C E O Center for Effective Organizations

A Profile of Meetings In
Corporate America:
Results of the 3M Meeting
Effectiveness Study

Peter M. Monge
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Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of the 3M Meeting Effectiveness Study. 903 people from 36 small, medium, and large companies in the public and private sectors completed a detailed survey describing the last meeting they attended. The major results are presented in this executive summary.

1. The typical meeting in corporate America:

   - lasts 1 1/2 hours

   - is attended by nine people

   - is called with 2 hours notice (if not regularly scheduled)

   - has a written agenda less than half the time

   - primarily uses handouts and overheads for presentations

   - covers the agenda completely only half the time

2. Major topics of meetings are:

   - organizational updates

   - project management

   - product or service issues

3. Major purposes of meetings are:

   - resolve a conflict

   - reach a group decision

   - communicating information

4. Major outcomes of meetings are:

   - information sharing

   - action

   - creative ideas

- decisions made

- negative outcomes.

5. Time spent in meetings is related to organization size:

   - people in large firms spend 1 hour, 42 minutes per day

   - people in small firms spend 54 minutes

6. Managers spend much more time in meetings than nonmanagers

   - managers attend more meetings

   - managers attend longer meetings

7. Presentation aids are not extensively used in meetings.

   - Half the time graphics aids are not used at all

   - When used, they occur for short periods during the meeting

8. Presentation aids used most frequently are low technology

   - handouts and samples

   - overheads and chalkboards

9. Satisfaction with a meeting is correlated with:

   - job satisfaction

   - satisfaction with meeting leaders

   - satisfaction with who attends the meeting

   - satisfaction with the agenda

   - satisfaction with the decision or meeting outcome

10. Satisfaction with a meeting is also correlated with:

    - amount of individual participation in the meeting

    - the extent to which the agenda was covered

- amount of preparation

- presentation effectiveness

- amount of time spent talking about irrelevant issues

11. One third of meeting participants feel they have little or no influence on the outcome of decisions.

12. One third of meeting participants feel mild, strong, or great pressure to publicly express opinions in meetings with which they privately disgree.

13. A quarter of meeting participants say they discuss irrelevant issues 11% to 25% of the time, or more often.

Acknowledgments

This report was the product of many efforts by people whose names do not appear on the cover as authors. We wish to acknowledge their contributions to this project and express our gratitude for their assistance. First, we appreciate the coooperation of the more than 900 participants and 36 organizations, who gave generously of their time and experience to assist us in developing this profile of meetings in corporate America. Second, five graduate students at the Annenberg school worked extensively on the project for nearly a year, coordinating the contact with the host companies, coding data, entering it onto the computer, etc. Without the tireless efforts of Lisa Fox, Irene Guevara, Bill Hawkins, Jennifer Monahan, and Jennifer Root, this project would never have been completed. Third, our thanks go to Virginia Johnson, Director of the 3M Meeting Management Institute, who provided unfailing support and encouragement throughout the research. Ginny had the vision to see the importance of using established scientific research techniques to acquire valid and reliable data about corporate meetings. Under her guidance, The Meeting Management Institute provided the grant that made the research possible. David Lee served as the project advisor; his council and advice were invaluable at several key points in the research. Peter Clarke, Dean of the Annenberg School, provided extensive school resources to support the research. Finally, Linnea Berg of the Annenberg School, helped to coordinate the project and prepared the graphics and text for the final report, all with incomparable skill. We thank each of you for your contributions to this collective project. We hope the knowledge provided in this report is adequate recompense for your efforts.

A Profile of Meetings in Corporate America:

Results of the 3M Meeting Effectiveness Study

There are many popular stereotypes about meetings in American society. Movies such as "Wall Street" and "Working Girl" portray meetings that take place around highly-polished, stylized walnut tables with thick leather chairs. Here, meetings are battlegrounds where slick game-playing, posturing, and oneupsmanship are the keys to corporate conquest and survival. Someone always gets ahead at someone else's expense. Warrooms, boardrooms, conference rooms and offices are the sites of highly intense, conflictual, displays of power.

Television commercials often present business meetings as singularly unpleasant affairs where participants contend with stuffy protocol and bumbling formality. Books like "The Organization Man" (Whyte, 1956) portray meetings as populated with highly ambitious corporate conformists whose ultimate fear is "saying the wrong thing."

The media are not the only sources of lore about meetings. The popular business literature contends that managers spend an inordinate

amount of their time in meetings, perhaps as much as 60% Mintzberg's (1983) study suggests. Much of this time is thought to be unproductive. A recent study of 200 corporate vice presidents (Motivational Systems, 1989) reported that 40% admitted to falling asleep or dozing off during a meeting presentation. More than 43% of business meetings, they reported, are "boring."

Anecdotal evidence and personal experience does little to dispel these myths. Simply ask a handy half dozen businesspeople what they dislike most about their organizations and "too many unproductive meetings" is likely to appear near the top of the list. Everyone has experienced incredibly bad meetings that were poorly managed, overly long, and completely unproductive. Everyone has their favorite horror story to tell about "the worst meeting ever."

Finally, despite the plethora of fiction about meetings in American society, there is very little scientific research reporting the facts or testing theory. Given the frequency and importance of meetings throughout corporate America, this is a surprising state of affairs. Ironically, in commenting on this research deficit Helen Schwartzman (1986) argued that organizational scientists haven't studied meetings because they have used them as a "tool" to study other aspects of organizations. Consequently, they have overlooked meetings as an important topic of investigation.

Whatever the reasons for this dearth of knowledge, it is important that this problem be rectified. Improving meeting productivity in America

depends on understanding how meetings work. Understanding how they work, depends on research to obtain the facts and details.

An important step in establishing a framework for studying meetings was taken by Lynn Oppenheim (1987). Oppenheim argues that meetings are rarely independent events. Rather, a meeting is typically one of a series of interdependent meetings which, taken together, constitute one of three organizational control systems. The other two are the organizational hierarchy and the financial control system. Of the three control systems, meetings are the most flexible, the most adaptable to the changing needs of the organization. As a control system, meetings provide the primary context for reviewing alternatives, weighing evidence, debating likely outcomes, and making decisions.

Using focus group technology in eight companies, Oppenheim discovered considerable evidence that meetings operated as highly diversified control systems. Additionally, that research highlighted the need to acquire a broad-based, detailed description of meetings. Building on that foundation, the purpose of this research is to establish the basic characteristics of meetings and the facts about how meetings work. Specifically, the research attempts to:

* develop a profile of the typical meeting in corporate America

* establish baseline information about the major characteristics of meetings such as the agenda

* identify the reasons why people hold meetings

* identify and evaluate the presentation tools people employ in meetings

* determine the features of meetings that are associated with participant satisfaction.

Methods

Companies Studied

Thirty-six companies from the Los Angeles and Minneapolis metropolitan areas participated in the research. Companies in the public and private sectors were studied, as were private sector, nonprofit organizations. Finally, companies were selected to fit into one of three sizes: small, medium, or large.

Private sector, profit-oriented firms were selected by a two-step sampling method. First, a systematic, stratified random sample of companies in California and Minnesota was chosen from Dunn's 1988 Business Index, a listing of organizations that are publicly held (i.e., firms that sell stock). Then, these companies, or others with characteristics that matched those of the sampled firm, were recruited. These characteristics were number of employees, industry type, and profitability. Public sector and nonprofit organizations were selected on the basis of personal contacts of the researchers. This was necessary since sampling frames for these types of organizations are lacking or inadequate.

Participants

After an organization agreed to participate, the researchers obtained a list of employees and randomly selected people to participate in the survey. The number of employees chosen to complete the survey depended on the total number of employees available in the organization. The

number of people sampled varied from 15 to 70. In smaller organizations, the list of employees included all members of the organization. In larger firms, the list typically constituted one or two divisions of the firm.[1]

Survey

Participants filled out a questionnaire developed by the researchers, typically in 15 to 20 minutes. The questionnaire was divided into seven sections that asked about:

* characteristics of meetings

* the agenda

* preparation

* leadership

* purpose

* audio-visual aids used

* personal data about the respondents

Most questions required the respondent to check a box next to the "best answer," but five questions invited the respondent to write a short paragraph.

The survey defined a meeting as "a scheduled gathering of three or more people to conduct business relevant to their organization." This

[1.] In one case, respondents were selected from among the participants in a special training program. In two other companies, the companies insisted on handling selection of respondents, but guaranteed that the respondents would be selected at least systematically (for instance, selecting every tenth person on a list of managers at one site) or that those selected would include all managers in a department. Finally, four companies refused to release a list of their employees, but allowed us to provide a list of randomly selected numbers to match with their own lists, ensuring that participants were indeed randomly selected.

definition excluded one-on-one meetings but allowed the study to focus on the larger scale meetings that are of central importance in organizations.

Also, repondents were asked to think about the last meeting they attended and to respond to all questions with that particular meeting in mind. This strategy enabled respondents to report on a specific meeting rather than requiring them to mentally compute an average or typical response. When combined, this report presents results for a sample of more than 900 meetings.

Procedures

Survey "packets" were prepared for each participant. This packet was a large envelope addressed directly to the respondent. Included in the packet were: a) the survey itself, b) a cover letter that explained the purposes of the study, who was conducting it, how to fill out the questionnaire and how to return it, c) a postage paid, addressed return envelope, and d) a postcard that respondents could use to separately request the results of the study. The researchers personally delivered the surveys to company representatives in all but three cases, where the surveys were mailed to the representatives with complete instructions for distribution. The representatives were asked to distribute the surveys through their company's own internal mail system, with an attached memo explaining that the survey was authorized by the organization but emphasizing that participation was voluntary. After completing the survey, respondents placed the questionnaire in the return envelope and put it in the mail. The company representatives were asked to circulate a

memo four days after they distributed the survey to remind the respondents to complete and return the questionnaire.

Two weeks after the survey was distributed, the researchers sent out postcards to those who had not returned the questionnaire. These postcards requested that the respondents send back the completed questionnaire at their earliest convenience.

Analysis

Surveys were coded into a computer database for statistical analyses. These analyses included statistics of the sample as a whole, and statistics of particular segments of the sample (for instance, public versus private sector organizations). Finally, the relationships between characteristics of meetings and satisfaction with various facets of meetings (leadership, agenda, etc.) and presentation aids were examined with correlational techniques.

Results

Participants in the Study

A total of 1427 surveys were distributed to 36 organizations. A list of participating organizations grouped by location, sector, and size is presented in Table 1. Of these, 903 surveys were returned for a total response rate of 63%. Participants had worked at their present location for an average of 9.5 years. Nearly half (47%) were managers. The gender composition of the sample was evenly balanced; 52% were male and 48% were female. 70% had more than two years of college education. The respondents indicated that they had participated in an average of three

Table 1
<u>Organizational Sample Used in the Study</u>.

Minnesota

Private Sector
  Small
    KARE-TV
    Mona, Meyer & McGrath
    Questar Data Systems
    Wilson Learning Corporation

  Medium
    Graco, Inc.
    The Toro Company, Minnesota

  Large
    Cray Research
    Ecolab
    Honeywell
    Norwest Bank
    U.S. West Communications

Public Sector
    Minnesota Department of Education
    St. Louis Park Public School District

Table 1 continued
Organizational Sample Used in the Study.

California

Private Sector
    Small
        Industrial Indemnity
        Intervisual Communications
        King, Weiser, Edelman, & Bazar (A Law Corporation)
        Sage Publications

    Medium
        Cedars-Sinai Medical Center
        Holmes & Narver Engineering
        The Toro Company, California

    Large
        Automobile Club of California
        Great Western Bank
        GTE West
        Hughes Aircraft
        Pacific Bell
        Security Pacific Automation Company
        Southern California Edison

Table 1 continued
<u>Organizational Sample Used in the Study</u>.

California, con't.

Public Sector

    City of Los Angeles Department of Telecommunications
    City of Santa Monica: Information Systems & Police Depts.
    Cucamonga County Water District
    Cypress College

Private Nonprofit

    American Diabetes Association
    United Way of Los Angeles
    United Way of Orange County
    World Vision International

Other

    The Discovery Channel (Maryland)

meetings in the last five days (Remember that the definition of a meeting used in the survey requires three or more people.).

Profile of the Typical Meeting

The findings of the survey were analyzed to provide a profile of the typical meeting in corporate America. This profile gives the most frequently reported values for selected characteristics of meetings. The profile is presented in Table 2.

The typical meeting is a staff meeting that takes place in a company conference room. The typical meeting begins most frequently at 11:00 am and lasts for an hour and a half. It is attended by nine people who have been given 2 hours notification that the meeting would take place, if it wasn't a regularly scheduled meeting. There is a written agenda less than half the time. The meeting tends to be somewhat or very informal with most or all attendees participating actively. Participants use handouts or overheads more than half of the time, but completely cover the agenda only around half the time. A little over ten percent of the time is spent talking about irrelevant issues.

Characteristics of Meetings

People were asked to describe several characteristics of meetings. These included the types of meetings they attended, length, location, formality, who called and led the meeting, and meeting continuity. This section reports the results of these characteristics of meetings.

Types of Meetings. The types of meetings people attended are shown in Figure 1. Of the 903 meetings described, nearly half (45%) were staff

Table 2
A Profile of the Typical Meeting in Corporate America.

A typical meeting can be described as:

- A staff meeting (45%)
- Taking place in a company conference room (74%)
- Beginning at 11:00 A.M.
- Lasting an hour and thirty minutes
- Attended by nine people (two managers, four coworkers, two subordinates, and one outsider)
- With two hours notification that the meeting would take place
- Having no written agenda distributed in advance (63%)
- Being somewhat or very informal (76%)
- With most or all attendees participating actively (72%)
- Utilizing handouts (47%)
- But covering the agenda completely only half the time (53%)
- With 11% of the time spent talking about irrelevant issues

Legend:
- Staff
- Task Force
- Info Sharing
- Brainstorming
- Ceremonial
- Other

5% 2% 5%

5%

21%
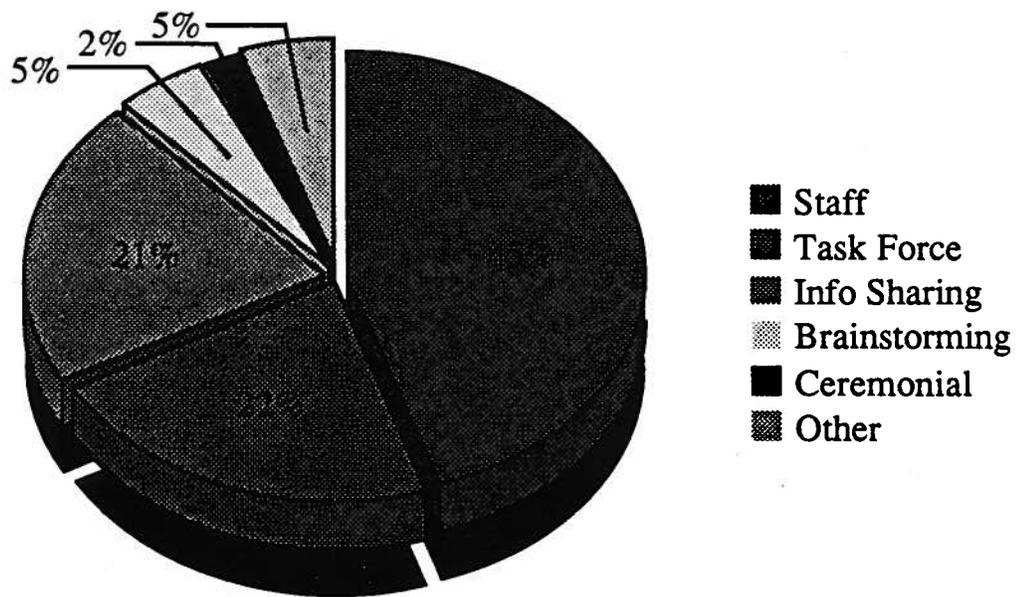
Figure 1. Types of meetings in corporate America.

meetings. Task force and information sharing accounted for 22% and 21% of the meetings, respectively. Brainstorming and ceremonial meetings were considerably less frequent, only 5% and 2% respectively.

Average Length of Meetings. Figure 2 presents the length of meetings reported by respondents. Half (51%) of the meetings lasted between 30 minutes and an hour and a half. Though not shown in Figure 2, meetings ranged in length from 5 minutes or less (1%) to more than 10 hours (1%) with a maximum of 11 hours. The average (median) meeting lasted one hour and thirty minutes.

Respondents were asked how the length of the meeting they described compared to the other meetings of this type that they have attended. 72% said that the meeting lasted about as long as their usual meetings. 17% said it was longer than usual; 12% said that it was shorter.

Adequacy of Meeting Length. Respondents reported their views about the adequacy of the length of the meetings. Figure 3 shows that the majority of people (70%) said that the meeting was about the right length. However, more than a quarter said that the meeting took too much time (23%) or far too much time (4%). Very few said that the length of the meeting was too short (5%).

Time Spent in Meetings Each Day. The data on average length of meetings was used as a basis to compute an estimate of the amount of time that people spend in meetings each day. This figure was obtained by multiplying the actual time spent in the meeting that was described in the survey by the number of meetings people reported attending in the past
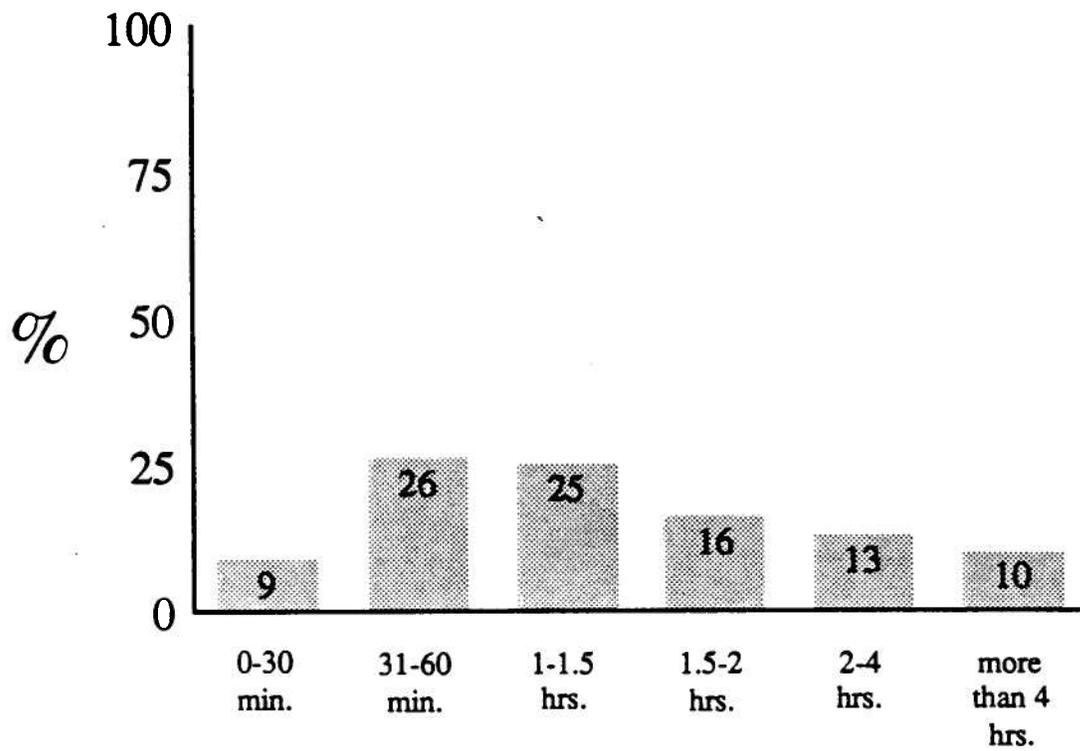
Figure 2. Reported length of actual meetings in corporate America.
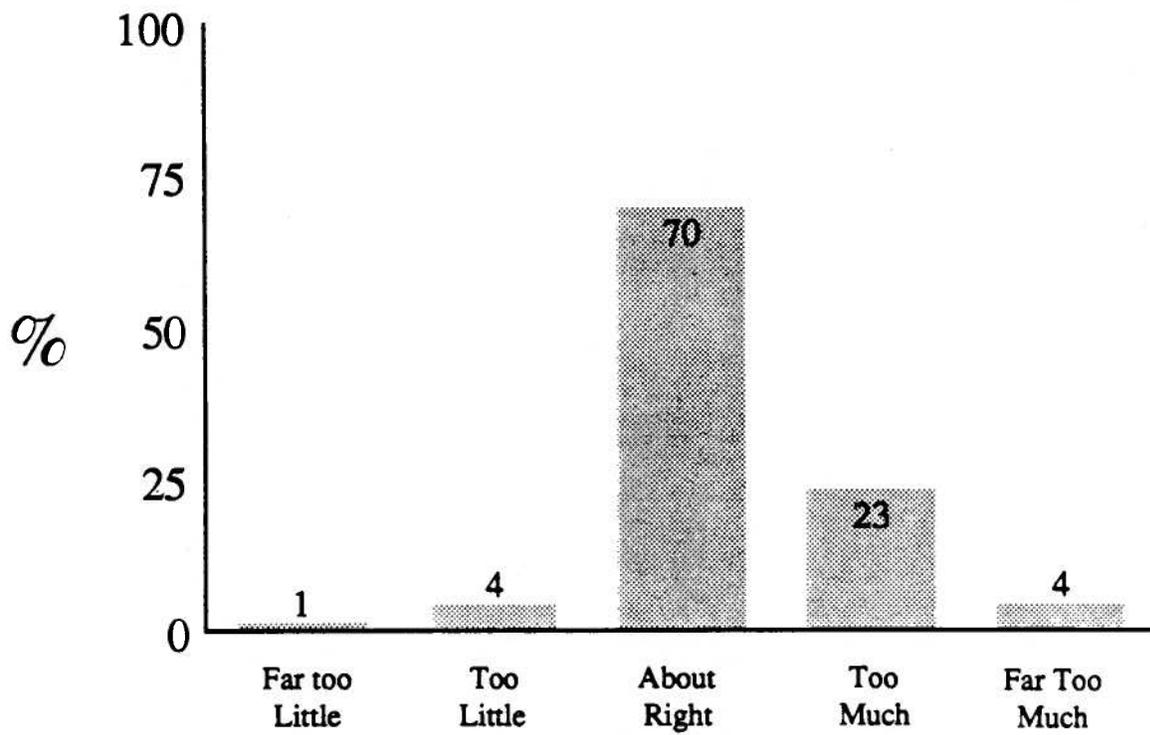
Figure 3. Adequacy of amount of time for the meeting.

week. This product was divided by five to obtain the time spent in meetings per day.

