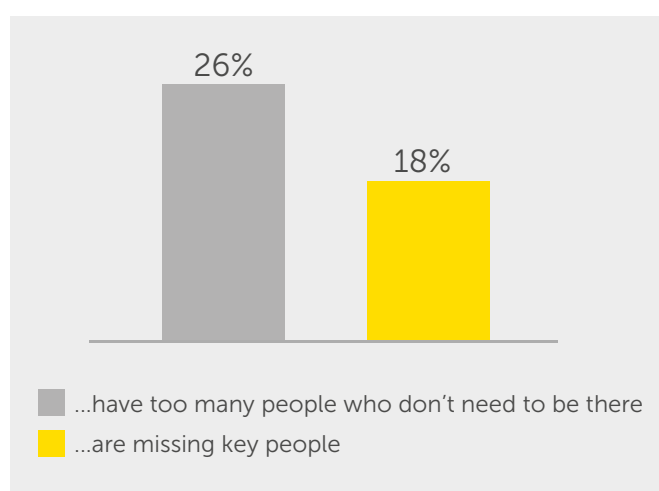


Figure 11. Percentage of USA employees who agree with statements about the people present in meetings

Second, assign meeting roles in advance. Our research showed that the majority of attendees find roles such as a chairperson and note taker to be helpful.

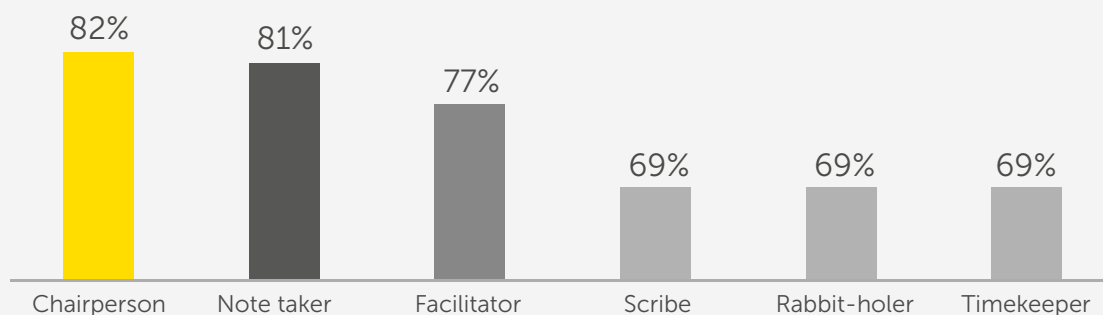


Figure 12. Percentage of USA employees who find it helpful to have roles in a meeting

Let's reclaim our weeks by making meetings shorter and more productive. Cut the deadwood 'weekly catch-ups' that serve no purpose. Refrain from booking hour-long meetings because that's the standard diary slot. Stop adding the world and their dog to every invitation.

Embrace the short, sharp, productive meeting and reclaim your week.

Actions:

- Schedule fewer and shorter meetings
- Cancel weekly diary catch-ups, unless each has a unique purpose
- Encourage staff to book the meeting time they actually need, rather than an arbitrary time slot
- Choose meeting attendees more selectively – only have key decision-makers present
- Assign and circulate roles before the meeting
- Limit the amount of formal meeting time – more spontaneous huddle-style meetings are a great alternative

