

## Hey! What's New? 2024-89

### Can We Make Work Meetings More Bearable?

According to an article on the BBC webpage, written by Jane Wakefield, Elon Musk once said that “excessive meetings are the blight of big companies and almost always get worse over time.” Few would disagree. Meanwhile, writes Wakefield, “72% of meetings are ineffective, according to one global study. And your brain activity drops when you have a Zoom meeting, says a report by researchers at Yale University in the US, and the UK’s University College London.”

Yet, as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, “a great many businesses and organizations were forced to move their meetings online back in 2020, with everyone sitting in front of a webcam. And like them or loathe them, video meetings are here to stay, via the likes of Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Google Meet.”

Jaime Teevan, chief scientist at Microsoft, says this switch was “fortuitous” because it “created the opportunity for AI to [positively] impact our meetings.”

The three big providers of video meetings technology certainly think this is the case, and all now offer users AI-powered assistants. Zoom has AI Companion, Teams has Copilot, and Meet has Duet AI. Rapidly expanding functions already include the AI transcribing the meeting for you, suggesting questions you might want to ask, summarizing the meeting in point form.

Husayn Kassai is the founder of London-based start-up Quench AI, which makes AI-powered training software. He predicts that, in the future, “everyone in the workforce will have some sort of AI coach accompanying them” to meetings. “Meetings are going to be a lot more productive, because we will be going into them much better informed and able to make useful and more valuable judgements,” he says, adding that workers will use AI “to help get them clued up and give them a breakdown of the information.”

Kassai also envisages AI acting as a kind of moderator, offering feedback after the meeting, perhaps even pointing out the things the humans in the room feel unable to. “When you have an idiot in the meeting room who goes off on a rant, and someone who doesn’t say much, the AI could say things like ‘speaker three, you only spoke 2% of the time and next time you need to speak 20% of the time’.”

Yet, notes Wakefield, “as numerous reports over the past year have indicated, AI isn’t yet foolproof, and can make mistakes or, as they are also called, hallucinations.”

In response to the old adage “garbage in, garbage out,” Teevan says Microsoft is currently doing a lot of work to ensure that Copilot’s “AI prompting” is as good as possible.

AI prompting refers to the AI giving the best possible answer to a user’s question. To do this, it needs to be able to learn as quickly as possible who the user is, what he or she does as a job, and which answers the user is most likely to want. “One of the most common ways that I use AI is to ask it what questions I should ask in a meeting,” says Teevan.

Business psychologist Jess Baker says it is easy to understand why so many of us don’t like work meetings. “The data suggests, as does our experience, that most meetings are time consuming and ineffectual.”

She is also “not convinced that the general level of frustration will disappear altogether” thanks to AI. “I think we may find that we continue to be frustrated with meetings, but for different reasons, such as annoyance with person A who never shows up to the Monday morning meeting, but instead requests that the AI tool attend on their behalf. Or frustration with the person who turns up late to every meeting, and uses the AI tool to update on what they’ve missed so far. I can see how this could result in increased resentment and mistrust between colleagues.”

Yet, Teevan is convinced that AI will help to improve meetings. “It can help people feel less overwhelmed, it can help them get started and check things off their list. And it can help spark ideas, seeing things in new ways and getting support there.”

Read all about it at [Can we make work meetings more bearable? \(bbc.com\)](https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-58111111).