Increasing Meeting Effectiveness for Internal Auditors

Sponsored by:
The St. Louis Chapter of the Institute for Internal Auditors
Research Committee

Author:
Kelly A. Lambing, CIA, CPA
Research Committee Chair, St. Louis IIA
Team Lead, Internal Audit Services
Anheuser-Busch Companies, Inc.

January 2008
(Survey Results 2007)

Table of Contents

Purpose ……... 1

I. Introduction ……... 1

II. Body
- A. Time in Meetings ……. 2
- B. Time in Meetings vs. Career Level …….. 3
- C. Cost of Meetings …….. 4
- D. Unproductive Meeting Factors ……. 6
- E. Productive Meeting Factors ……. 7
- F. Meeting Types ……. 8
- G. Key Elements to Effective Meetings ……... 9
  - 1. Objective …….. 9
  - 2. Agenda ……. 10
    - a. Objective ……. 10
    - b. Attendees ……. 11
    - c. Time …… 12
    - d. Introduction ……. 12
    - e. Body of Meeting …….. 13
    - f. Meeting Conclusion ……. 13
    - g. Other …… 14
  - 3. Meeting Minutes …… 14
  - 4. Facilitator …… 15
  - 5. Feedback ……. 16
- H. Meetings and Technology …… 17
  - 1. Face-to-Face ……. 18
  - 2. Teleconferencing …….. 19
  - 3. Video Conferencing ……. 21
  - 4. Web-Hosted Interactive Media …… 22
  - 5. Email ……... 23
  - 6. Instant Messaging …… 24
- I. The Future of Meetings ……. 25

III. Summary …….. 26

IV. Appendix One ……. 27

V. Works Cited …….. 30

Purpose

Efficient and effective meetings are essential to the internal audit profession. From client engagement communication to team meetings and professional training, internal auditors are constantly challenged to balance their audit workload with the demand for meetings. Through researching[1] the meetings of internal auditors from varying levels of the profession in the St. Louis area, this document will provide guidance for internal auditors to make meetings as efficient and effective as possible.

Introduction

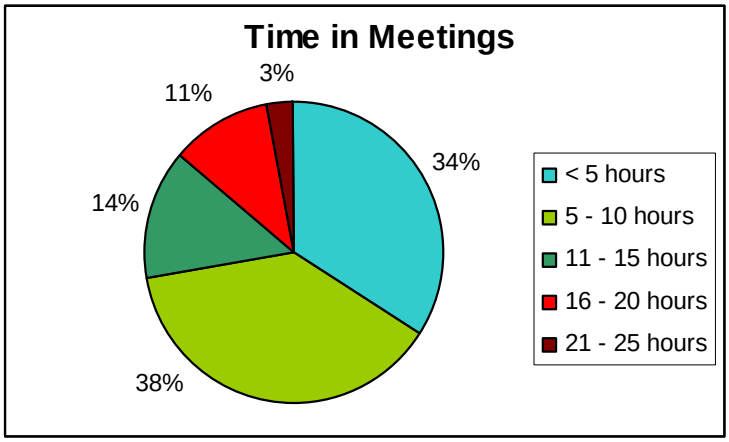
If you think you and your coworkers attend more meetings today than ever before, it is probably not your imagination. The workplace has evolved into a more collaborative and democratic environment, experts say. Organizations have needed more meetings to share information, receive input and make group decisions. Also, mergers and alliances have increased the need for inter-organization meetings in addition to those taking place within companies (Krattenmaker). One study suggested the number of meetings for an average executive doubled between the 1960's and the 1980's. In addition, a survey of 1,900 business leaders revealed they are spending 72% more time in meetings than they did five years ago and 49% of business leaders expected their time in meetings to increase in the future (Rogelberg).

As a result of the increase in meeting time over the years, meeting efficiency has become a focus. One study by MCI found most professionals believe over 50% of meeting time is wasted. In addition, more than 90% admit to daydreaming in meetings, 73% have brought other work, and 39% have fallen asleep. Meetings cost companies valuable time and money when there are no end results or desired outcomes (Henkel). How can internal auditors be sure they are using time and money effectively? The answer is with proper knowledge and training on the key elements needed for efficient and effective meetings, especially in light of a globalized economy and technological advancements.

[1] Research methodology: Appendix One

Time in Meetings

For the internal audit profession, meetings are a significant part of an auditor's responsibility. Meetings are held with the audit team to plan and execute audits, with the client to obtain necessary information to complete the audits and with the department to provide proper training and tools to enhance auditors' knowledge. Efficient and effective meetings are necessary to keep internal auditors on-track with their planned work.

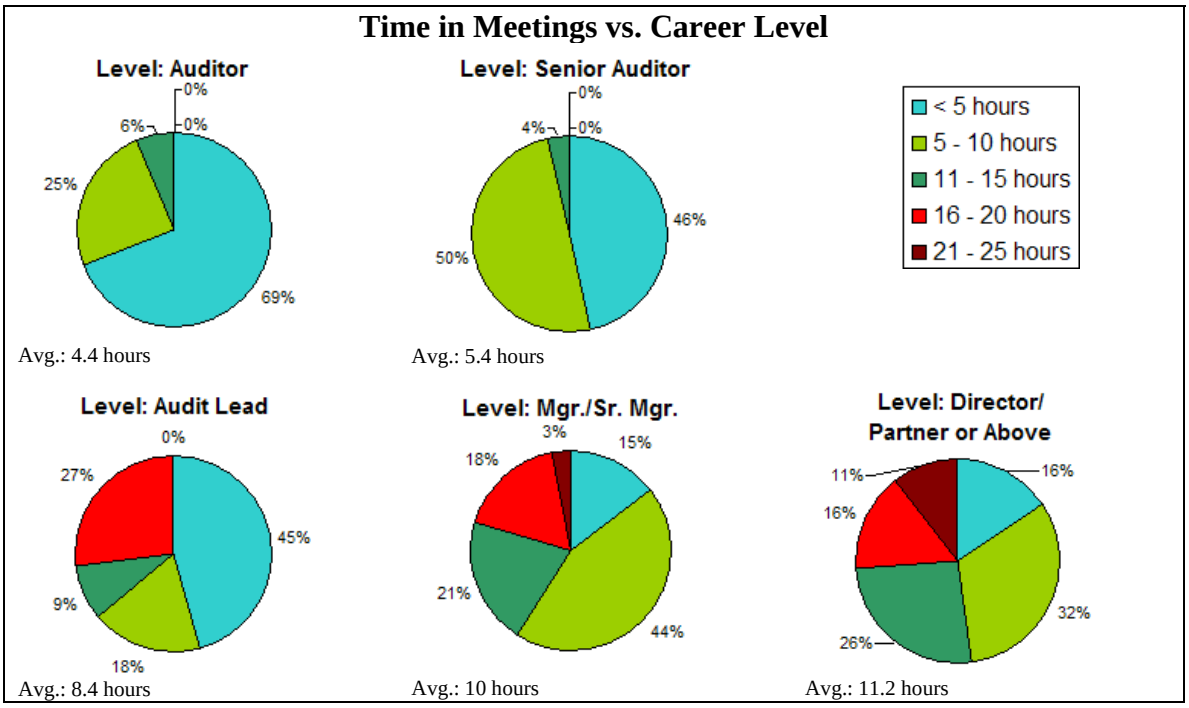


When internal auditors estimated the number of hours during their typical work week they spend in meetings, 72% of respondents indicated they spend an average of ten or less hours of their week in meetings, which amounts to approximately one day per week in meetings. These results are consistent with a 1998 MCI Conferencing white paper, which showed the average employee spends about six hours a week in scheduled meetings (Rogelberg). The remaining 28% of internal audit respondents claimed to spend anywhere from two to three days a week in meetings, which is 40-60% of their time. The overall average was about eight hours[2] per week for internal auditors.

[2] Derived from the mid-point in the range of hours offered in the survey question

Time in Meetings vs. Career Level

The results of the 1998 MCI Conferencing white paper also revealed supervisors spend more time in meetings than non-supervisors. In one estimate, senior managers spend nearly 23 hours per week (58% of their time) in meetings, especially in larger organizations (Rogelberg). Another study indicated typical managers spend approximately 40% of their time at work in meetings (Lindenberger). For internal auditors, there were noticeable trends in the amount of time spent in meetings versus the position level. For example, only about 4-6% of the auditor/ senior auditor respondents claimed to spend between 11-15 hours per week in meetings, whereas 21% of audit managers and 26% of audit directors/partners spend that amount of time in meetings. In addition, 11% of directors/partners claimed more than half of their week (21-25 hours) is typically spent in meetings, which surpassed other levels responding to that range.