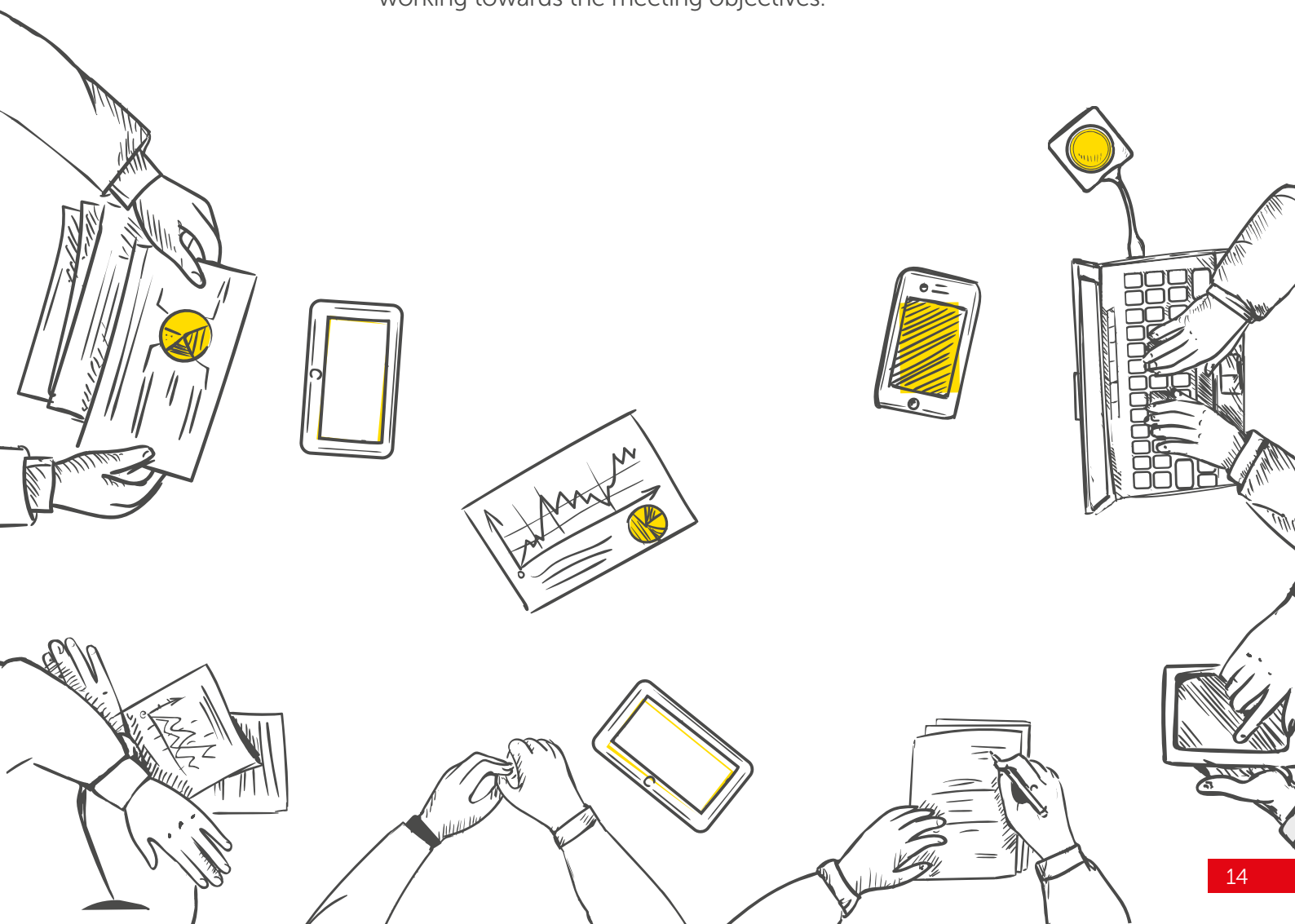
Chapter Three

We'll bring our own devices

Make secure sharing a habit

The huge rise in remote working in recent years is largely thanks to the flexibility provided by conferencing and remote collaboration; technologies that make sharing ideas and opinions quicker, easier and more effective. Technology can act as a great enabler of highly productive meetings...

...that is, when it actually works. When it doesn't, technology becomes the 'enabler of wasted time'. Employees in the USA spend, on average, 12% of each meeting trying to set up or connect to technology, rather than working towards the meeting objectives.



Attend 11 meetings a week each lasting the typical 45 minutes? That's nearly an hour a week (59 minutes) that you're wasting trying to get tech to work!

