



# THE MEETING

Rebuilt for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century



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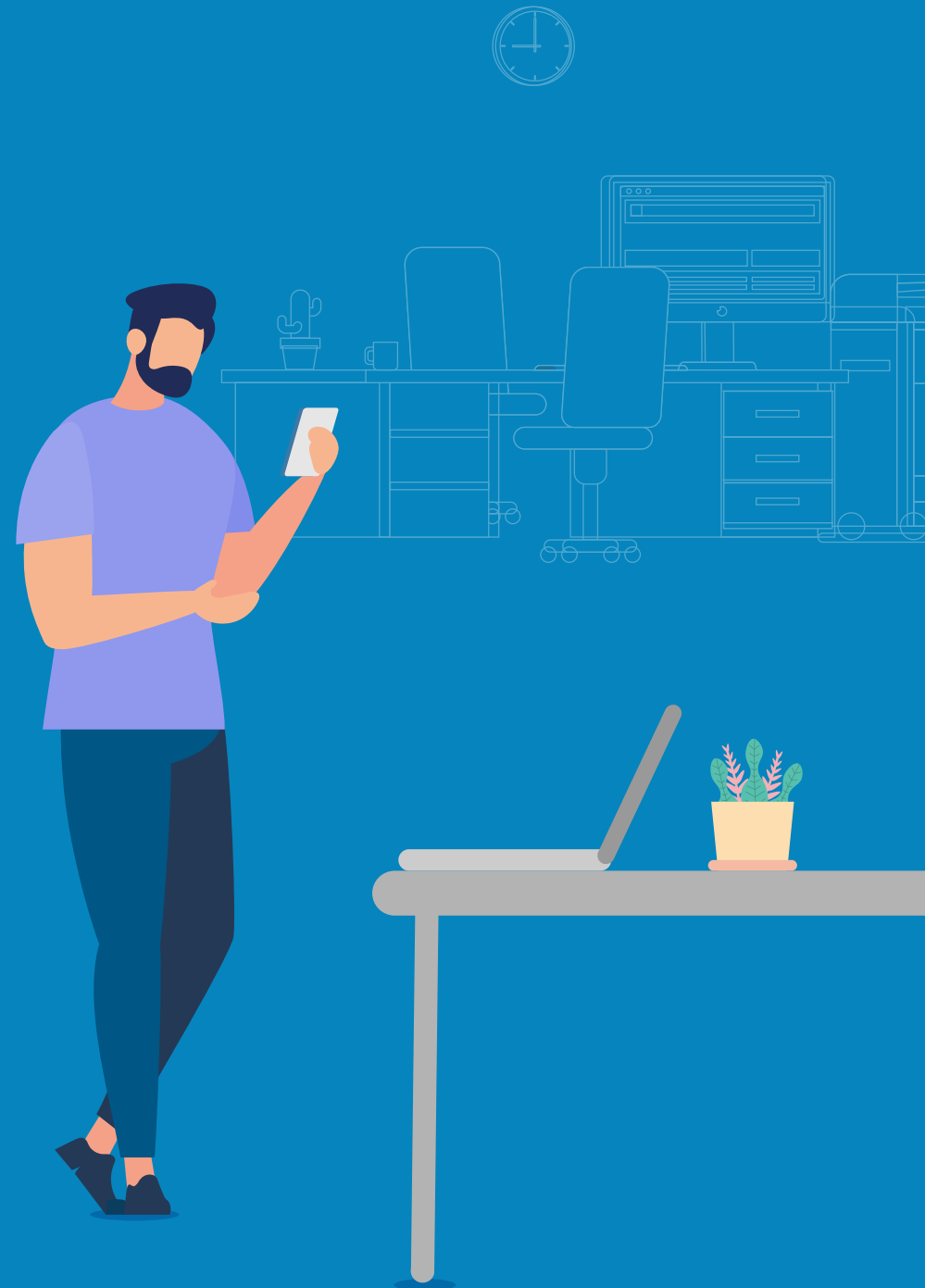
One afternoon, billionaire hedge fund manager Ray Dalio checked his email and discovered an interesting message from one of his employees, Jim Haskel. Haskel had just facilitated a meeting Dalio had attended and he wasn't happy about his boss's performance.