Cost of Meetings

When applying a cost to meetings, it becomes evident that a company can spend a significant amount of money each year, which is money wasted if meetings are either ineffective or inefficient. In 2003, the Quicksilver Group compiled business operating data from the United States, Europe and Asia. The data revealed if an executive spends about 30 hours a week in meetings (i.e., about 1,500 hours annually) at about a rate of $150 an hour, it would cost a company around $225,000 for that executive to attend meetings. The study also analyzed the effectiveness and efficiency of meetings and concluded 40% were effective and 50% were efficient, which means the overall effectiveness was 20% (40% x 50%). If that information is extrapolated over 100 executives in a large company, the investment lost would be $18 million (Shaffran).

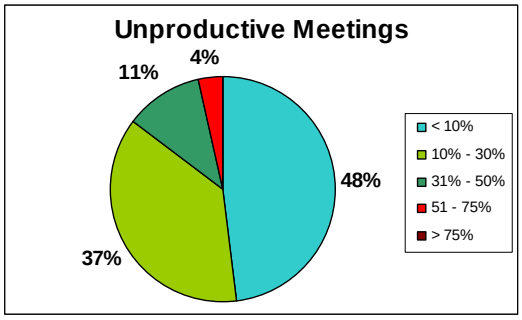
Although it appears internal auditors do not spend the majority of their time in meetings, what time they do spend costs companies significant time and money. An "Effective Meetings" website[3] has a "Meeting Cost Calculator" which takes into account the average annual salary, the number of members in the meetings, length of the meetings and number of meetings per week (Krattenmaker). When applying this calculator to the internal audit survey results, the following costs were estimated for the given scenarios:

Level	Salary[4]	Meeting Hours / Week[5]	Cost / Week*	Cost / Year*	% of Salary Spent on Meetings
Entry-Level Auditor[6]	$46,961	4.4	$115	$5,969	13%
Senior Auditor[7]	$69,567	5.4	$209	$10,852	16%
Audit Lead[8]	$85,462	8.4	$399	$20,739	24%
Audit Manager / Sr. Manager[9]	$102,818	10	$571	$29,703	29%
Auditing Director / Partner or Above[10]	$123,217	11.2	$767	$39,868	32%
* Excluding benefits					

Therefore, companies could spend anywhere from $115 to $767 a week and $5,969 to $39,868 annually for one internal auditor to attend meetings. When applying that to an internal audit department with, for example, one director, three audit managers, three audit leads, five senior auditors and five entry-level auditors, a company could spend approximately $275,299 in salary expenses annually for internal auditors to attend meetings. In addition, for this same department to attend an all-day department meeting or training, a company could spend about $1,055 in salary expenses. These expenses do not include any additional company expenses to hold meetings such as personnel benefits, travel costs, room reservations and technological resources.

[3] Source: www.effectivemeetings.com
[4] Source: Monster.com Salary Center, Salary Wizard as of January 2008
[5] Derived from the mid-point in the range of hours offered in the survey question
[6] Source: The median expected salary in St. Louis, MO for an "Internal Auditor I"
[7] Source: The median expected salary in St. Louis, MO for an "Internal Auditor III"
[8] Source: The median expected salary in St. Louis, MO for an "Auditing Project Lead"
[9] Source: The median expected salary in St. Louis, MO for an "Auditing Manager"
[10] Source: The median expected salary in St. Louis, MO for an "Auditing Director"

When considering the cost of meetings to a company, it is essential they are productive meetings. According to an article entitled "The Science and Fiction of Meetings" from the MITSloan Management Review, three different studies concluded the largest negative factor in how an employee feels at the end of a workday and feels about his or her overall job satisfaction is meetings that are perceived as ineffective. The studies also found these negative feelings were amplified as the amount of time in meetings increased. Finally, those employees were more likely to consider leaving the company.



When internal auditors were asked to select what percentage of meetings they attend are unproductive, 48% indicated less than 10% of their meetings are unproductive. However, 37% felt between 10%-30% of their meetings and 11% felt between 31%-50% of their meetings were unproductive. When estimating the overall percentage[11] of unproductive meetings, the outcome is approximately 17%. Therefore, companies could spend anywhere from $19 to $130 per week and $1,015 to $6,778 annually for one internal auditor to attend unproductive meetings. Once again, when applying that to an internal audit department with, for example, one director, three audit managers, three audit leads, five senior auditors and five entry-level auditors, a company could spend approximately $46,801 in salary costs annually for internal auditors to attend those unproductive meetings.

[11] Derived from the mid-point unproductive percentage offered in the survey question

Unproductive Meeting Factors

The term "unproductive" when applied to meetings is a very broad term which will have different meanings to different people. Therefore, the root cause of these feelings of unproductiveness needs to be determined in order to improve internal auditors' perspectives of meeting outcomes. The following are some of the reasons meetings could be considered unproductive according to the various resources and external surveys consulted (Karpay) (Micale, xi):

Too large of a group	Objective of the meeting was not met	The leader was not leading the meeting
Irrelevant topic	No visuals (e.g., handouts, slide show)	Too many diversions to the focus of the meeting
No clear meeting objective	Too many agenda items to cover	Method for the meeting was distracting or not effective

Internal auditors were asked to rate whether one of these specific inhibitors to productive meetings was a definite factor, likely factor, indifferent, probably not a factor or definitely not a factor of unproductive meetings. The following trends were noted:

1. Diversions: The internal auditors ranked having too many diversions to the focus of the meeting as being the definite and most likely factor for unproductive meetings.
2. Objective not met: Internal auditors indicated not reaching the objective of the meeting was the third-highest definite factor and second-highest likely factor causing unproductive meetings.
3. Ineffective leader: Leaders not fulfilling his or her responsibilities of leading or directing the meeting was cited as the second-highest definite factor and fourth-highest likely factor for unproductive meetings.
4. Loaded agenda: Finally, it is note-worthy that internal auditors indicated having too many agenda items to cover given the allotted time for the meeting was an unproductive factor. It was the third-highest response as a likely factor for unproductive meetings.

Factors of UNPRODUCTIVE Meetings

	Definite Factor	Likely Factor	Indifferent	Probably not a factor	Definitely not a factor
Too large of a group	7%	33%	19%	23%	17%
Irrelevant topic	11%	37%	14%	24%	14%
Too many agenda items to cover	9%	41%	19%	21%	10%
Too many diversions to the focus of the meeting	19%	44%	19%	12%	6%
The leader was not leading the meeting	17%	40%	11%	23%	9%
No visuals (e.g., power point or handout)	3%	15%	30%	37%	16%
Objective of the meeting was not met	16%	42%	22%	15%	6%
Method for the meeting was distracting or not effective	1%	31%	29%	25%	14%

Productive Meeting Factors

Internal auditors were also asked to rate factors present during meetings they considered productive. The results of this question did not reveal concise trends, but did provide the following insight into the factors of productive internal audit meetings.

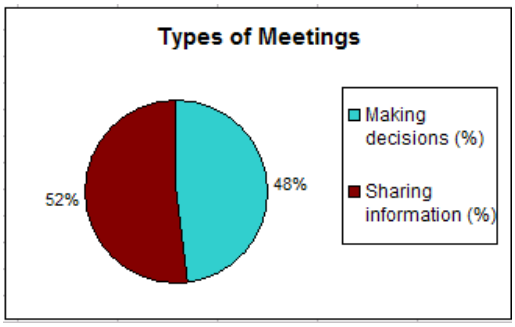
1. On-track with agenda: Internal auditors indicated staying on track with the given agenda was a definite factor in productive meetings.
2. Relevancy: In addition, attending a meeting with a relevant topic that aligned with their job duties was cited as the second-highest definite factor to productive meetings.
3. Effective leader: Having a definite leader was cited as the third-ranking definite factor to productive meetings.
4. Concise agenda: Internal auditors included a concise agenda as being the highest likely factor in productive meetings.
5. Objective met: Feeling like the meeting objective was met was the second likely factor.
6. Attendee size and venues: Finally, having the proper amount of attendees and good venues/technology tied for being the third-highest likely factor.