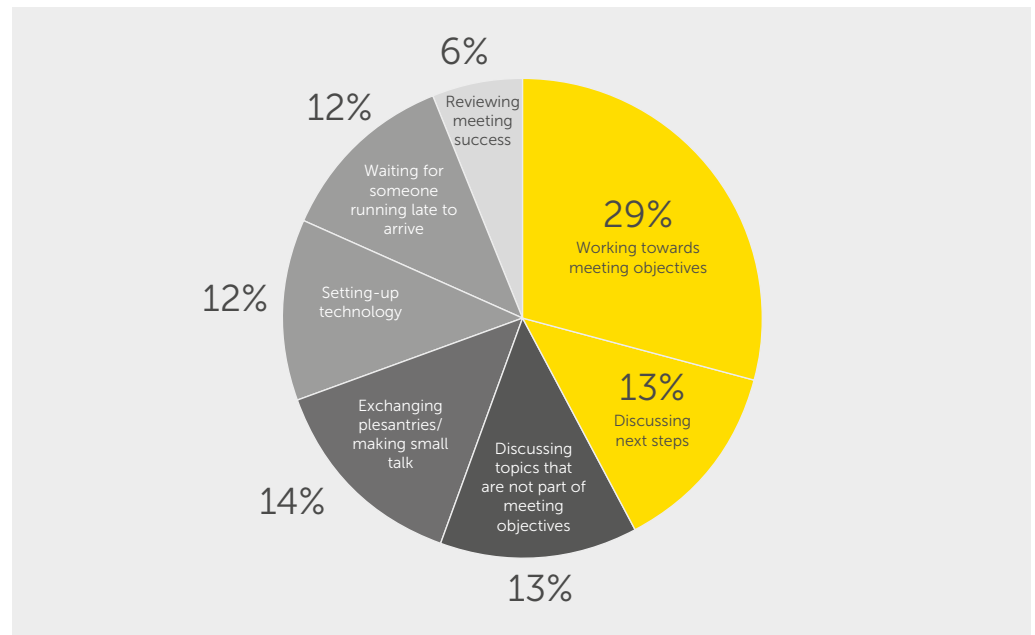


Figure 13.
Average amount of time spent in meetings on setting up technology

Meeting room tech must be intuitive. Nearly three quarters of employees (71%) want 'plug-and-play' technology that doesn't require any time spent on setup or device compliance.

Far from this though, too often company-provided hardware and software is a hindrance to employees' efficiency. The upshot being that employees instead turn to their own technology to collaborate – which they find quicker and easier to use.

Seven in ten millennials (72%) say they are much more productive using their own tech than their company's. So that's what they do. Nearly two-thirds of millennials (63%) are using tech that is not supplied or managed by their business.

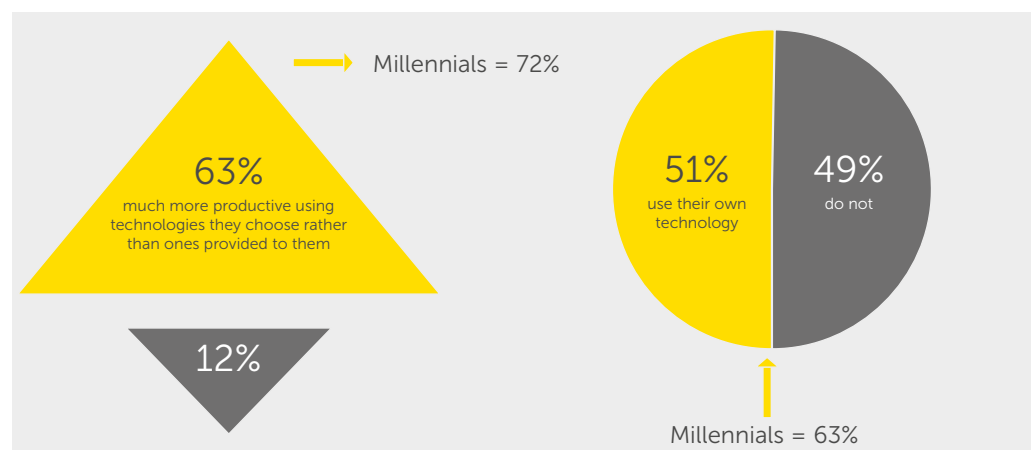


Figure 14.
Attitudes towards productivity and use of own technology amongst USA employees

While many staff feel that using their own tech to get work done more efficiently is showing great initiative, company IT departments will likely think otherwise. Employees using hardware or software that are not managed by their firm presents big security problems – particularly as these tools are being used to carry out commercially sensitive tasks, such as communicating with customers and sharing documents.

