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Meetings at work: Perceived effectiveness and recommended improvements ☆

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates why a large proportion of meetings continue to be regarded as a poor use of time, despite a substantial body of literature on how to make improvements. Employees from 41 countries provide comments on the effectiveness of their typical meetings and how to improve effectiveness. Less than half the respondents describe meetings as an effective use of time. The results suggest that employees are often invited to meetings of little personal relevance and many meeting organizers fail to apply fundamental meeting design practices. The findings show differences in response patterns for country of origin, job status (part- or full-time), and organizational type, but not for gender, supervisory status, and organizational tenure. The study provides illustrative comments about forms of effectiveness/ineffectiveness and forms of improvement, and discusses the implications with respect to theory development, future research, and practice.

1. Introduction

Meetings are a common activity in most organizations, seeking to provide a means for decision-making and goal-setting, scheduling work, solving problems, and disseminating information (e.g., McComas, Tuit, Waks, & Sherman, 2007; Volkema & Niederman, 1995). Research indicates that the amount of organizational time spent in meetings is steadily increasing (e.g., Elsayed-Elkhouly, Lazarus, & Forsythe, 1997; Mosvick & Nelson, 1987; Rogelberg, Leach, Warr, & Burnfield, 2006; Tobia & Becker, 1990), and the growing popularity of teamwork is likely to accelerate the trend.

While some meetings are highly productive and valued by attendees, a substantial number are not, with estimates as high as 41.9% (Schell, 2010, as cited in Kauffeld & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2012). Indeed, meetings are widely regarded as a source of inefficiency and a poor use of time (e.g., McManus, 2006; Mosvick & Nelson, 1987; Sisco, 1993). Inefficiencies can cost the organization in terms of staff wages for time spent in unproductive/unnecessary meetings, opportunity costs or efficiency costs (i.e., inability of staff to engage instead in more productive activities), and potential organizational costs such as lowered morale (McManus, 2006; Rogelberg, Shanock, & Scott, 2012).

Much of the existing trade and research literature focuses on meeting procedures, also referred to as design characteristics (e.g., Leach, Rogelberg, Warr, & Burnfield, 2009; Litsikas, 1995). These characteristics – potential antecedents of meeting effectiveness – include using an agenda, keeping minutes, starting and ending on time, and having a chairperson (e.g., Carlozzi, 1999; Leach et al., 2009; Nixon & Littlepage, 1992; Spencer & Pruss, 1992; Tropman, 1996; Volkema & Niederman, 1995). In more detail, Cohen, Rogelberg, Allen, and Luong (2011) categorize 18 meeting design characteristics as relating to temporal (e.g., promptness), attendee (e.g., presence of facilitator), physical (meeting setting), and procedural (e.g., formal agenda, meeting minutes) characteristics. Design characteristics are generally under the control of the meeting organizer and can be planned before, or initiated during, the meeting. Research, however, is often limited to only some of the potentially important features, for instance either more structural characteristics (e.g., use of an agenda, facility characteristics; Cohen et al., 2011) or particular communication processes (e.g., member participation or exploring options in decision making; Nixon & Littlepage, 1992). Leach et al. (2009) examine both structural and communication process characteristics and treat attendee involvement as a mediator variable that links structural characteristics to meeting effectiveness.

Further, in a study of executive meeting leaders, Perkins (2009) distinguishes the process of leading a meeting from the content of the meeting itself. According to Perkins, meeting process behaviors include

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"proposing how the meeting should be conducted, reducing tension, asking clarifying questions, summarizing, and testing for consensus" (p. 300), and content behaviors include "giving information, seeking information, supporting, and disagreeing/attacking" (p. 300). These conceptualizations build on elements of the broader leadership behavior literature, such as elements of initiating structure (e.g., Fleishman, 1995). Interestingly, Perkins reports that, on average, meeting leaders focus 80% of their time performing content-related behaviors and 20% of their time on process behaviors, while expert leaders spend 50% on each. The study highlights the importance of how communication is delivered or exchanged and how objectives are achieved as much as what is conveyed. A subsequent investigation of top-management group meetings similarly reports that goal clarity (an example of initiating structure) and focused communication relate positively and significantly with team effectiveness (Bang, Fuglesang, Ovesen, & Eilertsen, 2010).

However, these studies of executive/management meeting groups have limitations. Perkins' study involves only 21 participants (20 of whom were male); all of whom are high-potential senior executives, none are poor meeting leaders, and only three are experts. Bang et al.'s (2010) sample comprises only eight top management teams in Norway, all in the public sector. Patterns may of course be different outside the public sector or in other countries. These studies, while informative, do not include a large segment of meeting attendees and they may be missing key elements of meeting-leader behaviors. Building on these studies of leader actions taken during meetings, an examination of the behaviors of leaders (and attendees) pre- and post-meetings is warranted.

The present qualitative study examines comments from a broad, multi-national sample of employees on the factors that influence perceptions of meeting quality. This approach – the use of open-ended questions to allow participants to comment on whatever they feel is relevant to meeting effectiveness – is particularly appropriate in appraising the importance of previously-identified design characteristics (cf., Cohen et al., 2011) and in identifying new design characteristics. More specifically, this study aims to build upon Perkins (2009) to reveal both content and process factors in effectiveness perceptions, and uses a sample of leaders and attendees which is broader than in most previous research. Furthermore, the study goes beyond an examination of meeting effectiveness alone to also obtain attendees' practical recommendations for improvement.

Recommendations to improve meetings are often based on managerial perceptions of what happens in meetings they attend (e.g., Bang et al., 2010; Myrsiades, 2000) or on observations of manager/executive meetings (e.g., Perkins, 2009). This approach is valuable because meetings are a mechanism through which supervisors (or meeting leaders) may influence relationships with others and shape their perceptions of the organization. However, an exclusive focus on leader/supervisor perceptions is problematic because research suggests that meeting facilitators have more positive perceptions of meeting quality than those who are not in positions of power (Cohen et al., 2011). Therefore gathering perceptions from all meeting attendees and not just from the leaders is important (e.g., Baran, Shanock, Rogelberg, & Scott, 2012). The present study thus obtains a diverse range of recommendations from attendees at all levels of the organization with varied meeting experiences and backgrounds.

This qualitative investigation considers three additional topics: meeting dissatisfaction, culture, and theory development. First, what are the drivers of meeting dissatisfaction? Although a number of studies examine participants' satisfaction with meetings (e.g., Cohen et al., 2011; Leach et al., 2009; Streibel, 2003; Tobia & Becker, 1990; Tropman, 1996), relatively little research explores the origins of meeting dissatisfaction. Better understanding of what does not work well can inform the development of action plans for improving meeting activities. Rogelberg, Allen, Shanock, Scott, and Shuffler (2010) note eight variables as potential predictors of dissatisfaction, including too many meetings with no substantive agenda, unfocused discussion, meetings starting and ending late, and lack of follow-through on what is discussed. Vivacqua, Marques, Ferreira, and de Souza (2011) point to additional meeting problems, such as avoidance, contradicting opinions, difficult personal attitude, repetition, and lack of information. Given the two studies' disparate findings for what contributes to meeting dissatisfaction or problems during meetings, the present research examines reasons that underpin perceptions of ineffective meetings, as well as those that relate to effective meetings.

The second topic concerns cultural differences in work meeting practices. Despite increasing globalization, cross-cultural research is scant. In a recent study of differences in meeting norms, Köhler, Cramton, and Hinds (2012) report differences in German and American expectations for the purpose, content, participant roles, and timing of meetings. For instance, their results suggest that Americans generally begin meetings with small talk and follow more of an impromptu and linear style while Germans tend to focus on task definition and use recurrent cycles of refinement. While groundbreaking in understanding cultural differences, Köhler et al.'s study examines only a restricted number of teams in limited populations (i.e., one manufacturing team, six student teams, and three software teams), assesses only two cultures, and focuses primarily on interaction patterns. The present broader investigation extends across several countries, and examines additional elements, such as meeting outcomes and design, and attendee characteristics.