The results are provided in Figure 4. Nearly a third (31%) reported that they spend an hour or more in meetings with three or more people each day. This 31% includes 11% who reported that they spend two to four hours in meetings each day and another 7% who reported that they are in meetings for more than four hours a day. Another third (35%) indicated that they spend only fifteen minutes or less in meetings each day.

Location of Meetings. Participants were asked to indicate where the meeting they described was held. Figure 5 shows that three quarters (74%) of the meetings were held in one of the firm's conference rooms. Other locations, such as the respondent's or coworker's office were used relatively infrequently (2% - 10%).

Formality of Meetings. Figure 6 reports the participants' description of the formality of meetings. Most of the meetings (76%) were described as being very or somewhat informal. Only 1% were described as very formal, with another 23% described as somewhat formal.

Who Convenes Meetings. Survey participants indicated who called the meetings. As Figure 7 shows, well over half (58%) said the meeting was called by someone to whom they report. 14% said that a coworker called the meeting. Only 10% indicated that they called the meeting.

Who Leads Meetings. Participants were asked who led the meeting they attended. The results are reported in Figure 8. A quarter indicated that they led the meeting by themselves (10%) or that they led the meeting
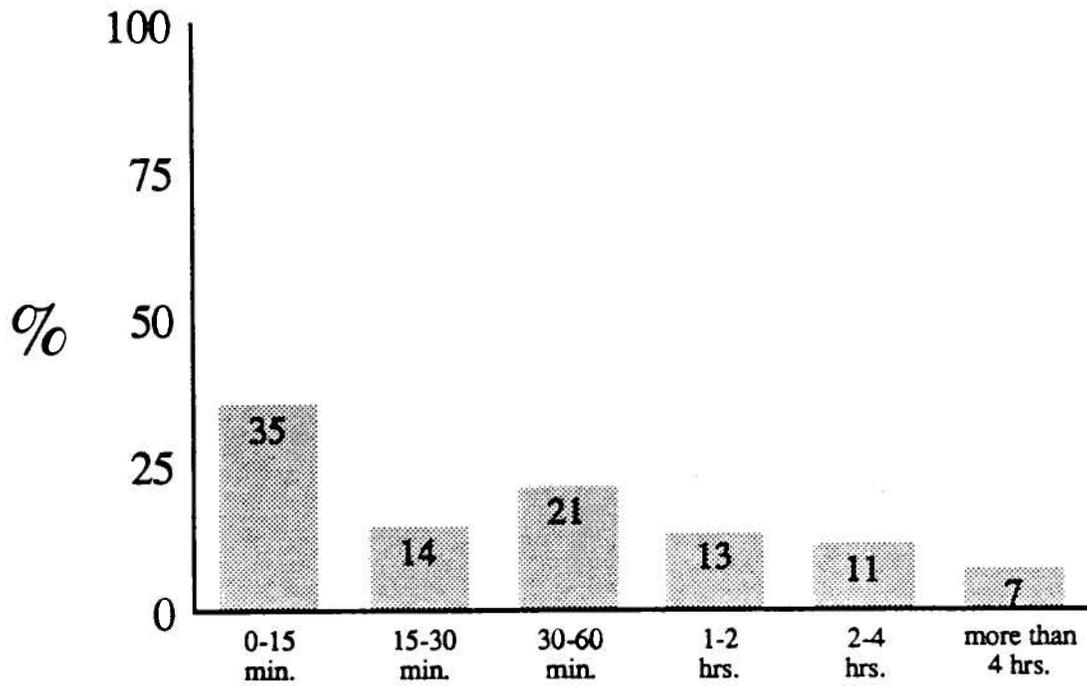
Figure 4. Time people spend in meetings each day.
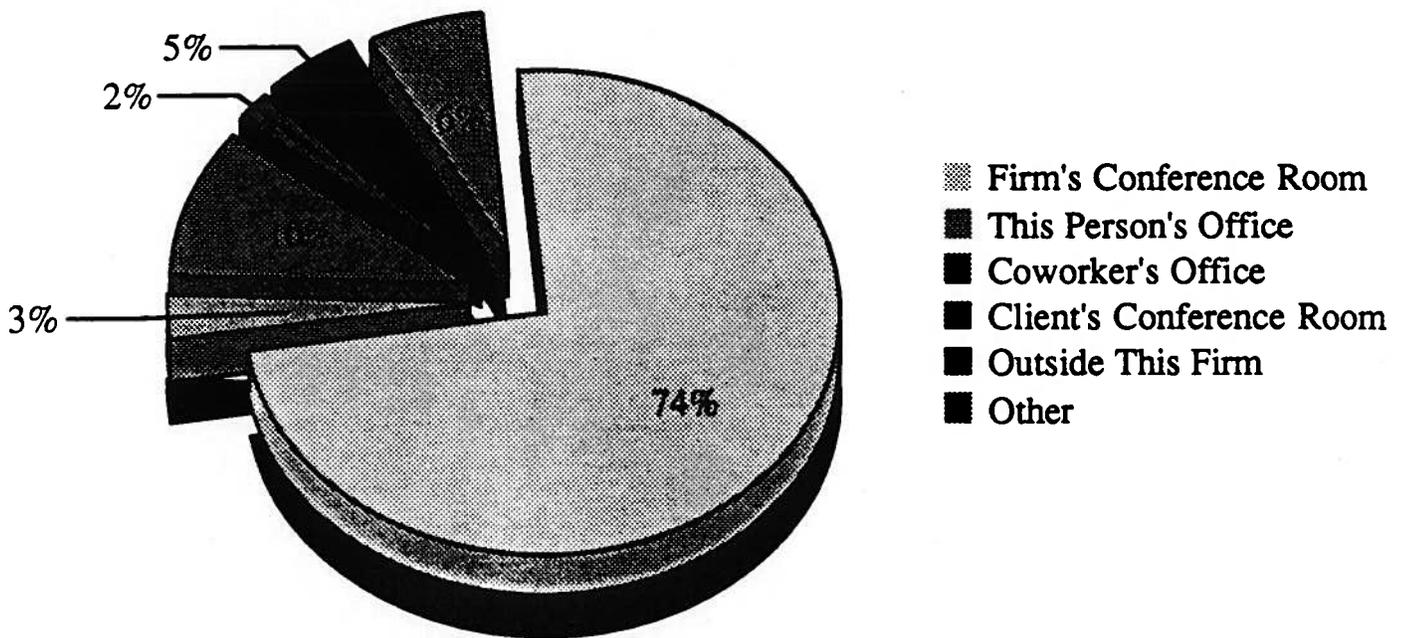
Figure 5. Locations where meetings are typically held.
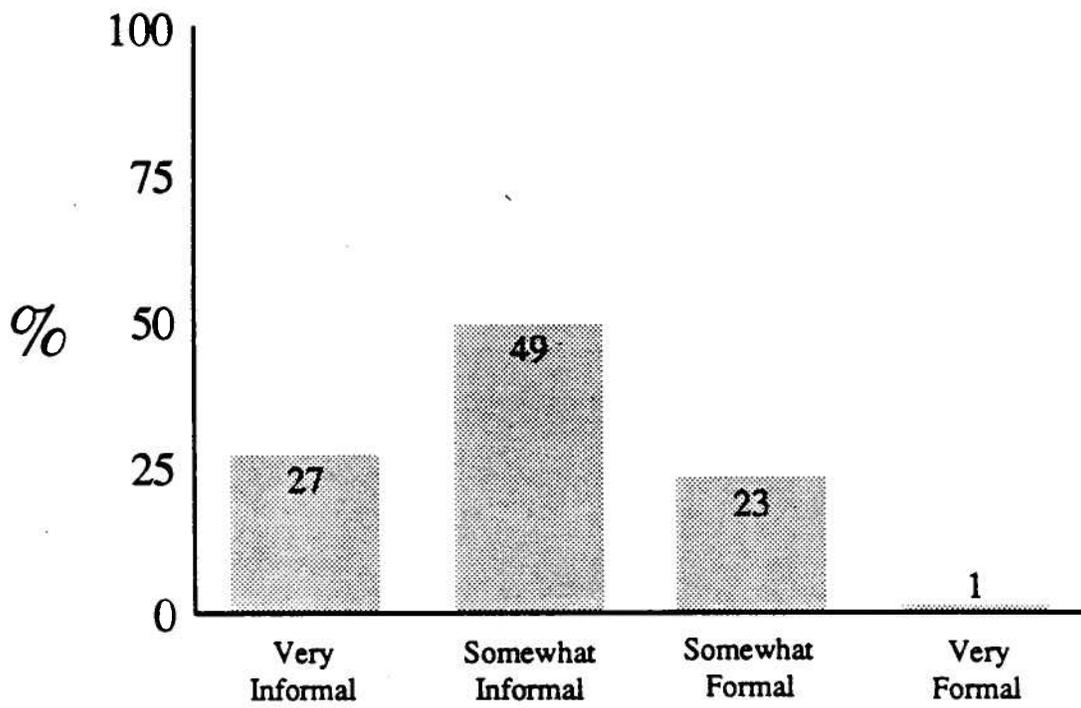
Figure 6. Formality of meetings.

1%

1%

58%

■ I Called It
▒ Someone I Report To
■ Someone at the Same Level
■ Someone Reporting to Me
■ Other
☐ Clients
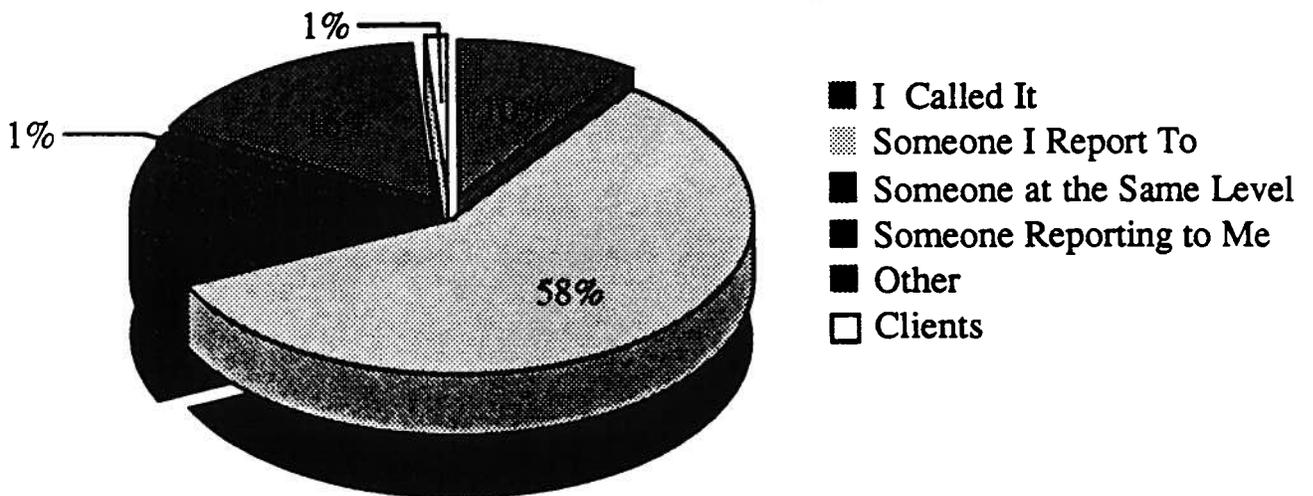
Figure 7. Person who called the meeting.

4%

10%

16%

- I Led
- Someone Else Led
- Several People, Including Me
- Several People, Not Me
- No Clear Leader
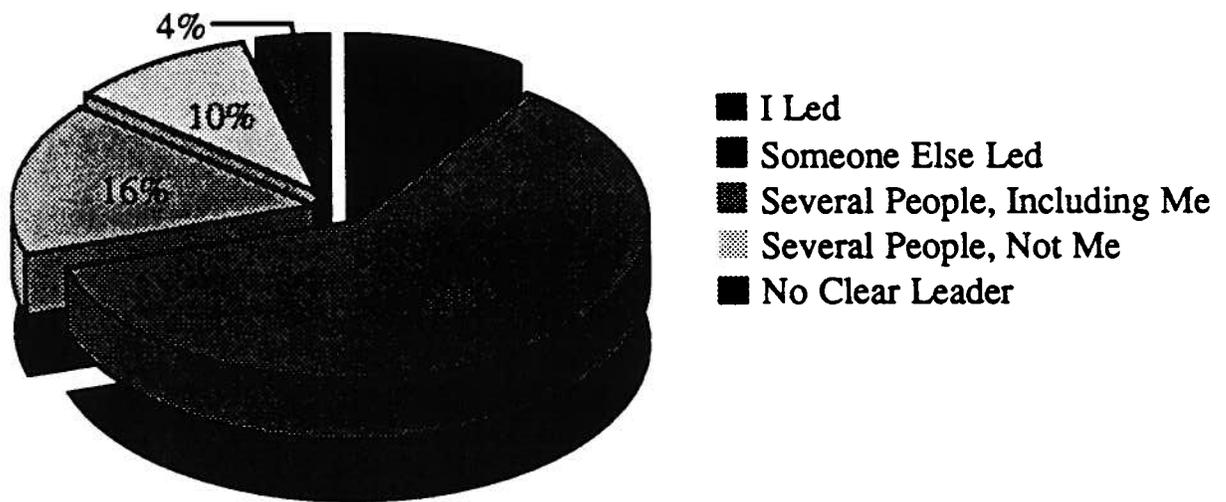
Figure 8. The person(s) who led the meeting.

with several other people (16%). Nearly three quarters said that someone else (60%) or several other people (10%) led the meeting. 4% said there was no clear leader.

Regularity of Meetings. Meetings can be regularly scheduled or called as needed. Figure 9 shows that half (49%) of the meetings that people attend are regularly scheduled. 21% are one time meetings and 30% are one of several meetings on a topic, though not regularly scheduled.

Number of Other Meetings Attended and Expected. Meetings rarely occur in isolation. More typically, they are part of a meeting system that contains a series of meetings. Survey respondents were asked the number of meetings they had already attended on this topic. They were also asked how many more they expected to attend. The results are shown in Figure 10.

A quarter (24%) of the respondents said that they had attended five or more meetings on this topic. The same number said that they expected to attend another five or more meetings on the topic. Only 17% said that they had not previously attended a meeting on this topic and 19% said that they did not expect to attend another meeting on the topic. The data in Figure 10 support Oppenheim's (1987) view that individual meetings are typically imbedded in larger meeting systems.

Preparation for Meetings

Amount of Meeting Notification. Respondents were asked how much notification they had been given for the meeting. The results are shown in
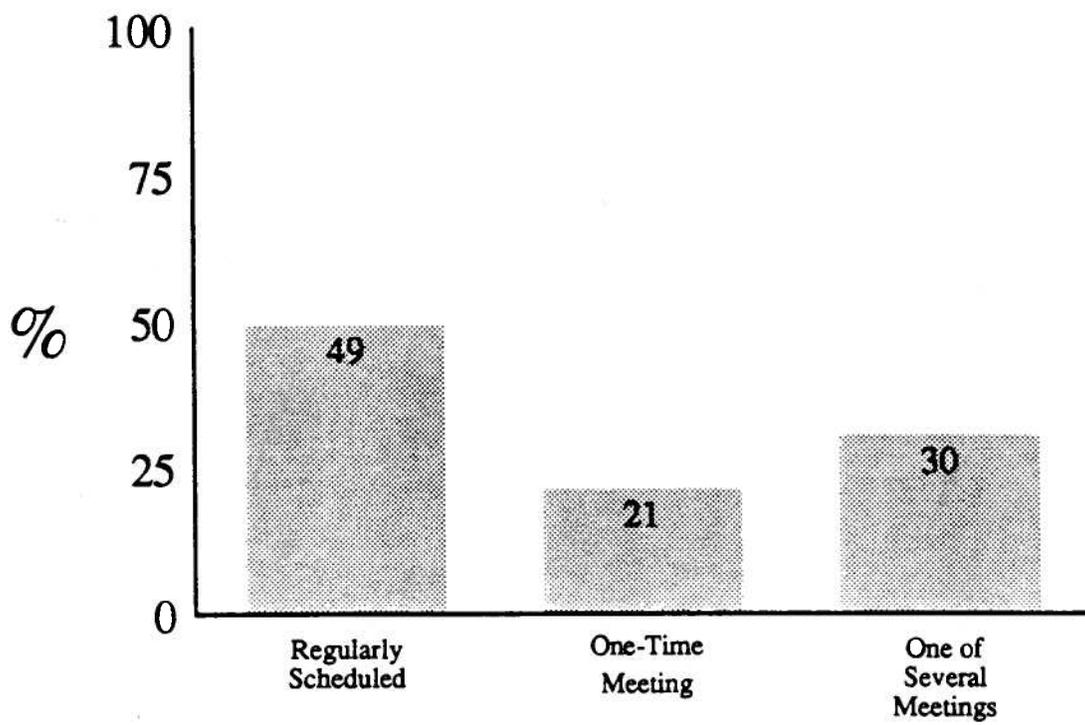
Figure 9. Regularity of meetings.
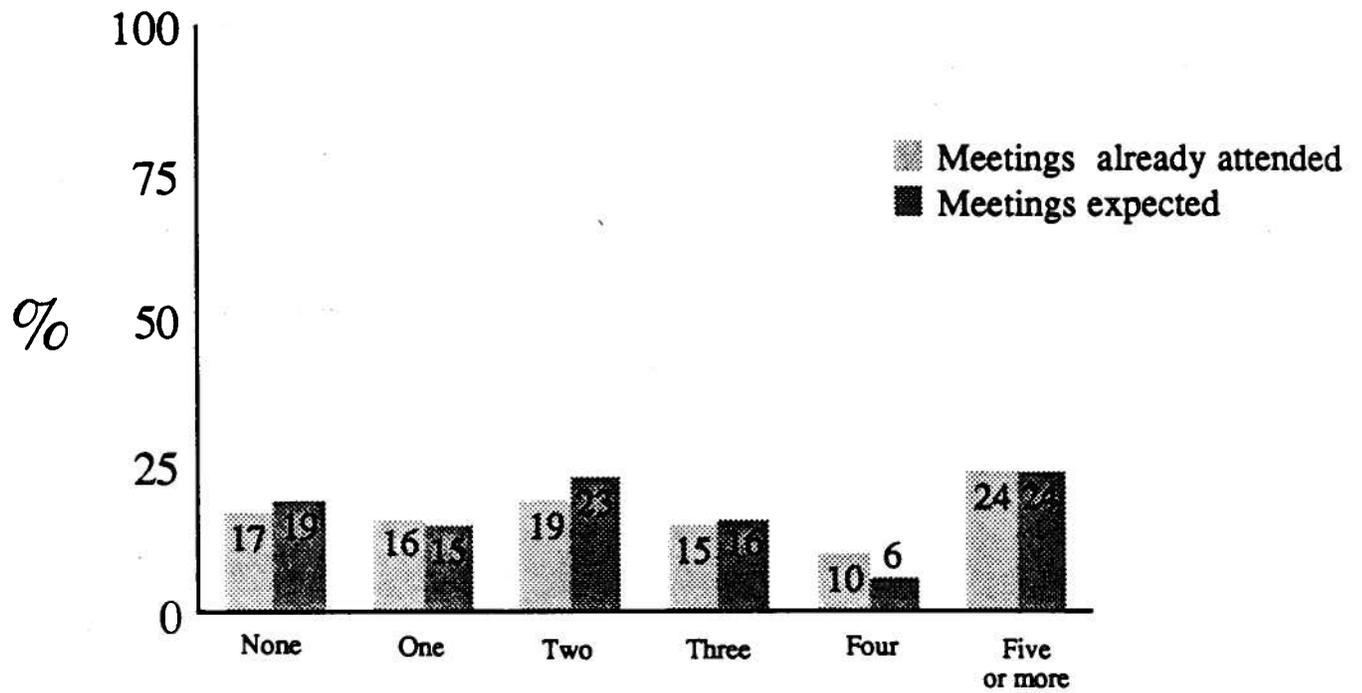
Figure 10. Number of meetings already attended
and expected on this topic.