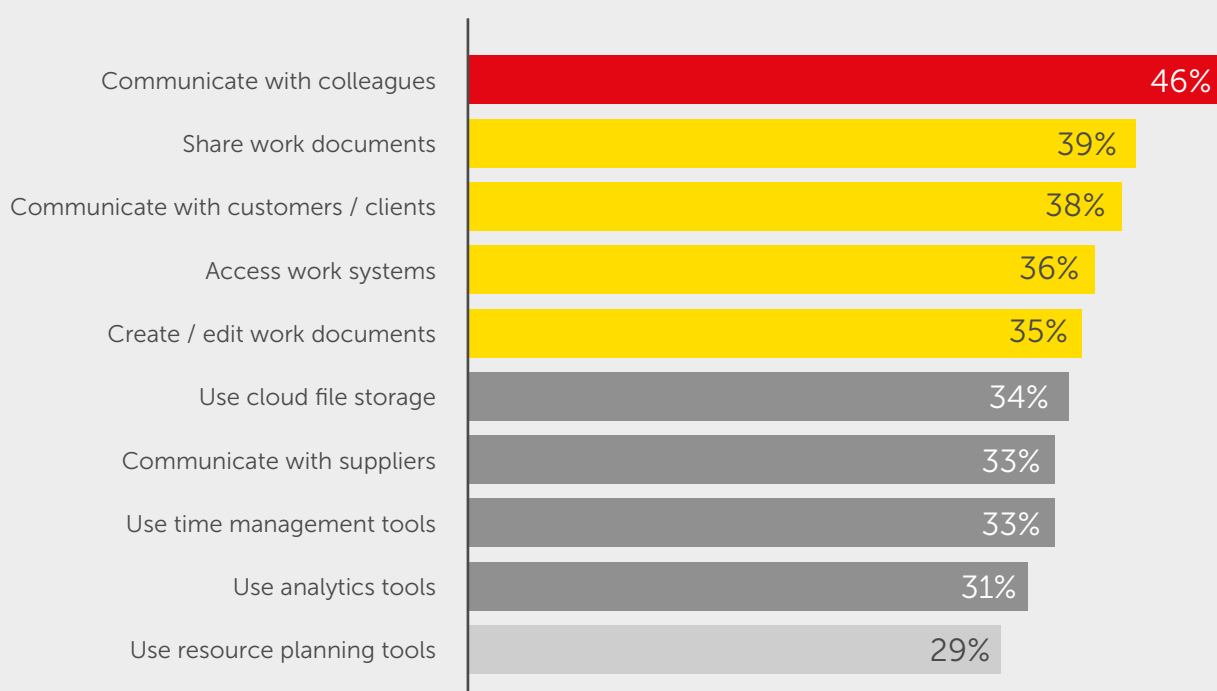


Figure 15.
The type of work carried out on USA employees' own technology

It goes without saying that the security risks of such ways of working are high – in North America, 32% of data breaches lead to a C-level leader, manager or president losing their job².

² <https://www.techrepublic.com/article/why-31-of-data-breaches-lead-to-employees-getting-fired/>

Do we blame employees for these lapses though? Or rather, do we blame the businesses for not providing the tech employees are crying out for?

In trying to balance security concerns with productivity, over half of employees in the USA (56%) take the stance that working productively is more important than working securely and openly accept that they will take security risks if necessary to get the job done. This also means that they are taking more risks than staff in Europe and the Pacific (both 50%).

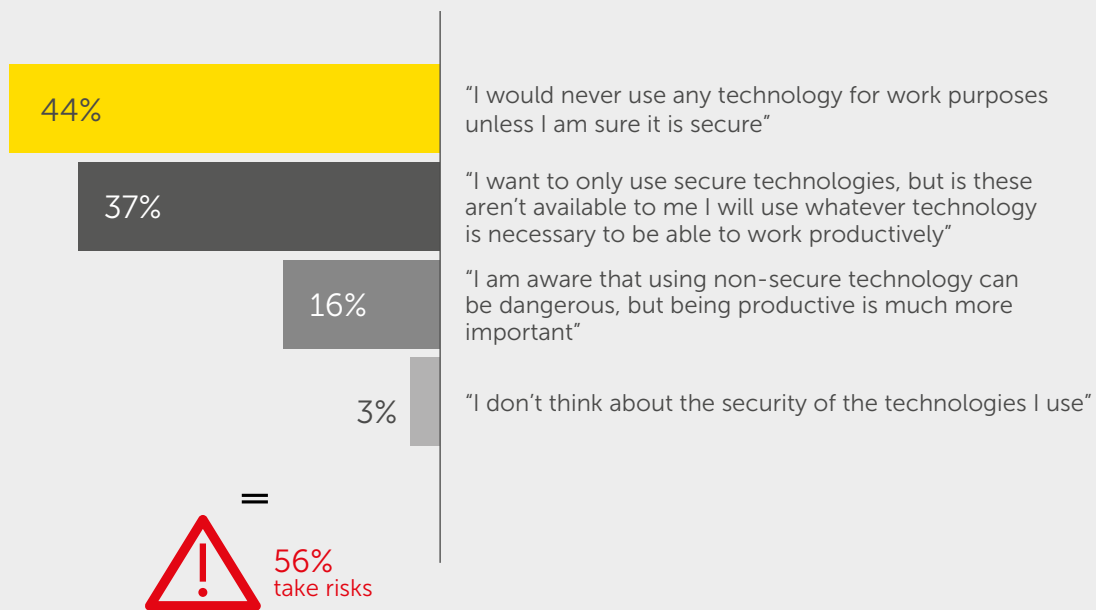


Figure 16.
USA employees' attitudes towards security and productivity

Businesses need to invest in better tech that allows employees to work productively and securely.

70% believe their company should invest in more modern technology to enable better meetings

Actions:

- This is too serious a security risk - businesses cannot ignore staff conducting commercially sensitive tasks on their own devices and software
- Companies need to invest in productive, secure and easy-to-set-up technologies

Chapter Four

Where are we going?

When technology works well, it can enable seamless collaboration between employees in multiple locations, empowering staff to choose flexible and remote working environments.

Half of employees in the USA now regularly work from home, with customer premises, trains and public spaces all also being frequently used as work locations.