The third topic relates to the use of theoretical frameworks to explain why various meeting design characteristics or other meeting process variables might contribute to meeting quality or perceptions of effectiveness. Using a needs-based model, Malouff, Calic, McGrory, Murrell, and Schutte (2012) report that several meeting-leader behaviors (e.g., encouraging participation, arriving before the start of the meeting, moving the meeting along, summarizing decisions made, smiling) relate to perceived meeting productivity or meeting satisfaction. In contrast, Kauffeld and Lehmann-Willenbrock (2012) apply an input–process–output model of team performance (e.g., Hackman & Morris, 1975) to examine communication in real time using behavioral observational methods. They view meeting processes as "activities that mediate the relationship between input factors (e.g., team members' personalities, group size, or financial incentives) and team outputs or outcomes (e.g., productivity, team member satisfaction, or meeting effectiveness)" (p. 131). Although Kauffeld and Lehmann-Willenbrock's study and coding scheme advance understanding of interpersonal communication processes during meetings, findings are limited to a German-speaking background and only address verbal behaviors. Generally, though, relatively few studies of work meetings are theoretically grounded. Through analysis of perceptions of meeting effectiveness, the present study seeks to inform theory development with respect to why meetings are often negatively perceived.

2. Method

2.1. Sample and procedure

In order to obtain a wide range of views and to address gaps in previous meetings research (e.g., focusing on a single country, single organization, or a set of organizations in a single field), the primary sampling strategy draws participants from across the world and in multiple industries. This strategy involves contacting respondents through online interest groups, commercially purchased email addresses, advertisements, and articles in newspapers and magazines. Participants then provide, through an online platform, comments about meeting effectiveness and ways to improve effectiveness by responding to the following questions: (1) In regard to the effectiveness of your typical meetings, please provide the main reason why you feel as you do about the meetings you attend and (2) What suggestions do you have for improving the effectiveness of meetings? To ensure comparable individual responses, the survey provides a standard definition of work

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meetings: a scheduled – you had some advance notice – gathering of two or more individuals for the purpose of a work-related interaction. The survey invites participants to evaluate their typical meetings in terms of the degree to which the meetings they attend are a good or poor use of time. Participants also provide information on meeting demands (i.e., the number of meetings attended and the amount of time spent in meetings in a typical week), whether or not they received meeting training, and a range of demographic variables, including country of employment, gender, supervisor status, organizational tenure, job status, and organizational type.

After basic data-cleaning (e.g., removing cases that provide demographic information but no substantive data), 1081 of the 1223 respondents answered at least one of the two open-ended questions. These 1081 respondents comprise the sample described here, of which 1065 (87.1%) participants provide usable responses to the effectiveness item and 700 (57.2%) provide recommendations.

In this study, of those participants who responded to the meeting demand questions, 917 (94.8%) and 940 (97.2%) provide responses to the number of meetings attended per typical week and time spent in meetings, respectively. In more detail, 561 (61.2%), 225 (24.5%), 56 (6.1%), and 75 (8.2%) report that they attend 0–3, 4–6, 7–9, and 10–25 meetings per typical week, respectively, and 496 (52.8%), 207 (22.0%), 85 (9.0%), and 152 (16.2%) report that they spend 0–3, 3.5–6, 7–9, and 10–35 h in meetings per week, respectively. In regard to meeting facilitation training, 926 (95.8%) indicate whether or not they received meeting training, with 228 (24.6%) reporting that they received such training. The sample is 61.6% female and the average age of participants is 39.0 ($SD = 11.2$). Participants report an average organizational tenure of 6.8 years ($SD = 7.2$), 52.8% supervisors, and 89.2% full-time workers. The most common types of organization in the sample include public sector (national or city government; 31.8%); private-for-profit organization that is not quoted on the stock exchange (27.7%); and private-for-profit that is quoted on the stock exchange (22.8%). From the 41 source countries, most respondents work in the US (585, 54.1%), the UK (221, 20.4%), and Australia (61, 5.6%). Other countries are represented in small numbers and 77 (7.1%) participants declined to indicate their source country; as such, this report does not describe further country break downs.

2.2. Research approach

Qualitative research approaches are especially needed in the study of work meetings because these methods have the potential to identify or produce factors that are unexamined in previous quantitative research (Bachiochi & Weiner, 2002; Fowler, 1993; Lee, 1999), and can complement quantitative procedures to provide evidence for triangulation of results (e.g., Tucker, Powell, & Meyer, 1995). Qualitative research is inductive in nature, can enhance understanding of social phenomena (Mays & Pope, 1995), and is particularly suited for investigations of participants' experiences and the meanings they place on these experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Patton, 2002). The survey in the present study includes open-ended questions, allowing workers to characterize meeting experiences in their own words.

3. Results

3.1. Coding themes and content analysis

Following recommendations by Bachiochi and Weiner (2002), two of the authors developed coding themes based on a representative sample of the effectiveness and recommendations comments (see Tables 1 and 2, respectively). Consistent with Creswell (2007), the themes are structured hierarchically, yielding four main themes for effectiveness comments and five main themes for the recommendations, with more specific sub-themes under each category. The two authors revised the themes (e.g., merging categories) after an initial coding of sample comments. The revised themes represent the basis for the coding of all comments.

Two coders (one from the US and one from the UK) who were not involved with creating the coding themes (and not co-authors of this paper) underwent training to familiarize themselves with the framework and to practice its application to respondents' comments. For the effectiveness responses they were asked to code the valence or tone of each comment (positive, negative, or neutral), as well as to assign one main theme and one sub-theme to represent the comment. For the recommendations comments, coders recorded whether the comment dealt with issues that occurred before, during, or after the meeting (which could help in identifying points of action for potential improvement efforts) as well as the main and sub-themes.

3.1.1. Effectiveness themes

The effectiveness comments reflect four main themes: (1) *People* (P), (2) *Meeting organization* (MO), (3) *Meeting activities* (MA), and (4) *Meeting outcomes* (O), see Table 1. Sub-themes address components of each of these categories. *People* refers to behaviors or individual characteristics of one or more attendees which are presumed to impact meeting effectiveness (e.g., personal conscientiousness, interpersonal conflicts, respect for others). *Meeting organization* pertains to structural factors (e.g., agenda use, meeting composition, intervals between meetings). *Meeting activities* refers to meeting content (e.g., relevance of information) and meeting purpose (e.g., information dissemination, networking). Finally, *Meeting outcomes* represents the presence or absence of decisions made during or after the meeting (e.g., goal evaluation), and impact on work outside of the meeting (e.g., meetings generate more work). This theme also captures the perceived value of meetings: the extent to which they are valuable (e.g., they improve efficiency, they are necessary, and they are neither good nor bad).

3.1.2. Recommendation themes

The recommendations responses represent five main themes (see Table 2): (1) *People* (P), (2) *Meeting structure/organization* (SO), (3) *Content/specific activities* (CA), (4) *Purpose of the meeting* (PM), and (5) *Barriers/constraints* (B). *People* represents recommendations to change aspects of attendee behavior (e.g., arrive on time, listen to others). *Meeting structure/organization* refers to the management of meetings (e.g., use of a chairperson, meeting timeliness). This theme also pertains to aspects of the meeting environment (e.g., a more comfortable setting). *Content/specific activities* relates to attendee participation (e.g., allow the meetings to be more interactive, break into smaller groups, delegation of responsibilities). *Purpose of the meeting* refers to improved communication processes (e.g., information dissemination, minute taking), as well as recommendations to increase commitment to meeting outcomes (follow up on proposed solutions). Finally, the theme *Barriers/constraints* refers to suggestions to remove obstacles to effective meeting practices (e.g., provide training on conducting meetings, allowing sufficient time to prepare for meetings).

