

How to hold more productive meetings

White Paper | MindManager



Introduction

Whether working together in person or remotely, there's always room to improve how you and your team run meetings. We've all experienced a meeting that has left us feeling frustrated.

Perhaps the person running the meeting didn't have a clear agenda, there was a lack of collaboration and/or engagement among attendees, or maybe you couldn't share your thoughts or feedback due to a lack of time or the way the meeting was structured.

With so many innovative virtual business collaboration tools now available, it's simpler than ever to find the right tools to help you and your team get things done.

With more and more companies transitioning to a [hybrid working model](#), the need for [virtual collaboration](#) tools that offer features, such as mind mapping to streamline meetings, is increasing.

A tool like MindManager®, for example, [enables visual diagrams known as mind maps](#) to be shared with all attendees. These maps immediately provide a common, visual tool that everyone in the meeting can interact with simultaneously.

With these maps serving as a single source of information, meeting participants can easily transition from brainstorming to assigning follow-up tasks, all in the same tool. Once the meeting is over, the map can be shared with team members to refer to later.

In this white paper, we'll highlight why many meetings fail to be productive and illustrate how a solution like MindManager can help you [hold more effective meetings](#), no matter where teams or employees are located.

The problem with meetings

It's easy to fall into the trap of attending too many meetings. Your colleague wants to brainstorm new ideas for an upcoming product launch, or your boss wants a progress update on a virtual event that's right around the corner.

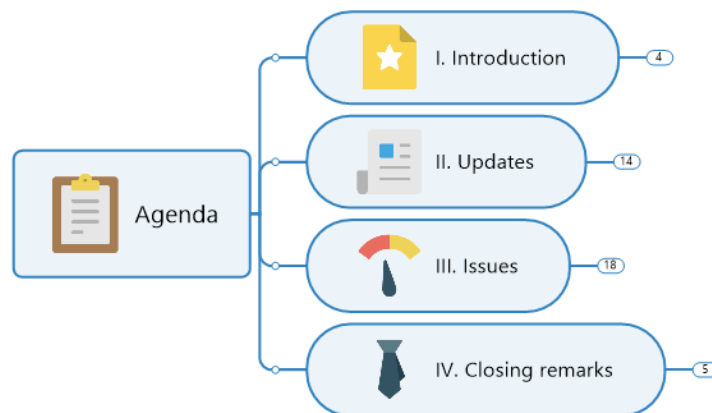
Employees often struggle to understand which meeting invitations to accept and which ones to politely decline.

Other common meeting problems include:

- **Lack of preparation.** The meeting organizer fails to create and/or send out an agenda ahead of time. As a result, much of the meeting is spent explaining what the purpose and objectives are, rather than accomplishing key tasks or gathering important feedback from attendees.
- **The right people aren't in attendance.** The meeting invite was sent to an entire team or department and didn't specify whose attendance was optional versus mandatory, so either too many or too few people show up, limiting what can be accomplished.
- **Lack of organization.** The meeting leader doesn't do a good job of keeping the meeting on track and soliciting feedback from key stakeholders, so only more vocal team members get a word in, while more reserved attendees feel left out.
- **Failure to accomplish key goals/objectives.** The meeting gets sidetracked by a separate issue or discussion that's brought up, and thus doesn't accomplish its intended objectives or goals.
- **Lack of a clear meeting summary and next steps.** The meeting ends abruptly, and the meeting leader doesn't send a recap, so attendees leave confused about what decisions were made and what follow-up items need to be completed.

You've likely encountered these issues in many meetings. With the right tool in place, however, these meeting challenges can be easily overcome.

Employers can provide employees with visual tools that can be used to increase clarity and organization and encourage greater engagement and participation during meetings.



Meeting agenda mind map in MindManager

[Mind maps](#), for example, give employees a centralized place to create meeting agendas, document feedback during the meeting in real-time, and enable tasks to be assigned—essentially turning meeting maps into mini project management tools.

5 steps to plan and run better meetings

There are several best practices to follow in order to improve the quality of meetings at your organization. Before scheduling a meeting, first ask yourself if an email or another form of communication would suffice instead.

If a meeting is indeed necessary, follow these five steps:

1. Determine who must attend. A good rule of thumb is to limit meeting attendees to [six people](#). Beyond this number, the quality of the conversation tends to erode, which prevents the meeting from being a productive use of everyone's time.