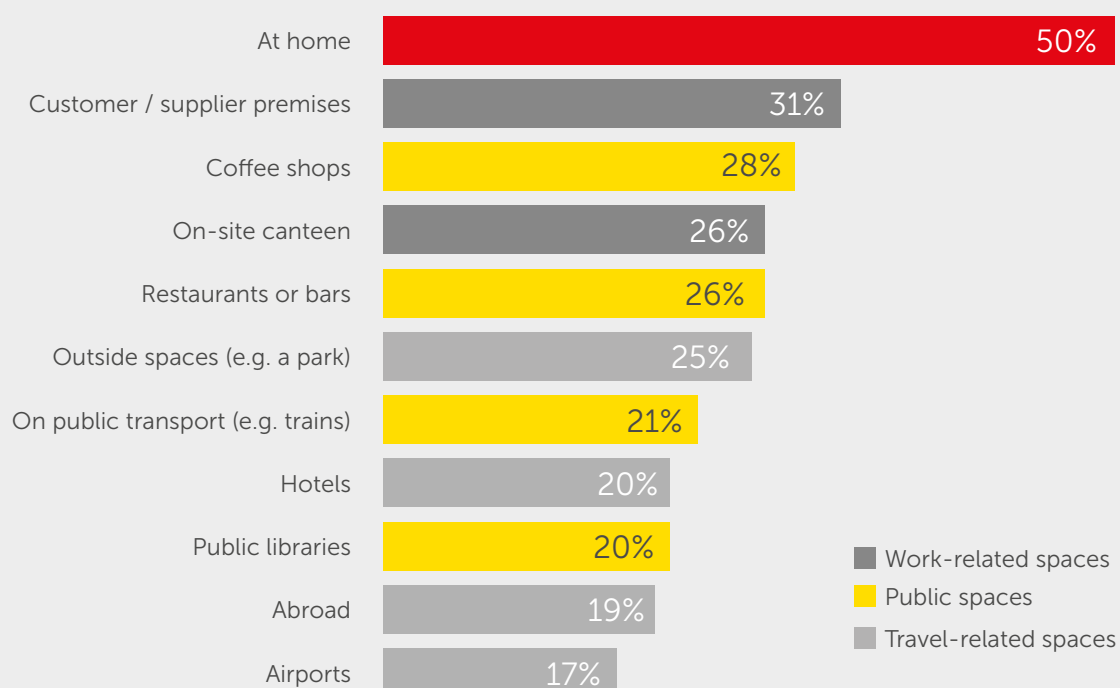


Figure 17. Locations where USA employees regularly work remotely

So, are the days of the office numbered? No. Whilst technology is opening up a plethora of workplaces, this does not detract from the importance of the office. The office is now part of an ecosystem of workplaces that need to connect seamlessly with each other. Employees – including millennials – want the flexibility to work remotely when it makes sense, but they also want a workplace to call ‘home’.

80% of staff in the USA want to work from a fixed place – an office – most days.

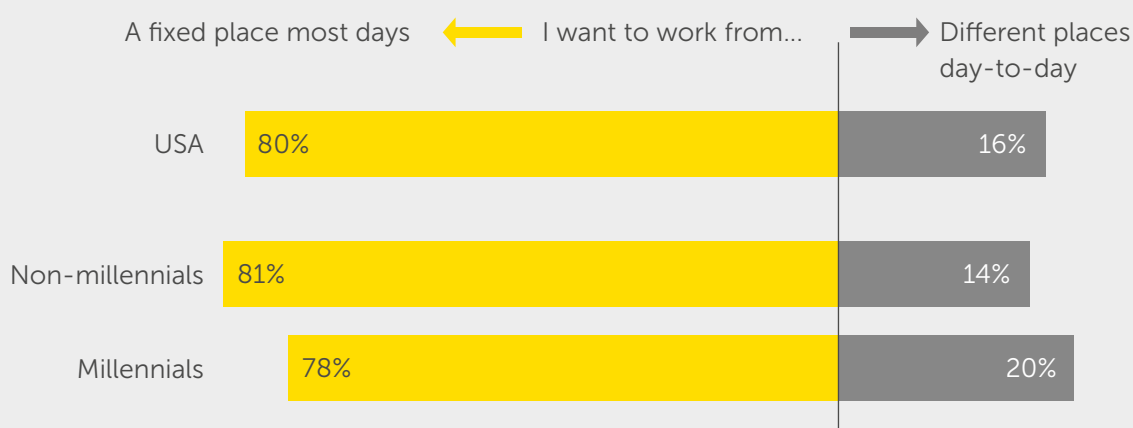


Figure 18. Percentage of USA employees wanting a fixed place most days / different places to work day-to-day

Given its importance, the office should be an area of businesses investment. As an important collaboration hub for employees, it needs a range of workspaces and technologies that can keep pace with evolving working behaviors. And the technology used in meeting spaces should be no exception.