Factors of PRODUCTIVE Meetings

	Definite Factor	Likely Factor	Indifferent	Probably not a factor	Definitely not a factor
The proper amount of attendees	26%	46%	15%	9%	4%
Relevant topic	54%	42%	3%	1%	1%
Concise agenda	42%	52%	6%	0%	0%
Stayed on-track with the agenda	58%	36%	6%	0%	0%
Definite Leader	48%	39%	13%	0%	0%
Effective Visuals	16%	42%	30%	11%	2%
Objective of the meeting was met	42%	48%	8%	0%	2%
Good venue or easy-to-use technology	17%	46%	27%	7%	3%

Meeting Types

Before suggestions are offered on how internal auditors can increase meeting productiveness, it is important to understand the types of meetings internal auditors participate in. Meetings can be categorized into two major functions: information-sharing or decision-making. When internal auditors were asked what percentage of their time is spent in information-sharing versus decision-making meetings, the response was nearly even with about 52% information-sharing and 48% for decision-making.



Information-sharing meetings are the more traditional types of meetings that require the leader of the meeting to take on a directive role to run the meeting and to present information to attendees (Micale xi-xii). The two types of informational meetings internal auditors participate in are department meetings and trainings. These meetings tend to be highly structured with specific objectives in mind for the attendees of the meeting. Department meetings occur periodically, such as monthly or quarterly, to update the attendees on strategic objectives, policies and procedures and to address any issues which may inhibit the department's goals. Attending training is an essential part of an internal auditor's responsibilities. For those that are practicing Certified Internal Auditors (CIA's), the Institute of Internal Auditors requires they obtain 80 hours of training or equivalent credit over the course of two years. Many internal auditors also have other certifications to maintain such as the Certified Public Accountant (CPA) or Certified Fraud Examiner (CFE) certifications, which require 120 hours of training over three years and 20 hours each year, respectively. In addition to the required training, companies often consider industry-specific training to increase an internal auditor's technical skills required for effective audits. The most significant weakness of informational meetings is the potential for attendees to not find every aspect of the meeting beneficial because of the typical large amount of attendees and topics covered.

Decision-making meetings can be one of the more powerful meetings because attendees are asked to engage themselves as an essential part of the meeting. The dynamics of the meeting are shifted from a directive leader to a facilitator whose role is to keep the overall agenda on-track while the focus is upon each of the attendee's participation in a decision. One of the most encompassing decision-making processes for internal audit departments is to meet and decide on the annual audit plan. Managers and above typically spend significant time researching and planning for audits in light of a departmental budget and available human resources. In addition, internal auditors spend time in meetings to perform the specific audits such as the initial meetings with the team to plan the work, with the client to perform the audit and with the team to track status and determine potential issues. These meetings are set up to either make a decision or to assign follow-up work to be done so a decision can be made at an additional meeting. The most significant weakness to decision-making meetings is the potential for objectives to never be met if the decision is tabled to a future meeting which may not occur timely or at all.

Key Elements to Effective Meetings

The most significant obstacles internal auditors face in meetings are diversions to the focus of the meeting, the objective is not met, there is an ineffective leader and the agenda contains too many items to cover.

Since about 17% of St. Louis internal auditors' meetings are considered unproductive, the following factors must be considered in conducting meetings in order to overcome these obstacles:

- Set the objective
- Create an agenda
- Record meeting minutes
- Have a facilitator
- Request feedback

Objective

"A meeting without an objective is like walking around blind-folded" (Micale 5). One of the first steps in planning a meeting is to determine the objective of the meeting. Both information-sharing and decision-making meetings must have an objective. Decision-making meetings must have an objective which focuses on an outcome that is both realistic and reasonable for the time frame given. For example, internal auditors cannot decide on an annual audit plan over the course of one meeting. Instead, the objective for decision-making meetings must be focused a specific step toward the overall goal, such as meeting to determine the necessary staffing levels for the upcoming year to support the audit plan. For information-sharing, the objective is not as tangible, but the organizer should establish what the attendees should learn from the meeting, such as "An understanding of…" or "A presentation on…." (Micale 5).

In addition, by establishing an objective, the meeting planner can evaluate the necessity of having a meeting. The planner must verify there are decisions, issues or such items which cannot be effectively handled outside of the meeting. Often planners hold meetings merely because it is a routine meeting that is perceived as occurring "just because it's Tuesday morning and we always have a meeting on Tuesday morning" (Kearns). Also, the planner must consider the hourly cost of the meeting if it is being held to communicate to the attendees topics which could be communicated just as effectively by email, memorandum or informal conversations ("Running Effective Meetings"). This consideration should be applied more if the meeting type is information-sharing (Krattenmaker). Typical situations that have objectives which require meetings are managing a project, managing people, managing a client, email is getting complicated, and problems are arising within the project or business ("Types of Meetings").

Finally, by establishing a specific objective and communicating it as early as possible before the meeting, the attendees are informed as to what their role will be and will be able to determine if their presence at the meeting is necessary. Internal auditors revealed attending meetings with relevant topics which align with their job duties results in productive meetings. For example, if an objective is "An understanding of…," which is more informational, the attendees will be able to establish if understanding the particular topic is relevant to them. If so, their role is to actively listen and learn about the speaker's topic. On the other hand, if the objective is decision-making,

attendees will be able to focus efforts on how they will best be able contribute to the discussion and decision at the meeting (Micale 3-5).

Recommendation: Develop a brief and to-the-point outcome statement. Evaluate whether a meeting is required to achieve the objective. If so, distribute the objective statement in the meeting invitation.

Agenda

Internal auditors feel their meetings have too many diversions to the objective and the agendas consist of more topics than can reasonably be covered in the timeframe. According to a survey of business leaders, which was cited in the article "Make the Most of Your Meetings", 75% of respondents say it is "almost essential" to have an agenda, yet agendas are only used about 50% of the time (Lindenberger).

Internal auditors must keep in mind the objective of the meeting drives the agenda. The agenda is an important step in establishing effective meetings when prepared and executed properly. The following explains the key components of an agenda that will establish an effective meeting framework (Micale 7).

Agenda Framework

Objective: _____
Date / Time / Place: _____
Attendees: _____

ITEM	TIME	WHO
Introduction:		
Welcome	About 10% of total time	Name
Objective		
Expectations		
Body of Meeting:		
TBD…	About 85% of total time	
Open Forum		
End of Meeting:		
Summary	About 5% of total time	
Action items		

1) **Objective**
   Document the established objective of the meeting at the top of the agenda to remind attendees of the intention of the meeting. It should be the same brief and to-the-point statement made during the meeting invitation. The facilitator or an attendee should refer to this statement if the discussions are off-track with the set objective.

   Recommendation: Include the objective in the agenda.

2) Attendees

Internal auditors indicated having the proper amount of attendees was the third-highest likely factor in successful meetings. A popular meeting size is around six to nine attendees, which is small enough to control, yet large enough to provide different perspectives to achieve the objective (Hindle 16). However, the type of meeting does dictate the size of the meeting. The following are some guidelines on meeting sizes versus requirements (Doyle and Straus 181-185):

- Two to seven attendees: This size of a meeting may not be big enough for most major decision-making meetings, but it is ideal for most audit team and planning meetings. In addition, this size of a meeting typically does not require a formal facilitator, although someone can designate themselves as a neutral attendee to keep the focus of the meeting on task.
- Seven to 15 attendees: This size of a meeting is ideal for decision-making. Therefore, it is recommended the meeting have a formal, neutral facilitator.
- 15 to 30 attendees: This size of a meeting is not ideal. If meetings like this need to occur, it is recommended the group is divided into smaller groups of less than 15 for some of the discussions and brainstorming sessions. In addition, it is recommended a professional facilitator is utilized to run the meeting.
- Over 30 attendees: This size of a meeting should only be used for information-sharing and lecture situations, and is not ideal for decision-making meetings. If it is a decision-making meeting, it is recommended the group is divided into smaller groups of less than 15 for discussions and brainstorming sessions.