2. Create a clear meeting agenda. Prepare an agenda with clear goals and outcomes that all team members can easily understand. When creating your agenda, determine how long the meeting will take and how long you should spend on each topic or section.

Always try to leave at least five to 10 minutes at the end of the meeting for questions, or to act as a buffer in case the meeting runs over.

3. Take ownership of running the meeting. Above all, do your best to keep the meeting on-topic. If other issues arise during the meeting, encourage people to take the conversation offline or schedule a follow-up meeting.

If the meeting requires participant feedback, actively call on each employee to provide their thoughts and/or ideas (and make sure they know they're expected to do this ahead of time by including this information in your agenda).

4. Recap key points and/or decisions made. Provide a brief verbal recap at the end of the meeting listing any key decisions made, what next actions are needed, and who is responsible for assigning and/or executing these tasks. This ensures all attendees are on the same page once the meeting ends.

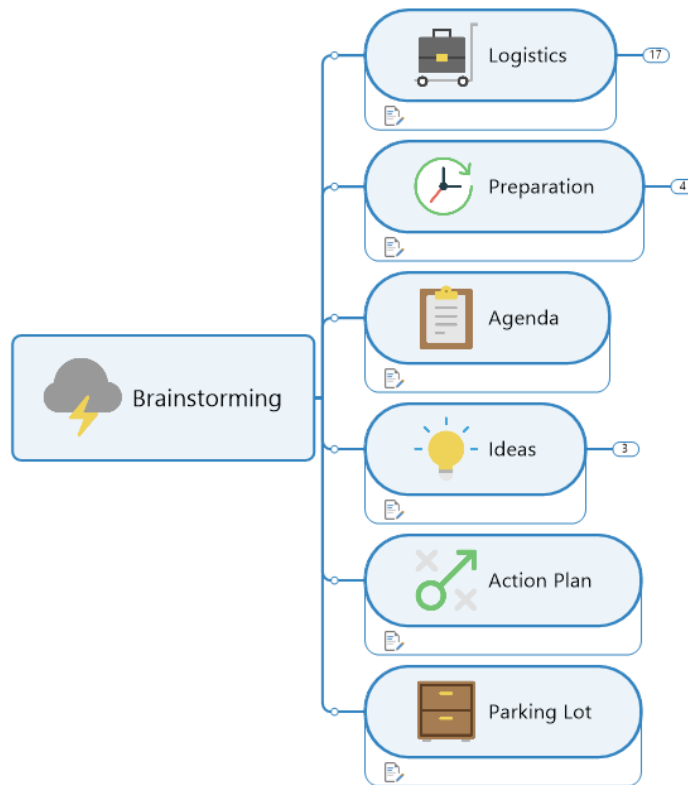
5. Send out a meeting summary. Once the meeting is over, send a summary to all attendees and key stakeholders so everyone understands what was accomplished and what the next steps are, if any, so they can anticipate tasks you may assign to them.

If you have employees in multiple time zones that make it hard to get everyone in a virtual room at once, consider recording important meetings and sending out a link to the recording along with the summary.

The benefits of using visualization tools for meetings

In addition to the steps outlined above, using a visual tool to plan, execute, and follow up on meetings can be a simple, easy way to make them more productive.

This is because visual communication is extremely powerful—visual information enters the brain [60,000 times faster](#) than text. Using visual tools to hold meetings helps team members engage with the ideas covered on a deeper level.



Brainstorming mind map in MindManager

Visual meeting tools provide the following benefits:

- **Break complex topics into easily understandable pieces.** When presenting plain text, whether in person or virtually, it can be difficult for meeting participants to quickly digest the information. Visual tools allow you to divvy up larger, more complicated ideas or topics into smaller sections that are easier and quicker to understand and retain.
- **Create and highlight visual connections among topics.** With a visual tool like a diagram or mind map, meeting participants can quickly see what a particular agenda topic is about and how it connects to other topics, tasks, or projects. This improves clarity and structure and reduces confusion—especially for meetings that cover particularly detailed or complex projects.
- **Quickly spot redundant or missing elements.** With the ability to see a meeting map or project plan laid out visually, meeting participants can easily spot redundancies or important areas of discussion that may be missing. This helps streamline meetings so they're a better use of participants' time.
- **Promote collaboration.** Visual formats make it easier for attendees to collaborate and engage with the meeting content. For example, if a team member realizes that a task or project is missing from the meeting map, they can simply edit the map during the meeting to add that information. Attendees can also leave feedback on agenda items in real-time, ensuring that everyone gets a chance to participate.
- **Move directly from discussion to execution.** With visual tools like mind maps, you can assign tasks to your team directly within the meeting map. Once the meeting is complete, the map serves as a centralized point of reference where progress on tasks can be updated, helping ensure that any next steps are quickly executed.