Employees in the USA are excited about the potential for new and emerging technologies to be used in meetings:

- 66% - and 70% of millennials – want voice recognition to be used in meetings to make them more efficient and interactive
- 60% - and 67% of millennials - believe Augmented reality (AR) will improve meetings and this increases to 64% - and 68% of millennials - for Virtual reality (VR)



And this reality is not far off. One third (35%) expect VR meetings to be one of the three most common ways to collaborate with colleagues in meetings within the next 5 years.

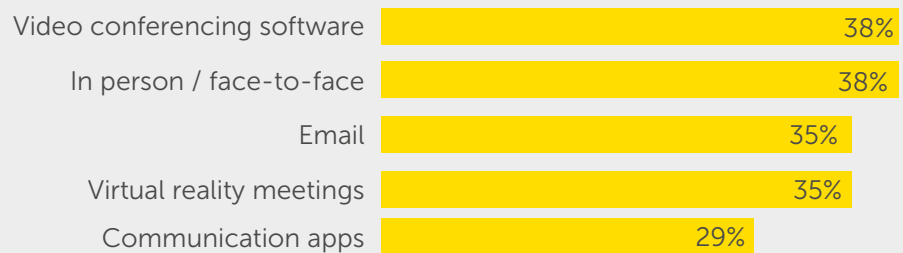


Figure 19.

Expected top three most common ways of collaborating with colleagues in 5 years amongst USA employees

We're on the verge of a period of rapid evolution in meeting room technology, as employees demand solutions that seamlessly connect virtual and physical workplaces. These emerging technologies will increase meeting productivity, efficiency and engagement like never before. And businesses will need to keep abreast of any new technologies as they arise, and be ready to capitalize.

Actions:

- Give employees flexibility over where they work
- But ensure the office remains an important, useful base for collaboration
- Businesses must invest in both established and emerging technology to support their employees' collaboration

Technology investment isn't just about step changes; it's also about keeping up to date on the technologies you already have. From operating systems to firmware, technology needs to be looked after if it is to remain helpful and secure.

Chapter Five

Ok, let's huddle!

Help enable collaboration

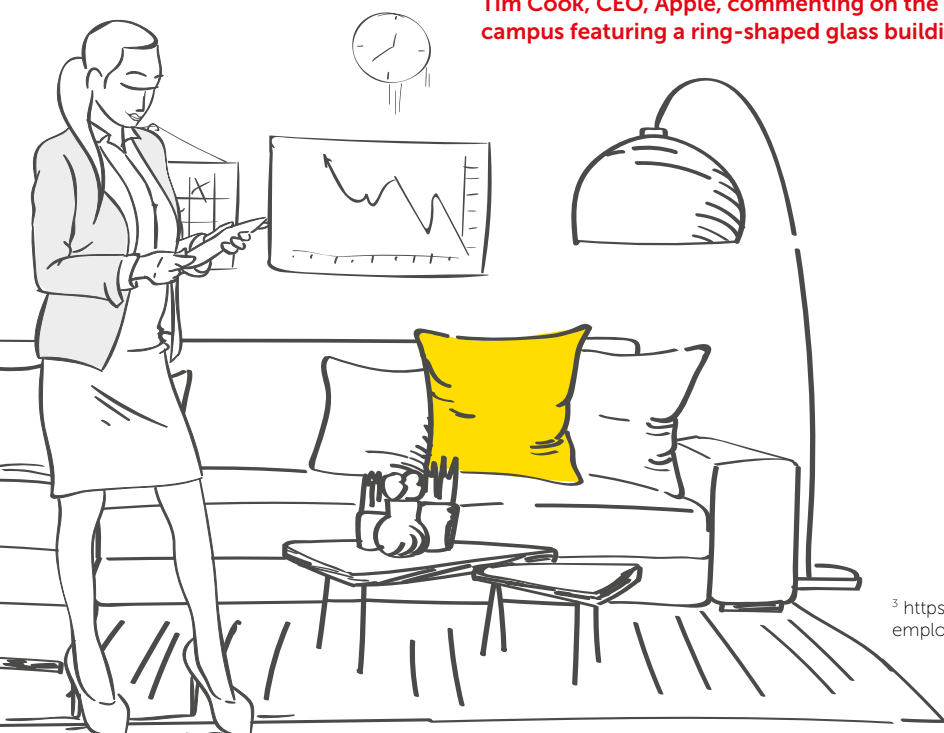
Along with great technology, the meeting space itself has a major role to play in positive outcomes. Bland, beige boardroom walls should be a thing of the past. The space to meet should be a draw, not a drag – otherwise how can employees feel inspired and at their creative best?