It is also important to consider the specific attendees invited to the meeting. The planner should evaluate the attendees using a "two-tier approach" in which the potential attendee list consists of "core" members and "peripheral" members. Core members are expected to be directly involved in driving the agenda items and their participation is crucial to momentum of the meeting (Rogelberg). In addition, the planner should ensure the attendees who are considered core members are good decision-makers and problem-solvers ("Running Effective Meetings"). These core people should hold the knowledge and experience to accomplish the meeting's objective (Lindenberger).

Attendees who may be considered peripheral will have important expertise and input to offer, but their direct involvement is not necessary in every decision. Rather, it is acceptable to involve peripheral attendees only at the point in the meeting when their input is crucial (Rogelberg). In addition, a peripheral attendee might be someone who will not necessarily participate and will attend in order to simply go back to their manager or team and report the results to them. Rather, the planner can send a copy of the meeting minutes to them as more of an effective way of narrowing the attendees to core attendees ("Running Effective Meetings"). Finally, another option is to schedule peripheral attendees to attend the meeting only during the agenda item they are needed for. This will help eliminate attendees in the room who do not need to be a part of the rest of the meeting and save their valuable time (Mann).

Recommendation: There should be 15 or less attendees working together on decision-making discussions, while information-sharing can be as large as needed. Only core attendees should be invited to the meeting, while peripherals receive meeting minutes.

3) Time

The first consideration in meeting time is the preparation of the agenda itself. According to the article "In Search of the Perfect Meeting", an important theme in planning an agenda is those responsible for organizing or leading the meeting should "spend time to save time" and should spend about 30 to 60 minutes preparing an agenda (Krattenmaker). The planner should be knowledgeable enough about the steps that can be taken to achieve the desired objective or, if not, should consult the proper personnel to assist in planning the agenda items in the body of the meeting (Kearns).

When the planner allots time for items on the agenda, he or she should be generous because it is essentially an estimate which serves as a guideline for the flow of the meeting (Hindle 23). Each item on the agenda should not have equal time. Rather, the planner should consult the person covering the item on the allotted length of time (Turner). Generally, the introduction of the agenda should account for about 10% of the total allotted time, the body of the agenda accounting for about 85% and the conclusion about 5% of the time (Micale 7).

After determining the length of the components of the agenda, the planner should consider the overall time allotted for the meeting. One study revealed productivity decreases sharply after about an hour and a half of meeting (Lindenberger). Another study showed the attention span of most participants picks up for the first 10-15 minutes, dips after that and then picks up as attendees anticipate the end of the meeting. Therefore, the ideal meeting length is 45-minutes. If a longer meeting is necessary, the planner should provide breaks at least every 90 minutes (Hindle 50).

Finally, to stay on-track with the allotted time in the agenda, the facilitator of the meeting should not take additional time to help late arrivals catch up because it will look like it is acceptable arriving late (Kearns). Also, recapping covered items wastes other attendees' valuable time ("Running Effective Meetings"). Time limits allow the facilitator to focus on accomplishing the agenda items and refer to the agenda time to avoid hard feelings when relevant discussions go in circles or irrelevant topics arise (Kearns). For example, the facilitator can politely say, "In the interest of time, we will have to go on to the next topic" while referring to the agenda (Thomsett 90).

Recommendation: Conservatively assign time to each agenda item while keeping in mind an ideal meeting length is 45 to 90 minutes. Assign at least 10% of the time to introduce the meeting, 85% for the body of the meeting and 5% to conclude it.

4) Introduction

To open the meeting, the facilitator should welcome all of the attendees and encourage members to socialize briefly as a way to build cohesion in the group, such as a 30-second headline about an exciting or frustrating event which occurred in their area. This serves as an icebreaker and gives the meeting more energy (Hawkins). In addition, the facilitator should verbalize the objective documented on the agenda to emphasize the reason for the meeting.

Finally, the introduction to the meeting should include meeting expectations such as only one person speaks at a time, everyone participates, stick to the allotted time frames and no side conversations (Lindenberger). Side conversations tend to be more of an issue in recent years with the introduction of mobile phones and blackberries. The facilitator should emphasize all laptops, phones and blackberries be turned off. In other words, emphasize no "electronic grazing" because everyone else has made time for the meeting. If emergencies should arise, the attendee should politely leave the room (Mann).

Recommendation: Introduce the meeting with a brief icebreaker, verbalize the objective and set expectations for the meeting attendees.

5) Body of Meeting

Internal auditors indicated not reaching the objective of the meeting is a factor of unproductive meetings. In fact, one study indicated only 64% of meetings achieve their intended outcome (Lindenberger). The body of the agenda is an important factor in achieving the objective.

The planner must consider that each of the agenda items is an important basis upon which the meeting was called in the first place (Kearns). There should not be a meeting held to merely discuss agenda items, such as recapping the status of events that occurred between meetings. This often occurs during audit status meetings. Rather, the body of the agenda should strive to build a plan or discuss key barriers to success (Krattenmaker). It is recommended that the planner begin by listing all of the related discussion points (Karpay). Then, in order to avoid a loaded agenda, the planner should arrange the items in order of importance and assign less or no time to less important items.

Internal auditors also considered diversions to the focus of the meeting as an unproductive meeting factor. In cases when time is running short, the facilitator can adjust the time for the remaining items as long as all attendees are aware of the trade-off (Hawkins). Especially in the open forum section of the body of the agenda, the facilitator should not allow new issues to become the focus of the meeting and take away from agenda items (Kearns). When the discussion strays or a new topic is brought up, the facilitator should ultimately decide what to do with the discussion to keep the meeting on task (Reh). Remaining agenda items could be carried over to another meeting, covered another way, such as a phone call, email or a memorandum, or simply dropped (Hawkins). A diplomatic way of steering the meeting quickly

back on course without hurting feelings is to place items on a "parking lot", such as a white board listing ideas which can be pursued at a more appropriate time (Krattenmaker).

Recommendation: Agenda items should focus on building plans or discussing barriers. Cover the items in order of importance. The facilitator must table diversions or new topics and document those items on a "parking lot" list so they can be addressed outside of the current meeting.

6) Meeting Conclusion

The facilitator should close the meeting by summarizing what was discussed so all attendees are in agreement about what was covered. If action items were determined, then the facilitator should summarize the task list with those responsible and expected timelines, including plans to follow-up with people who could not attend (Thomsett 60).

In addition, it is important to ensure time is taken to summarize items on the parking lot list and determine the action plan to address those items, such as a follow-up email within a week or a topic on the next meeting's agenda (Kearns).

Recommendation: Briefly recap the items covered and assign a responsible person and a timeline to cover any items tabled during the meeting (i.e., included on the "parking lot").

7) Other

One of the additional tips the planner should keep in mind is to try to restrict the agenda to one page. If the agenda is larger than that, the planner should re-evaluate the agenda to ensure all topics support the objective or consider dividing the agenda into two or more separate meetings (Hindle 23).

Also, the planner should distribute the agenda well in advance of the meeting so attendees can prepare for the meeting. It should be distributed at least 24 hours in advance, but preferably two or three days ahead of the meeting (Turner).

Finally, if there is valuable reading for the meeting (e.g., new policy or budget information), the planner must send it out in advance so meeting time is not spent skimming handout materials (Kearns).

Recommendation: One-page agendas are ideal and should be distributed at least one day in advance of the meeting, along with any valuable reading or handouts applicable to the meeting.

Meeting Minutes

An attendee at the meeting should be responsible for recording meeting minutes, preferably someone who is independent from participating in it. Minutes should document the decisions of the meeting, the actions agreed upon and provide a record of the meeting so progress over the course of time can be tracked and monitored ("Running Effective Meetings").

The style of the minutes depends on circumstances surrounding the meeting. If having a detailed record is important, such as audit committee meetings, then the more detail is required. If not, a simple list of decisions and actions would suffice. Generally, the meeting minutes should be as short as possible ("Running Effective Meetings"). It is recommended the recorder use the agenda as an outline. The minutes should document who attended, what was discussed, agreements reached and action items assigned. Finally, the minutes should be issued within 24 hours to all invitees, whether they attended or not and to those who may be affected by the discussion (Reh).

Recommendation: Concise meeting minutes should follow the flow of the agenda and include attendees, discussion, decisions and actions agreed-upon. They should be issued within 24 hours to core and peripheral personnel.