3.1.3. Agreement between the coders

Saldana (2009) recommends the use of collaborative coding, with the rationale that "multiple minds bring multiple ways of analyzing and interpreting data" (p. 27), and suggests assessing inter-coder agreement in terms of percentage of consistent codes. Other researchers advocate group discussion or group consensus as an agreement goal (Harry, Sturges, & Kingner, 2005). This study uses a combination of these approaches. Coders first made independent ratings of all comments. For comments they disagreed upon, they were able to change their rating if they accepted the other coder's ratings (consensus ratings), consistent with Saldana's provision of a reality check on each other's codes. Because the coders live in separate countries, the consensus procedure was carried out iteratively in successive stages by e-mail exchanges. This iterative process of reaching agreement is common practice in qualitative research. Saldana (2009) notes that "coding is a

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Table 1
Themes for effectiveness comments.

People	Meeting organization	Meeting activities	Meeting outcomes
P1: conscientiousness of attendees • Arrive late • Leaders start meetings late due to late attendees • Attendees arrive unprepared for the meeting	MO1: meeting structure • Agenda (or lack thereof) • Distribution of agenda in advance (or not) • Lack of direction/goals • Chaired in/effectively • Meetings held just to have them (routine, no purpose)	MA1: unproductive discussion • No new information (rehash ideas) • Discussion gets off target (irrelevant topics, stray from agenda) • Core issues not discussed	O1: impact on workload demands • Meetings take up time for work/action to be implemented • Participation results in increased workload
P2: communication • Lack of acceptance for others' ideas, opinions, recommendations; • One-way communication (top down) • Insufficient interaction	MO2: meeting composition & size • Appropriate parties are not invited • Inappropriate parties are invited (meeting content irrelevant to one's job) • Too many attendees	MA2: meeting activities are monotonous/boring	O2: personal agendas • Used for leader's own agenda (hidden agendas) • Decisions have already been made (rubber stamp)
P3: conversation not meaningful • People talk just to appear to add value • Self-promotion: status symbol; used to boost egos • True feelings not expressed	MO3: Temporal issues • Time conflicts • Difficult to schedule • Takes time to travel to meeting • Meet at inappropriate intervals • Meetings take too long	MA3: role ambiguity • Lack of clarity about what the attendee is supposed to do	O3: inaction post-meeting • No direct consequences/products (solutions) • No evaluation of effectiveness or follow-up on goals • Organizational constraints (barriers) to meet goals
P4: interpersonal behavior • Interpersonal conflicts • Incivility/disrespect • People interrupt/talk during meeting • People use meetings to target, denigrate, or punish others	MO4: other	MA4: good mechanism to exchange ideas & get feedback	O4: effective & necessary • Meetings improve efficiency • keep things focused • Delegate responsibilities • Get agreement • Deal with problems/important issues
P5: co-workers are respectful, motivated		MA5: good mechanism to disseminate information	O5: (neutral/ambivalent) some meetings are good, some are not
P6: people do not assume accountability for their actions and duties		MA6: good for face time and social contact, networking	O6: other
P7: other		MA7: other	

Note. The category other is for comments that do not fit well into existing sub-themes. P6 comments were coded in the initial independent rating task, but the raters did not agree on these items for the final consensus judgment (none of the comments in the final set were coded as P6).

cyclical process that requires you to recode not just once but twice and sometimes even more … Virtually all researcher developed coding schemes are never fixed from the beginning — they evolve as analysis progresses" (p. 29). Further, Bernard and Ryan (2010) point out that the greater the number of attributes or units of analysis being coded, the lower the likelihood for coders to agree (and the greater the

Table 2
Themes for recommendations comments.

People	Meeting structure/organization	Content/specific activities	Communicate meeting outcomes and achieve meeting purpose	Remove barriers/constraints
P1: conscientious • Come prepared • Arrive on time	SO1: improve structure • Provide meaningful agenda • Clarify plan of action • Use or rotate a facilitator/chair • Improve organization of meeting	CA1: seek/obtain input/participation from all attendees • Make meetings more interactive	PM1: disseminate information • Distribute appropriate information via e-mail instead of in meeting • Record, distribute meeting minutes	B1: provide training on how to conduct meetings
P2: open-mindedness & empathy • Open to change • Actively listen to what others are saying (*not merely asking for input* CA1)	SO2: invite appropriate attendees (e.g., information is relevant to the person)	CA2: manage discussion • Stay focused on the topic • Prioritize items	PM2: action-oriented • Follow up with proposed solutions	B2: allow time to prepare for meetings
P3: displays professionalism during the meeting	SO3: temporal considerations • Pay attention to timing limit • Shorten meetings • Start/end on time	CA3: break into smaller groups (brainstorming, etc.)	PM3: other	B3: allocate resources for meeting activities
P4: other	SO4: hold meetings at appropriate intervals • Reduce/increase number of meetings held • Meet only when necessary	CA4: delegate responsibilities and set deadlines for assigned tasks		B4: other
	SO5: make meeting environment more comfortable • More relaxed • Stimulating setting • Provide food	CA5: other		
	SO6: technology-facilitated meetings • Multimedia technology • Teleconferencing			
	SO7: other			

Note. The category other is for comments that do not fit well into existing sub-themes.

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difficulty to obtain a high kappa score). The coding framework in the current study is fairly large for the sub-themes.

Percent agreement is the most commonly used index of reliability for qualitative data (e.g., Miles & Huberman, 1994), and is the method computed for the independent ratings and consensus ratings in the present study. Many researchers consider percent agreement to be a liberal estimate (e.g., see Lombard, Snyder-Duch, & Bracken, 2004); therefore this study also reports a more conservative index, Cohen's kappa (κ), for the independent ratings of the main themes (pre-consensus) where possible. This measures the extent to which raters agree in their coding assignments beyond levels which would occur by chance (Di Eugenio, 2000).

The minimum acceptable level of percent agreement is considered to be at least 70% (Lombard et al., 2004). Although no standard level of acceptance for Cohen's κ exists, values above .50 or .60 are generally cited as acceptable (e.g., Baird & Wagner, 2000; Grove, Andreasen, McDonald-Scott, Keller, & Shapiro, 1981). Other estimates define .41 to .60 as moderate agreement and .61 to .80 as substantial agreement (Landis & Koch, 1977; Rietveld & van Hout, 1993). Given these proposed ranges, the minimally acceptable level of kappa is defined as .50 in the current study.

Table 3 displays the agreement statistics for the two coders. Results show that initial levels of agreement (independent ratings) are acceptable according to the index of inter-coder agreement for valence of the effectiveness comments and the main theme of the recommendations comments. Estimates of percent agreement are relatively low for the initial coding of the effectiveness main theme, sub-themes, and time-of-action recommendation, but are considerably higher after the consensus processes. Coders provided information to indicate the source of initial disagreements. During the independent rating task, the coders interpreted some comments differently and therefore assigned a different theme/time of action. During the consensus process, one coder on reflection could often understand how the other coder arrived at that particular theme/time of action, hence enhancing agreement. Feedback from the coders suggests that the training exercise prior to coding the comments was adequate for this task, and that, in general, recommendations comments were more straightforward in nature than the effectiveness comments, and were easier to code.

Table 3
Agreement statistics for the qualitative comments.

	Independent ratings: N (% agreement)	After consensus 1: N (% agreement)	After final consensus: N (% agreement)
Effectiveness			
Main theme	703 (66.01[a])	1051 (98.69[b])	1055 (99.06)
Sub-themes	538 (50.52[a])	853 (80.09)	1057 (99.25)
Valence	856 (80.38)	1023 (96.06)	1065 (100.00[c])
Recommendations			
Main theme	546 (78.00[a])	671 (95.86)	698 (99.71)
Sub-themes	482 (68.86[a])	660 (94.29)	690 (98.57)
Time of action	271 (38.71)	660 (94.29)	695 (99.29)

N = 1065 for effectiveness comments and N = 700 for recommendation comments. Cohen's κ = .54 for reasons independent ratings and Cohen's κ = .67 for independent ratings of recommendations main theme; this statistic could not be calculated for other indices of independent ratings due to the lack of a completely symmetrical matrix. The agreement is low for the recommendations time of action code, in part, because one coder left 307 (43.9%) of the comments uncoded at this stage and the second coder left 53 comments uncoded.