“Ray,” read the [email](#), “you deserve a ‘D-’ for your performance today in the meeting...”

And that was just the start. The email went on to slam Dalio for an apparent lack of preparation and general inattentiveness.

In many organizations, such candid and unsolicited feedback would have resulted in the swift dismissal of its author—but not at Dalio's investment firm, Bridgewater Associates. Dalio is an advocate for something called radical transparency, which is the simple idea that teams should default to honest, open, and straightforward communication. Dalio loved the email because it was all three. Indeed, he was so impressed by his employee's criticism that he shared a screenshot of the email with all 1,700 of his employees.

Several years later, Dalio even included the story in his [TED talk](#) on company culture.



While such candid feedback might feel strange to most of us, the meeting that prompted it probably doesn't. Across the world, millions of meetings are derailed each day due to inattentive attendees like Dalio.

But attendees who don't prepare are just the tip of the problem. Meetings are constantly undermined and derailed by a raft of common organizational faux pas, such as writing vague agendas, and circular discussions. While it's easy to blame a meeting's attendees for not following business etiquette, they might not actually be the problem.

Increasingly, organizational experts are asking whether it's our meetings rather than our attendees that are the problem.



## THE MODERN WORKPLACE

The modern workplace is changing—and fast. New technologies, new roles, and new generations have upended the status quo, transforming both the work we do and how we do it. While some change is to be expected, few predicted just how rapidly the contemporary workplace would evolve.

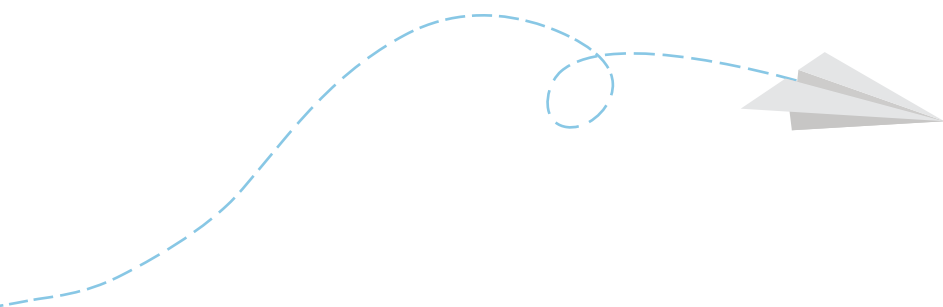
But against a backdrop of seismic change, the meeting has stayed static. Fundamentally, our meetings are the same organizational instruments that our parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents used in their companies. And that's a problem.

The conventional meeting has turned into an organizational black hole, sucking time, resources, and energy into its depths. In the U.S. alone, meetings cost businesses approximately **\$30 billion a year** in wasted time.

While it may feel tempting to reject all future meeting invites, that isn't the solution. Meetings are valuable tools. They bring people together, enable conversation, and facilitate group decision making. Discarding meetings entirely risks losing all of those benefits.

Instead, we have to understand the cultural and technological changes going on in our workplace. Then we must design a new form of meeting to complement our contemporary business habits. When we refactor our meetings, we can reclaim our wasted time and get back to the work we were actually hired to do.