It's no coincidence that some of the world's most innovative companies also have some of the most creative workspaces in the world.

A stimulating environment for collaboration is important – but pointless if it's never available to use. Nearly half (47%) of employees in the USA regularly can't hold meetings when they want to, due to a lack of room availability.

Steve Jobs' vision for Apple stretched far beyond his time with us. He intended Apple Park to be the home of innovation for generations to come. The workspaces and parklands are designed to inspire our team as well as benefit the environment.

Tim Cook, CEO, Apple, commenting on the opening of the unique Apple Park, a 175-acre campus featuring a ring-shaped glass building and vast parklands in California³



³ <https://www.apple.com/uk/newsroom/2017/02/apple-park-opens-to-employees-in-april/>

A huddle space is a small, impromptu meeting space equipped with collaborative technologies. Combining comfy seating and playful visuals, huddles spaces cannot be prebooked and are designed for spontaneity and creativity.

Difficulties accessing appropriate meeting spaces is stifling collaboration and creativity. Nearly two-thirds of employees (62%) – and 79% of C-suite and Directors – say that easier access to meeting spaces would make them more creative.

To achieve this, employees point towards a simple and highly powerful solution – huddle spaces

Employees in the USA show overwhelming support for these unbookable, informal meeting spaces.

85% of those who already have access to huddle spaces believe that every office should have huddles spaces.

The enthusiasm for huddle spaces is not merely due to their accessibility – it’s also about the kind of meetings that huddle spaces encourage: collaborative, creative and productive.

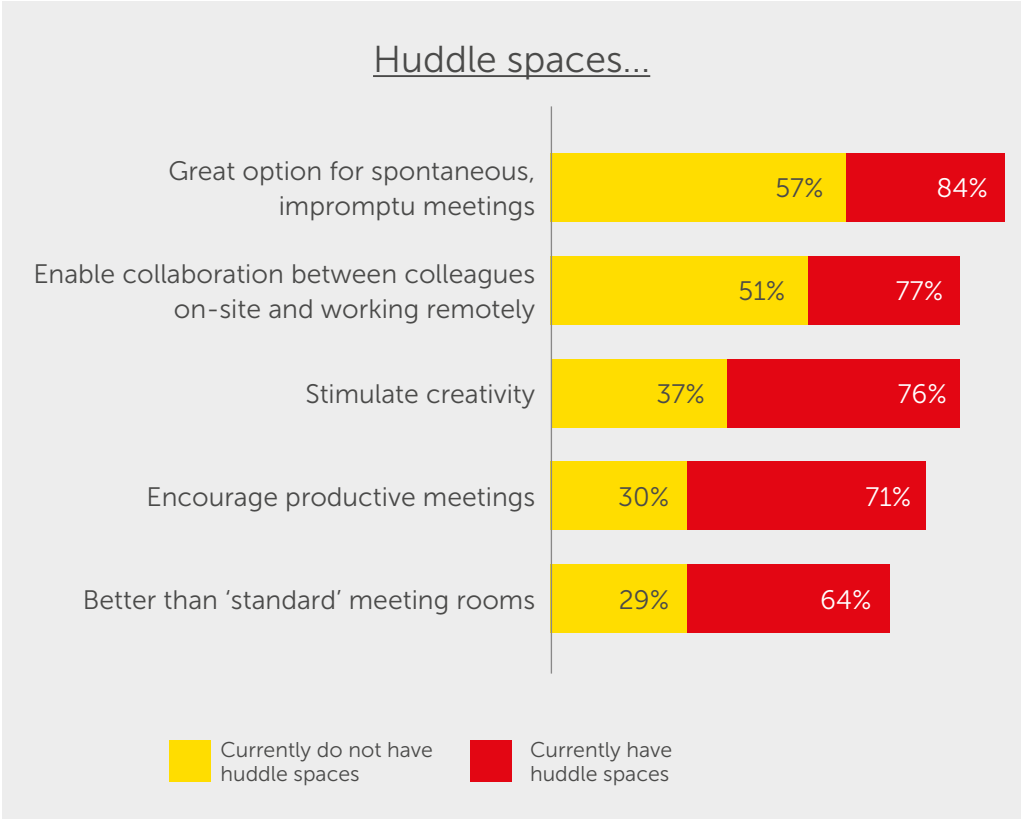


Figure 20. Proportion of USA employees agreeing with statements about huddle spaces

Employees working at organizations with huddle spaces are more likely to recognize their benefits; employees who don't currently have access to huddle spaces don't know what they're missing out on!

