

Third Meeting Science Symposium Online Event, 17–21 May 2021

How shall we meet, today and tomorrow? Meeting habits in the contemporary world

Meetings are ubiquitous. As researchers, practitioners, social activists, policy makers, managers or scholars, we spend a considerable amount of time meeting to do politics, devise policies, run organizations, and deliver public services. Beyond decision-making, meetings serve to make sense of situations (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005), to govern and resist (Haug, 2013; Schwartzman, 1989; Sandler & Thedvall, 2017), and to learn (Freeman, 2008). As such, they are vital, even decisive, to our social, political, organizational, and administrative life (van Vree, 2011). Following the Covid-19 pandemic, most face-to-face meetings were replaced by virtual meetings (Thunus & Standaert, 2020). Also, after the lockdown measures, virtual meetings are expected to remain more prevalent than before and to be combined with face-to-face meetings in hybrid meetings. The consequences thereof are still to be researched.

We see this unexpected, unprepared and rapid change as an occasion to initiate a collective reflection about our contemporary meeting habits, meeting architectures and the role of meetings in nowadays globalized and rapidly changing societies. Therefore, we would like to invite you to the **Third Meetings Science Symposium** held online from 17-21 May 2021.

Like the first two editions of the symposium in Gothenburg (2017) and Copenhagen (2019), the symposium will welcome **researchers in diverse disciplines** such as sociology, anthropology, political and administrative science, management and organizational science, communication, and psychology, as well as **practitioners**. The symposium programme will include different online sessions on selected topics relevant to the symposium themes each focusing on a specific area. We plan to have keynotes, panel discussions, and paper development workshops.

Confirmed keynote speakers include:

- Joseph A. Allen, Professor of Industrial and Organizational (I/O) Psychology and Director of the Center for Meeting Effectiveness at the University of Utah.
- Jen Sandler, Senior Lecturer in the Department of Anthropology, University of Massachusetts, Amherst.
- Renita Thedvall, Associate Professor at the Department of Social Anthropology, Stockholm University.

Furthermore, we invite **practitioners** to join the symposium to foster the exchange of ideas with academic researchers. We can already confirm the participation of Barco, a provider of technology in the meeting space, and MeetingQuality, which quantifies meetings. If there are other practitioners who are interested in sharing their knowledge, showcasing their solutions, and /or supporting this event in any other way, feel free to contact us to discuss possibilities.

The **paper development workshops** are intended primarily as a venue for researchers to develop their ongoing work in a friendly and collegial environment. The sessions will be developmental in form and function: you will receive feedback on your ongoing research from peers with similar interests. In each workshop, different papers will be discussed, selected based on a common topic, methodology, or domain.

We are specifically interested in meetings across different settings, learning about the role of meetings in the organizational, political and community arenas, and across different (policy) domains. For your inspiration, we have compiled a preliminary list of five contemporary topics that we think would be interesting to discuss together. The topics are summarized below. Please do not hesitate to submit work or express interest in different topics than the ones mentioned.

1. Meetings as object of study
 - Why are meeting so important to social processes and activities?
 - Why should we look at meetings as unit of analysis?
 - Is there an essential difference in meeting between domains and levels, i.e. political vs community, health vs environment, or local vs international?
2. Meeting practices
 - What is the role of meeting artefacts and architectures for the outcome of meetings?
 - How does interaction take shape in meetings (who interacts with whom and on what terms, who speaks and who is heard), and how does this matter for politics, administration, and organizing?
 - How do materiality, spatiality and temporality matter in meetings?
3. Meetings in context
 - How do interaction and inscription, meetings and documents relate to each other? How do different meetings relate to one another?
 - How can we understand meetings in relation to other aspects of social, political, organizational, and administrative life?
 - What is the relationship between meetings and well-being at work? Under what conditions do meetings increase or reduce stress? What is the role of humour?
4. Improving meetings
 - What drives meeting design choices?
 - How can a moderator increase the effectiveness of meetings? What does effectiveness mean?
 - How do participants experience diversity in meetings (e.g. in multi-lingual settings, interprofessional teams, multi-cultural communities or work-places) and how can barriers to communication be overcome?
5. Virtual meetings and conferences
 - How do virtual meetings change the relationships among participants?
 - How do virtual meetings change how participants achieve meeting objectives?
 - How do technologies change interactional patterns and meetings practices? And how about emerging technologies (e.g., VR, AI, etc...)?

We ask those who are interested in discussing their paper in a development workshop to **send us an extended abstract** of approximately 2000 words (excluding references). Please send this abstract as soon as possible and no later than **20 April 2021**, please indicate the topic of interest and send your abstract to MSS2021Brussels@gmail.com. You will receive a notification and further instructions soon after. The workshop neither requires copyright transfer nor publishes proceedings.

Based on your input we will put together an interesting final programme, of which we will inform you after the submission deadline.

Participation in the symposium programme (with or without a submitted abstract) is free of charge, but please send an email to MSS2021Brussels@gmail.com if you want to participate. There will be no further registration process.

We look forward to meeting you online in May of 2021!

The organizing committee

Sophie Thunus	UCLouvain, Belgium
Willem Standaert	HEC Liège, Belgium
Lianne Visser	Radboud University, The Netherlands
Richard Freeman	Edinburgh University, United Kingdom
Christoph Haug	University of Gothenburg, Sweden

Important dates:

20 April 2021:	Submissions of extended abstracts due
17-20 May 2021:	Meeting Science Symposium

References

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- Haug, C (2013) Organizing spaces: Meeting arenas as a social movement infrastructure between organization, network, and institution. *Organization Studies*, 34(5-6), 705–732).
- Sandler J, Thedvall R (2017) Introduction: Exploring the Boring: An Introduction to Meeting Ethnography. In: Sandler J, Thedvall R (eds) *Meeting Ethnography*, pp. 1-23. Routledge, New York.
- Schwartzman HB (1989) *The meeting: Gatherings in organizations and communities*. Plenum Press, New York.
- Thunus S, Standaert W (2020) What do we think of virtual meetings? How do they change our organizations? Working paper.
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