[a] Coders agreed not to code 15 comments (1.4%) for the independent ratings of the main theme (e.g., non-substantive comment). 10 (0.9% effectiveness subcategory independent ratings), and 40 (5.7% recommendation main theme and sub-theme).

[b] Coders agreed to leave five comments uncoded at consensus 1; these were later categorized in the final consensus.

[c] For the final valence consensus, the US coder made decisions about retaining the consensus 1 code, changing the consensus 1 code, or changing an assigned code from consensus 1 to a no code; for the final consensus 93 (8.7% final valence) had no assigned valence code.

3.2. Findings for comments about effectiveness

Of the 1065 effectiveness comments that were coded in terms of tone, main theme, and sub-themes, only 93 (8.7%) have no clear valence and coders disagree on the valence of 5 (0.4%) comments; these 98 cases are therefore excluded from further analysis. The remaining 967 comments represent the following categories: 88 (9.1%) *people*, 197 (20.3%) *meeting organization*, 329 (34.0%) *meeting activities*, and 353 (36.5%) *meeting outcomes*. Additionally, three comments concern other topics, and two comments lack an agreed-upon categorization from the coders. Across the themes, 293 (30.3%) are coded as negative, 198 (20.5%) are coded as neutral (ambivalent), and 476 (49.2%) are coded as positive. Thus, less than half of the respondents describe meetings as an effective or good use of time. In more detail, themes with the lowest/highest number of negative comments concern *meeting outcomes* (42, 14.3%) and *meeting organization* (126, 43.0%), respectively; themes with the low/highest number of ambivalent comments relate to *people* (11, 5.6%) and *meeting organization* (89, 44.9%), respectively; and themes with the lowest/highest number of positive comments concern *people* (14, 2.9%) and *meeting outcomes* (222, 46.6%), respectively.

The following sections present a sample of the most common negative and positive comments for each main theme (some ambivalent comments are available on request), and also report the findings of analyses that compared the distribution of valence across main themes, meeting demands (number of meetings attended and time spent in meetings), meeting facilitation training, and demographic variables (country of employment, gender, supervisor status, organizational tenure, job status, and organizational type).

3.2.1. People

Of the 88 comments concerning *people*, 63 (71.6%) are coded as negative and 14 (15.9%) as positive. The most common negative comments relate to sub-themes P2 (e.g., lack of acceptance of ideas and opinions, unidirectional communication) and P4 (e.g., interpersonal conflicts, meetings are used to target/punish others), see Table 1. Sample comments:

> "*My organization is very hierarchical and senior managers often seem to want to tell us what ought to be going on rather than addressing what is actually happening*." (P2)"*The agenda is determined by the chair who infrequently and unambitiously seeks input from group members*." (P2)"*Meetings in our company have become more of a brow-beating than anything. I walk away with gladness that I wasn't the target of the day*." (P4)"*Sales management tell us how bad we're doing and come up with threats or lame ideas to help us*." (P4)

The most frequent positive comments relate to P5 (i.e., people are respectful, motivated). Sample comments include:

> "*I feel that the meetings motivate me to work harder on the main objectives of the company. I feel that the meetings make me feel more of a part of my company*." (P5)"*The work atmosphere is supportive and open-minded and the people involved are usually direct and fair*." (P5)"*The meetings are conducted in a very good manner with all employees responding well*." (P5)

3.2.2. Meeting organization

Of the 197 comments pertaining to *meeting organization*, 126 (64.0%) are coded as negative and 31 (15.7%) as positive. The most prevalent negative comments concern sub-themes MO1 (e.g., a lack of structure) and MO2 (e.g., inappropriate parties are invited). Sample comments include:

> "*Meetings are ill-planned, lack a tight focus, and do not have a structure that ensures work will get done*." (MO1)"*The lack of an agenda and goals contribute greatly to the feeling of a waste of time*." (MO1)

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"*Lack of preparation and lack of information given to attendees beforehand.*" (MO1)"*We are expected to attend a [sic] staff meetings biweekly. We are then forced to sit and listen to various conversations about others' problems and projects when they have absolutely nothing to do with people in the room.*" (MO2)"*Some of the meetings are totally ineffective and have nothing to do with certain departments in the firm. I feel that separate meetings should be held for separate departments and not one meeting for all departments.*" (MO2)

The most common positive comments relate to MO1 (e.g., chaired effectively, clear goals, agenda use). Sample comments:

"*Well-structured and prepared in advance. Single (company) objective for most meetings. Formal chairman and minute taker who records agreed actions on the spot and ensures follow-up by next the meeting.*" (MO1)"*Many of the meetings are Board or Board committee meetings — chaired and with clear agendas. As a Non-executive director, meetings are the main forum for me to exercise my influence, listen to views, and make joint decisions.*" (MO1)

3.2.3. Meeting activity

Of the 329 comments pertaining to *meeting activity*, 62 (18.8%) are coded as negative and 209 (63.5%) as positive. The most frequent negative comments relate to the sub-theme MA1 (e.g., core topics not discussed). Sample comments:

"*The meetings often feel like they are going over old ground. Too much time seems to be spent talking through problems and not enough on solutions.*" (MA1)"*Just too much time wasted on topics other than what the meeting was organized for.*" (MA1)"*Meeting [sic] do not to seem focused. Even though the time together is important, the topics do not seem to be prioritized.*" (MA1)

The most common positive comments concern MA4 (i.e., mechanism to exchange ideas, get feedback) and MA5 (i.e., mechanism for information dissemination). Sample comments:

"*I think getting people together for a meeting often communicates more than is possible in an email exchange and that issues can be resolved more quickly.*" (MA4)"*We are a series of individuals facing similar circumstances and the meetings allow us to receive and give coaching to others that face similar issues.*" (MA4)"*I am an Executive in a garment manufacturing company. We need to meet the customer face to face for them to see/touch the garment. This allows feedback and open dialog [sic] for product change or order commitment from the customer.*" (MA4)"*My work is done through a committee system. Meetings are for the purpose of sharing information discussing and making decisions. One way or another, decisions are made and therefore the meetings are effective.*" (MA5)"*Broadens the range and scope of knowledge about my organization and provides opportunities to develop projects/initiatives with others.*" (MA5)"*Need to spread information to other colleagues and personal contact is the most effective way to do it because it is interactive.*" (MA5)

3.2.4. Meeting outcomes

Of the 353 comments relating to *meeting outcomes*, 42 (11.9%) are coded as negative and 222 (62.9%) as positive. The most common negative comments concern O2 (e.g., personal agendas) and O3 (e.g., inaction post-meeting). Sample comments:

"*Typically meetings tend to have pre agendas and known outcomes. The meeting is used as a seal of approval for previously decided ideas and tasks.*" (O2)"*The meeting is usually controlled by one individual and although opinions are expressed the overall outcome of the meeting is usually pretty much pre-determined.*" (O2)"*Too much time is spent addressing issues and no action steps ensue.*" (O3)"*Little gets carried through on solutions/ideas discussed at the meeting.*" (O3)

The most prevalent positive comments relate to O4 (e.g., meetings are relevant, enhance commitment to goals). Sample comments:

"*Regular meetings are one thing that promotes my group's effectiveness. They are a good mix of accomplishing work (usually making assignments, discussing work-related issues, sharing information) and socializing.*" (O4)"*We are a very cross-functional organization and being a medium sized manufacturer we need meetings to get all participants on the same page. Generally speaking the meetings I attend are very useful and often specifically focused.*" (O4)"*My meetings involve streamlined communication among an already tight-knit closely working group. Our typical meetings make firm what was only tentative before with regard to scheduling goals for the next day or next week.*" (O4)"*I feel that it is important to maintain a culture based on teamwork and these meetings afford us that opportunity.*" (O4)"*It helps to bring commitment to work group and set priorities.*" (O4)

3.2.5. Analysis of valence

Analyses examine variance in valence ratings by main themes, meetings attended and meeting facilitation training, and demographic variables. Where possible, *chi*-square tests are used to examine whether the proportion of positive, neutral, and negative comments differ by these factors.