This is not to say that huddle spaces should replace other meeting spaces entirely. There remain certain types of meetings – e.g. hierarchical decision-making – for which more traditional or formal rooms continue to be first choice.

However, options should be available to choose the right space for every meeting. When asked to pick the best location out of huddle spaces, standard meeting rooms and boardrooms, employees in the USA place huddle spaces at the top of the list for:

- Working together with colleagues
- Highly creative meetings
- Brainstorming
- Inspiring staff

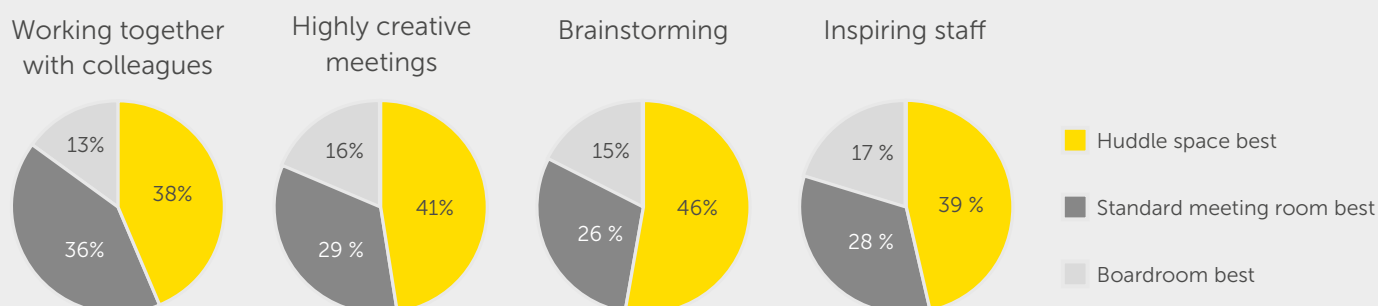


Figure 21.
USA employees' preferred choice for different types of meetings

The workforce has spoken and the way forward is clear: businesses need to provide more unbookable, informal spaces to facilitate spontaneous, impromptu meetings – long live the huddle space.

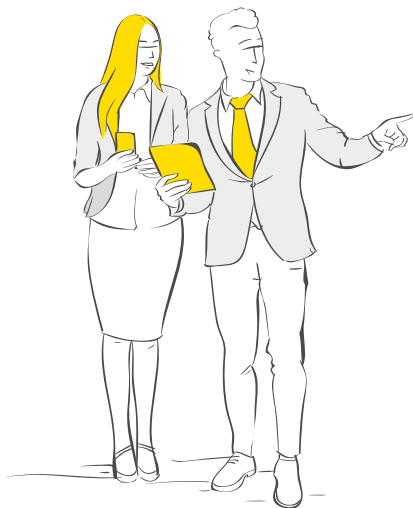
Actions:

- Create more available meeting space, to help stimulate creative and productive meetings
- Give employees what they want – more huddle spaces

Conclusion

Seizing the opportunity

Meetings don't need to cause consternation. They can be exciting, productive environments that people want to be part of! Just follow five simple steps:



- 1 Set a clear objective for every meeting**
Each meeting needs its own, clear objective and the meeting must end as soon as this is achieved. If at any point it becomes clear that the objective cannot be met, stop the meeting immediately. If the meeting is not relevant to you, walk out. Value your time.
- 2 Reduce the number and length of meetings**
Many employees spend at least one day a week in meetings. This needs rationalizing. Cancel unnecessary recurring meetings. Only book the meeting for the time required, not the standard calendar slot. And be selective in who you invite – meeting VIPs only.
- 3 Provide simple, intuitive technology**
Underperforming technology is frustrating employees and wasting time. The workforce is taking the solution in their own hands, using personal tech to conduct work... and simultaneously creating security woes. Businesses must provide the technology the workforce needs – simple, intuitive and collaborative. Fail to invest at your own peril.
- 4 Keep an eye on the future**
The future of meetings is exciting. Yes, you did read that correctly! Employees are super positive about the role that voice recognition, VR and AR are set to play in meetings. By introducing the right technologies, you can simultaneously improve meetings and keep your workforce engaged.
- 5 Let's huddle!**
Meetings are stunted by a lack of available spaces and boring layouts. The solution is huddle spaces: smart, comfy, unbookable spaces that provide perfect environments for quick, collaborative, impromptu meetings. Embrace the huddle.

We believe that every meeting should be productive... and enjoyable. Something to embrace with joy (not dread!). In fact, we believe this so strongly that we decided to extend our research, and challenge businesses to achieve the perfect meeting experience, bringing together all of the insights from this report.

How did they fare? Would they embrace the huddle? And is a 19-minute super-productive meeting possible?