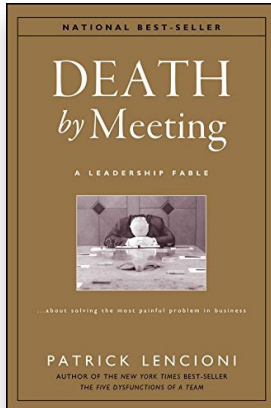


# EXECUTIVE BOOK SUMMARIES

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Patrick Lencioni is president of The Table Group, a management consulting firm, and the author of ten best-selling books.

# Death by Meeting

## THE NUTSHELL

Jossey-Ball 2004

### Introduction

"If I didn't have to go to meetings, I'd like my job a lot more." It's a remark I've heard from many leaders, but for those of us who lead and manage organizations, meetings are pretty much what we do. Yet, most of us hate them. We complain about, try to avoid, and long for the end of meetings. If we hate meetings, can we be making good decisions and successfully leading our organizations? I don't think so.

### The Paradox of Meetings

Meetings are a puzzling paradox. They are the critical activity at the center of every organization. The good news is that there is nothing inherent about meetings that make them bad, and so it is entirely possible to transform them into compelling, productive, and fun activities. The bad news is that in order to do this, we will have to fundamentally rethink much of the way we perceive and manage meetings.

### Executive Summary

Meetings are tedious, disengaging, and dry. But the most justifiable reason to loath meetings is that they don't contribute to the success of our organizations. Why are meetings boring and ineffective? *Meetings are boring because they lack drama.* To make meetings less boring, leaders must look for legitimate reasons to provoke relevant,

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constructive ideological conflict. *Meetings are ineffective because they lack contextual structure.* Participants have a hard time figuring out whether they're supposed to be debating, voting, brainstorming, weighing in, or just listening.

## **Problem #1: Lack of Drama**

By definition, meetings are dynamic interactions involving groups of people discussing topics that are relevant to their livelihoods. So why are they so often dull? It's because we eliminate the one element that is required to make any human activity interesting and that is conflict.

Employees are looking for a reason to care. Ironically, most leaders of meetings go out of their way to minimize drama and avoid the healthy conflict that results from it, which only drains the interest of employees. When a group of intelligent people come together to talk about issues that matter, it is both natural and productive for disagreement to occur. Resolving those issues is what makes a meeting productive, engaging, and even fun.

## **Problem #2: Lack of Contextual Structure**

The single biggest structural problem facing leaders of meetings is the tendency to throw every type of issue that needs to be discussed into the same meeting. Unfortunately, this only ensures that the meeting will be ineffective and unsatisfying for everyone. There should be different meetings for different purposes.

### *THE FOUR MEETINGS*

#### *Daily Check-in Meetings*

Share daily schedules and activities (5 minutes)

- Don't sit down
- Keep it administrative
- Don't cancel even when some people can't be there

#### *Weekly Tactical Meetings*

Review weekly activities and metrics, and resolve tactical obstacles and issues (45 - 90 minutes)

- Don't set agenda until after initial reporting
- Postpone strategic discussions

#### *Monthly Strategic (or Ad Hoc Strategic) Meetings*

Discuss, analyze, brainstorm, and decide upon critical issues affecting long-term success (2 - 4 hours)

- Limit to one or two topics
- Prepare and do research
- Engage in good conflict

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## *Quarterly Off-Site Review Meetings*

Review strategy, industry trends, competitive landscape, key personnel, and team development (1 - 2 days)

- Get out of office
- Focus on work; limit social activities
- Don't over structure or overburden the schedule.

## **The Biggest Challenge of All: "The Myth of Too Many Meetings"**

While it is true that much of the time we currently spend in meetings is largely wasted, the solution is not to stop having meetings, but rather to make them better because when properly utilized, meetings are actually time *savers*. Most executives I know spend hours sending e-mails, leaving voice mails, and roaming the halls to clarify issues that should have been made clear during a meeting in the first place.

## **A Final Thought on Meetings**

Bad meetings exact a toll on the human beings who must endure them. Bad meetings generate real human suffering in the form of anger, lethargy, and cynicism. While this certainly has a profound impact on organizational life, it also impacts people's self-esteem, their families, and their outlook on life. Improving meetings is not just an opportunity to enhance the performance of our companies. It is also a way to positively impact the lives of our people—including us.