Using mind maps for meetings also has the added benefit of being visually stimulating to look at. This can be a welcome break for people who spend all day in emails, Word documents, or spreadsheets, or who frequently attend meetings filled with text-heavy PowerPoint presentations.

How to make meetings more productive with MindManager

MindManager [helps improve meetings](#) by transforming unstructured ideas and information into dynamic visual diagrams. You can think of it as a [virtual whiteboard](#) that allows team members to collaborate in real-time to accomplish more during every meeting on your schedule.

MindManager can be used on Windows, Mac, Microsoft Teams, Chromebook, and web browsers. Maps can also be published and shared, which other users can access via any web browser. This versatility makes it easy for team members and other project stakeholders to view maps even if they don't have MindManager installed.

MindManager also allows teams to store and access files online by supporting integration with online storage providers, such as SharePoint, OneDrive, Google Drive, Dropbox, Box, and iCloud.

Let's look at the three key areas MindManager can help improve meeting quality: before, during, and after meetings.

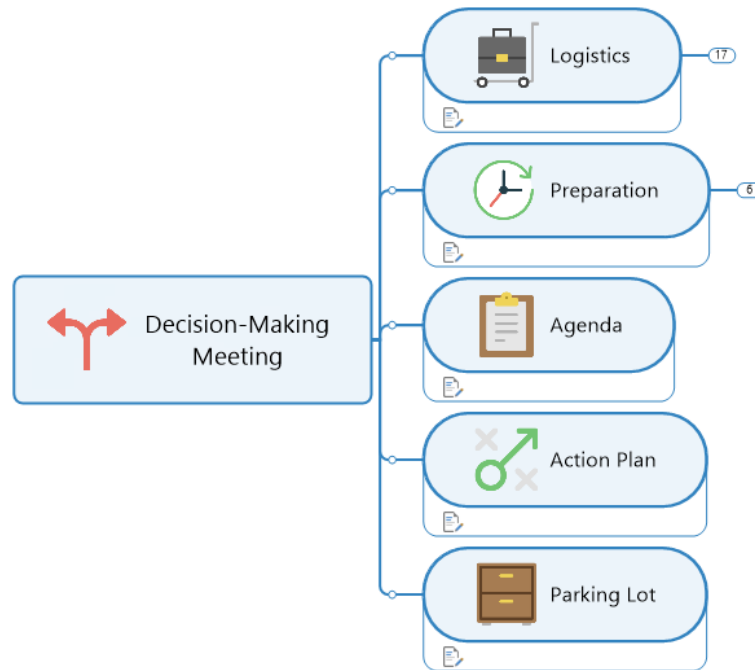
Before meetings: Create clear, structured agendas for attendees

MindManager includes a wide variety of templates to create structured visual agendas quickly and easily. Here are four steps for creating a meeting agenda using MindManager:

1. Decide on a template

Start by creating a diagram from scratch or selecting one from MindManager's extensive template library, such as the "Decision-Making Meeting" template. This map allows you and your team to add topics and sub-topics and easily edit them to name them whatever you want.

With your template selected, you can start planning your agenda. When doing so, think about what the goal of the meeting is and what essential elements you'd like to discuss or brainstorm.



Decision-Making meeting template

A good question to ask is, “What information and actions do I want meeting attendees to leave this meeting with?”

2. Determine the overall goal and key outcomes

Create a topic box in your mind map to highlight the overall meeting goal(s). This gives you the chance to clearly define what you plan to accomplish. An example of a meeting goal could be, “Obtain status updates from all marketing team members on tasks for upcoming virtual event X.”

Next, add a key topic name to the meeting plan so attendees immediately know what to expect from the meeting. Using the example above, you might use “Event X” as your key topic name.

Once this first topic is created, you can start building out information, ideas, tasks, etc., that are applicable to the meeting using topic boxes, going clockwise around the map using the available prompts.

Next, create an outcomes box. For this section, start by thinking about what types of outcomes you’re looking for, then populate the topic boxes with these items.