3.2.5.1. Main theme by valence. In connection with analysis of main themes, comments reflecting the theme of *meeting outcomes* differ statistically from those reflecting *meeting activities* ($\chi^2 = 20.87$, $p < .05$), *meeting organization* ($\chi^2 = 520.30$, $p < .05$), and *people* ($\chi^2 = 300.07$, $p < .05$). For example, results indicate that individuals tend to be more positive about *meeting activities* and *outcomes* than about *meeting organization* and *people*. The percentage of negative comments about *meeting outcomes* (11.9%) is lower than the percentage of negative comments pertaining to *meeting activities* (18.8%), *meeting organization* (64.0%), or *people* (71.6%). The valence of comments pertaining to *meeting activity* has a statistically different response pattern than those reflecting *meeting organization* ($\chi^2 = 284.39$, $p < .05$) and *people* ($\chi^2 = 162.64$, $p < .05$). This finding reflects the observation that the majority of comments about *meeting activity* are positive (63.5%) while only 15.7% and 15.9% of comments are positive for *meeting organization* and *people*, respectively. Comments about *meeting organization* are not statistically different from comments concerning the topic of *people* ($\chi^2 = 3.44$, $p > .05$) with respect to comment valence.

3.2.5.2. Meeting demands and training by valence. In connect with meeting-related features, participants who report attending *zero to three* meetings per typical week display a statistically different pattern of comment valence when compared to participants who report attending *four to six* meetings per week ($\chi^2 = 9.84$, $p < .05$), but not those who report attending *10 to 25* ($\chi^2 = 1.82$, $p > .05$) or *seven to nine* ($\chi^2 = 0.42$, $p > .05$) meetings per week. This finding reflects a minor difference in the valence of comments reported by those who attend *zero to three* meetings per week (32.6% positive comments, 49.4% negative comments) and those who attend *four to six* meetings per week (28.2% positive comments, 45.8% negative comments). Pairwise comparisons between all other groups are not statistically significant with respect to meetings attended per week. No statistically significant differences in valence are observed when using reported time spent in meetings per week as an independent variable.

Participants who previously received *meeting facilitation training* differ in comment valence from those who did not report receiving such training ($\chi^2 = 8.77$, $p < .05$). Participants who have attended training report 23.1% positive comments and 54.1% negative comments while

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those who did not attend training report 32.3% positive comments and 47.5% negative comments.

3.2.5.3. Demographics by valence. The analysis of valence by *country of employment* uses four country classifications: Australia (AUS), United States (US), United Kingdom (UK), and Other. The sample size for each of the Other countries is too small to group further into meaningful categories.

The US sample differs from the UK ($\chi^2 = 9.67$, $p < .05$) and Other ($\chi^2 = 13.09$, $p < .05$) samples, and the Other sample differs from the AUS sample ($\chi^2 = 10.81$, $p < .05$). For instance, 51.1% of US participants provide comments coded as positive in tone, whereas 42.8% of comments from UK participants are coded as positive. To extend this analysis, this study examines the influence of *cultural background* on valence ratings. Using the Hofstede Centre's national culture dimensions (e.g., power distance, individualism; see Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010; http://geert-hofstede.com/national-culture.html), the authors obtained data on 37 countries. No statistically significant differences in valence ratings are observed, however.

Valence ratings do not differ between *males and females* or between *supervisors and non-supervisors*, and that is also the case for *organizational tenure* (e.g., less than 5 years compared to more than 10 years). In regard to *job status*, the analysis shows a significant difference between full-time and part-time employees ($\chi^2 = 12.74$, $p < .05$). Of the part-time participants, 62.4% provide comments coded as positive, whereas 46.7% of comments from the full-time ones are coded so. Finally, analysis of response patterns for *organizational type* show that respondents from *public* organizations differ significantly from the three types of *private* organization (for profit not quoted on the stock market, $\chi^2 = 34.31$, $p < .05$; for profit quoted on the stock market $\chi^2 = 11.50$, $p < .05$; not for profit $\chi^2 = 11.97$, $p < .05$), but not *other* types of organization ($\chi^2 = 3.01$, $p > .05$). For instance, 38.7% of participants employed in *public* organizations provide comments coded as positive, whereas on average 53.4% are coded so across the *private* organizations. All other comparisons between organizational types are non-significant.

Due to space constraints, additional analyses that compare the frequency of comments for each main theme across meeting demands and meeting facilitation training, and the demographic variables are available on request.

3.3. Findings for recommendation comments

After final consensus, of the 656 agreed-upon time-of-action codes, 105 (16.0%) concern the theme of *people*, 358 (54.6%) *meeting structure and organization*, 130 (19.8%) *content and specific activities*, 37 (5.6%) *communicate meeting outcomes and achieve meeting purpose*, and 26 (4.0%) *remove barriers and constraints*. Additionally, 18 recommendations concern miscellaneous topics. Across themes, 222 (33.8%) recommendations reflect actions to take before meetings, 408 (62.2%) concern actions during meetings, and 26 (4.0%) relate to post-meeting actions. The theme with the highest number of recommendations before and during meetings is *meeting structure and organization* (168, 75.7%, and 190, 46.6%, respectively). The theme with the highest number of recommendations post-meetings is *communication and purpose* (23, 88.5%).

This section presents sample recommendations by main theme and time, and results from the analysis of the distribution of time-of-action codes across the themes, meeting demands and meeting training, and the demographic variables (country of employment, gender, supervisor status, organizational tenure, job status, and organizational type).

3.3.1. People

Of the 105 recommendations pertaining to *people*, 17 (16.2%) refer to actions before the meeting, 87 (82.8%) during the meeting, and 1 (1.0%) relate to recommendations post-meetings. The most common recommendations relating to before meetings are coded as P1 (e.g., people come prepared). Sample recommendations are as follows:

> "*All participants should prepare in advance — not just the person chairing the meeting.*" (P1)"*People need to be prepared and to the point when presenting. Tendency to detail irrelevant information which wastes time and makes meetings take longer than they should.*" (P1)

The most frequent recommendations for during meetings relate to P2 (e.g., actively listen to what others are saying). Sample recommendations include:

> "*Always value everyone's opinion no matter what level of work they are at.*" (P2)"*The person holding the meeting should never discredit input by any of the participants. I have seen participation completely shut down when a general manager shot down a newer manager's suggestion.*" (P2)"*Facilitator should be NEUTRAL in the discussion.*" (P2)"*More open to new ideas and respectful to more junior members of staff.*" (P2)

3.3.2. Meeting structure and organization

Of the 358 recommendations pertaining to *structure and organization*, 168 (46.9%) apply to actions before meetings, 190 (53.1%) during meetings, and no recommendations concern activities post-meetings. The most frequent recommendations relating to actions before meetings concern SO1 (e.g., improve structure, use a facilitator) and SO4 (e.g., hold meetings at appropriate intervals). Sample recommendations:

> "*Provide written agenda ahead of time and give time limits for discussion of each item. If more discussion is required, set up another meeting.*" (SO1)"*Meetings would be more efficient and time-effective if a PAL (clearly stated PURPOSE; well defined AGENDA; time LENGTH & limitation) was distributed as part of the meeting announcement.*" (SO1)"*Only have meetings when there is something that can be defined as a real point for discussion cannot be handled through other media and make sure each meeting that occurs somehow significantly furthers solution of the problem.*" (SO4)"*Ban them [meetings] for 4 out of the five days of the average working week — make Friday meeting day. Replace meetings with one on one or one on two conversations — shorter to the point and that have clearer person specific functions.*" (SO4)

The most common recommendations relating to during meetings concern SO1 (i.e., improve meeting structure) and SO3 (e.g., meeting duration, punctuality). For example:

> "*Convenors of meetings need to have a clear picture of the critical goal or goals to reach during the meeting and to not lose sight of that objective while guiding the discussions with an open mind.*" (SO1)"*The presence of a really good administrator who could take detailed minutes to stop whoever is running the meeting being able to rewrite history according to their own choosing when summarising what went on.*" (SO1)"*Fix end times as well as start times — and stick to both of them!*" (SO3)"*I wish that they sometimes can be a little shorter. In my industry I deal with time sensitive issues and I sometimes wish that the meetings could be sped up to take this into account.*" (S03)

3.3.3. Content and specific activities

Of the 130 recommendations pertaining to *meeting activities*, 3 (2.3%) concern before meetings, 125 (96.2%) during meetings, and 2 (1.5%) relate to post-meetings. Evidently, the most common recommendations concern action during meetings, in particular CA1 (e.g., participation, input) and CA2 (e.g., manage discussion). Sample recommendations:

> "*Make it clear before the meeting starts that everyone has an equal say. Everyone should be able to express themselves even though they might not agree with their workmate or boss.*" (CA1)"*Encourage views/*

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opinions from all participants at a meeting rather than just those at the head of the table." (CA1)"*Be sure that all who are present are involved in some way in at least 50% of the topics discussed otherwise break the meetings into smaller groups at different times so that those attending don't feel as though they are wasting their time*." (C1)"*There must be more preparation and some follow-up. Further, each attendee should be required to contribute to the discussion — not just acquiesce to comments by other [attendees]*." (CA1)"*The best meetings are those in which the chairman uses his/her authority to say at the start why we are there and what we are aiming to achieve and then runs the meeting with that end in sight*." (CA2)"*Do not try to address too many issues at once because that doesn't seem to solve any one of them.*" (CA2)"*Having a time-schedule for every issue in the agenda and a clear end-point*." (CA2)"*I feel meetings would sometimes be more focused if they were broken down into smaller sections particularly where it is known that the subject area is complicated. More attention paid to structure and preparation*." (CA2)

3.3.4. Communication and purpose of the meeting

Of the 37 recommendations relating to *meeting purpose*, 11 (29.7%) concern before meetings, 3 (8.1%) during meetings, and 23 (62.2%) post-meetings. The most common recommendations relating to before meetings concern PM1 (e.g., information dissemination). Sample recommendations:

"*The information that needs to be reported could be more usefully e-mailed to everyone beforehand and the meeting used for discussion of this information. The meetings should only cover issues that require actual face-to-face discussion*." (PM1)"*Some information should be transmitted via e-mail memos etc. There is no reason to get together to waste time when we have so much to do*." (PM1)

The most frequent recommendations regarding post-meeting action also concern PM1. Sample recommendations:

"*Minutes are the single most effective meeting improvement. They need to be taken correctly and issued before the next meeting and they need to be covered in detail at the next meeting. Otherwise the meeting has no benefit and no way of being tracked.*" (PM1)"*Actions from previous meeting should be documented and used at the starting point/focus for the next meeting.*" (PM1)"*I believe that decisions made at the meetings need to be shared immediately with all staff (if it affects them). Decisions shouldn't be made without the intentions of following through*." (PM1)

3.3.5. Barriers and constraints

Of the 26 recommendations pertaining to *meeting barriers*, 23 (88.5%) are for before meetings and 3 (11.5%) are for during meetings. No recommendations concerning barriers for post-meetings are present. The most prevalent recommendations regarding before meetings concern B1 (e.g., training on how to conduct meetings). Sample recommendations:

"*Meeting leaders need to practice placing themselves in the mindset of the diverse participants in order to craft agenda items and interactions in the most participatory and effective way*." (B1)"*Have clearly identified team/meeting leaders who have been trained in running meetings and conflict resolution*." (B1)"*Leaders need to be trained to embrace and support better meeting behaviours*." (B1)

Of the few recommendations relating to during meetings, the following is an example:

"*Meetings would be much more effective if I had actually met some of the people I was talking with at some point*." (B1)

3.3.6. Analysis of time of action

Analyses examine variance in time of action of participant recommendations by main themes, meetings demands and meeting facilitation training, and the demographic variables. Where possible, chi-square tests are used to examine whether the proportion of before-meeting, during-meeting, and after-meeting recommendations differ by these factors.

3.3.6.1. Main theme by time. Recommendation main themes differ from one another in terms of the time frame of recommended action. More specifically, recommendations regarding *meeting structure and organization* statistically differ from those concerning *content and specific activities* ($\chi^2 = 100.62$, $p < .05$), *people* ($\chi^2 = 38.69$, $p < .05$), *meeting communication and purpose* ($\chi^2 = 16.43$, $p < .05$), and *barriers* ($\chi^2 = 18.01$, $p < .05$). Recommendations for *content and specific activities* statistically differ from those reflecting *people* ($\chi^2 = 89.86$, $p < .05$), *meeting communication and purpose* ($\chi^2 = 1034.29$, $p < .05$), and *barriers* ($\chi^2 = 856.03$, $p < .05$). Recommendations concerning *people* differ in time of action from *meeting communication and purpose* ($\chi^2 = 1484.71$, $p < .05$) and *barriers* ($\chi^2 = 100.09$, $p < .05$). Finally, recommendations pertaining to *meeting communication and purpose* differ from those concerning *barriers* ($\chi^2 = 46.71$, $p < .05$). These statistics reflect the fact that each topic has a statistically unique pattern of recommendation times of action. For *people*, *meeting structure*, and *meeting content*, the majority of recommendations are aimed at things occurring during the meeting, although these percentages vary (82.9%, 53.1%, and 96.2%, respectively). For *meeting purpose*, the majority are post-meeting recommendations (62.2%). For *barriers and constraints*, the majority are before-meeting recommendations (88.5%).

3.3.6.2. Meeting demands and training by time. Although the results show no statistically significant differences in time-of-action related to the number of meetings attended per week, participants who report spending *0 to 3* h per typical week in meetings differ statistically from those who report spending *10 to 35* h per week in meetings ($\chi^2 = 19.5$, $p < .05$). The difference between these two groups is most pronounced in the percentage of during-meeting recommendations (68.1% for *zero to three*, 53.3% for *ten to 35*) and before-meeting recommendations (26.8% for *zero to three*, 44.3% for *ten to 35*). Results show no other statistically significant differences in recommendation time-of-action using hours per week as an independent variable. Furthermore, there are no statistical differences when comparing participants who had and had not reported receiving *meeting facilitation training*.

3.3.6.3. Demographic variables by time. Demographic comparisons by *country of employment* (and *national culture*), *gender*, *supervisor status*, *organizational tenure*, *job status*, and *organizational type* are all non-significant in respect of time of action.

Due to space constraints, additional analyses comparing, regardless of the time of action, the frequency of comments/recommendations per main theme across meeting demands and meeting facilitation training, and the demographic variables are available on request.

4. Discussion

This large investigation reveals that less than half of participants' comments about meeting effectiveness are positive; practical improvements are clearly needed. The contrast between positive and negative comments is mainly one of *function (positive comments)* versus *structure (negative comments)*. Positive comments generally contain the theme that meetings are important for organizational purposes — not only to achieve work objectives (e.g., focused on goals, solved problems) and to disseminate information, but also to maintain both commitment to goals and a collectivistic/team-based culture. Negative comments, on the other hand, emphasize more structural problems in terms of poor organization — for instance, poor planning, lack of an agenda, and a

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content of low relevance to attendees' work. In addition, many negative comments note the perceived lack of impact of meeting attendees, as manifest in the form of unproductive discussions or a lack of consideration for attendees' input.

The finding that around a third of participants were dissatisfied with their typical meetings (see also McManus, 2006) suggests that poorly run meetings can be regarded as a form of interruption, defined by Jett and George (2003, p. 494) as activities/events that "impede or delay organizational members as they attempt to make progress on work tasks." Although meetings were defined in the present study as pre-planned, being required to attend poorly run meetings can detrimentally affect the psychological state of attendees, reducing the time available for key tasks and lowering subsequent capacity to perform (c.f., Zijlstra, Roe, Leonora, & Krediet, 1999). Rogelberg et al. (2010) demonstrate that meeting satisfaction is an important aspect of overall job satisfaction. Furthermore, they report a significant positive association between meeting satisfaction and affective organizational commitment, such that meeting dissatisfaction might lower organizational commitment and in turn lead employees to retract psychologically and physically from the workplace (Colquitt, LePine, & Wesson, 2008). Therefore, the value of meetings ascribed by participants is manifestly important.