Figure 11. 7% indicated that they had received no prior notification of the meeting. 18% said they were given less than a day's notice.

Amount of Time to Prepare for Meetings. Figure 12 reports the amount of time that respondents spent in preparing for meetings. A third (33%) said they spent no time at all preparing for the meeting. Another 44% said they spent an hour or less. Only a quarter spent more than an hour in preparation.

Level of Preparation for Meetings. In addition to the actual time spent preparing for meetings, participants were asked how prepared they felt they were for the meeting. As Figure 13 shows, more than three quarters said they were prepared (54%) or very prepared (25%). Only 5% said they were unprepared or very unprepared (1%).

People in Attendance

Number of People Attending Meetings. Figure 14 shows the number of people attending the meeting. Forty-one percent of the meetings were attended by 6 to 10 people. The median number of attendees was 9. Nearly a quarter of the meetings had 16 or more people attending. 20% had fewer than six people attending.

Level of People Attending the Meetings. Respondents described the level of people who attended the meetings. These data are provided in Table 3. Of the nine who were in attendance, 2 were managers, 4 were coworkers, 2 were subordinates, and 1 was from outside. When asked whether this was about the right number of people, 85% responded that it was. 7% said that it was too few; 8% said that it was too many.
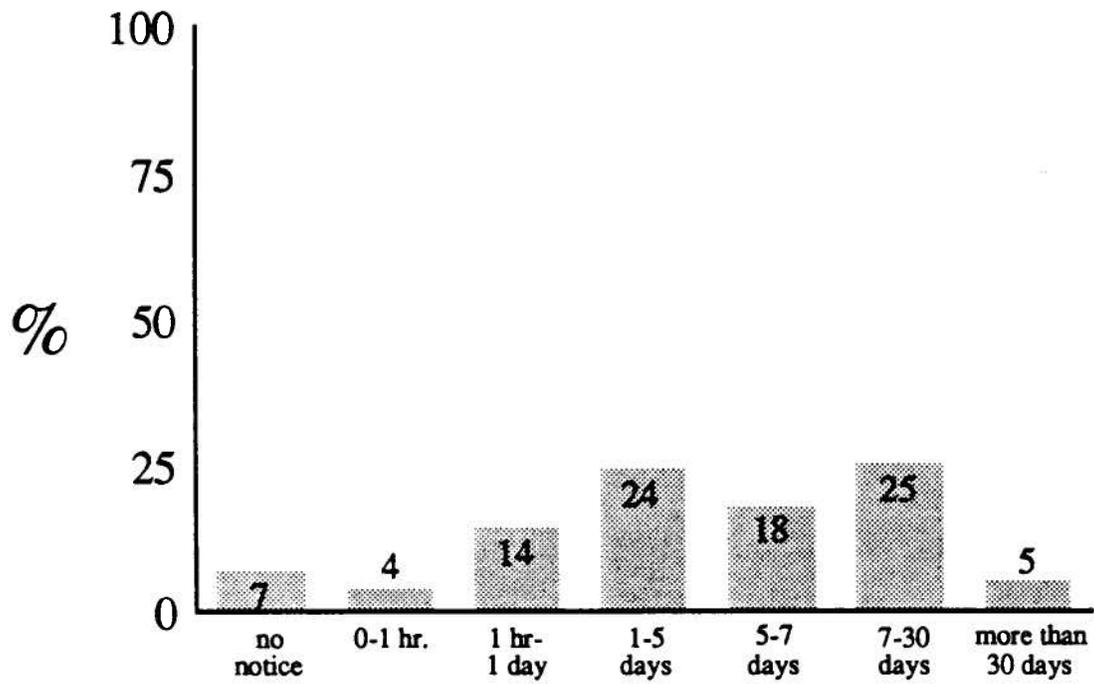
Figure 11. Amount of notification for meetings.
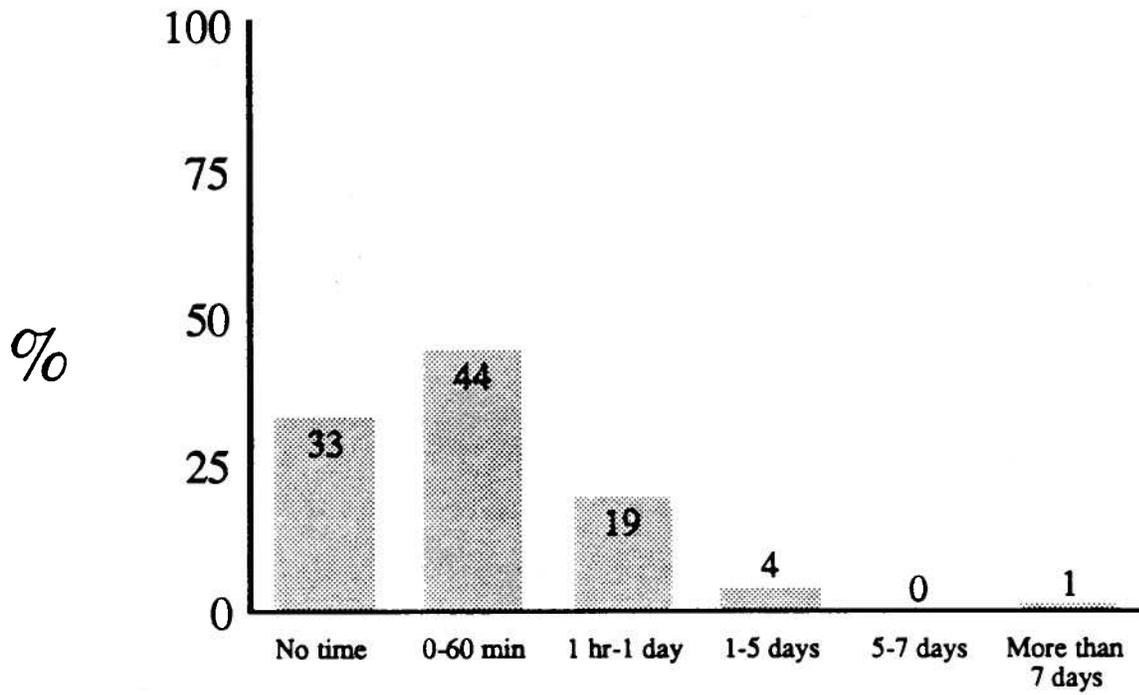
Figure 12. Time people spend preparing for meetings.
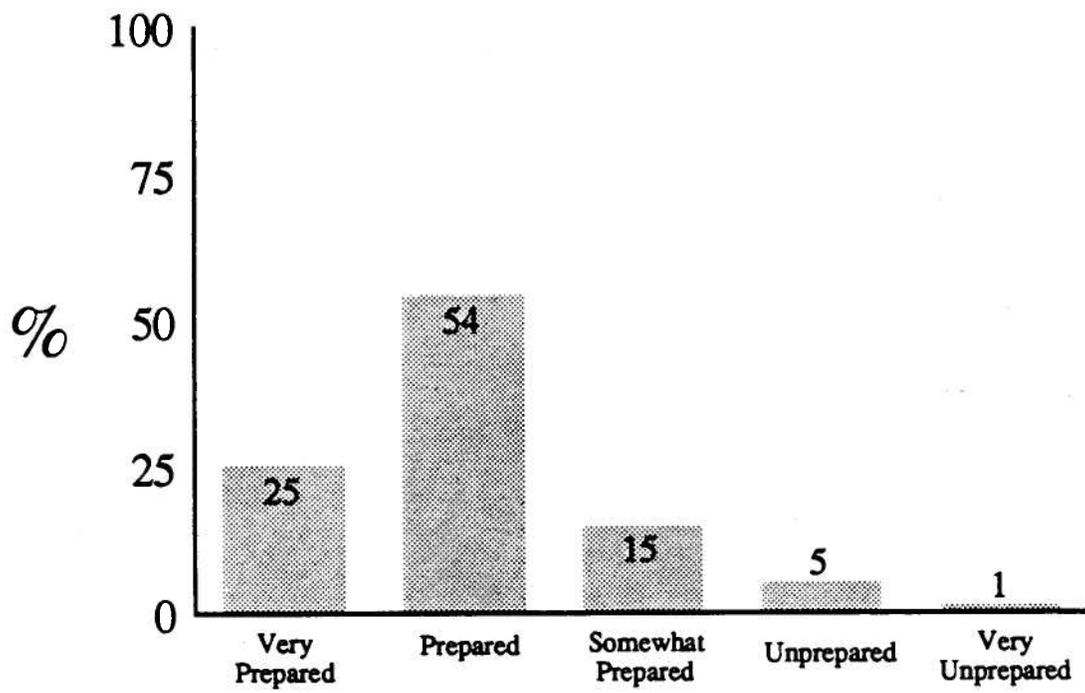
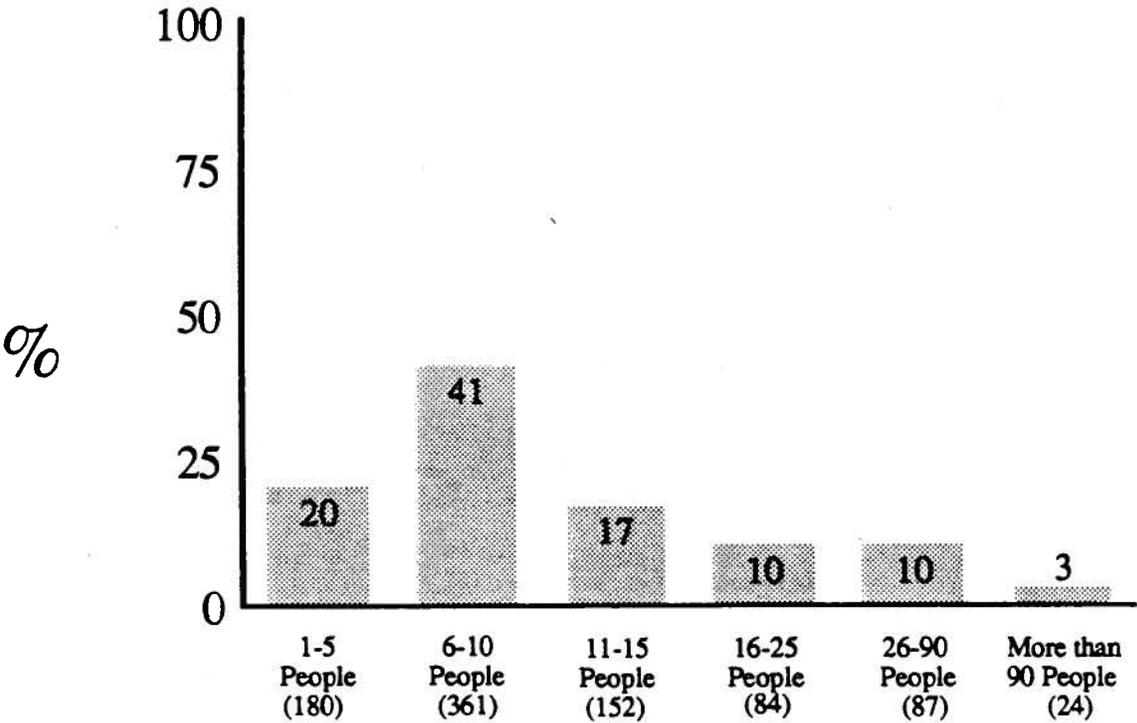Figure 13. How prepared people are for meetings.

Figure 14. Number of people attending the meetings.

Table 3
Typical level of people attending meetings.

Coworkers	4
Managers	2
Subordinates	2
Outsiders	1
Total	9

Relevance of People Attending. Survey participants were asked whether the relevant people attended the meetings. As Figure 15 shows, in two thirds of the meetings, all the relevant people were present. However, in the other third, only a few (4%) or some (30%) of the relevant people attended the meeting.

Participation in meetings. Figure 16 reports data on who participates in meetings. In more than a quarter of the meetings, only the leader or a few other people spoke. However, in three quarters of the meetings most people spoke (52%) or everyone spoke equally (21%).

Irrelevant issues. Respondents reported on the amount of time that irrelevant issues were discussed in meetings. Figure 17 presents these results. 75% reported that they discussed irrelevant issues no more than 10% of the time. 25% reported that irrelevant issues were discussed 11% to 25% of the time, or more.

Agenda

The agenda is an important framing device for meetings. It identifies topics to be covered and assigns a priority to those topics. It assigns responsibility for items and enables people to prepare for meetings. This section reports the results about four important aspects of agendas.

How people find out about a meeting's agenda. As Figure 18 shows, a third (32%) of all meetings have no stated agenda at all. Fewer than a third (29%) of the meetings have written agendas that are distributed in advance, while an additional 17% have verbal agenda that are stated in
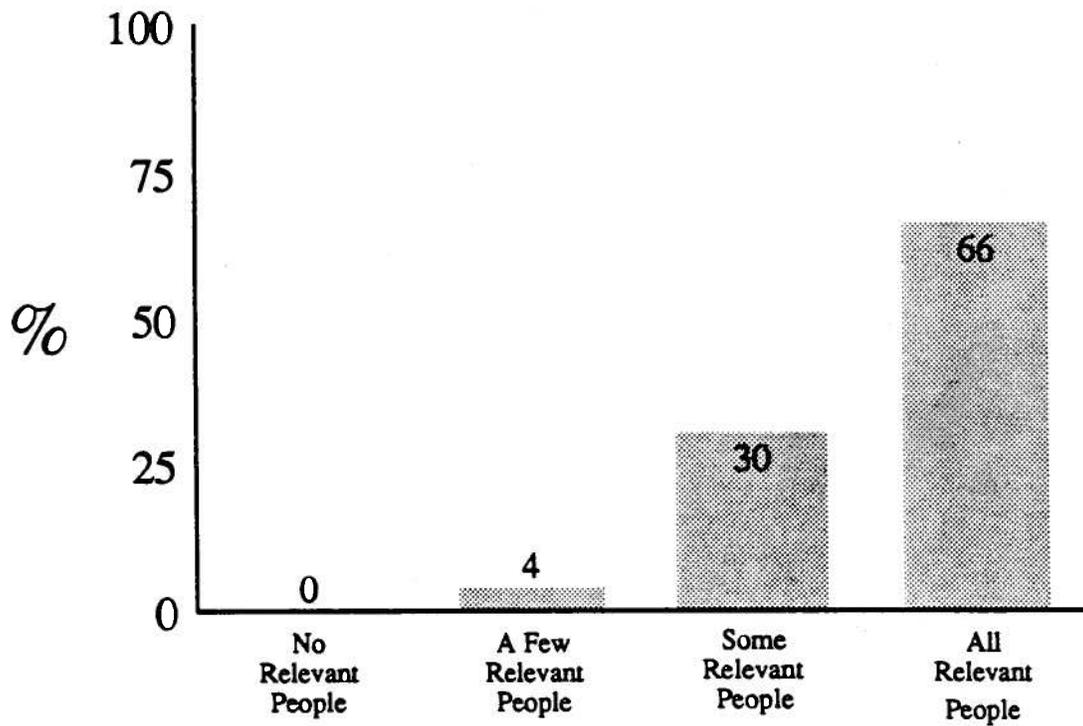
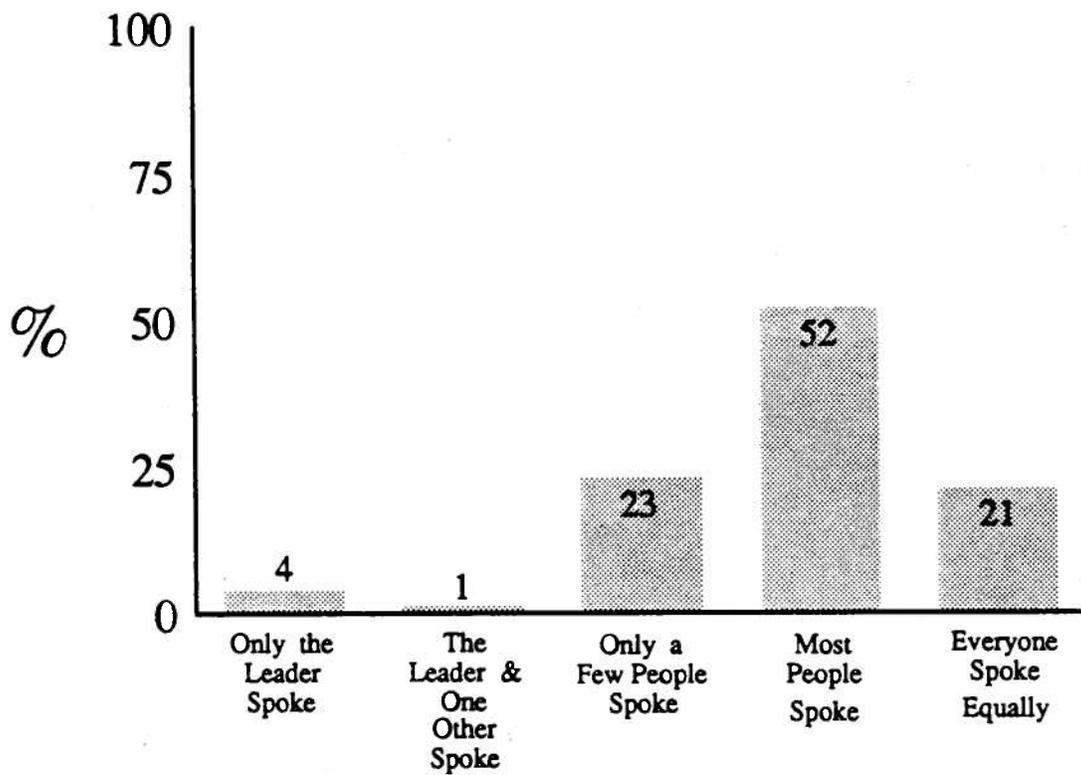Figure 15. Relevance of the people who attend meetings.

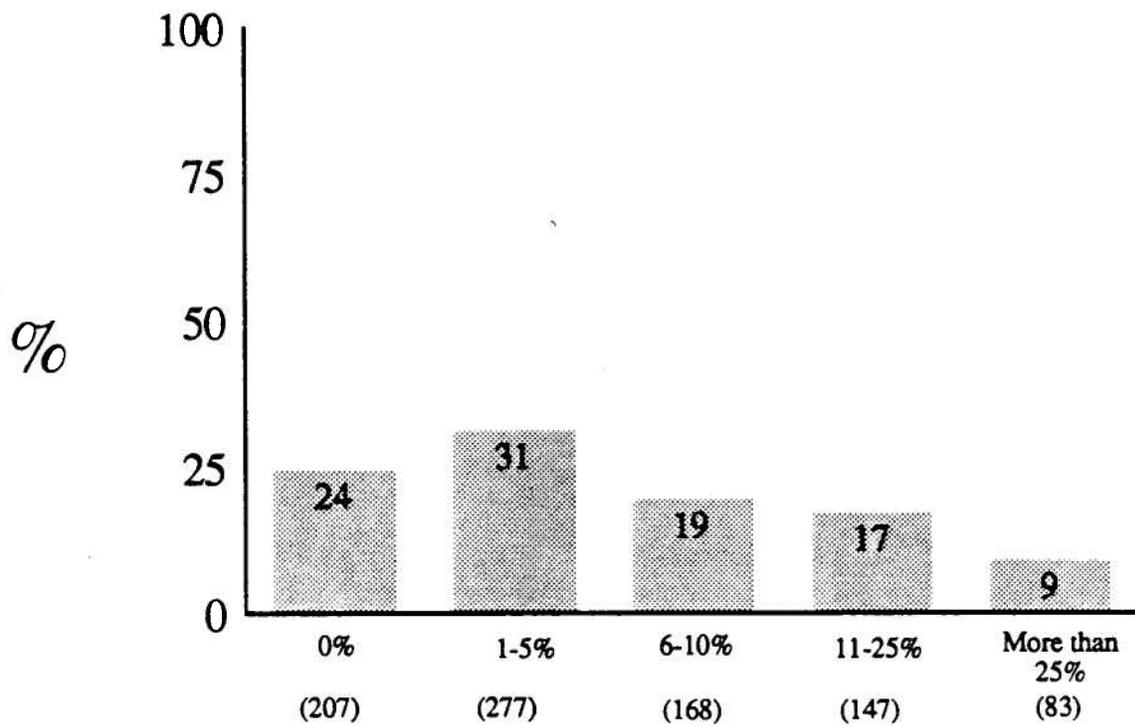Figure 16. Participation in meetings.