An example of a possible outcome might be, “Assign any outstanding tasks for Event X to marketing team to be completed by Y date.”

Here are a few MindManager features you can use to further enhance your map:

- **Subtopics.** Subtopics are used to provide details about their parent topic. They branch off other topics in a mind map.

For example, your main topic may be “Choose a platform to run the virtual event.” Your subtopics could then be “Book demos with three platforms” and “Read product reviews.”

- **Priority icons.** These can be used to indicate which outcomes are the most essential. This feature allows you to number your topics (e.g., 1, 2, 3) so meeting attendees can see which items need attention first and which can be addressed later.

- **Progress icons:** Add these to each topic box so individual tasks can be checked off as they’re completed both during and after the meeting.

These icons look like little circles that indicate progress as a percentage (e.g., 25% complete will show one-fourth of the circle colored in; 50% will show half of the circle colored in). Once the task is complete (100%), the box will turn into a green checkmark.

- **Drag and drop:** Once you create topics and subtopics, you can use your mouse to easily drag and drop them to any location within the map to quickly organize your agenda in any way you like. This helps simplify the process and makes map building more efficient.

3. Allocate time slots for each agenda item

Clearly outlining the timing of your meeting helps ensure that all agenda topics are covered. Once you have your agenda items set, you can easily add times (e.g., 10 minutes) to each one, or even add the time of day you’ll spend on a topic (e.g., “Client Project Update: 10:30-10:40 am”).

4. Share your agenda with attendees

When it comes time to assign tasks and sub-tasks to team members, you can use the task feature to assign them to specific employees in real-time. Once your agenda is complete, you can share the meeting map with all attendees so they can review it beforehand and come to the meeting prepared.

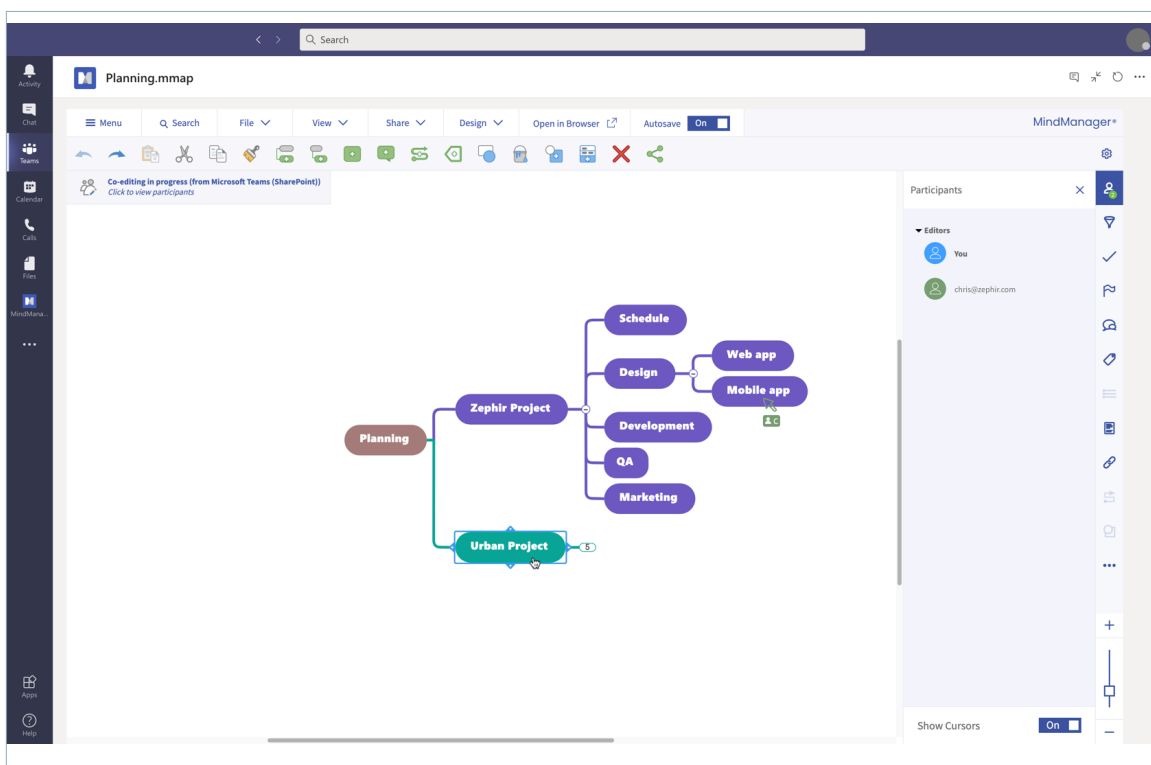
During meetings: Use mind mapping to stay organized and on track

When it comes time for the meeting itself, MindManager provides a variety of ways to keep things moving smoothly. Here are a few ways to use your mind map effectively during a meeting.