Facilitator

Internal auditors also found facilitators often do not fulfill their responsibilities of leading or directing the meeting. When people talk around the agenda items, such as audit issues, it is usually because it is not clear who is leading the meeting or the facilitator is providing poor direction (Karpay). There should ideally be a facilitator at each meeting. A facilitator is responsible for preparing the agenda, distributing it and making sure the meeting stays on track with the agenda (Turner). Other responsibilities include (Doyle and Straus 124):

- Being a neutral part of the group, if possible, by not evaluating or contributing ideas,
- Focusing the group on a common task, and
- Protecting attendees from attacks on their ideas

The facilitator does not necessarily have to be the person calling the meeting. In fact, sometimes it is better for someone other than the person who initiated the meeting to facilitate it. The person who calls it might be more inclined to allow topic diversions rather than sticking to the agenda because the additional topics may be in the initiator's own interest (Turner).

Finally, for routine meetings, attendees should take turns facilitating to expand skills of the team and allow them to see what it is like from the facilitator's point of view. It also relieves responsibility from one person and saves the initiator's time when other attendees assist in the facilitator role (Turner).

Recommendation: A facilitator must lead every meeting by keeping the agenda on track. For larger or more formal meetings, especially decision-making meetings, a neutral facilitator is recommended.

Feedback

Finally, requesting meeting effectiveness feedback from the internal audit department will provide invaluable insights into what can be done better next time. One approach is to solicit attendees to provide the facilitator with two or three positives and negatives from each of the meetings they attend (Hawkins). Another approach is for internal audit departments to conduct periodic surveys to evaluate meetings overall, similar to the annual employee evaluation process. 360-degree feedback, which is both upward and downward feedback, should be provided and evaluated (Rogelberg). The following is an example of such a survey (Shaffran).

HOW GOOD ARE YOUR MEETINGS?

Measure your meeting effectiveness by completing this questionnaire:

PLEASE TICK WHICH APPLIES	RARELY 1	2	3	4	ALWAYS 5
There is a clearly defined, results-focused theme and agenda					
They are without conflict					
Everyone contributes					
No one dominates discussion					
Communication is open and positive					
We generate many creative ideas					
We challenge the status quo to explore alternative ideas and solutions					
Everyone is energized and focused					
We fully maximize the knowledge and expertise of all participants					
We keep to time					
Everyone continually develops meeting skills					
We always achieve our desired results					
There are concrete, measurable outcomes that move the business forward					
We have good return on time invested					
Everyone enjoys the process					

On average, how effective are the meetings you attend? ____ %

Of decisions made, what percentage are implemented? ____ %

How many hours/week do you spend in meetings? ____ hours/week

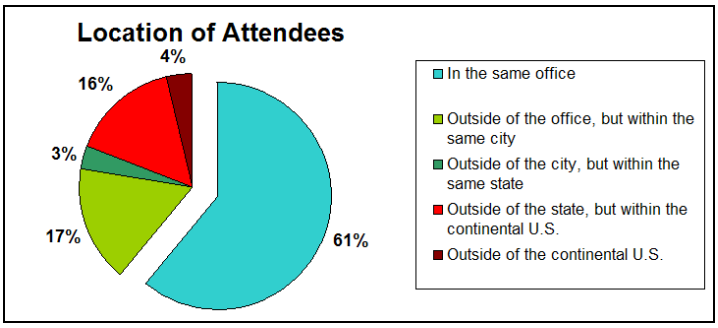
Recommendation: Periodically survey the internal auditors' perspectives on meeting productivity to provide insight into future improvements in meeting effectiveness.

Meetings and Technology

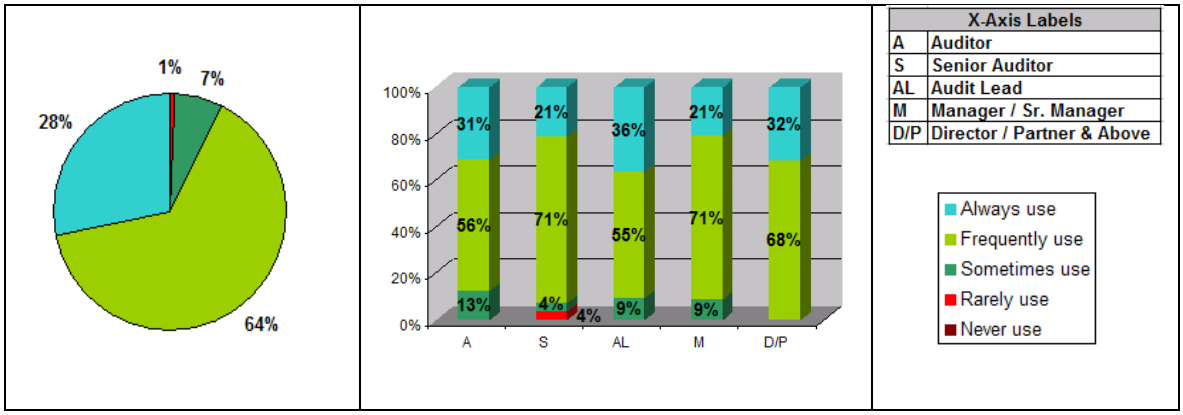
Meetings can be conducted through a variety of methods including face-to-face, teleconference, video conferencing, email, instant messaging and web-hosted interactive media, such as WebEx One. Each one of these methods has specific benefits and challenges. Differences in the media internal auditors utilize suggest modifications in the way these meetings should be managed ("Types of Meetings").

The following discusses the pros and cons of each method and analyzes how often internal auditors use those methods and how to make them more effective in light of the challenges the method may present.

Face-to-Face Meetings



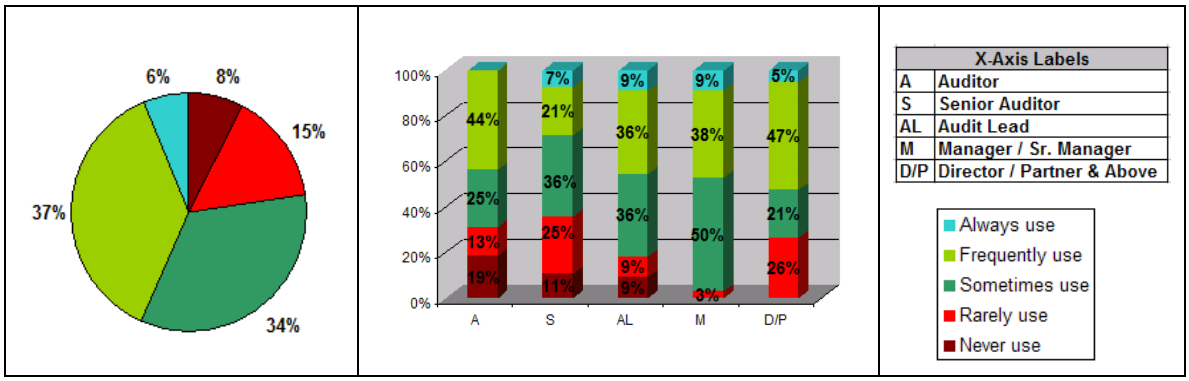
Internal auditors spend 61% of their meetings with attendees from the same office building. Therefore, it is reasonable to see the strong correlation between meeting attendees being in the same office and the type of meetings internal auditors use the most, which is face-to-face meetings. About 28% of internal auditors claimed their meetings are always face-to-face, while about 64% claimed face-to-face meetings are frequently used. It is also noteworthy that directors, partners and executives all responded that they always or frequently use face-to-face as their meeting methods, whereas the other levels of internal auditors had some responses indicating they use face-to-face only sometimes or rarely.



Face-to-face meetings have several advantages to other means of hosting meetings such as the ability to read people, build relationships and it is more personal when it comes to discussing sensitive issues with attendees (Micale 107). However, face-to-face meetings can be expensive, especially when travel costs are involved. Whether the travel includes people traveling from another office within the same city or traveling from another geographical location, it costs the company valuable employee time and money (101). In addition, attendees being in the physical presence of other attendees with potentially opposing thoughts may stifle the objectivity of attendees and cause more of a group-think syndrome where attendees agree to maintain status quo (107).