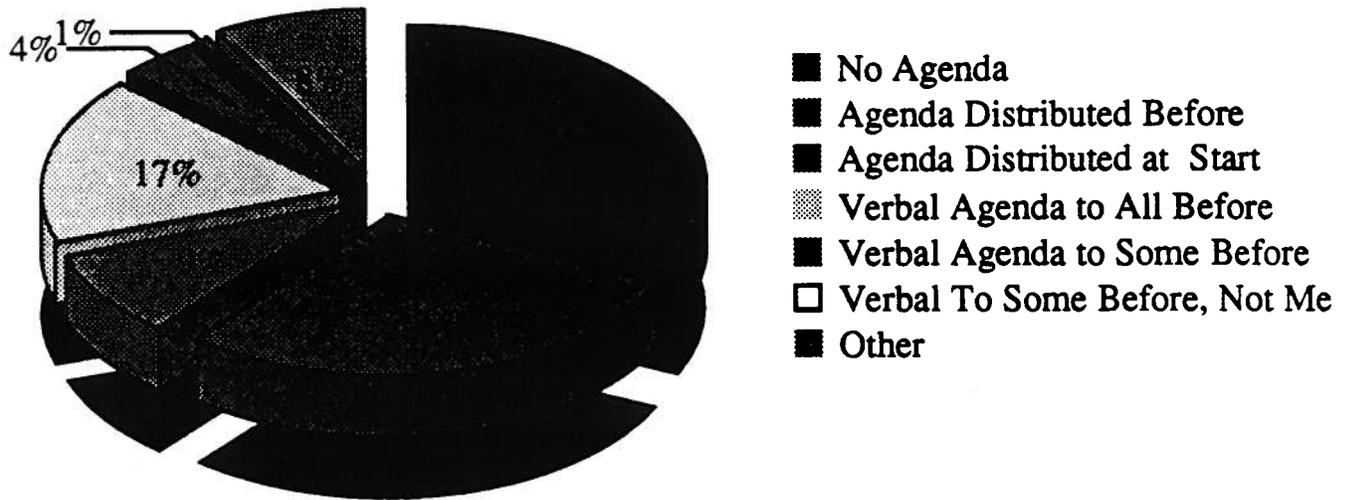Figure 17. Percent of meeting time spent talking about irrelevant issues.

4% 1%

17%

■ No Agenda
■ Agenda Distributed Before
■ Agenda Distributed at Start
▦ Verbal Agenda to All Before
■ Verbal Agenda to Some Before
☐ Verbal To Some Before, Not Me
■ Other

Figure 18. How people find out about a meeting's agenda.

advance. Finally, 9% of the meetings have written agendas that are distributed at the beginning of the meeting.

Who set the Agenda. In nearly half of all meetings (49%), the agenda was established by a manager to whom the respondent reported. Figure 19 shows that the respondents to the survey set the agenda only ten percent of the time, while coworkers created agendas for 13% of the meetings. Finally, 15% of the respondents indicated that agendas were set cooperatively by several people.

Amount of Detail in the Agenda. Agendas vary greatly in their level of detail. Figure 20 shows that in meetings where agendas have been established, nearly a quarter (23%) are not detailed at all. 41% are somewhat detailed. And more than a third are detailed (26%) or very detailed (10%).

Extent of Coverage of the Agenda. If meetings contained agendas, topics on the agenda tended to be well covered. Figure 21 shows that more than half (53%) reported that topics on agenda were completely covered. Another 41% said that they were mostly covered. Only 4% said that topics were slightly covered, and only 1% indicated that topics were not at all covered.

Meeting Topics, Purposes, and Outcomes

Three sets of questions invited participants to describe in their own words the topics covered in the last meeting they attended, the purposes of the meeting, and the outcomes of the meeting. The answers to these questions provided a large and rich description of topics, purposes,
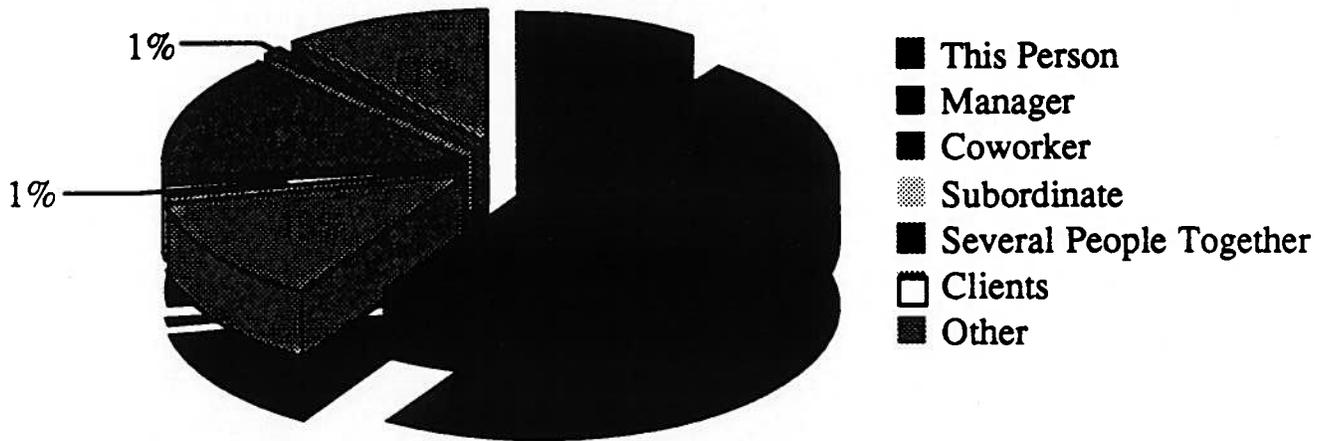
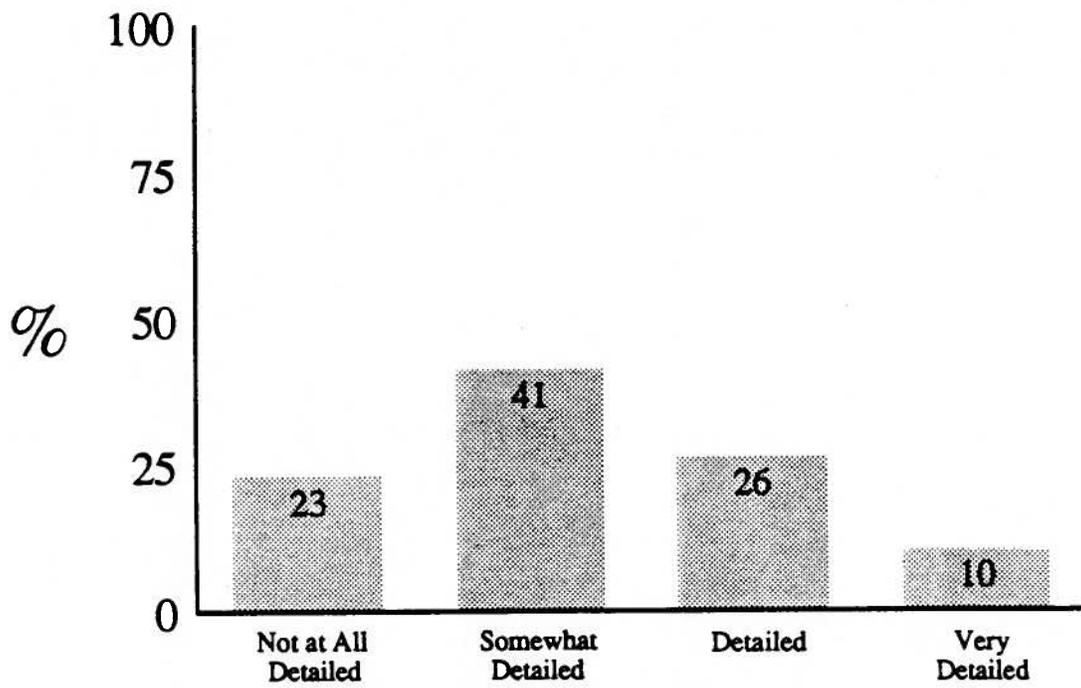Figure 19. Who set the agenda.
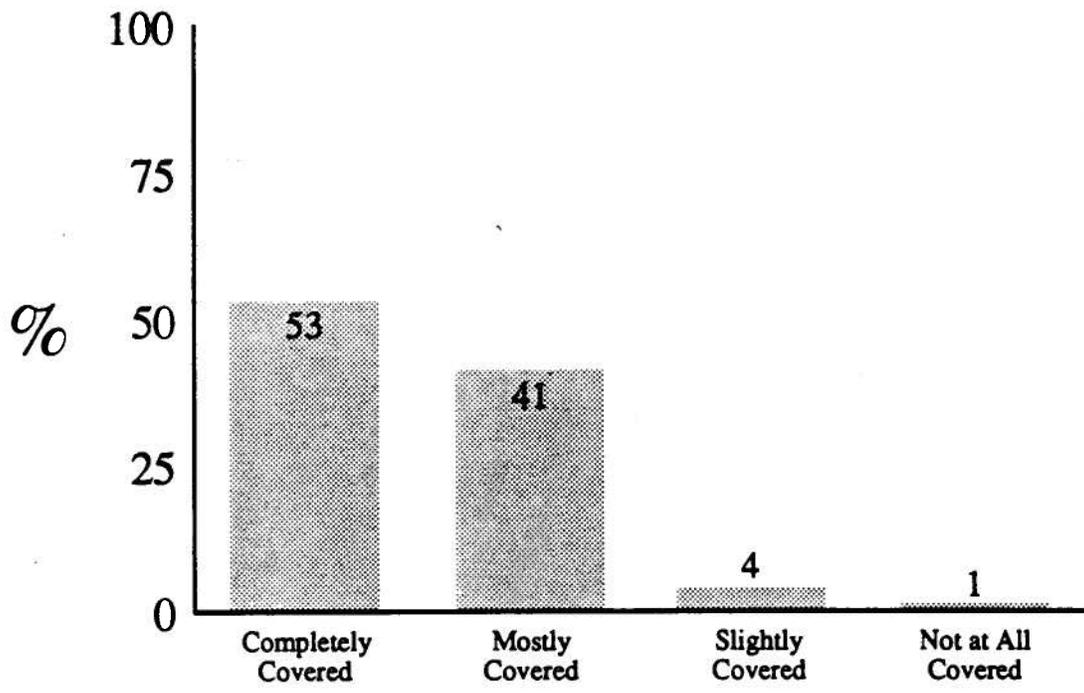
Figure 20. Amount of detail in agendas.

Figure 21. Extent of coverage of topics on the agenda.

and outcomes. A sample of two hundred fifty surveys was drawn at random. These data were content analyzed and are reported in this section.

Meeting Topics. The topics of meetings were highly diverse. The results of the content analysis are presented in Table 4. Meeting topics fell into two broad categories, operational and strategic. The most frequent operational topics were organizational updates (16%), workload and project management (14%), and product or service issues (14%). The most frequent strategic topics were organizational development (10%) and improving productivity (8%).

Purposes of Meetings. The purposes of meetings vary widely. The 3M book, "How to Run Better Business Meetings," provides a framework of specific purposes for calling meetings. This framework was used to analyze the responses to the purposes question of the survey. Table 5 reports the results of this analysis. Two thirds (167) of the 250 responses could be categorized within the framework. The most prominent purposes were to reconcile a conflict (29%), and to reach a group judgment or decision (26%). 11% of the topics were devoted to solving a problem and 11% to communicating information so that everyone understands the information.

The remaining third of the purposes which did not fall into the 3M framework were also analyze. The categories which best seemed to describe these purposes were developing a plan (31%), reviewing a product/process status (19%), and developing standards or guidelines to

Table 4
Topics of meetings.

- Operational Topics

Organizational update	16%
Workload & project management	14
Financial issues	4
Human resource management	5
Policies & procedures	6
Product or service issues	14
Miscellaneous operational issues & tasks	8

- Strategic Topics

Improving productivity	8
Product & service planning	4
Strategic goal setting	6
Organizational development	10
Marketing	3

Table 5
<u>Purposes of meetings</u>.

- Accept reports   2%
- Reach a group judgment or decision   26
- Solve a problem   11
- Gain support for a program   4
- Reconcile conflicting views   3
- Communicate information   29
  - Relieve tension by providing information   1
  - Ensure that everyone understands   11
  - Facilitate staff communication   5
- Demonstrate a project or system   2
- Explore new ideas and concepts   4

improve a process (12%). The remaining purposes fell into several other idiosyncratic categories.

Outcomes of Meetings. The content analysis of the responses to the outcomes question revealed five categories. These were information sharing, action, creative ideas, decisions, and negative outcomes. The data are presented in Table 6. Information sharing accounted for more than a third of meeting outcomes. Nearly a quarter of the outcomes were focused on taking action and another quarter focused on making a decision. Negative outcomes were listed in 13% of the meetings. Finally, only 1% of the outcomes were identified as creative.

Progress on Decision Making. Respondents were asked how much progress they made on decisional topics in their meetings. Figure 22 reports these results. More than a third (36%) reported that a complete decision was made. Another third (36%) indicated that a partial decision was reached. Of the remaining third, 16% reported that solutions were discussed, but no decision was reached; another 12% stated that goals were discussed but a decision was not reached.

Influence on the Decision that Was Made. The amount of influence people have on the outcome of a decision can have considerable bearing on their willingness to contribute. Figure 23 shows that a third of all participants in meetings felt they have minimal (20%) or no (12%) influence. Half (49%) stated that they have some influence, while 19% indicated that they have a great deal of influence.

Table 6
Outcomes of meetings.

- Information Sharing

Problem analyzed and solution recommended	6 %
Status information shared	11
Better understanding	8
Group more cohesive	2
Group/management updated	3
Situation clarified	4
Group is better educated, trained	3

- Action

Workload assignments prioritized	4
Tasks & action items assigned	9
Process and policies adopted	5
Task completed	2
Program/project initiated	4

- Creative

Ideas generated	1

Table 6
Outcomes of meetings, continued.

- Decision

A decision was made	16 %
A questionable decision was made	2
Next steps defined	9

- Negative Outcomes

Inadequate information	2
Purposeless discussion	1
Failed to reach desired outcome	8
Confusion, uncertainty, anger	2
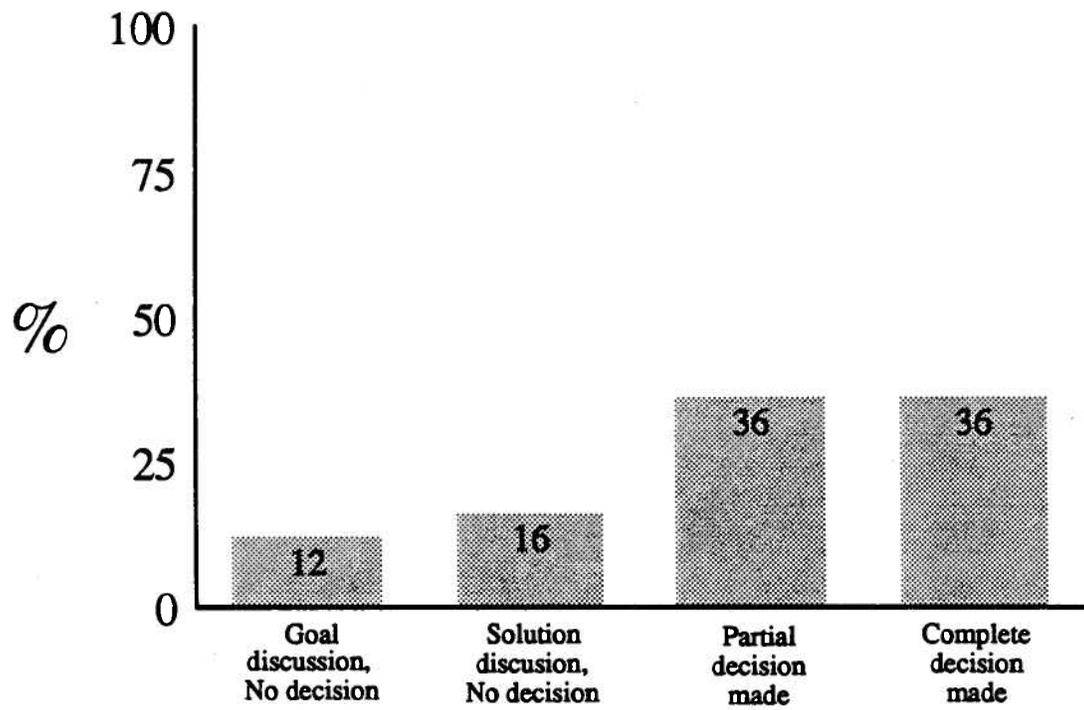
Figure 22. Progress on decision making.
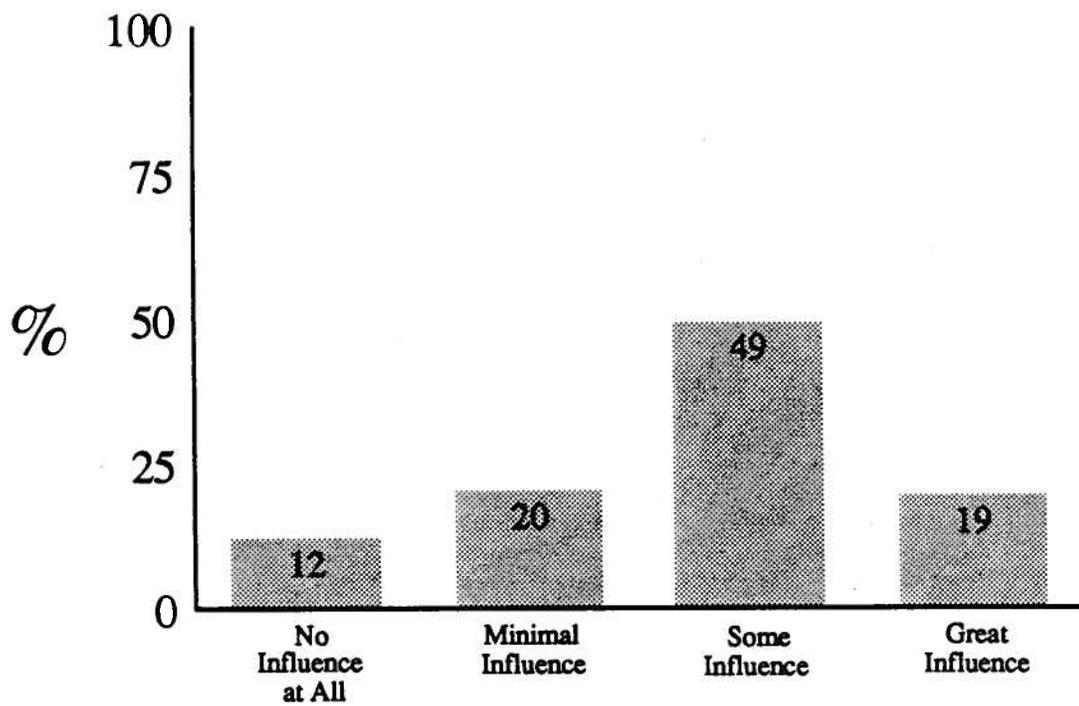
Figure 23. Amount of influence people have over the
decision-making process in meetings.

Pressure to Express an Opinion with which They Disagree. Like all social systems, meetings are places were pressures are often exerted. One of the more difficult of these to deal with is the pressure to express public agreement with a position with which people privately disagree. The results in Figure 24 indicate that more than a third of meeting participants felt some form of pressure to express an opinion with which they disagree. This includes 24% who stated that they experienced mild pressure, 10% who experienced strong pressure, and 3% who experienced very great pressure. Two-thirds (63%) stated that they felt no pressure at all.

Presence of Underlying Issues in Meetings. Even when a written agenda is distributed in advance, there may be underlying issues present that are not stated on the agenda. Figure 25 reports data on this issue. Nearly two-thirds of the respondents indicated that underlying issues were present at the meeting. 30% said these were present to a small extent, 21% stated that they were present to some extent, and 12% reported that underlying issues were present to a great extent. 38% said that there were no underlying issues present at the meeting.