1. Visually share your map with all attendees

Meeting maps can easily be projected on a screen or shared via web-based collaboration tools (e.g., [Microsoft Teams](#)) to enable all team members to view the map in real-time.

This is especially valuable for remote teams, as it gives attendees an easy way to add feedback to the map and view updates as they're made so they can comment and keep the discussion going.



MindManager for Microsoft Teams

2. Link to important external resources

Mind maps enable you to include hyperlinks, attach existing documents, and link to any other web pages you or other team members may need to reference during the meeting.

Having everything located in a single mind map reduces the number of documents attendees must refer to and provides one clear point of reference post-meeting.

3. Leverage unique features to keep attendees engaged

Using MindManager for meetings allows you to make the most of unique features to keep your meeting attendees engaged and actively participating throughout the meeting.

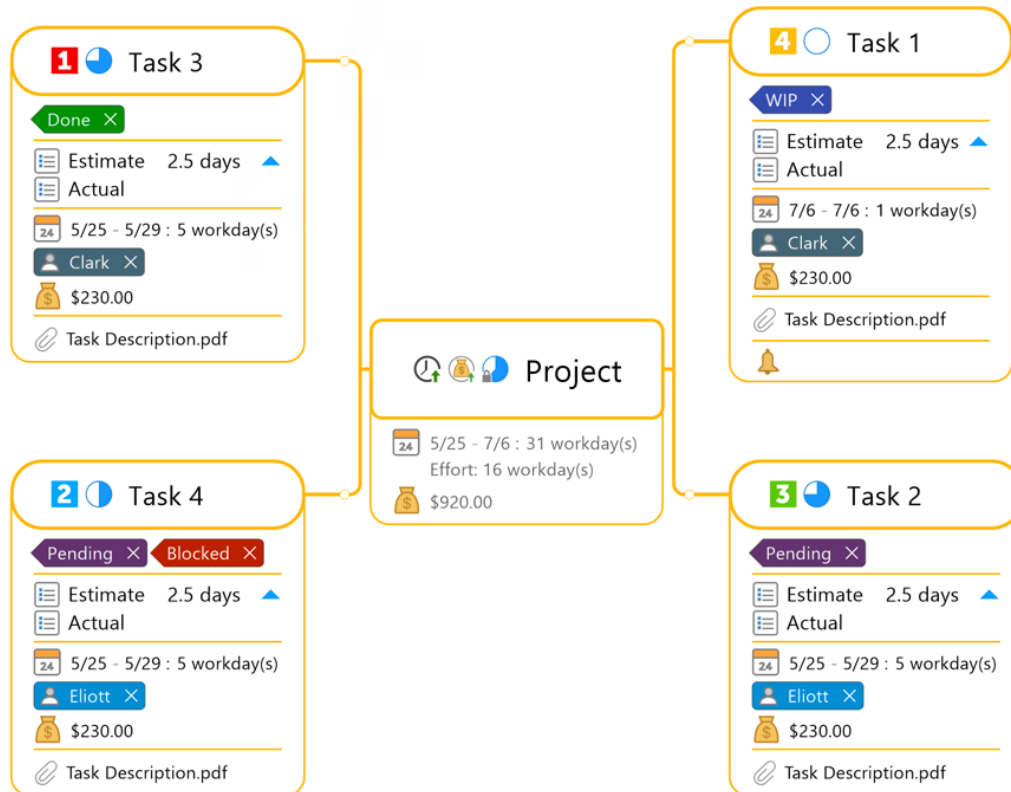
Here are some features that you can make use of in your meeting map:

- **Filtering.** Filter larger mind maps to display a more manageable subset of information. Use filtering throughout the meeting to customize your map and make it easier for attendees to view action items they may be part of.
- **Tag team members.** You can assign tasks to team members from each topic box by tagging them directly in the topic box.
- **Pros and cons.** This feature helps categorize attendee thoughts throughout the meeting by allowing them to add a green thumbs up icon (pro) to a topic box for something that they agree with, or a red thumbs down icon (con) for a topic they find less valuable.
- **Coding elements.** Use icons, symbols, colors, tags, and other elements to enhance your map and help team members better understand all the information within it.
- **Unlimited map space.** MindManager allows you to build out your map as far as you need to so that you can capture everyone's ideas during the meeting. (You can always consolidate this information post-meeting to make the meeting map more manageable.)