The majority of recommendations for improvement concern actions to take either before or during the meeting, with a focus on changes to structure and organization. This finding may be a result of the method adopted in the present study, in which participants first provide comments on meeting effectiveness and then offer recommendations to improve effectiveness. However, evidence about the role of structure and organization is consistent with findings by Leach et al. (2009), who highlight the importance of having and completing an agenda and having a facilitator. The present study is additionally valuable in adding information about improving structure through more targeted suggestions and by identifying indicators of an effective facilitator. Some valuable actions for meeting facilitators to improve structure include being explicit when constructing an agenda and noting specific needs to be accomplished in the meeting, addressing key timing issues (e.g., disseminating the agenda in advance so that meeting attendees are prepared for the meeting), and giving greater consideration to attendee participation (e.g., a meeting should be job-relevant, the person's contribution should be needed). In particular, inviting only those who need to be at the meeting should lead to more positive perceptions of employee involvement and meeting satisfaction (Cohen et al., 2011), as potential contributions may be more salient to the attendee. Because attendee involvement mediates or partially mediates the effect of some design characteristics (facilitation, agenda use) on perceived meeting effectiveness (Leach et al., 2009), this observation and other insights about improving participation can be particularly helpful.

Several comparisons in the present study are non-significant, such as those concerning male and female participants, supervisors and non-supervisors, and categories of organizational tenure, suggesting that the present findings are widely applicable to attendees and meetings in general. However, the results point to notable variation in certain response patterns. First, a greater proportion of part-time worker comments are positive in tone. Part-time employees are likely to attend fewer meetings than full-time employees, and therefore the ones they do attend might be more relevant and/or better organized, enhancing perceptions of effectiveness (cf. Still, 1983). Furthermore, part-time employees might derive greater value from the social aspects of meetings than full-time employees (Logan, O'Reilly, & Roberts, 1973), positively affecting perceptions. Second, in regard to country differences, the results suggest that Australian employees are generally the most positive about their typical meetings compared to the other country categories. A possibility to consider is that this finding reflects the Employer of Choice (EOC) principle for Australian businesses (Gill, 2010). Gaining EOC status is an emerging and critical part of successful businesses in terms of external reputation and strategic management of employee satisfaction, of which employee *inclusion* and *leadership and interrelationships* are desired characteristics. Well-run meetings, being positively perceived by attendees, could be one way of including employees as part of their organization's efforts to have human resource development practices relating to EOC. Third, public organization employees offer fewer positive comments than all other employees in this study. This finding may reflect traditional bureaucratic forms of organization in which "the majority of members have narrowly defined and highly specialized jobs, being protected from making risky decisions through reference to higher authority and to their rule-books" (McHugh, O'Brien, & Ramondt, 2001, p. 35). In this type of organization, rules and fixed bureaucratic procedures might constrain meetings in terms of decision-making capacity, thereby adversely affecting perceptions of their effectiveness.

Overall, these findings point to widespread non-implementation of good-practice guidelines, rather than the presence of substantive gaps in extant knowledge (see Section 1). The results suggest that a large number of meeting organizers fail to respond to the importance of, for instance, agenda circulation before meetings to enable attendees to prepare for it, meeting punctuality (starting and ending on time), and content relevance to permit attendees to participate fully. This possibility is reflected in the finding that the proportion of improvement recommendations concerning meeting structure/organization is larger for participants who indicate higher meeting demands (number and time spent in meetings). Those individuals have greater experience of meetings, whether or not they have previously attended meeting facilitation training.

4.1. Model development and future research

By way of integrating the findings from the present study and related research, the authors propose that a focus on attendee motivation has the potential to provide a more nuanced understanding of meeting effectiveness, see Fig. 1, than typically has been reported to date (e.g., Bang et al., 2010; Cohen et al., 2011; Leach et al., 2009), and therefore to advance research and practice. The authors contend that meeting organization factors, such as distribution of an agenda in advance (i.e., adequate forewarning of the meeting), including an account of why an individual has been invited to attend the meeting and the nature of his/her contribution, will have a positive motivational effect (i.e., a desire to perform well in the meeting).

Meeting motivation in turn will stimulate the individual to prepare thoroughly for the meeting, thereby enabling effective participation during the meeting. Gainful involvement will be positively related to attitudinal or perceptual outcomes, such as perceptions of meeting effectiveness or satisfaction with meeting processes and meeting outcomes, which will have a subsequent motivational effect (i.e., positive outcomes producing an expectation that future meetings will also be effective). This sequence or pathway, therefore, is manifestly dependent on the pre-meeting effectiveness of the meeting organizer/chairperson.

Three primary drivers will impact effective involvement during the meeting, as well as subsequent attitudinal and perceptual outcomes, and thereby contribute to meeting motivation: (a) meeting activity/structure drivers, (b) leader drivers, and (c) team/attendee drivers. Examples of meeting activities and structural factors from the present study include punctuality, adhering to time limits, and the quality of facilities and meeting environment, and the use of technology-facilitated meetings.

Meeting activity/structure is tied to leader drivers, as attendees may often consider leaders as the agents of imposing structure and keeping the discussion on track. With respect to leader drivers, the authors posit that directive meeting-facilitator behaviors (e.g., providing clarity on attendee roles and providing direction/goals during the meeting) may contribute to the motivation to actively participate during the meeting. Similarly, the results from this study suggest that meeting

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A model of meeting motivation

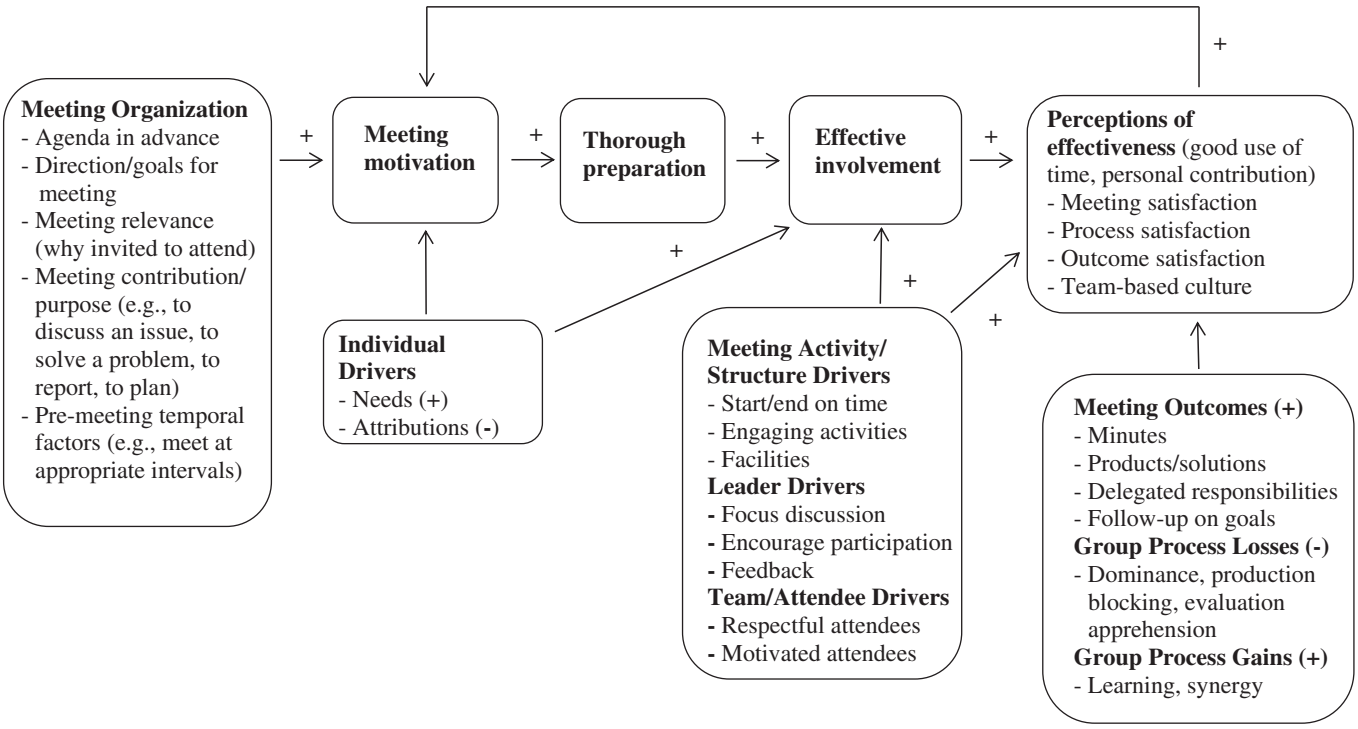

Fig. 1. A model of meeting motivation.