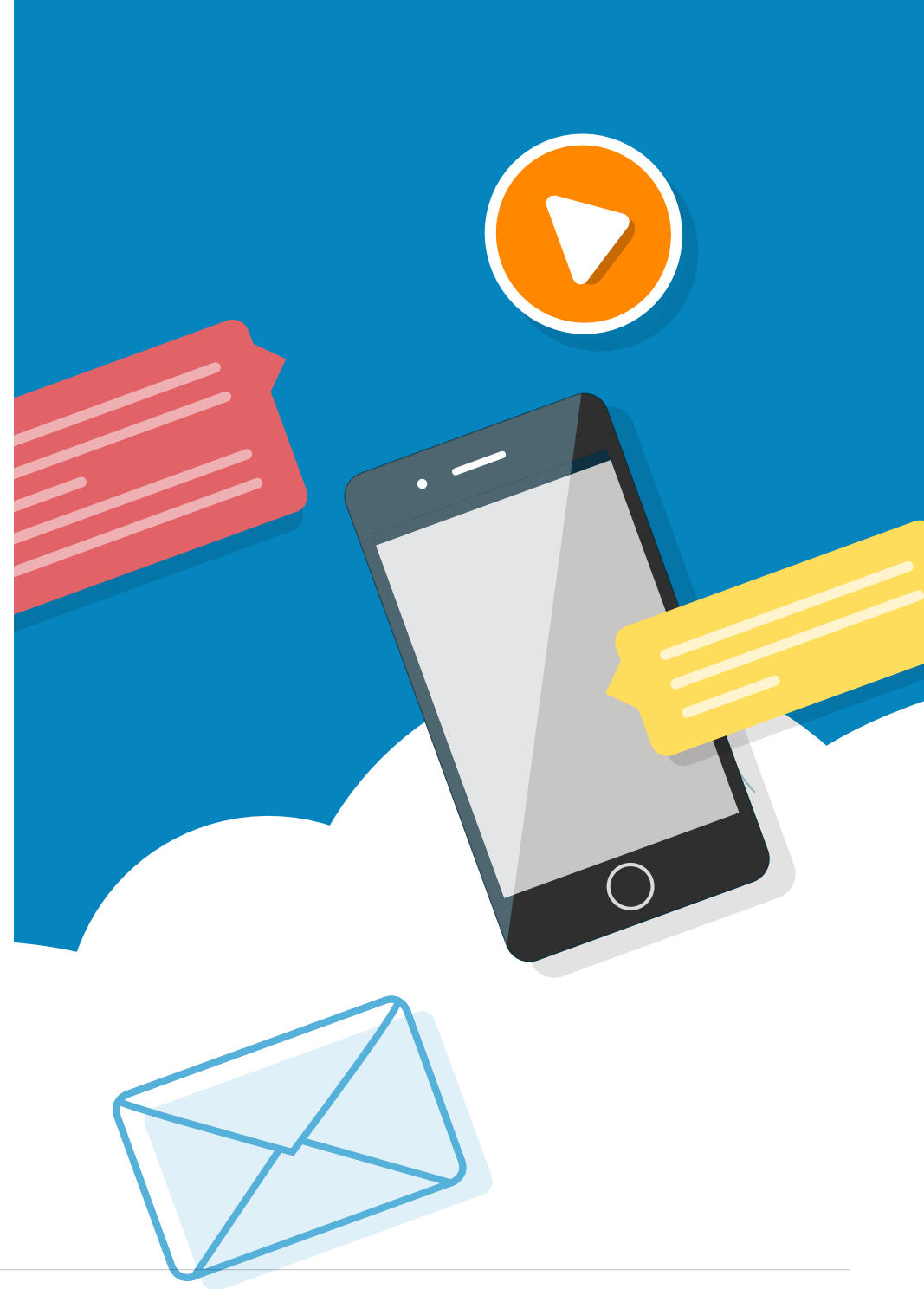
In the following sections, we have highlighted three important challenges that are disrupting our meetings.



## CHALLENGE #1: FALLING ATTENTION SPANS

Ten years ago, productivity author Nicholas Carr noticed something strange was happening to his brain. Carr used to be able to immerse himself in a novel for hours. But increasingly, he found concentration more and more difficult. “I get fidgety, lose the thread, begin looking for something else to do,” Carr wrote in [The Atlantic](#) in 2008. It wasn’t just reading, though. Carr felt the pull of distraction throughout his entire life—when he was working, talking, and even relaxing.

Reflecting on his cognitive change, Carr discovered the cause: technology distractions.



For more than a decade, Carr had immersed himself in technology. He would research his books on the Internet, write the manuscripts on a word processor, and relax afterwards reading blogs.