Teleconferencing

About 39% of internal auditors' meetings consist of attendees not in the same office. Therefore, internal auditors often use teleconferencing as one of the alternatives to meeting face-to-face. For instance, 6% of internal auditors always use teleconferencing and 37% use it frequently.



There are definite advantages to teleconferencing, which makes it one of the most popular alternatives to face-to-face meetings. These advantages include (Micale 104) (Kaye):

- Allow attendees at various geographic locations to attend
- Low overall cost compared to other meeting alternatives (i.e., long-distance phone packages and no travel costs)
- Ability to meet on short notice

However, there are disadvantages to using teleconferencing rather than face-to-face such as (Micale 104) (Kaye):

- Lack of visual contact causes challenges building relationships, makes it easier to get off-track and the facilitator cannot determine if the participants are engaged in the meeting, which hinder effective communication.
- The more participants required, the less productive the teleconference will become.
- It is a challenge to interject questions when it is etiquette to allow only one person to speak at a time.

In addition to the advantages and disadvantages of teleconferences, they also require specific ways to manage some of the key elements to an effective meeting.

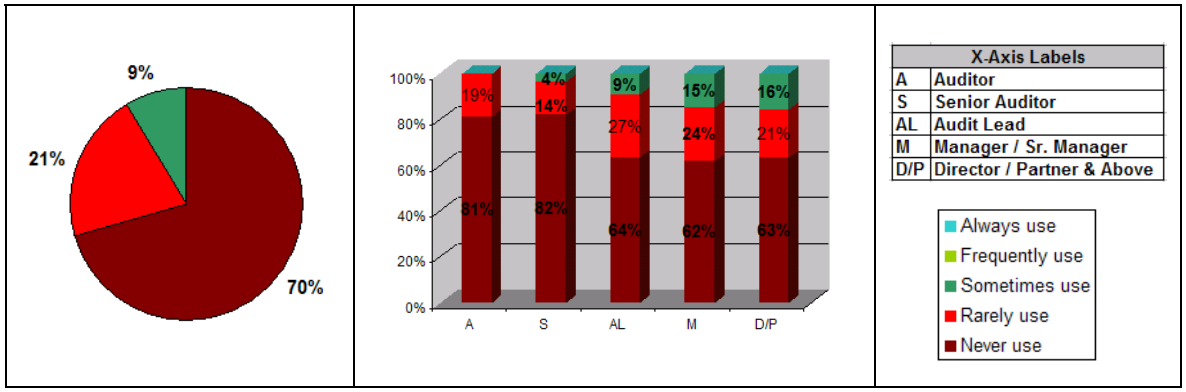
- It is recommended teleconferences last no more than 30 to 45 minutes to maintain attendees' attention (Kaye). If it needs to last longer, 90 minutes should be the maximum because if breaks are provided, it is often challenging to bring all attendees back to the conference call after the break (Micale 104).
- Also, it is recommended that fewer than eight people attend the teleconference, which should focus on only core participants (Kaye).

- The facilitator must distribute an agenda and any handouts well in advance of the call so all participants can follow. A teleconference without a visual reference as to the objective and agenda items will cause wasted time.
- The facilitator must be the first to call into the teleconference call. It is recommended the call be initiated at least two to five minutes ahead of the scheduled time.
- Meeting times must consider time zones and recognize areas with daylight savings time.
- Ensure there are clear instructions for all participants to use the teleconference system and everyone can be heard when they call in.
- All attendees must identify themselves by name and position at the beginning of the call. In addition, each attendee must state their name when beginning to speak.
- Ensure there are expectations that only one person speak at a time for sake of clarity ("Types of Meetings").

Finally, there appears to be a greater future emphasis on utilizing conference calls as a way of meeting because more employees are working from their homes and telecommuting to work. In addition, organizations are constantly expanding to new geographical areas. Organizations also continue to emphasize the reduction of operating expenses, which affect the demands on employees' time (Micale 104).

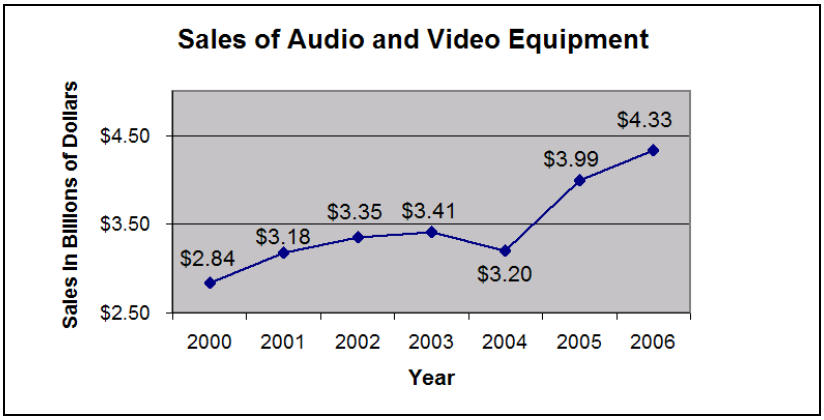
Video Conferencing

Internal auditors do not frequently use video over face-to-face meetings. Only 9% responded they sometimes use video conferencing, whereas 21% rarely use it and 70% never use it. The most likely factor to this trend is the cost of video conferencing equipment. The technology used to transmit real-time video images of the participants is costly and can be a challenge to use compared to other more user-friendly methods of holding meetings. Most internal audit departments do not think the value of visually interacting with participants (main advantage of video conferencing) outweighs the expense to put that technology in place (Hindle 14).



Regarding ways to manage the key elements of an effective meeting, many of the same suggestions provided for teleconferencing hold true with video conferencing. Examples include distributing agendas and handouts ahead of time, identifying the name of the person before speaking and being conscious of the length of the meetings (Hindle 14).

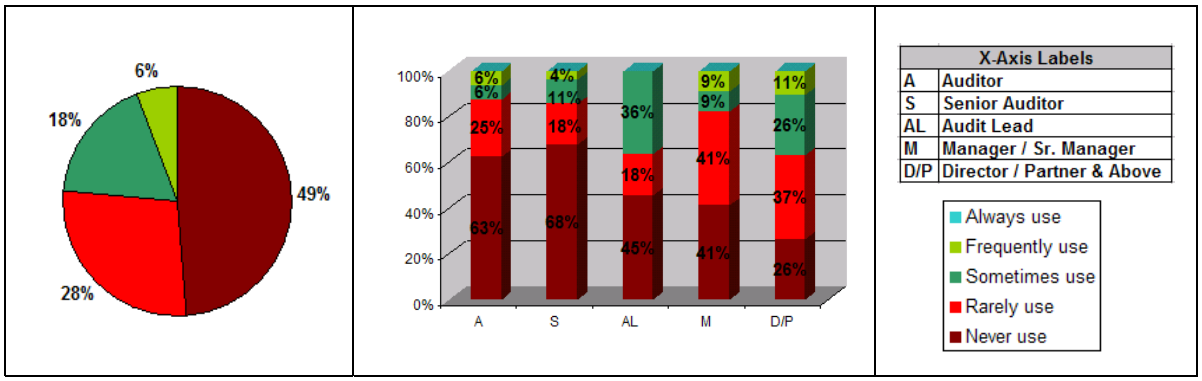
However, research does suggest that despite the cost, audio and videoconferencing equipment is on the rise according to "Conferencing Takes Wings as Travel Option" from the 8/11/06 Chicago Tribune. Sales in 2000 were $2.84 billion, while in 2006 sales were $4.33 billion (Kranz 130).



Web-Hosted Interactive Media

Web-hosted interactive media as an alternative to face-to-face meetings is relatively new. Web-hosted interactive media, such as WebEx One[12], is an online website which all participants access which enables both audio conferencing and video displays. Meeting attendees can talk to each other over a teleconference call and simultaneously view the same, real-time information other attendees are seeing because the facilitator is sharing his or her computer screen with everyone or all attendees have opened the same document attached to the website (Micale106).

About 6% of internal auditors frequently use this method and 18% sometimes use it. However, 49% of internal auditors still have never used this method. The most likely factor for this could be that it is a relatively new option or the cost of joining an online interactive media group may not outweigh the benefits. Its main benefit over teleconferencing is that the visuals are real-time and interactive with all users, instead of verbal descriptions of the handouts. The same methods for managing the key elements to an effective meeting are the same as teleconferencing and video conferencing.

