

Meetings: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

By [Steve Berczuk](#) - March 4, 2015



Teamwork and collaboration are essential to agile software development. The frequent feedback is what makes agile a potentially powerful approach to building systems.

To collaborate, you need to communicate, but while meetings are a crucial part of that communication process, they are often the subject of satire in [comic strips](#) and daily discussions. However, you can't just do away with them entirely—meetings are [essential to an agile process](#) like Scrum. Rather than avoiding all meetings, it's better to work at making the times you meet with people more effective.

Badly run meetings can create a culture that kills innovation and productivity, but well-run ones can be a venue for making important decisions and communicating important information. [From NPR](#):

Experts say poorly run meetings grind away at employee engagement and make companies less reactive by bogging decisions down in human red tape. Some companies, including Mattel, try to create limits around the size, duration or frequency of meetings.

Scrum defines a few standard meetings with a focus on eliminating time-wasting ones. The standard Scrum meetings are the [daily scrum](#), [sprint planning](#), and [sprint review](#). To encourage effectiveness, each of these meetings has a goal and a structure that helps it keep on track. But it is still important to take the time to run the meetings well.

It's easy to identify when a meeting isn't productive. Danger signs include people doing things other than addressing the topic under discussion (such as doodling or checking email), and using meetings to diffuse responsibility and delay decisions rather than solve problems. Often, meeting participants know the difference between a useful meeting and a time-wasting one, but they don't convey that feedback to the meeting organizer. Encouraging [the Law of Two Feet](#), commonly used in open spaces, can help force meetings to be more effective.

But walking out of a meeting can be difficult in some corporate cultures, and it also doesn't help the meetings become better. You can improve your scrum and other meetings by following some [guidelines for effective meetings](#). Jean Tabaka has [an excellent book](#) about how to facilitate effective agile meetings, and Ryan Martens [mentions some advice from Seth Godin](#) to add to Tabaka's tactics.

One technique that can help keep scrum meetings on track is following [checklists](#). You should revisit and refine these checklists periodically, especially if the checklist [empowers the participants to correct the process](#).

Agile software development is about collaboration, and meeting with people at appropriate times is essential to sharing ideas. Bad meetings can hurt a project and a team. Rather than avoiding meetings altogether, spend time improving your meetings. Doing so can have significant benefits for your team.

Do the meetings that you participate in help you get your work done? If not, do you try to change the meetings so that they do? Have you been successful?