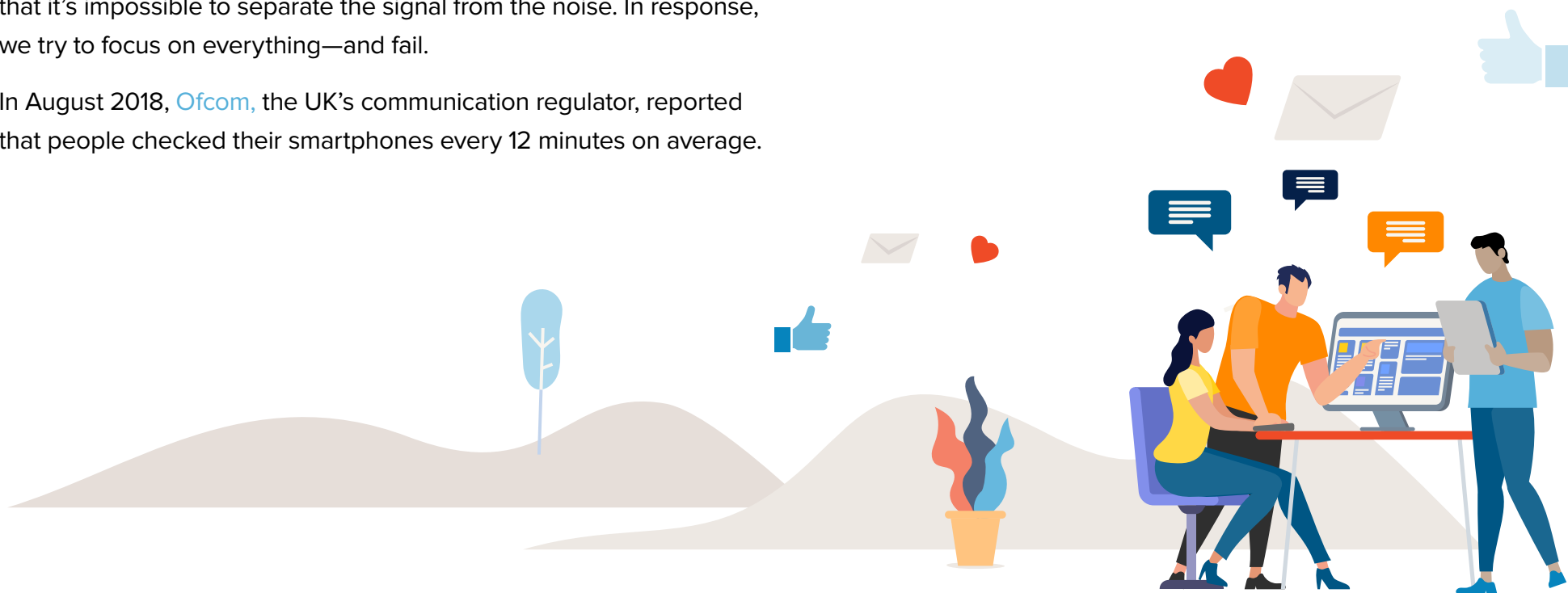
Technology did benefit his career—but it came at a price. Carr says his mind grew to expect all information to work the way the Internet distributed it—fast-paced and fragmented.

Carr isn't alone. All of our lives are dominated by technology, which inevitably affects our minds. With the rise of the attention economy, we are pummelled with so much content on a minute-by-minute basis that it's impossible to separate the signal from the noise. In response, we try to focus on everything—and fail.

In August 2018, [Ofcom](#), the UK's communication regulator, reported that people checked their smartphones every 12 minutes on average.

That's not surprising when you consider the barrage of dings, pings, and rings that punctuate our days.