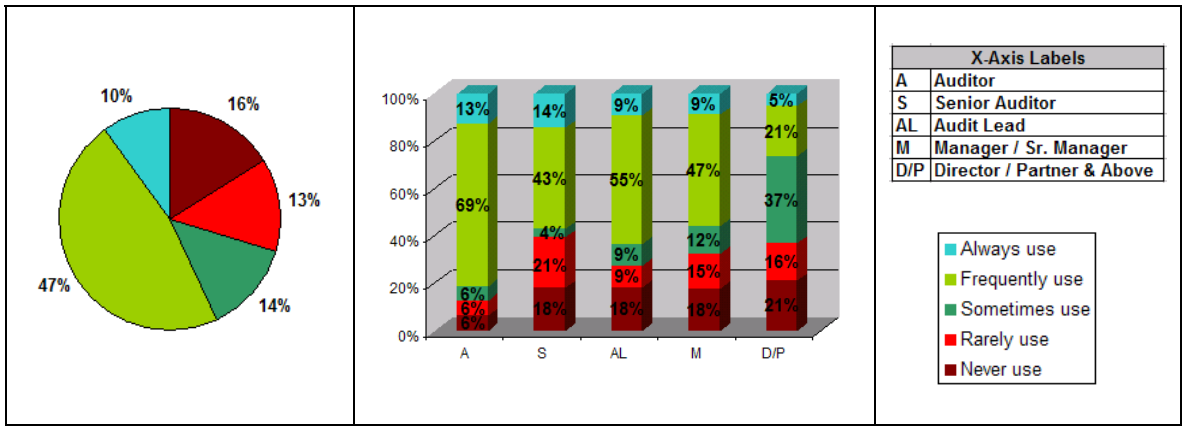


[12] Source: www.WebOffice.com/webexone

Email

Email is the most pervasive and useful communication tool to emerge since the telephone. The ease with which people can reach others has resulted in far more information being exchanged. A staffing company, Office Team, conducted a 2006 survey which found 71% of executives use email as their preferred method of communication where only 27% were doing it in 2001 (Kranz 18).

Internal auditors revealed they often use email as a way to communicate to other participants in lieu of hosting a meeting. Almost half (47%) of internal auditors frequently use email for communication with those who would otherwise need to attend a formal meeting.



In order to manage the key elements of effective meetings, emails require more unique guidance compared to other meeting alternatives. The following is some guidance to more effective email correspondence:

- The facilitator should treat recipients of the email the same way they would evaluate attendees to a meeting. Those receiving the email would most likely forward it to peripheral attendees, if necessary (Kranz 22). Another way to consider the recipient list is the "to" field is for core participants, the "cc" field is for peripheral participants who may need the information for background and the "bcc" field is for sparse use because it's arguably unfair to the recipient who is not fully aware of who else may be receiving the message (24).
- The subject should grab a reader's attention and should be a shortened version of the objective. This is important because the facilitator does not want the receiver to overlook the email as junk mail or as unimportant. Also, a specific subject helps the sender and recipients track the email for future reference. Finally, if a response is needed quickly, the facilitator must specify it in the subject line (e.g., "Audit Management Responses/Answers Needed Today") (Kranz 24).

In addition, a useful tip in constructing important email correspondence is to get in the habit of typing the attendees last after proofreading is complete so the email is not sent out too early.

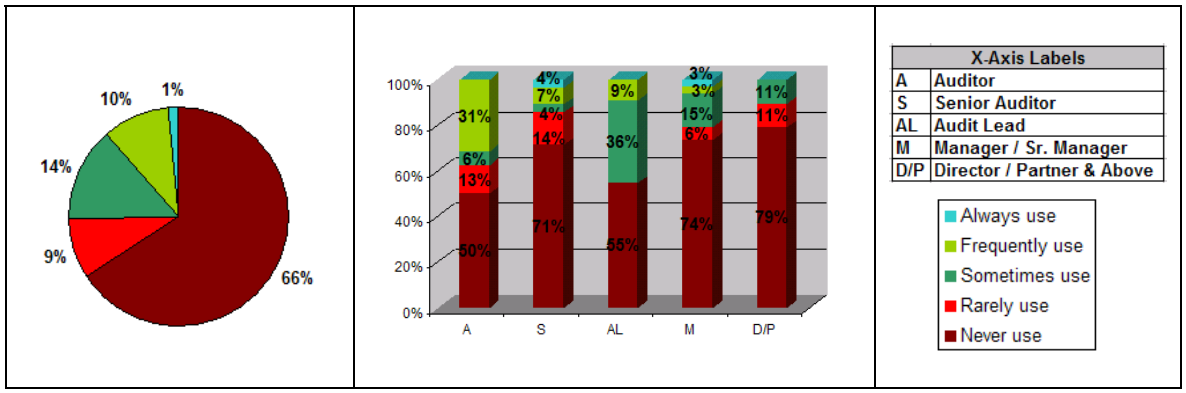
Also, the facilitator must be careful of auto-populating email programs to ensure the correct recipients are populated (Kranz 22).

One of the main downfalls of email correspondence in lieu of other meeting alternatives is email overload when the "reply to all" option is frequently utilized. This can lead to confusion and attendees disregarding them as they accumulate in their email inboxes. In those cases, attendees should revert to a formal meeting in a different setting (Kranz 24).

Finally, email users should be aware that email messages may come under the scrutiny of regulators. Once documented, it can typically be retrieved even if deleted in circumstances of legal issues, fraud or other areas when company deems necessary (Kranz 44). Also, users should be aware of the possibility of unsecured networks and confidential information being inadvertently viewed by an unintended party (38).

Instant Messaging

Instant messaging allows users to send real-time text messages to each other, which is the advantage it has over email in regards to response time. It is a low cost option to implement in the business IT environment. A research firm, IDC, reported 70% of companies have employees that rely heavily on it to transact vital business. 10% of internal auditors use instant messaging frequently and 14% sometimes rely on it to communicate in lieu of a formal meeting. At the same time, 66% still do not use it as an alternative to other methods of meeting.



Instant messaging is definitely the least formal way of communicating, but it has a unique advantage in that users can communicate over geographic boundaries instantly for a low cost. Also, it is normally used for internal communications only, which keeps the majority of the exchanges focused on business-related subjects. This is unlike email inboxes, which can have a variety of subjects from sources within and outside the company (Kranz 46).

The Future of Meetings

Bill Gates, the founder of Microsoft, wrote an article in 2006 called "The Unified Communications Revolution". In that article, he said new Microsoft technology will make communication a multi-sensory experience of sights and sounds, which will eliminate the barriers between communication modes like email, voice, web conferencing and more (Kranz 19). Unified communications is the combination of information within email, voicemail, instant messaging and videoconferencing to facilitate efficient communication. It is most successful when linked to a specific business process, such as an order processing system to reach customers and complete more orders each day. One of the users of unified communications is the Director of Technology at the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Henry Dennig. He said, "When traveling, I often find it convenient to have my cell phone so I don't need to use my laptop. When in the office, my voicemails are available from my desk phone and my compute speakers. My faxes arrive in my email box and I never have missing pages" (Malykhina).

The current state of unified communications is the resistance to implement such a costly system when there are challenges to proving solid return-on-investment (ROI) statistics. About one-third of 325 businesses surveyed by "Information Week" research cite lack of ROI metrics as an adoption challenge. Also, 51% of the 47 companies not deploying it cite it is difficult to measure and prove ROI. Cisco, Avaya, Nortel Networks and Microsoft all claim to have a full suite of products available. If these types of companies can successfully consult businesses on determining the ROI factors for their company, the future of integrating meetings and technology could rise significantly.

Summary

Internal auditors revealed a significant amount of their time is spent in meetings, which 17% are considered ineffective. Time spent in ineffective or inefficient meetings cost companies valuable money in salaries, travel and information technology. Internal auditors noted several factors which contributed to inefficient meetings, so the following is a summary of the recommendations provided to internal auditors to make meetings more effective.