Presentation Materials

Presentation Materials Used in Meetings. Meeting presenters have a wide selection of presentation aids from which to choose. Survey participants were asked to indicate which of twelve aids were used in the last meeting they attended. Figure 26 shows that handouts were distributed in nearly half the meetings (47%). The two next most
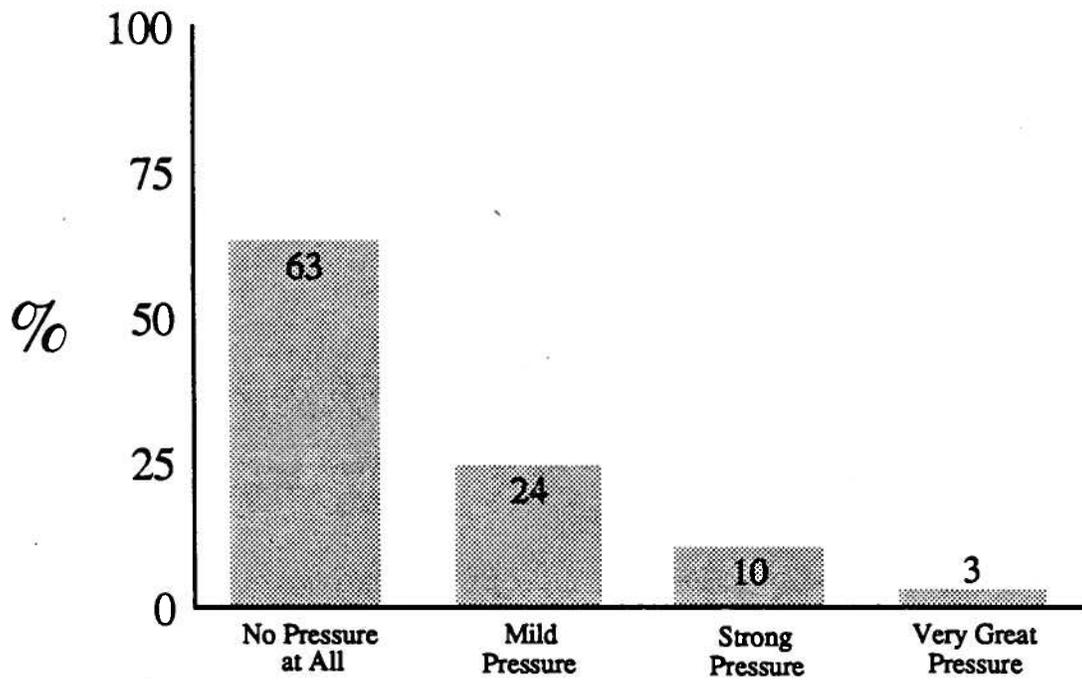
Figure 24. Amount of pressure people feel to express an opinion with which they disagree.
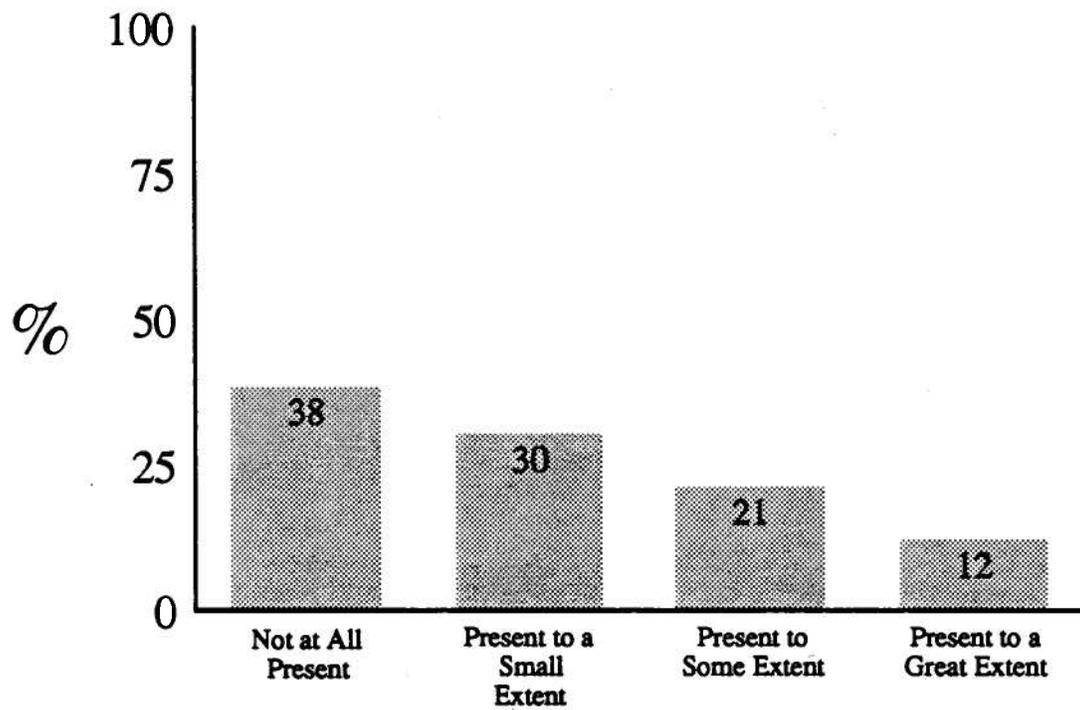
Figure 25. Presence of underlying issues
outside the official agenda.
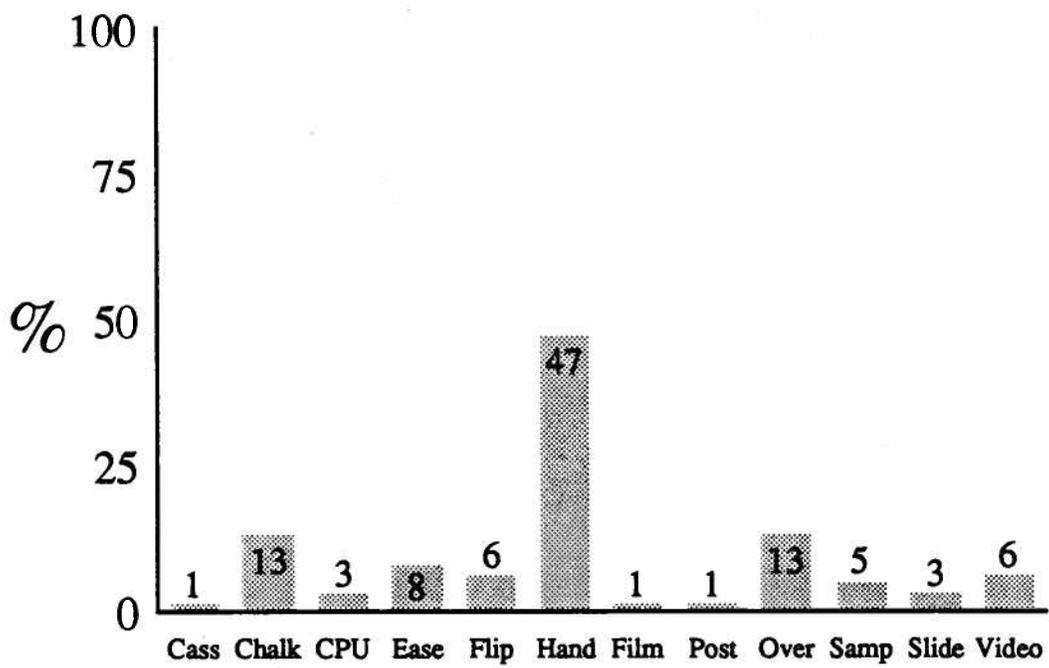
Figure 26. Percentage of meetings where each presentation aid is used.

frequently used aids were overhead projectors (13%) and chalkboards (13%). Audio cassettes, films, and posters were used in only 1% of the meetings.

Effectiveness of Presentational Aids. Participants also described how effectively each aid was used. Figure 27 shows that video (5.9) and actual samples (5.8) received the highest effectiveness rating. This was followed by slides and computers with ratings of 5.7, film and chalkboards with ratings of 5.6, handouts rated at 5.5 and overheads rated at 5.4. Posters recieved the lowest rating at 5.0.

Extent of Graphics Use. Graphics can be used continuously thoroughout a meeting, sporadically, or not at all. Figure 28 presents the extent of graphics use in meetings. Nearly half the time (47%), graphics were not used at all. When they were used, nearly a quarter said they were used less than 10% of the time. 12% reported that they were used up to a quarter of the time and 9% said they were use a quarter to half the time. Only 9% indicated that they were used between half the time and throughout the entire meeting.

Averate Rating of Each Presentation Aid. In addition to rating the effectiveness of each presentation aid, participants were asked to rate how well they liked each aid. Figure 29 displays these ratings. Highest ratings were given to handouts (5.8), samples (5.6), videos (5.4), and overheads (5.1). With the exception of audio cassettes, all other presentation aids were rated in the 4.1 to 4.9 range of the scale. Cassettes were rated substantially lower at 3.1.
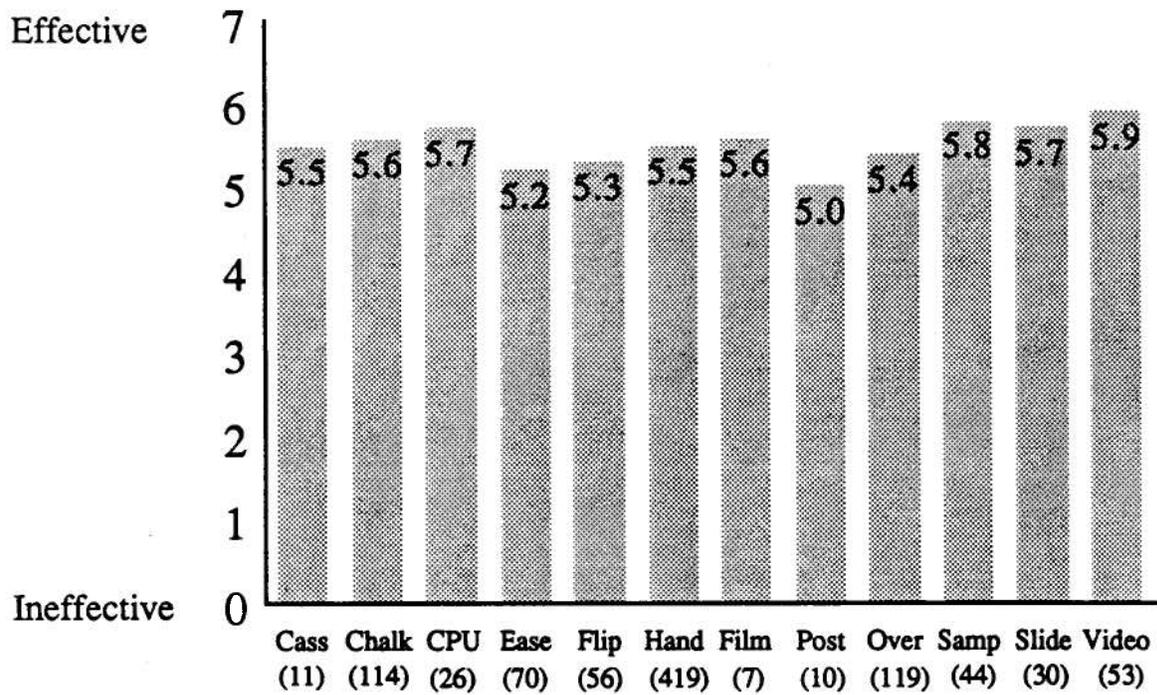
Figure 27. Average effectiveness of each presentation aid. (Number reporting use of each aid is given in parentheses.)
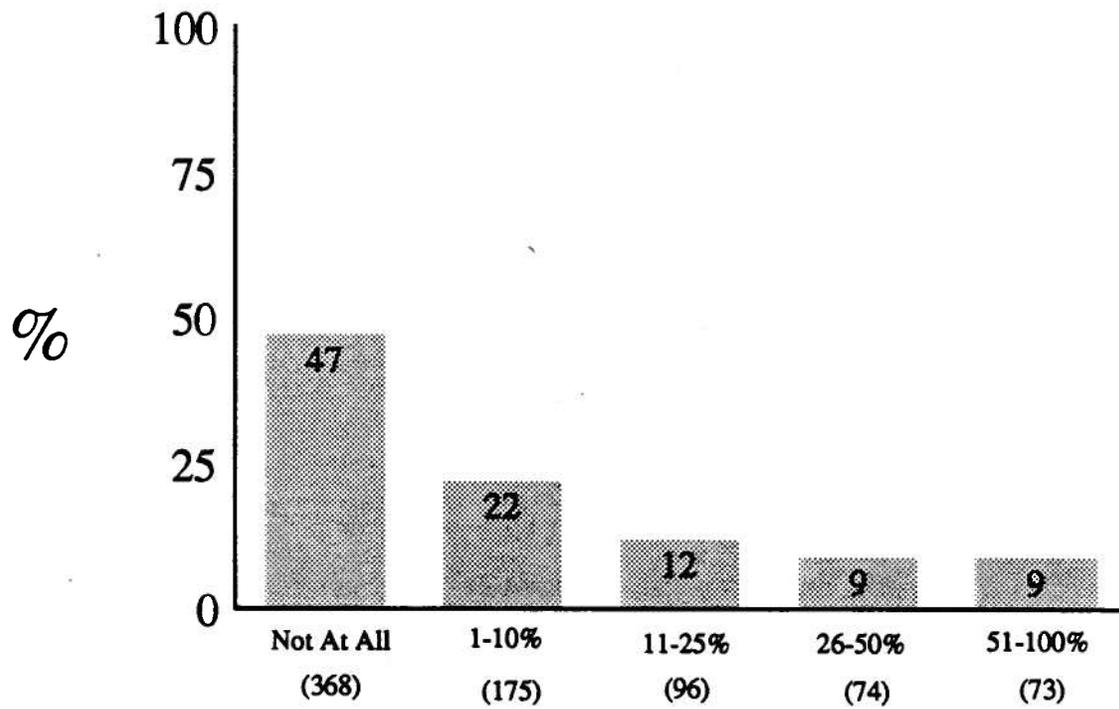
Figure 28. Percentage of time that graphics
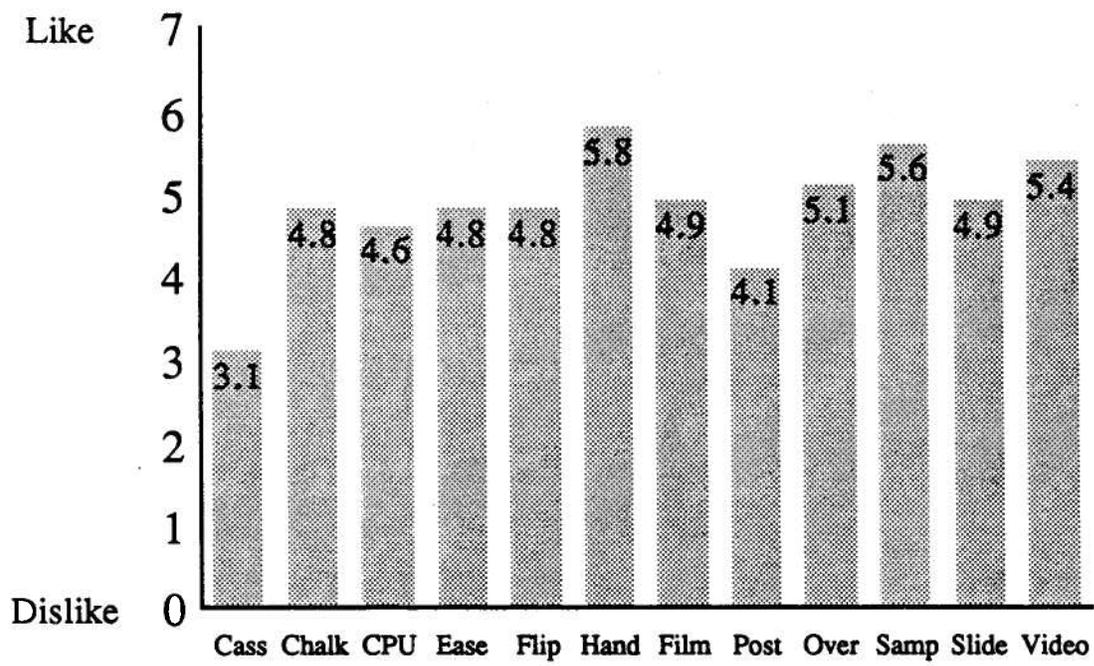are used during the meeting.

Figure 29. Average liking of each presentation aid.

Satisfaction

Participants were asked to report on their satisfation regarding several aspects of meetings. In this section results are reported for overall satisfaction with meetings, leadership, who attends, the agenda, and the decisions made. Additionally, correlations are provided between satisfaction and other components of meetings.

Overall Satisfaction with Meetings. As reported in Figure 30, nearly three quarters of the participants indicated that they were satisfied (52%) or very satisfied (20%) with the meetings they attended. 11% were dissatisfied and 2% were very dissatisfied with the meetings. 16% reponded that they were neutral.

Satisfaction with Leadership. Satisfaction with meeting leadership showed a similar pattern to overall meeting satisfaction, as shown in Figure 31. Two thirds were very satisfied (20%) or satisfied (45%) with the quality of leadership; 10% were dissatisfied and 2% were very dissatisfied.

Satisfaction with who Attends. Figure 32 shows that more than three quarters indicated that they were satisfied (53%) or very satisfied (25%) with who attends meetings. Noone was very dissatisfied and only 5% were dissatisfied.

Satisfaction with Agenda. As with satisfaction with meetings, leadership and who attends, three fourths indicated that they were satisfied (55%) or very satisfied (19%) with the agenda. Figure 33 also shows very low levels of dissatisfaction with the agenda.
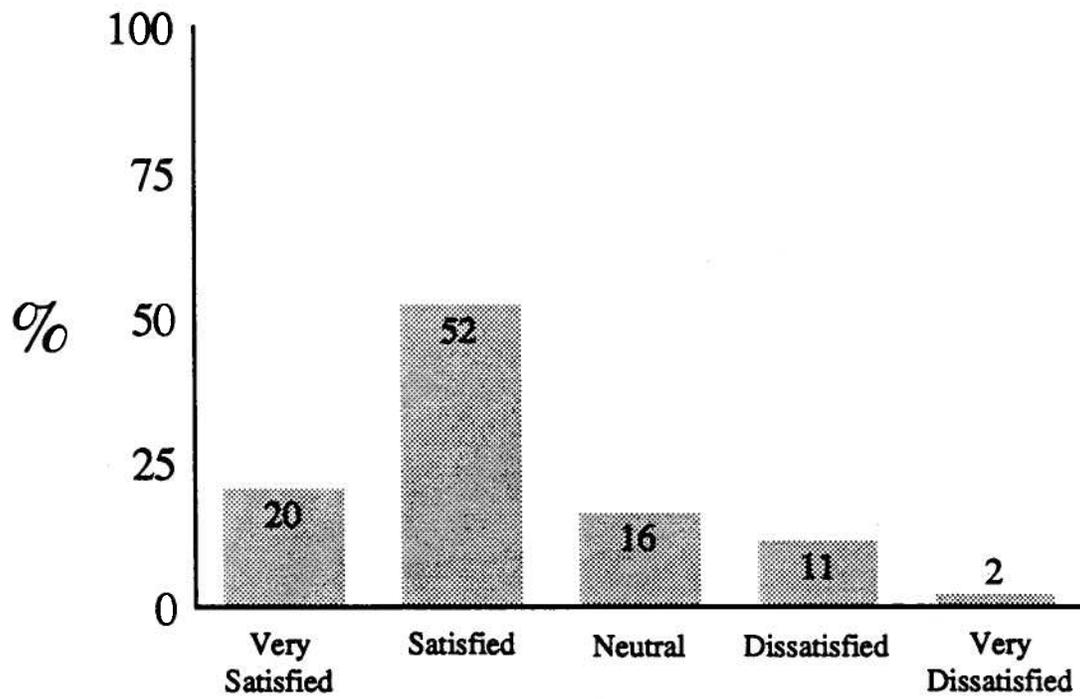
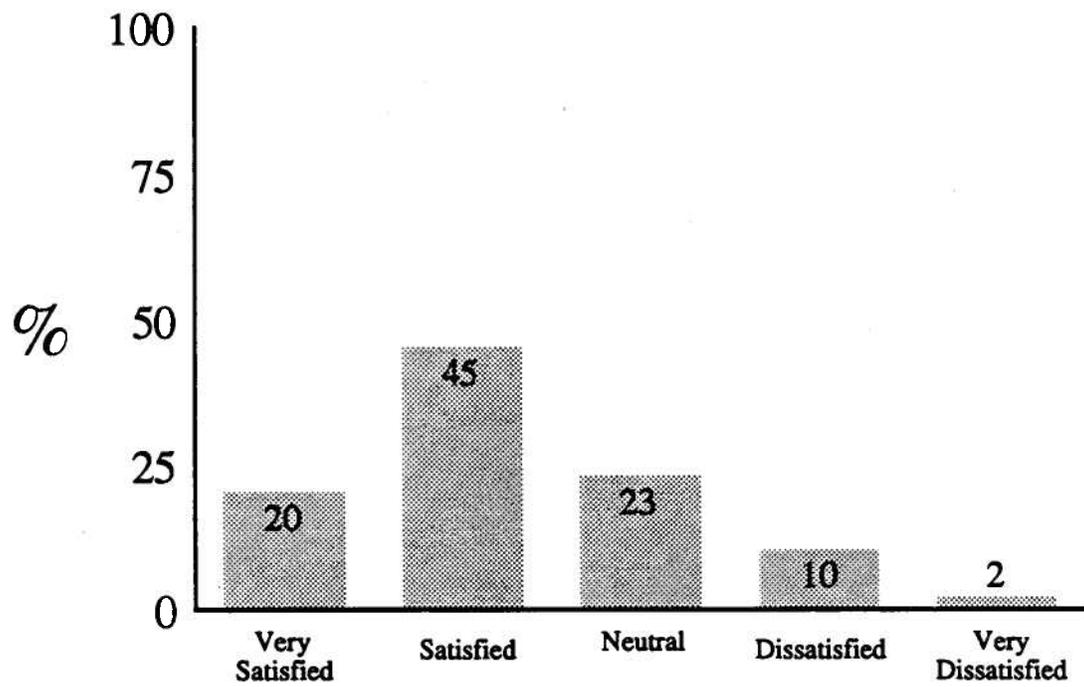Figure 30. Overall satisfaction with meetings.