4. Assign appropriate tasks

By tagging a team member in a topic box, you can assign any pre-meeting tasks to them. This feature also allows you to assign agenda items to people who will be expected to present and/or provide updates on a project or task.

During the meeting, you can use this feature to assign post-meeting deliverables to the correct team member so they can revisit the map once the meeting is complete to see which tasks are outstanding.



Assigning tasks in MindManager

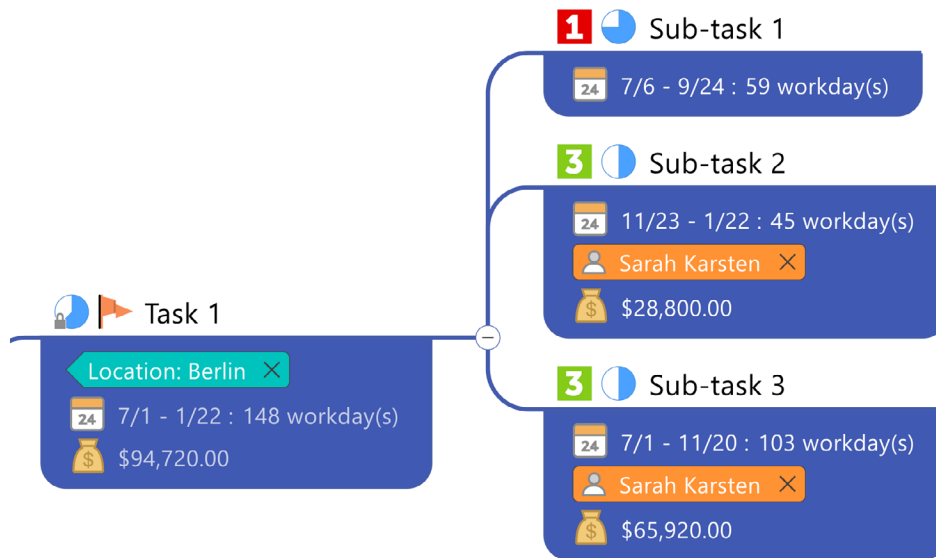
After meetings: Move from planning to execution

Once your meeting is complete, you can use MindManager to immediately get started on any next actions by doing the following.

1. Expand or collapse tasks and sub-tasks

Meeting maps allow you to both expand or collapse tasks and sub-tasks to refocus attention and ensure projects stay on track.

You may want to use this feature to either expand or collapse your meeting map before sending it out to team members to either prevent them from being overwhelmed or ensure they see the full picture.



Expanded tasks and sub-tasks in MindManager

2. Share the map with attendees and stakeholders

Mind maps can be easily shared via SharePoint, OneDrive, Google Drive, Microsoft Teams, Dropbox, Box, and iCloud, and via a published web link for stakeholders who do not have MindManager installed.

With maps accessible to all participants, anyone can open the mind map and view what tasks were assigned and to whom, see when project milestones are due, and even record progress made.

Compared to a multi-page document that would require attendees to read through and then consult a separate project or task management tool, mind maps thus help significantly reduce time and increase efficiency.

3. Use your map as a template for similar meetings

After you've run your first meeting with MindManager, you can use your map as a template for future meetings, eventually building up a personal or shared team library with templates for specific meeting types.

The more you leverage mind maps during meetings, the more collaboration and productivity you and your team are likely to see and benefit from.

Conclusion

In today's business world where remote and hybrid workplaces are the new norm, meetings are how organizations get work done.

But since too many meetings can [lead to burnout](#), especially among remote workers, it's important to get them right by ensuring they're an engaging and productive use of everyone's time.

MindManager can help organizations of all sizes and types around the world hold better meetings, from planning through execution and beyond.

**[Discover what it's like to hold more effective meetings:
Try MindManager free for 30 days.](#)**

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