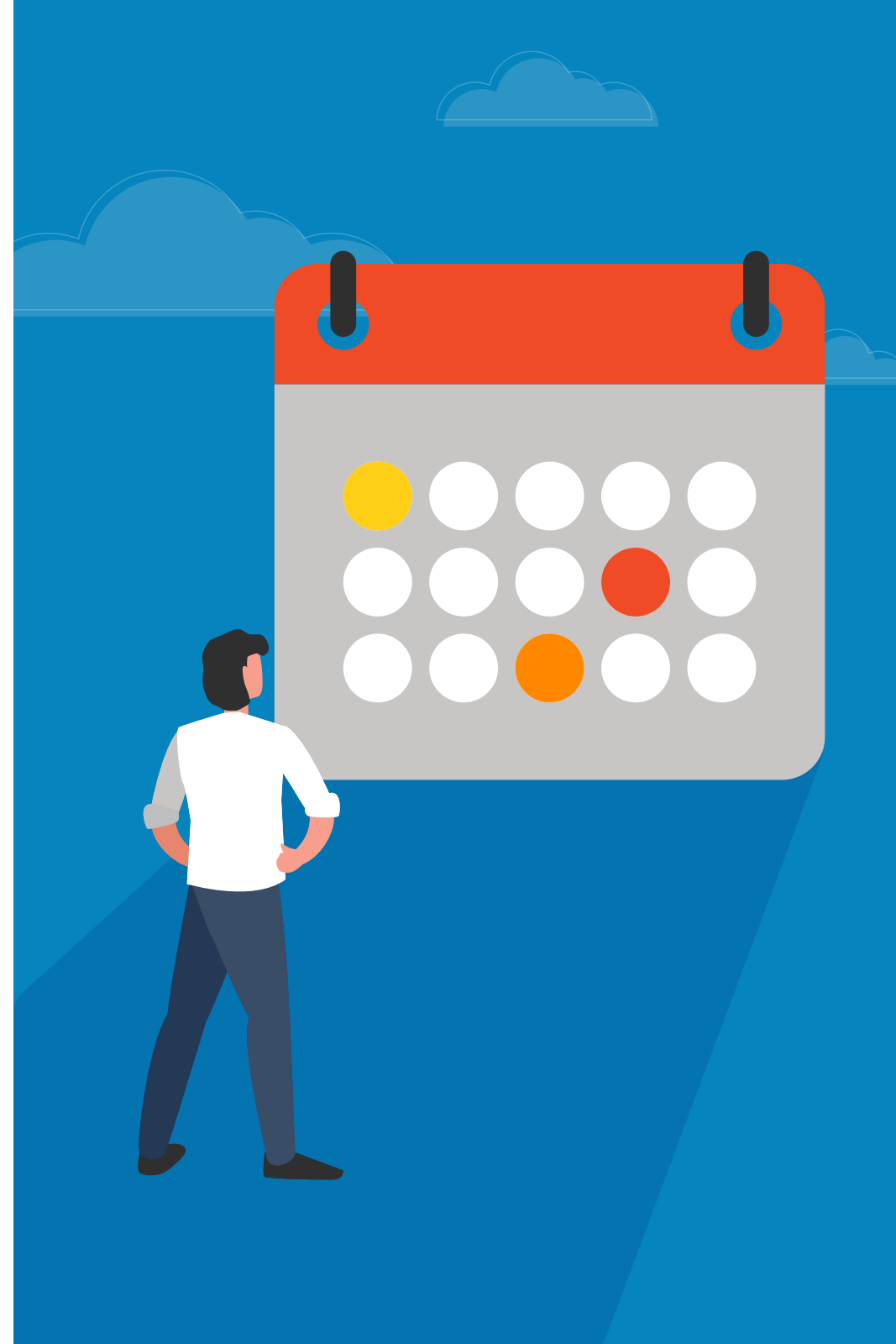
With our brains used to being pulled from task to task, it's our new default setting, and our attention spans have shrunk in response. Researchers at [Microsoft](#) discovered that the average attention span dropped by 50 percent between 2000 and 2013. If we ignore this trend and continue with conventional meetings, there won't be anyone listening in another 10 years.



## CHALLENGE #2: NO CLEAR OUTCOMES

In the fall of 2019, Bradley, a chemical engineer, traveled to a neighboring city to visit a research and development partner. The R&D company had booked his meeting months in advance as a project update but failed to specify an agenda.

When Bradley arrived, he learned the project was running late and there was nothing substantive to discuss. But because Bradley's R&D partner had booked a meeting, they insisted he stay to discuss the project. Bradley says he endured a two-hour discussion on tangentially related topics. After that, they started another ad hoc meeting on simulations, a subproject they had not even started. Bradley suggests that the day's agendas were designed on the fly because the original plan was no longer relevant.





Ultimately, that meant Bradley spent a full day in meetings where he learned nothing new and made no decisions. “I think there was about one hour of good discussion,” Bradley told RingCentral, “but that could have been covered in an email.”