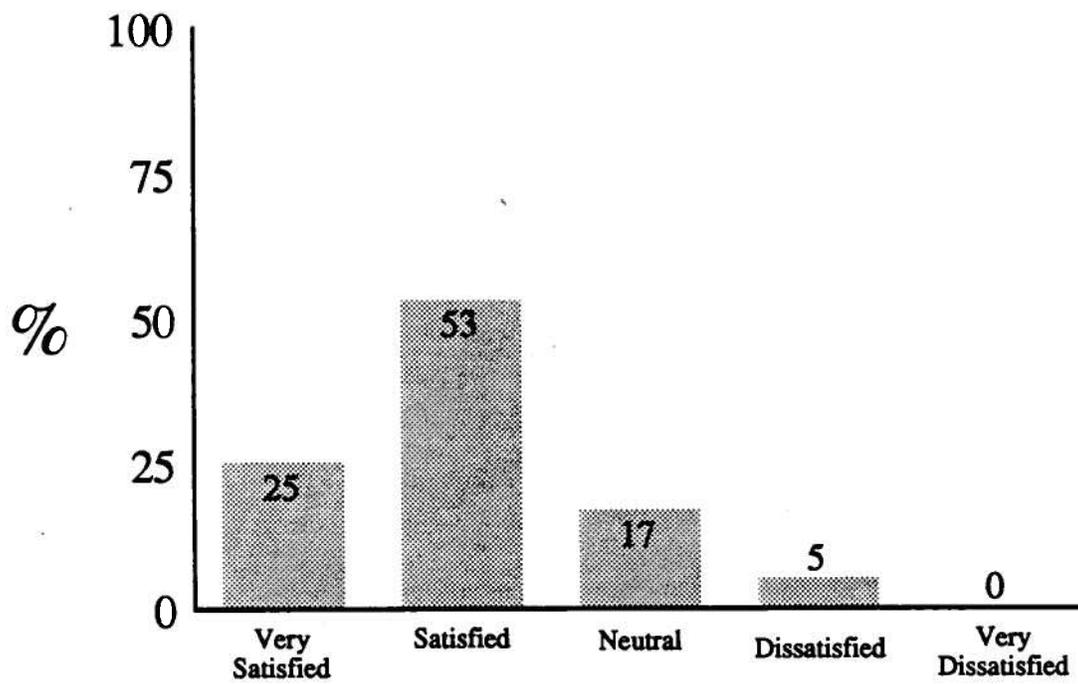Figure 31. Satisfaction with the quality of leadership.

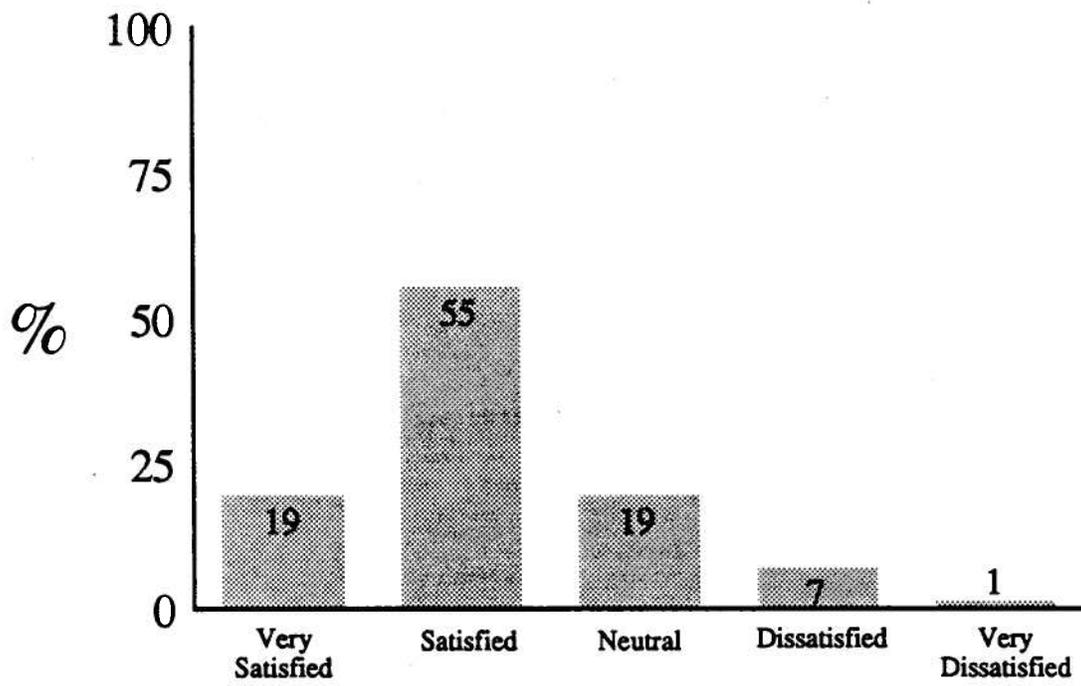Figure 32. Satisfaction with who attends meetings.

Figure 33. Satisfaction with the agenda .

Satisfaction with Decision. Figure 34 shows that the same pattern holds for satisfaction with decisions. Three quarters were satisfied (50%) or very satisfied (25%), while less than 10% were dissatisfied.

Correlation of Meeting Satisfaction with Other Satisfaction Items. Overall meeting satisfaction was correlated with each of the four specific satisfaction items. Figure 35 presents the results. Higher levels of overall meeting satisfaction were associated with higher levels of specific satisfaction with: leadership, who attends the meeting, the agenda, and the decision. The largest correlation was between overall meeting satisfaction and meeting leadership (.73). The lowest correlation was with who attends the meeting (.53).

Correlation of Meeting Satisfaction with Meeting Components. Overall meeting satisfaction was correlated with seven characteristics of meetings. Figure 36 reports the correlations. The largest correlation was between overall meeting satisfaction and meeting participation (.36). The correlations with the extent to which the agenda was covered (.32), amount of preparation (.31), presentation effectiveness (.14), and amount of time spent talking about irrelevant issues (-.33) were also significant. Correlations between overall meeting satisfaction and agenda detail and number of attendees were not significant.

Additional analyses of the two correlations between agenda detail and extent of agenda coverage indicated that the two variables operated independently of each other. Thus, a detailed agenda that was fully
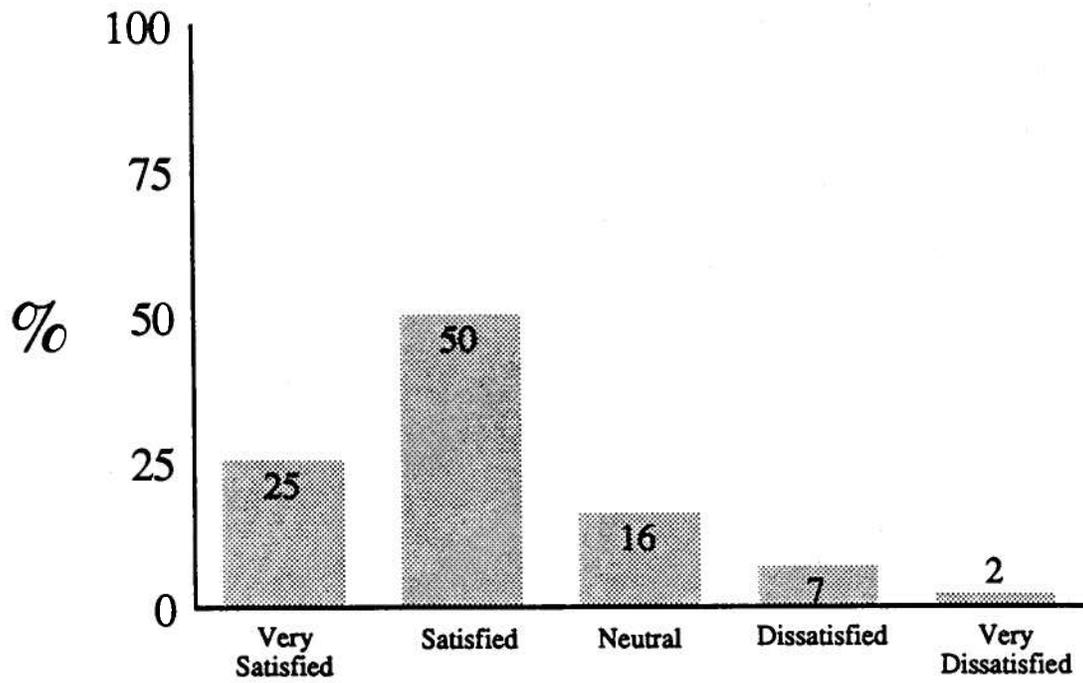
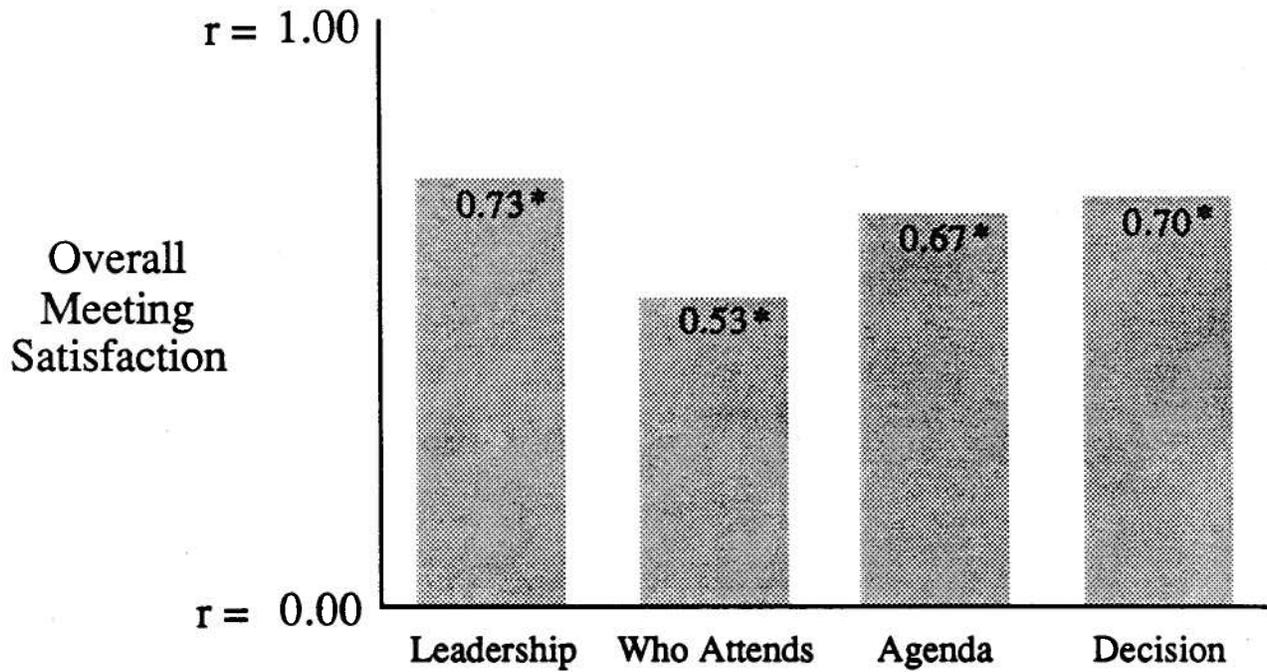Figure 34. Satisfaction with decisions.

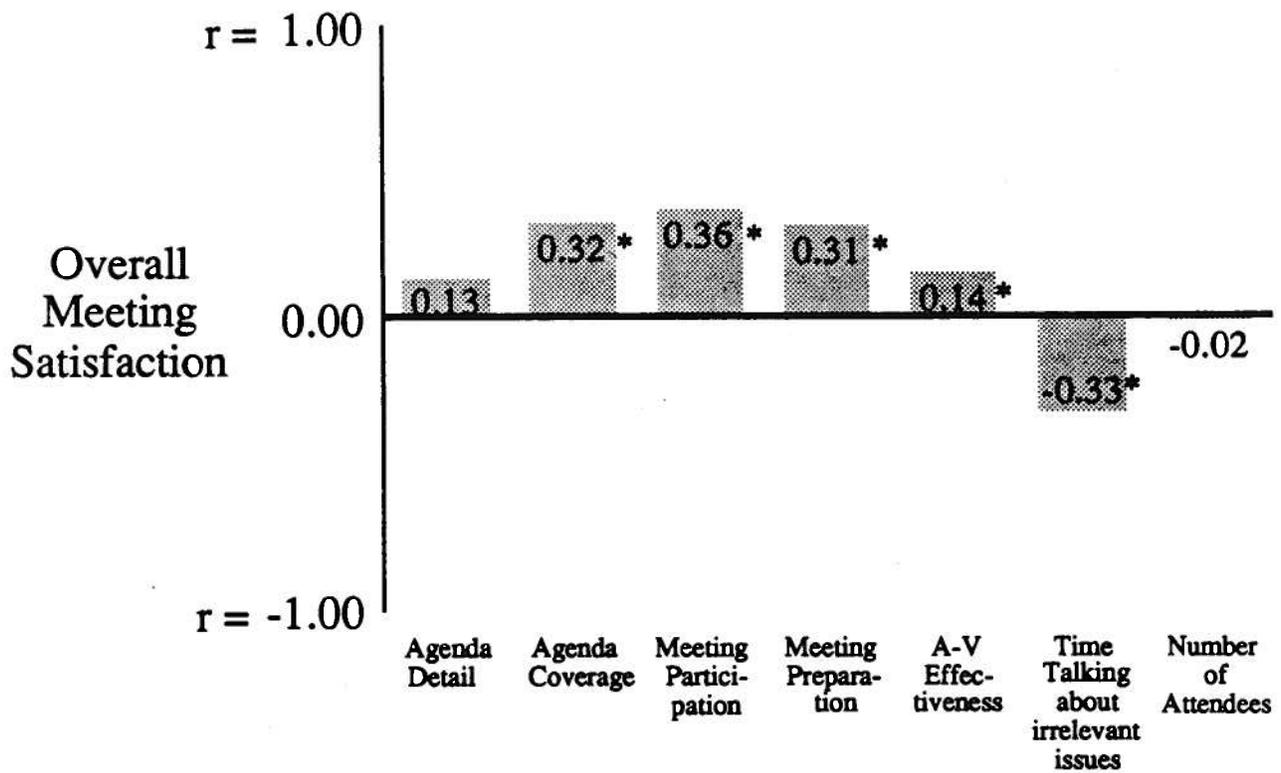Figure 35. Correlation of overall meeting satisfaction with specific satisfaction items. *p < .05

Figure 36. Correlation of overall meeting satisfaction with other meeting characteristics. $*p < .05$

covered yielded almost the same satisfaction as a sparse agenda that was fully covered.

Correlation of Job Satisfaction with Meeting Satisfaction. Respondents were asked to report on their satisfaction with their jobs. The responses to this scale were correlated with their overall satisfaction with meetings and their satisfaction with specific components of meetings. The results are provided in Figure 37. Job satisfaction and overall meeting satisfaction were correlated at .23. With regard to the specific components, job satisfaction was correlated with satisfaction with the decision (.27), meeting participation (.24), who attends (.23), and leadership (.21). Job satisfaction was not related to satisfaction with the agenda.

Correlation of Meeting Satisfaction with Each Presentation Aid. Figure 38 reports the correlations between overall meeting satisfaction and the 12 presentation aids. The numbers in parentheses at the bottom indicate the number of people who reported using the aid. This number affects the level at which a correlation value is statistically significant. The three highest correlations of presentation aids with overall meeting satisfaction were samples (.51), handouts (.49), and overheads (.45). The remaining significant correlations were with video (.44), flipcharts (.41), and easels (.37). None of the other correlations between presentation aids and overall meeting satisfaction were statistically significant.

Relationship between Satisfaction with Agenda and Who Set the Agenda. Level of satisfaction with the agenda was examined in relation to who set the agenda. Figure 39 shows that people were least satisfied with
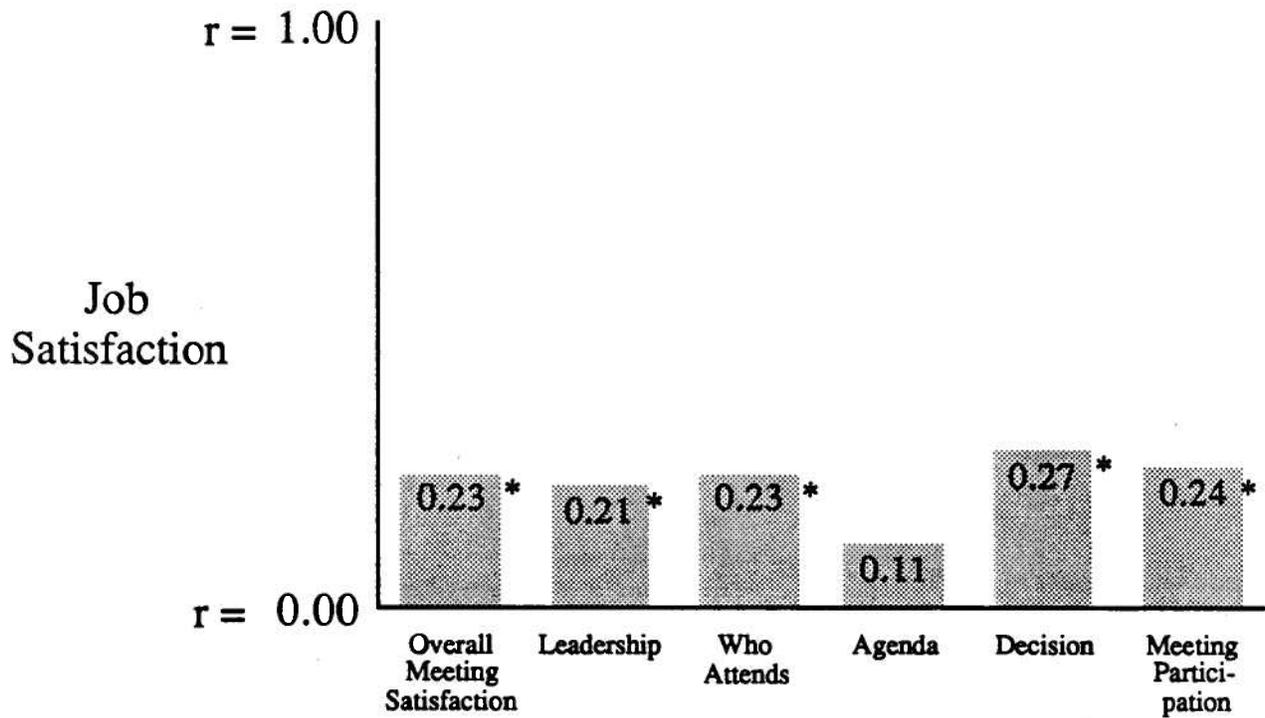
Figure 37. Correlation of overall job satisfaction with specific satisfaction items. * $p < .05$
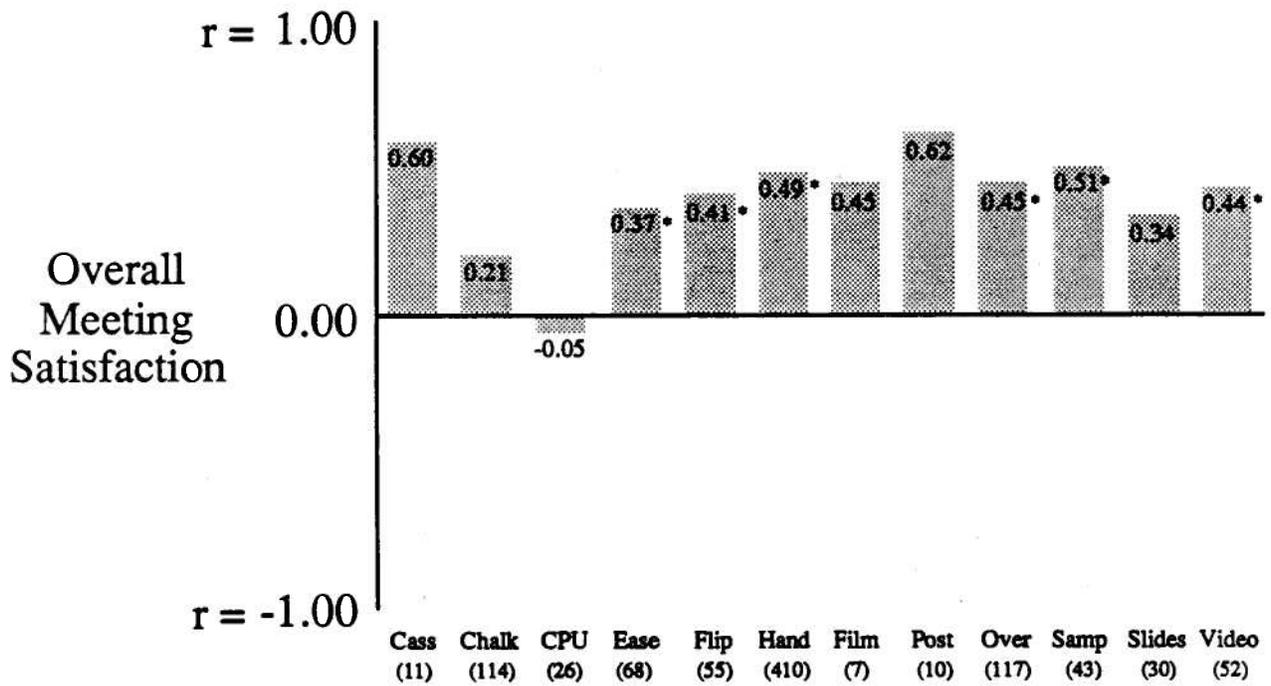
r = 1.00