Key Factor	Description
Objective	Develop a brief and to-the-point outcome statement. Evaluate whether a meeting is required to achieve the objective. If so, distribute the objective statement in the meeting invitation. Include the objective in the agenda.
Attendees	There should be 15 or less attendees working together on decision-making discussions, while information-sharing can be as large as needed. Only core attendees should be invited to the meeting, while peripherals receive meeting minutes.
Time	Conservatively assign time to each agenda item while keeping in mind that an ideal meeting length is 45 to 90 minutes. Assign at least 10% of the time to introduce the meeting, 85% for the body of the meeting and 5% to conclude it.
Agenda: Meeting Introduction	Introduce the meeting with a brief icebreaker, verbalize the objective and set expectations for the meeting attendees.
Agenda: Body of Meeting	Agenda items should focus on building plans or discussing barriers. Cover the items in order of importance. The facilitator must table diversions or new topics and document those items on a "parking lot" list so they can be addressed outside of the current meeting.
Agenda: Meeting Conclusion	Briefly recap the items covered and assign a responsible person and a timeline to cover any items tabled during the meeting (i.e., included on the "parking lot").
Agenda: Other Agenda Tips	One-page agendas are ideal and should be distributed at least one day in advance of the meeting, along with any valuable reading or handouts applicable to the meeting.
Meeting Minutes	Concise meeting minutes should follow the flow of the agenda and include attendees, discussion, decisions and actions agreed-upon. They should be issued within 24 hours to core and peripheral personnel.
Facilitator	A facilitator must lead every meeting by keeping the agenda on track. For larger or more formal meetings, especially decision-making meetings, a neutral facilitator is recommended.
Feedback	Periodically survey the internal auditors' perspectives on meeting productivity to provide insight into future improvements in meeting effectiveness.
Technology	Differences in the media internal auditors utilize suggest changes in the way meetings should be managed to uphold the key components to effective meetings.

Appendix One

Utilizing the website, ZapSurvey.com, a ten-question survey was distributed via email to all St. Louis Chapter IIA members during October 2007. There were 108 usable sets of survey responses out of approximately 900 internal auditors, which is a 12% response rate. The 108 sets of responses consisted of the following response rates per career level in internal audit:

Auditor	15%
Senior Auditor	26%
Audit Lead	10%
Manager/Senior Manager	31%
Director/Partner & Above	18%

The following were the survey questions distributed:

Effective Meetings for Internal Auditors
Answers marked with a * are required.

2. Meeting Survey

2*. What level/position do you currently hold at your company?

- Auditor
- Senior auditor
- Audit lead
- Manager/senior manager
- Director/partner or above
- Other (Please Specify)

3*. On average, how many hours of your typical business week do you spend in meetings?

- < 5 hours
- 5 - 10 hours
- 11 - 15 hours
- 16 - 20 hours
- 21 - 25 hours
- > 25 hours

4*. On average, what percentage of the time do you facilitate/host the meetings?

- ○ < 10%
- ○ 10% - 30%
- ○ 31% - 50%
- ○ 51% - 75%
- ○ > 75%

5*. On average, what percentage of your meetings is for making decisions (e.g., scheduling or audit planning) vs. information sharing (e.g., training or department meeting)?

Making decisions (%) _____

Information sharing (%) _____

6*. Please rate the following meeting methods based upon the type you use from most often to least often.

	Always use	Frequently use	Sometimes use	Rarely use	Never use
Face-to-face	○	○	○	○	○
Teleconference	○	○	○	○	○
Video conference	○	○	○	○	○
Web-hosted interactive media (e.g., WebEx One)	○	○	○	○	○
E-mail	○	○	○	○	○
Instant Messaging	○	○	○	○	○

7*. For the meeting method you use most often (refer to question 6), why do you think that method was chosen?

- ☐ Cost-effective
- ☐ User-friendly
- ☐ Most effective in meeting needs of attendees
- ☐ Other (Please Specify)

_____

8. What percentage of your meetings consist of attendees that are:

In the same office _____

Outside of the office, but within the same city _____

Outside of the city, but within the same state _____

Outside of the state, but within the continental U.S. _____

Outside of the continental U.S. _____

9*. On average, what percentage of the meetings you attend do you feel are relatively UNPRODUCTIVE?

- ○ < 10%
- ○ 10% - 30%
- ○ 31% - 50%
- ○ 51 - 75%
- ○ > 75%

10*. For meetings you have felt were UNPRODUCTIVE, please rate the following potential inhibitors to a productive meeting.

	Definite factor	Likely factor	Indifferent	Probably not a factor	Definitely not a factor
Too large of group	○	○	○	○	○
Irrelevant topic	○	○	○	○	○
Too many agenda items to cover	○	○	○	○	○
Too many diversions to the focus of the meeting	○	○	○	○	○
The leader was not leading the meeting	○	○	○	○	○
No visuals (e.g., power point or handout)	○	○	○	○	○
Objective of the meeting was not met	○	○	○	○	○
Method used for the meeting was distracting or not effective (e.g., static over the phone or cannot see visual aids)	○	○	○	○	○

11*. For meetings you have felt were PRODUCTIVE, please rate the following factors you consider to be contributors to that success.

	Definite factor	Likely factor	Indifferent	Probably not a factor	Definitely not a factor
The proper amount of attendees	○	○	○	○	○
Relevant topic	○	○	○	○	○
Concise agenda	○	○	○	○	○
Stayed on-track with the agenda	○	○	○	○	○
Definite leader	○	○	○	○	○
Effective visuals	○	○	○	○	○
Objective of the meeting was met	○	○	○	○	○
Good venue or easy-to-use technology	○	○	○	○	○

Works Cited

Doyle, Michael, and Straus, David. The New Interaction Method: How to Make Meetings Work!. New York: Berkley Publishing Group, 1976.

Hawkins, Charlie. "Conducting Effective Meetings: The Four "F" Words." The SideRoad. <http://www.sideroad.com/Meetings/conducting-effective-meetings.html>.

Henkel, Shri L. Successful Meetings: How to Plan, Prepare, and Execute Top Notch Business Meetings. Ocala: Atlantic Publishing Company, 2007.

Hindle, Tim. Essential Managers: Managing Meetings. New York.: DK Publishing, Inc., 1998.

Karpay, Ken. "How to help clients end the 'pointless, endless meeting syndrome.'" Consulting to Management. December 2007: 44-47.

Kaye, Steven. "Planning a Teleconference Call." The SideRoad. <http://www.sideroad.com/Meetings/planning-teleconference-call.html>.

Kearns, Kevin. Top 7 Strategies for Productive Meetings. 6 February 2005. <http://top7business.com/?Top-7-Strategies-for-Productive-Meetings&id=867>.

Kranz, Garry. Communicating Effectively: Write, Speak, and Present with Authority. Irvington: Hylas Publishing, 2007.

Krattenmaker, Tom. In Search of the Perfect Meeting. Harvard Management Communication Letter. May 2003. <http://hbswk.hbs.edu/archive/3507.html>.

Lindenberger, Judith. "Make the Most of Your Meetings." Office Solutions. July 2007: 40.

Malykhina, Elena. "A Better Way to Communicate." Information Week. 11 June 2007: 49, 50.

Mann, Merlin. 9 tips for running more productive meetings. 21 Feb. 2006. <http://www.43folders.com/2006/02/21/meetings>.

Micale, Frances. Meetings Made Easy: The Ultimate Fix-It Guide. CWL Publishing Enterprises, 2004.

Reh, John F. "Meeting Management." Your Guide to Management. <http://management.about.com/cs/people/a/MeetingMgt0601.htm>.

Rogelberg, Steven G., Cliff, Scott, and Kello, John. "The Science and Fiction of Meetings." MIT Sloan: Management Review. Winter 2007. Vol. 48 No. 2.

Works Cited (Continued)

"Running Effective Meetings." Mind Tools Ltd. <http://www.mindtools.com /CommSkll/Running Meetings.htm>.

Shaffran, Cliff. "Mind your meetings: How to become the catalyst for culture change." Communication World. Feb/Mar 2003: 26-29.

Thomsett, Michael C. The Little Black Book of Business. New York: AMACON, 1989.

Turner, Tracy T. "Conducting a Productive Meeting." The SideRoad. <http://www.sideroad.com/Meetings/productive_meeting.html>.

"Types of Meetings." Salary.com. <http://www.salary.com/personal/ layoutscripts/psnl_articles.asp?tab=psn&cat=cat282&ser=ser034&part=par386>.