leader follow-up activities (e.g., *inaction post-meeting* comments on evaluation of effectiveness of the meeting; follow-up on goals) can contribute to perceptions of meeting effectiveness. Indeed, research on team leadership suggests that a more directive style (e.g., setting clear expectations and goals, monitoring team member performance, and implementing corrective actions) can contribute to team member motivation, positive team leader evaluations, and higher team performance (e.g., DeRue, Barnes, & Morgeson, 2010; Manz & Sims, 1987).

Team or attendee drivers may also affect effective involvement and meeting perceptions or attitudes following the meeting. The most frequent positive comments concerning the category of *People* in this study reflect the theme that attendees are respectful and motivated. Conversely, most of the negative comments concerning *People* reflect themes such as a lack of acceptance for others' ideas.

Interestingly, some of the comments imply individual drivers, which may also affect meeting motivation and/or effective involvement. These drivers concern the needs of the meeting attendee and of the attendee's *attributions* about the needs of other attendees. Comments about meetings being good for face time and social contact/networking may reflect the attendee's underlying need for affiliation or camaraderie. Further, comments reflecting frustration about not resolving the target issues or problems in meetings may reflect a need for achievement. The concept of these secondary (acquired) needs is well reflected in general motivational research in organizational behavior (e.g., McClelland & Burnham, 1976; Yukl, 2012). In addition, one of the themes concerning *People* suggests that meeting attendees make attributions about other attendees' participation. For example, comments on themes such as people talk to appear to add value, or people use meetings as a means of self-promotion or to push their agenda suggest attributions about a need for power or a need for status. Such attributions about others' needs may hinder motivation from attendees to engage during meetings. In concert with the findings of the present study and Malouff et al.'s (2012) needs-based model of meetings, need-related drivers may be worthy of further research in a larger context of meeting motivation.

Direct outcomes of meetings are proposed to influence attitudinal and perceptual outcomes. Positive meeting outcomes suggest an indication of progress toward achieving meeting goals after the meeting is over (e.g., distribution of meeting minutes, delegated responsibility, follow-up on goals), or an indication of actual problem resolution, learning, or greater synergy. Conversely, negative meeting outcomes provide an indication of thwarted progress or meeting goal attainment. Along with this proposal, the findings of the present study demonstrate parallels with the concepts of group process losses and group process gains in the group dynamics and computer mediated communications (CMC) literature (e.g., Mejias, 2007; Reinig & Shin, 2002). In a study of CMC-enhanced meeting environments (i.e., use of two or more electronic devices to support communication), Mejias reports that group process losses, such as dominance, evaluation apprehension, or production blocking, can generate a significant negative impact on meeting satisfaction with outcomes and meeting processes, and with group process gains (e.g., learning). Some of the negative comments in the present study pertain to one-way communication and a lack of acceptance for others' ideas (*related to components of dominance)* and the concept that true feelings are not expressed (*related to evaluation apprehension*). In terms of group process gains in the present study, the most frequent positive comments reflecting *meeting activities* suggest that meetings are a good mechanism to exchange ideas (*a component of synergy)* and that the most frequent negative comments under *meeting activities* relate to unproductive discussion (e.g., no new information presented; *a reverse-coded component of the learning concept of group process gains*). Thus, the qualitative results from the present study seem consistent with Mejias' findings that group process gains generate positive effects on meeting outcome and process satisfaction.

In summary, meeting motivation determines the amount of effort that individuals invest in meeting preparation, which the authors contend underlies attitudinal and perceptual outcomes, such as meeting satisfaction with meeting processes and outcomes. Furthermore, the authors posit that individual drivers, meeting activity/structure,

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team/attendee, and leader drivers, along with meeting outcomes, are implicated in the meeting motivation process. The proposed model of meeting motivation also holds in respect of negative relationships: poorly planned and executed meetings will demotivate attendees. In parallel with the argument that meeting satisfaction should be regarded as a facet of overall job satisfaction (Rogelberg et al., 2010), meeting motivation is an important aspect of work motivation that researchers in general should consider.

The extant literature does not appear to discuss or operationalize the concept of meeting motivation. Therefore, a primary need concerns the development of a measure of such motivation (cf., Leach et al., 2013; Rogelberg et al., 2010). Once developed, examination of predictors of motivation and pathways to meeting outcomes, as illustrated in Fig. 1, could be tested. In addition to model development, a focus on meeting motivation could have practical implications. Should particular meetings lack motivational properties (i.e., the need for attendees to contribute in specific ways), then a possibility is to avoid use of such meetings. Alternatively, meetings that generate high levels of motivation could be used to establish best practice, with which to improve the quality of all meetings. Furthermore, assessment of meeting motivation could be used to examine the effects of meeting redesign (cf., Bluedorn, Turban, & Love, 1999). For instance, individuals could be invited to attend at a specific time during the meeting or drop in when their participation is required. To examine changes of this kind, longitudinal and experimental studies that monitor attendee evaluations before and after a change may be worthwhile. The assessment of job status and organizational type might also be supplemented by a targeted investigation of subgroup differences in perceptions of meeting motivation. For instance, recent research argues against treating all part-time workers as a single group, since experiences and group roles may differ between sub-sets (Martin & Sinclair, 2007; Wittmer & Martin, 2011).

4.2. Limitations

Although a strength of the present study is a basis in a substantial sample from more than 40 countries, the national representativeness of participants from these countries is impossible to determine; an issue that relates generally to cross-culture studies of all kinds (e.g., Kelly & Worthley, 1981). Despite a much wider coverage than most other research in this field, the findings are not necessarily generalizable to all settings. A related issue concerns that of non-response bias: might the perceptions of non-respondents differ from participants, for example in holding more extreme attitudes toward their typical meetings (Anseel, Lievens, Schollaert, & Choragwicka, 2010)? As in other cases, the presence of this form of bias is impossible to assess unequivocally (see Rogelberg & Stanton, 2007), but the paper's large-sample findings are largely consistent with other, more focused accounts (Schell, 2010, as cited in Kauffeld & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2012). Furthermore, research by Rogelberg et al. (2003) reports that a substantial majority of survey nonresponders are in fact passive, being willing to participate but, for instance, forgetting to do so. These researchers concluded that "Our data suggest that nonresponse bias does not appear to be a concern for satisfaction type variables, the typical core of an organizational survey" (p. 1112). Accordingly, the present findings should be applicable to the general population of meeting attendees. Nonetheless, future research should closely monitor demographic and meeting-related information during data collection to assess the composition of the sample. Doing so would identify, for instance, poorly represented countries (in the present study, such countries formed the *Other* category, see Results section) that could then be specifically targeted, thereby helping to improve the generalizability of findings.

4.3. Conclusion

The findings indicate that a large proportion of meeting organizers do not appear to apply fundamental meeting design practices. The illustrative comments and summary should be of immediate help in improving the quality of meetings. Furthermore, the proposed model of meeting motivation has the potential to advance the understanding of why some meetings are more effective than others.

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