Meetings like this are astonishingly common, especially in large companies where rooms and attendees must be booked far in advance. Because of the delay, meetings are often detached from their original purpose, leading to slipping agendas and vanishing decisions. The conversations will meander round in circles and fail to produce clear outcomes. It’s not just a waste of time, either.

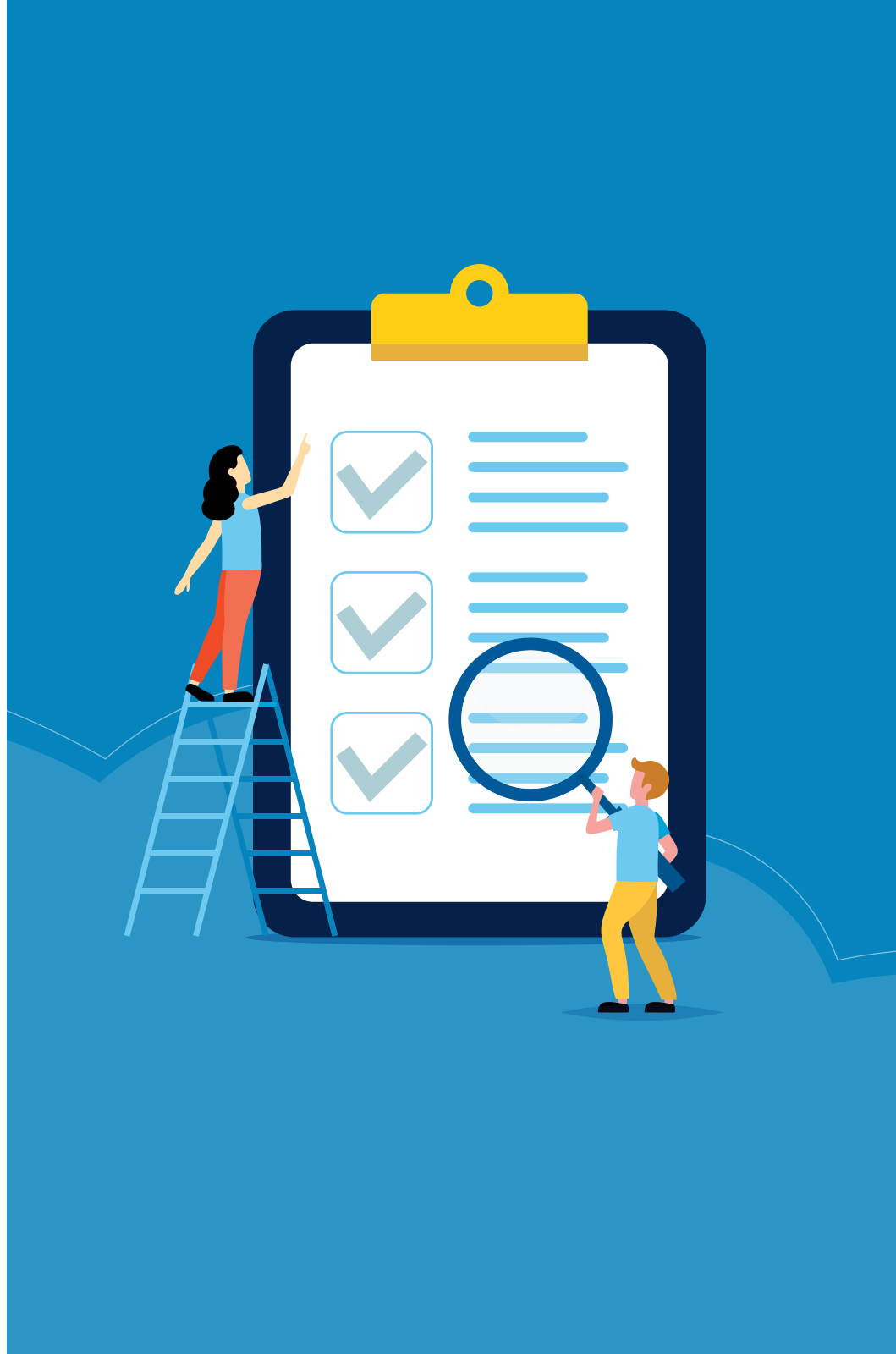
According to a survey from [Doodle](#), ineffective meetings are one of the most infuriating aspects of the modern workplace. Unfortunately, without a radical ideological overhaul, this trend is only going to continue.