Overall
Meeting
Satisfaction

0.00

r = -1.00

Cass	Chalk	CPU	Ease	Flip	Hand	Film	Post	Over	Samp	Slides	Video
(11)	(114)	(26)	(68)	(55)	(410)	(7)	(10)	(117)	(43)	(30)	(52)

Figure 38. Correlation of meeting satisfaction with effectiveness of presentation aids. *p < .01
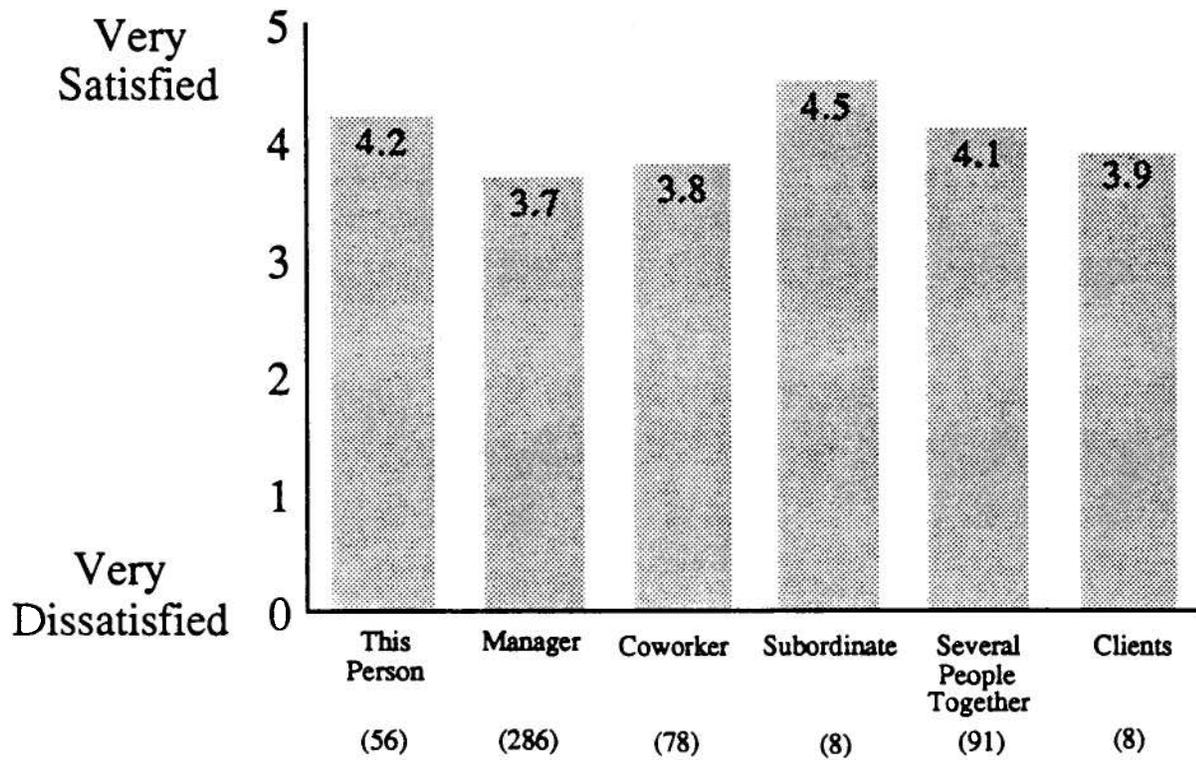
Figure 39. Satisfaction with agenda by who set the agenda.

the agenda when it was set by a manager and most satisfied when it was set by a subordinate.

Relationship between Satisfaction with Agenda and How People Were Notified. Figure 40 presents the relationship between satisfaction with the agenda and how people were informed about the agenda. Survey respondents were most satisfied with a written agenda (3.9 on a 5 point scale) or a verbal agenda distributed to everyone (3.9) or some people (3.7) before the meeting. People were less satisfied with agenda distributed at the start of the meeting (3.6) and with no agenda (3.6). People were least satisfied with an agenda distributed to other people but not them before the meeting (3.0).

Selected Results for Meeting Type

Data from the meeting effectiveness survey were analyzed for differences related to type of meeting. This section provides selected results for length of meeting, level of participation, use of graphics, and satisfaction with different meeting types.

Meeting length for Different Types of Meetings. Figure 41 provides the reported length of different types of meetings. Task force meetings were the longest at an average of 2 hours and 10 minutes. Staff (1:54), information sharing (1:52), and brain storming (1:56) all ran a little under two hours. The shortest meeting type was ceremonial (1:25), which ran for a little less than an hour and half.

Participation in Different Types of Meetings. Different types of meetings encourage different levels of participation. As Figure 42 shows,
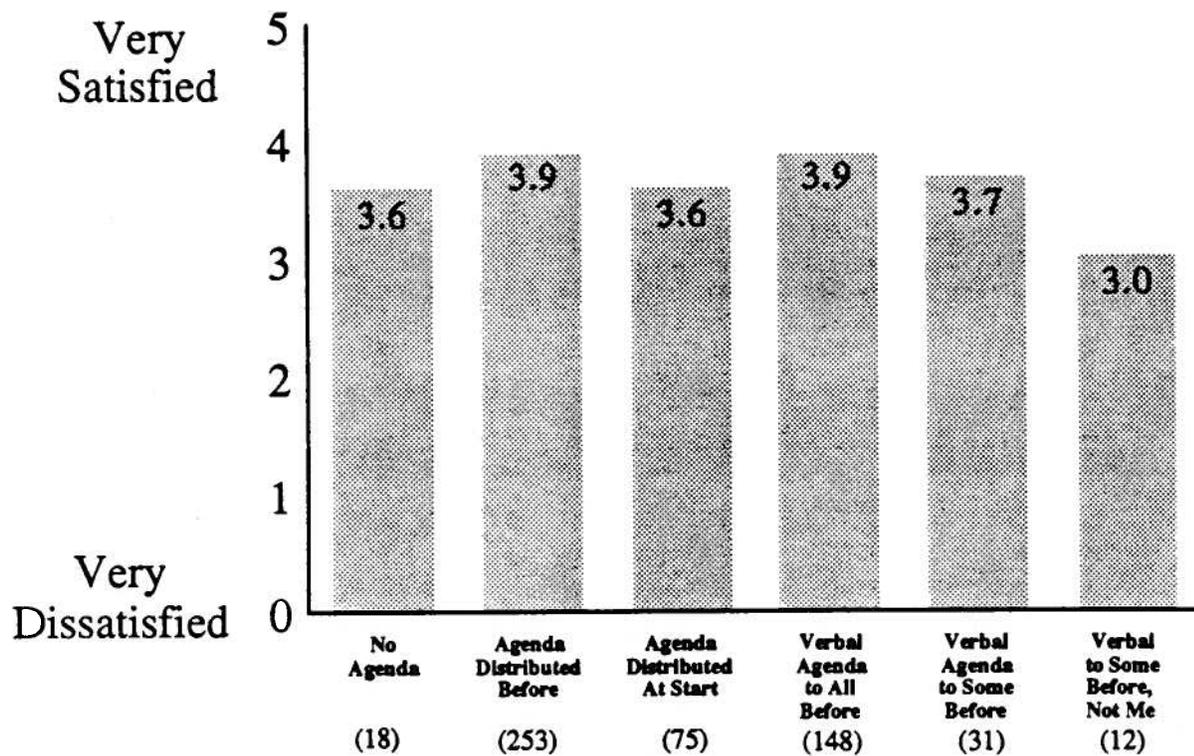
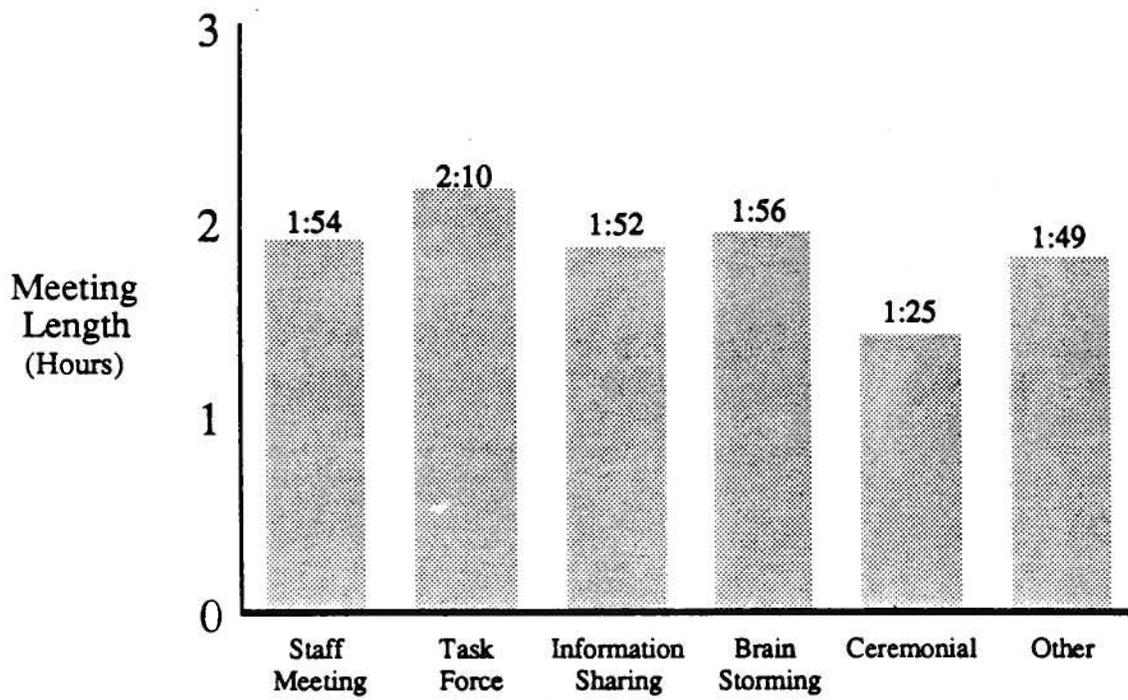Figure 40. Satisfaction with agenda by how people found out about agenda.

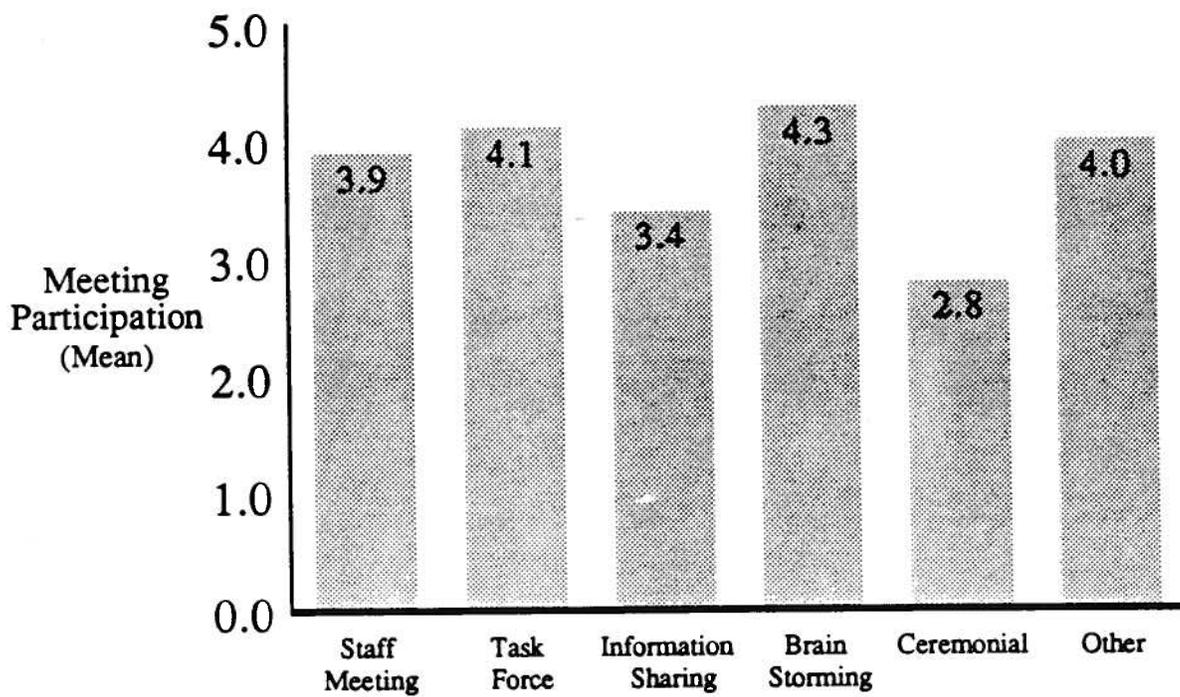Figure 41. Reported length of different types of meetings.

Figure 42. Level of participation in different types of meetings.

people participated most in brain storming (4.3), task force meetings (4.1),
and staff meetings (3.9). They participated least in information sharing
(3.4) and in ceremonial (2.8) meetings.

Use of Graphics in Different Types of Meetings. The data displayed
in Figure 43 reveal considerable differences in the amount of time that
graphics were used in different types of meetings. Graphics were used
nearly a quarter of the time in information sharing and brainstorming
meetings (22% for each). They were used less frequently in task force
meetings (15%) and in staff meetings (12%). Graphics were used in only 6%
of the ceremonial meetings.

Effectiveness of Presentation Aids for Different Meeting Types. The
overall effectiveness of presentational aids was analyzed for five types of
meetings. Figure 44 presents the rating for each meeting. Participants
indicated that presentational aids were most effectively used in task force
meetings (7.0), information sharing meetings (6.9), and brainstorming
meetings (6.5). Presentational aids were seen as less effectively employed
in staff meetings (5.1). The lowest effectiveness rating was given to the
use of presentational aids in ceremonial meetings (1.9).

Total Preparation for Different Types of Meetings. Figure 45
presents the amount of time that people spent in preparation for different
types of meetings. People spent the least time preparing for staff
meetings, approximatley 3/4 of an hour. They reported spending
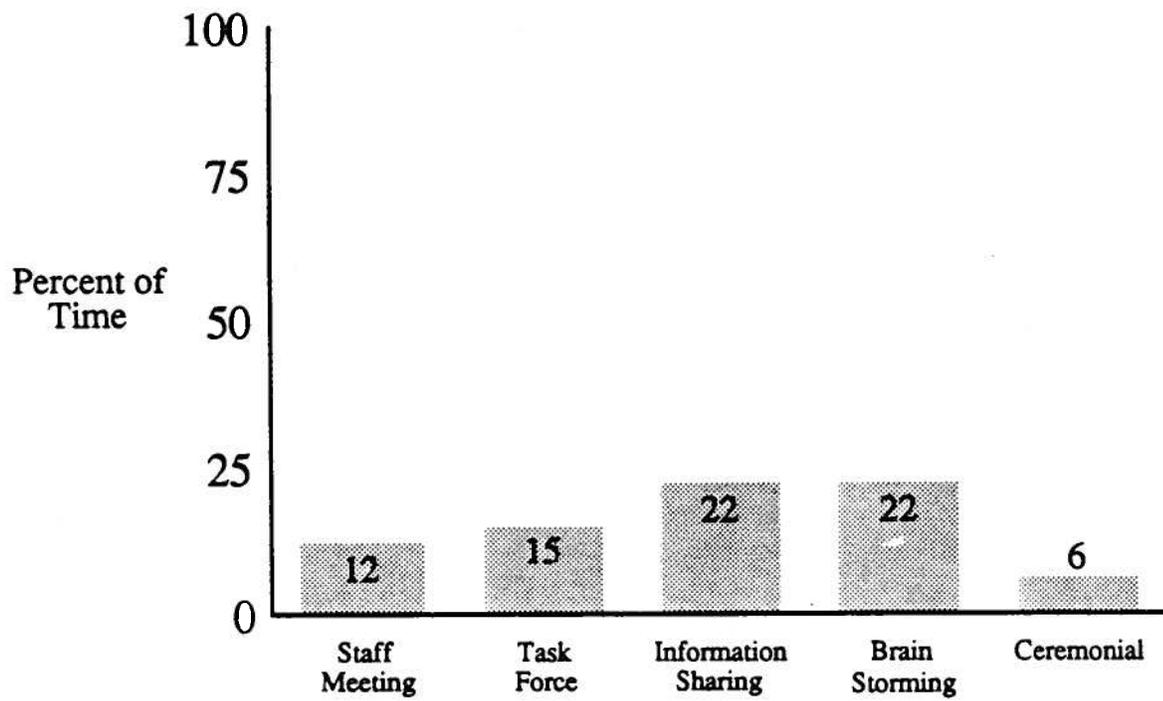approximately two hours preparing for information sharing meetings. Task