## CHALLENGE #3: FORGOTTEN MEETING HYGIENE

Andrew was never taught how to lead a meeting. After graduating from college, he set up a freelance web design agency and began pitching clients. Over the years, his business grew and he hired his first full-time members of staff. Suddenly, his role grew to include administration—and that meant meetings. In a typical week, Andrew usually had to hold several one-to-one reviews, an all-hands update, and countless project meetings. But he felt like an imposter as every decision he made during a meeting felt like a guess.

Last year, Andrew personally headed up an important internal project. Because of the huge scope, he implemented weekly project update meetings. Although every meeting had an agenda, it nearly always veered into tangential topics. What should have been a five-minute update regularly turned into an hour-long dive down a rabbit hole.



Many of Andrew's problems come down to poor meeting hygiene, which is simply the etiquette facilitators expect of their attendees. Think starting on time, limiting unnecessary interruptions, staying on topic, and so on.

For individual contributors-turned-managers, this is an incredibly common challenge. Facilitating a meeting is hard, and it requires knowledge and practice. Andrew, like millions of other untrained meeting facilitators, did his best but it often wasn't enough to keep his meetings on track.

Without clear leadership from a facilitator, traditional meeting hygiene starts to crumble and conversations become anarchic. Attendees bring up irrelevant topics, dive down rabbit holes, and push the meeting over its time limits.



## MODERN CONTEXTUAL MEETINGS

It would be almost impossible to reverse the trends in the modern workplace. Carr, for example, could not give up modern technology, and Andrew simply could not afford to hire a dedicated meeting facilitator.

Instead, what we must do is update our meetings' structures to complement how the contemporary workforce operates.

That means tearing down conventional meetings and replacing them with *contextual* meetings.

Our communication and collaboration has fragmented across multiple channels. We work together in short, often asynchronous bursts, allowing for rapid progress on specific topics. Our new meetings must mirror that trend. In practice, that means integrating meeting technology into our collaboration platforms or, ideally, shifting to a single platform that unifies both communication and collaboration.

When people can book meetings within their communication platform, meetings become an extension of everyday conversation, rather than a disruptive event. Think again about Bradley. Imagine he is working with an internal team on a complicated project but is struggling to convey what he means via team messaging.

A quick contextual meeting that can be launched with a single click from within the platform means Bradley can facilitate a laser-focused discussion, clear the communication blockage, and return to his work.

The other benefit to contextual meetings is technology. By integrating video and voice into your communication platform, meetings take place *within* your collaboration workspace. That means all your chat, files, and documents exist right alongside the meeting. Picture a team discussing a project in team messaging. When the discussion gets too complicated, they switch to a video call with a single click. The video sits right next to the conversation, providing instant context. If you want to invite other people, you can share the link to the messaging thread and, again, provide instant context to a meeting.

Contrast that with a meeting booked out weeks or months ahead of time. Often, people arrive totally cold, with no information or context for what it's about. Ultimately, contextual meetings are about just that: context. By placing the meeting *within* your work, the context—conversations, files, research, and so on—is available at your fingertips.

By upending how we think about meetings, we can transform them into a great productivity tool that can help us get work done at a good pace, and with great team collaboration.

## HELP FROM RINGCENTRAL

We work with our customers to reimagine the world of business communications and collaboration. RingCentral combines the three pillars of communication—voice, video, and team messaging—into one seamlessly integrated platform that also includes contact center.

Since RingCentral integrates all three channels into one product, users can switch between them freely. You can chat with colleagues via team messaging. Then if your discussion becomes too complex, you can switch to voice or video and continue the conversation right alongside your chat history.

With RingCentral, we set out to build the most effortless communication space possible. And as the #1 cloud communications provider worldwide, we're proud of what we've achieved.

Click here to learn more about [RingCentral Video](#), our browser-based, effortless video solution.