Figure 43. Percent of time that graphics are used in different types of meetings.
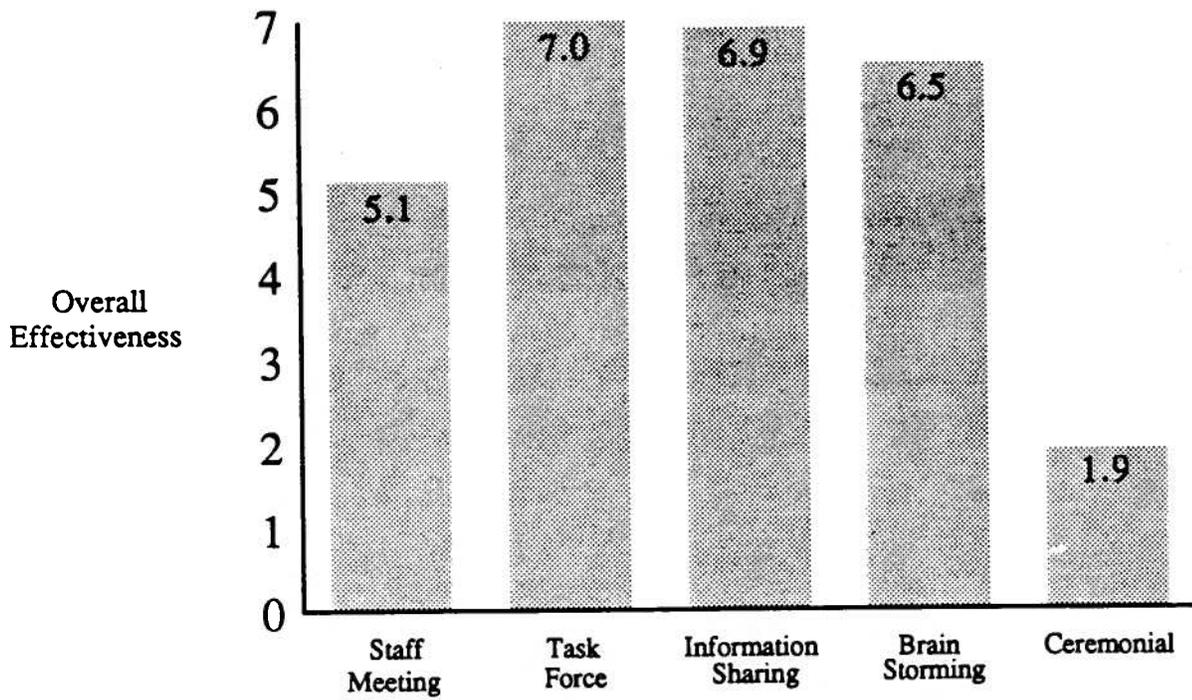
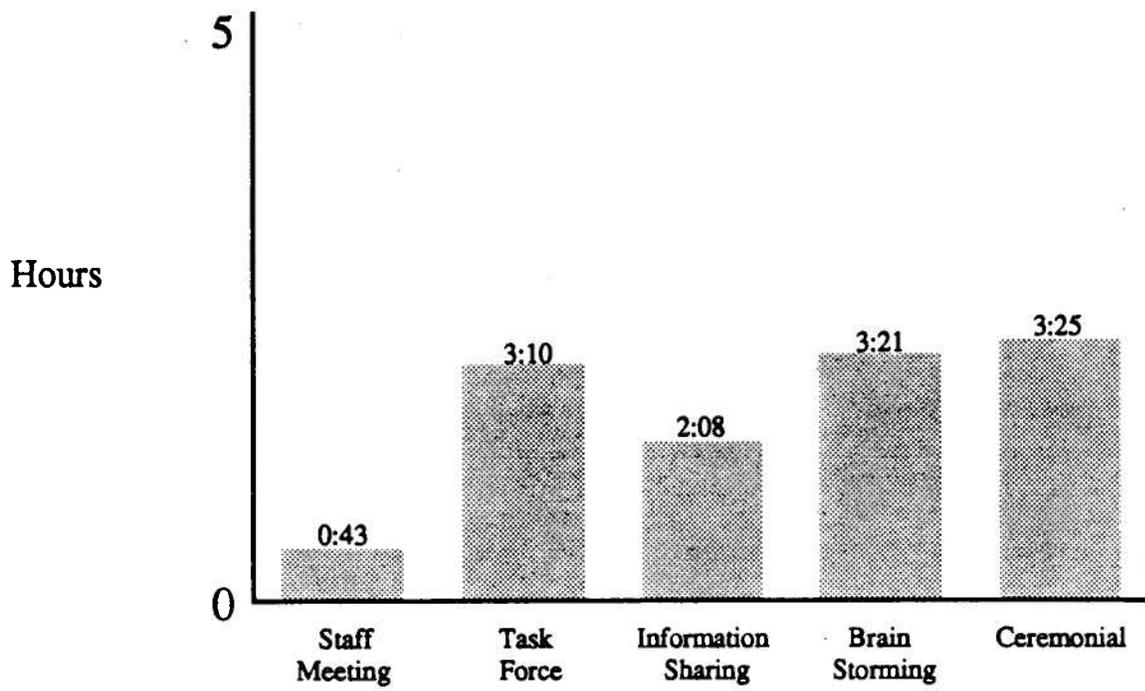Figure 44. Effectiveness of presentation aids for different types of meetings.

Figure 45. Total preparation for different types of meetings.

force, brain storming, and ceremonial meetings all required more than three hours of preparation time.

Satisfaction by Meeting Type. Participants reported their level of satisfaction for the meeting they described. These data were analyzed by type of meeting and are reported in Figure 46. People were least satisfied with staff meetings (3.7). They gave higher ratings to task force (3.8) and information sharing meetings (3.8), although the differences were not statistically different. Respondents were most satisfied with brainstorming meetings (4.1) and ceremonial meetings (4.1).

Selected Results for Managers

Differences between managers and nonmanagers are important in many dimensions of organizational life. This section reports selected results comparing manager and nonmanager responses to the survey. The results focus on length of meetings, meeting time per day, level of participation, rating of presentation aids, differences in satisfaction, and correlations among meeting satisfaction and job satisfaction.

Length of Meetings for Managers and Nonmanagers. Figure 47 presents the average (mean) length of time that managers and nonmanagers spent in the meetings they described in the survey. At two hours and 13 minutes per meeting, the average length of managers' meetings was approximately half an hour longer than nonmanagers' meetings (1:41). (The median length of time for managers was 1 hour, 30 minutes; for nonmanagers, 1 hour, 20 minutes. The difference between these two types of "averages" indicates that managers have a greater number of long
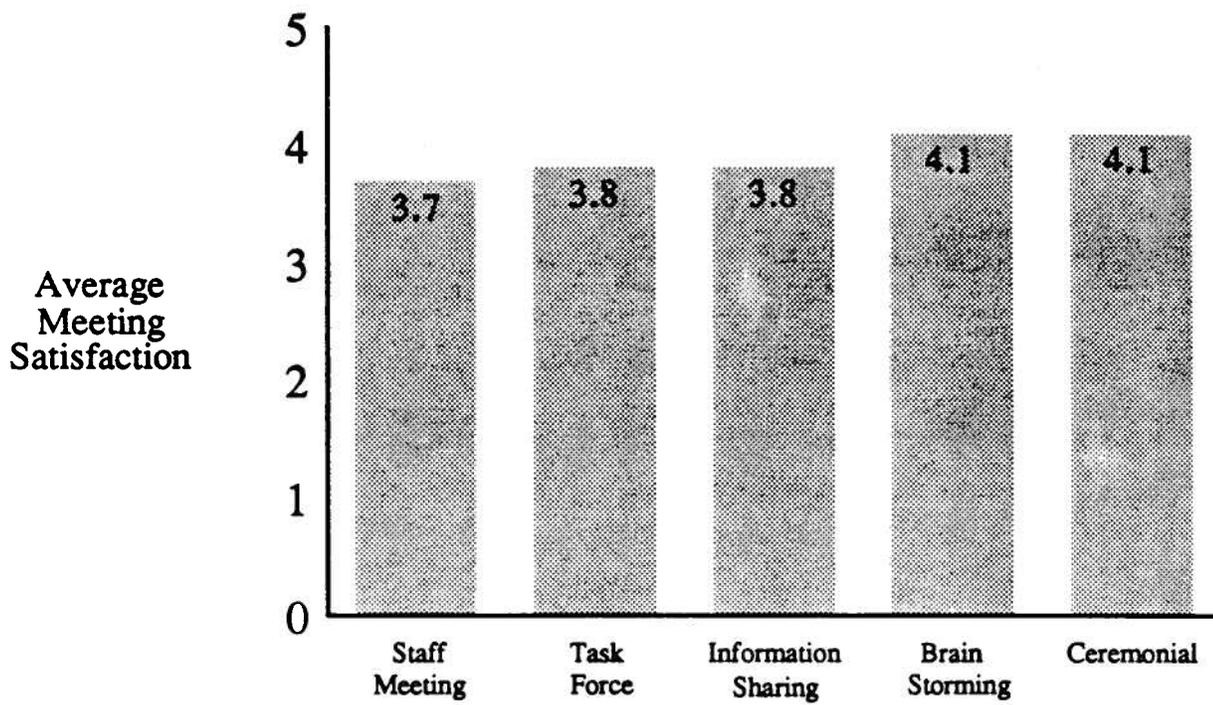
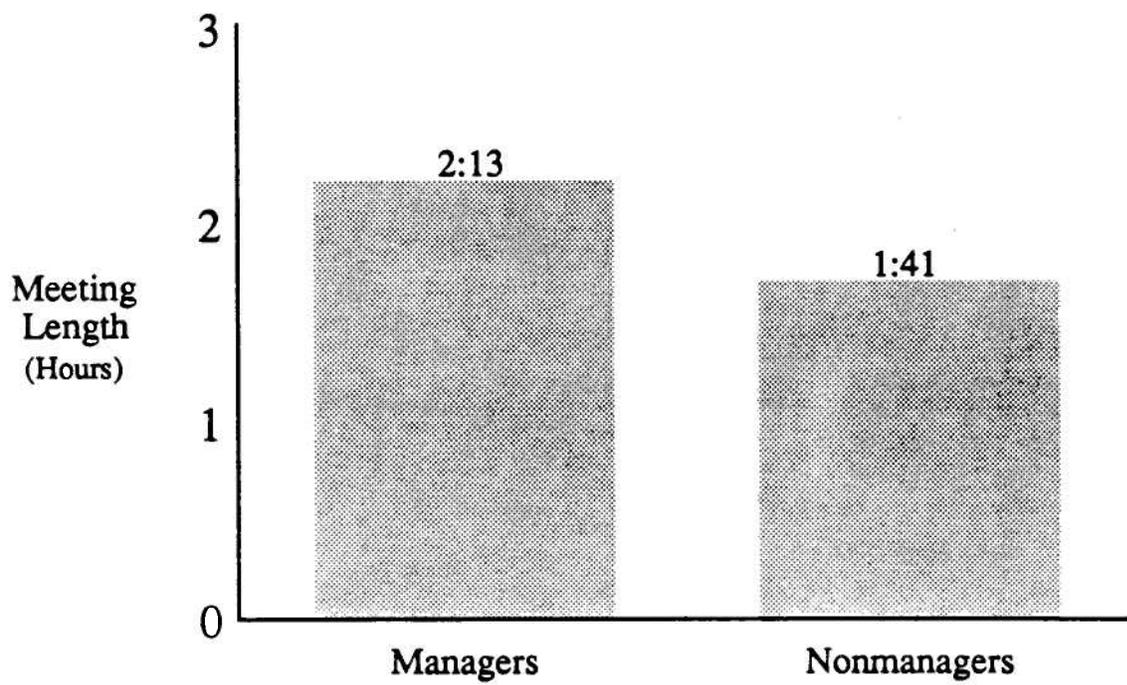Figure 46. Satisfaction with different types of meetings.

Figure 47. Length of meetings attended by managers and nonmanagers.

meetings, which makes the mean larger but only slightly increases the median.)

Meeting Time per Day. The previous section described differences between managers and nonmanagers in the average length of meetings attended. Managers reported that they attended an average of 5 meetings per week (5.1) while nonmanagers reported attending two per week (1.9). This information made it possible to compute the amount of time that managers and nonmanagers spend in meetings each day. Figure 48 shows these data. Managers spend a much larger percentage of time in longer meetings (30% in meetings over two hours) than nonmanagers (8%). Nonmanagers spend a much larger percent of time in short meetings (65% in meetings that are 30 minutes or shorter) compared to managers (29%). Though not shown in Figure 47, managers spent an average of 2 hours and 14 minutes per day in meetings. Nonmanagers spent an average of 43 minutes per day.

Level of Participation. Managers and nonmanagers differed slightly in the level of participation in meetings. As Figure 49 shows, managers reported an average participation level of 4.0 while nonmanagers reported a level of 3.7.

Rating of Presentation Aids. The ratings of all twelve presentation aids were separated into scores for managers and nonmanagers. Figure 50 indicates that there were no significant differences between the ways in which managers and nonmanagers rated the presentation aids.
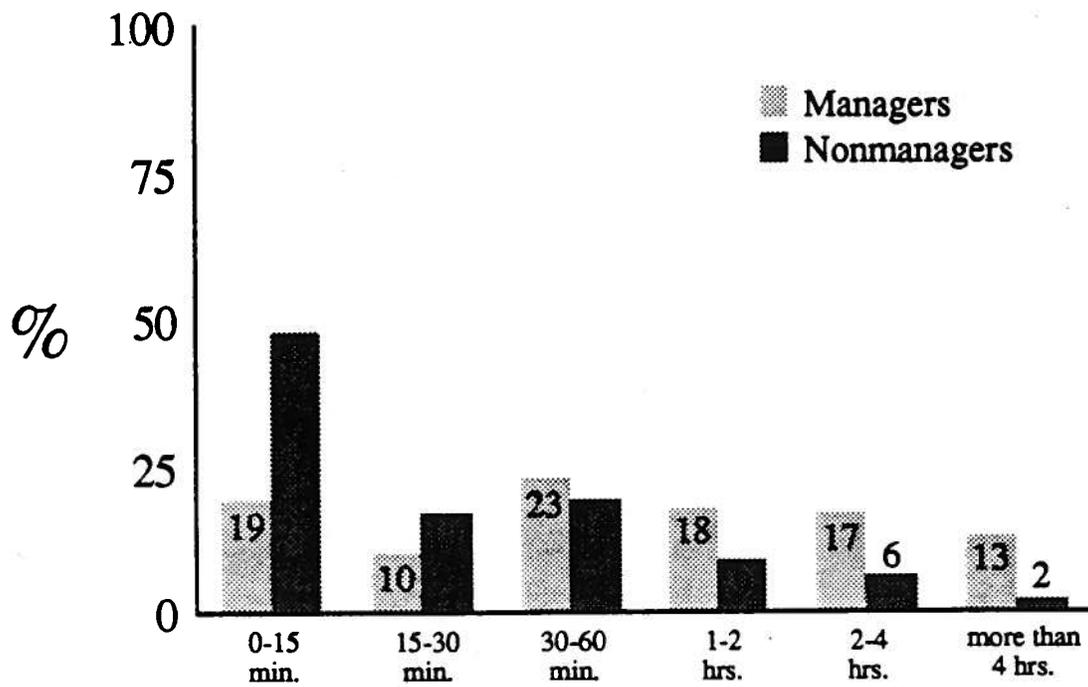
Figure 48. Amount of time managers and nonmanagers spend in meetings each day.
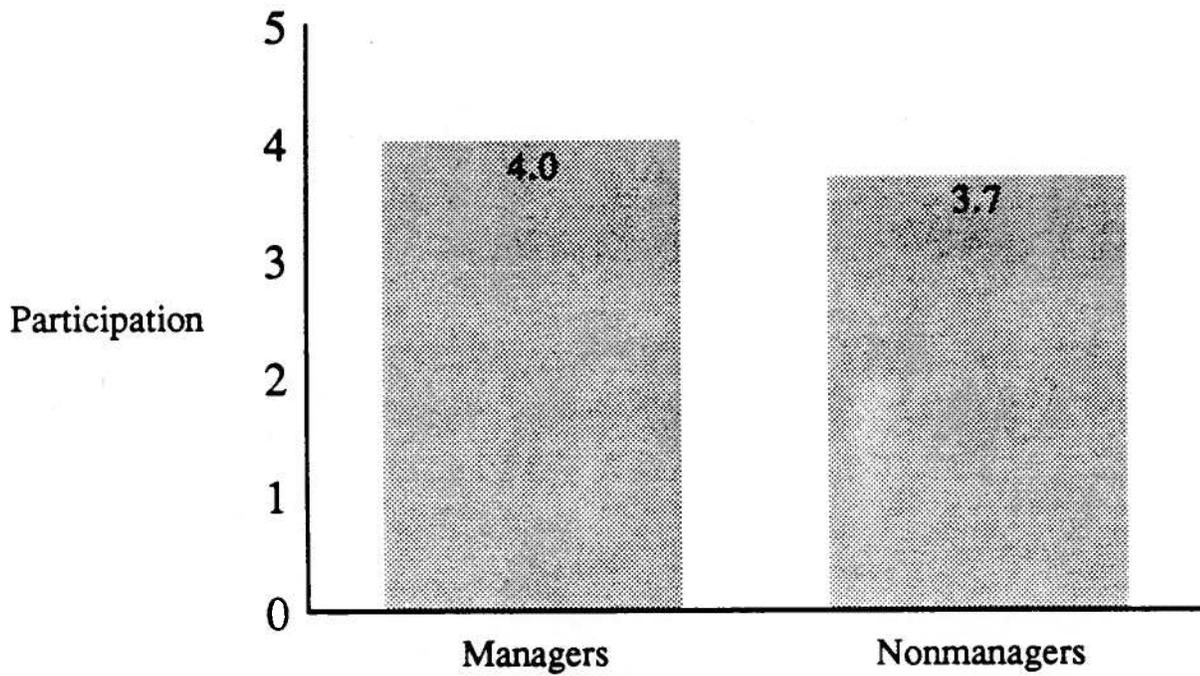
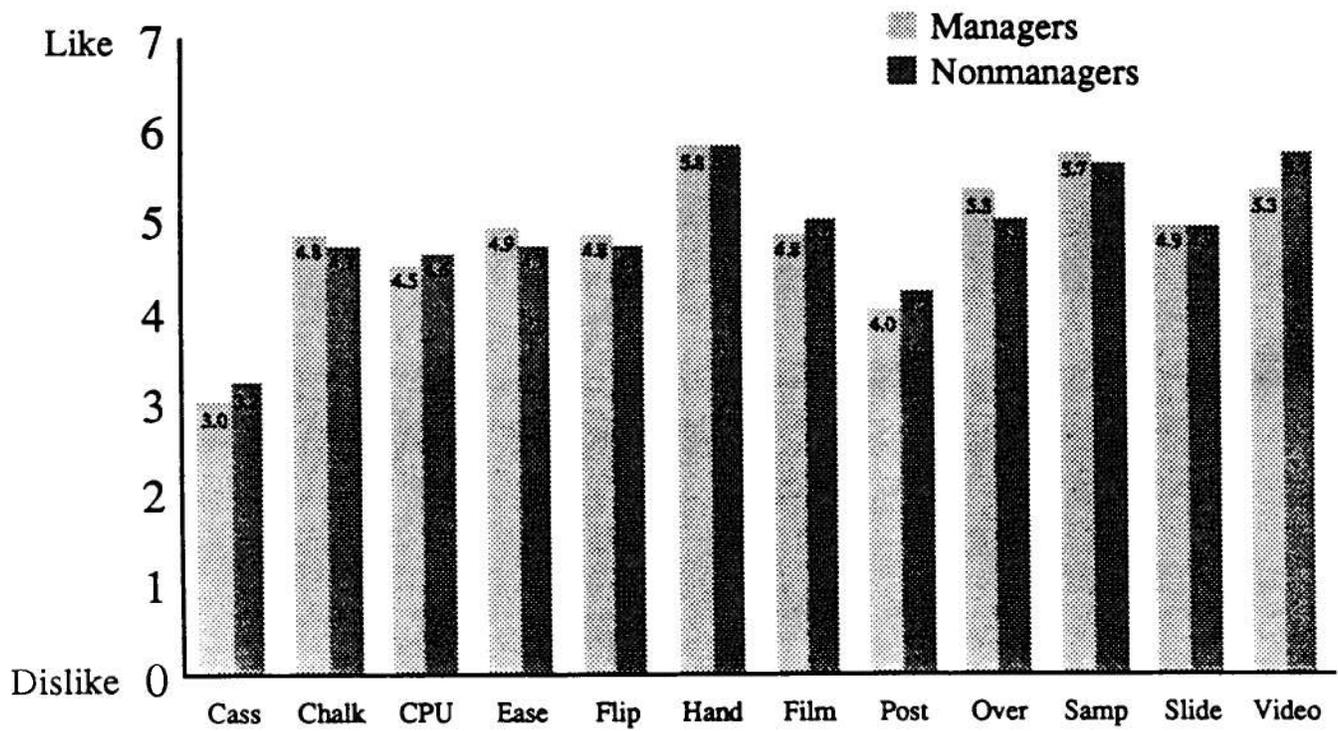Figure 49. Level of participation for managers and nonmanagers.

Figure 50. Average rating of each presentation aid.

Satisfaction with Meetings. Figure 51 indicates that there were no differerences between managers and nonmanagers on their satisfaction with meetings.

Correlation of Meeting Satisfaction and Job Satisfaction. The correlation between managers' overall satisfaction with meetings and their satisfaction with their job was .27; the correlation for nonmanagers was .26. As Figure 52 shows, there was no difference between managers and nonmanagers in the correlation between meeting and job satisfaction.

Selected Results for Leaders

This section presents results for selected findings pertaining to leaders and nonleaders. The section begins with a profile of meeting leaders. Results are also presented pertaining to views of meetings, satisfaction with meetings, and preferences for presentation aids.

Profile of Meeting Leaders. The survey asked respondents to indicate who led the meeting. There were four options. The person completing the survey led the meeting, that person led the meeting with others, someone other than the respondent led the meeting, and noone led the meeting. People who marked either of the first two options were considered leaders; those who selected either of the last two options were considered nonleaders.

The Profile of Meeting Leaders presented in Table 7 shows seven characteristics of leaders. For comparison, results for nonleaders are reported for the same seven items. When compared to nonleaders, meeting leaders spent more time in meetings per day, reported attending more
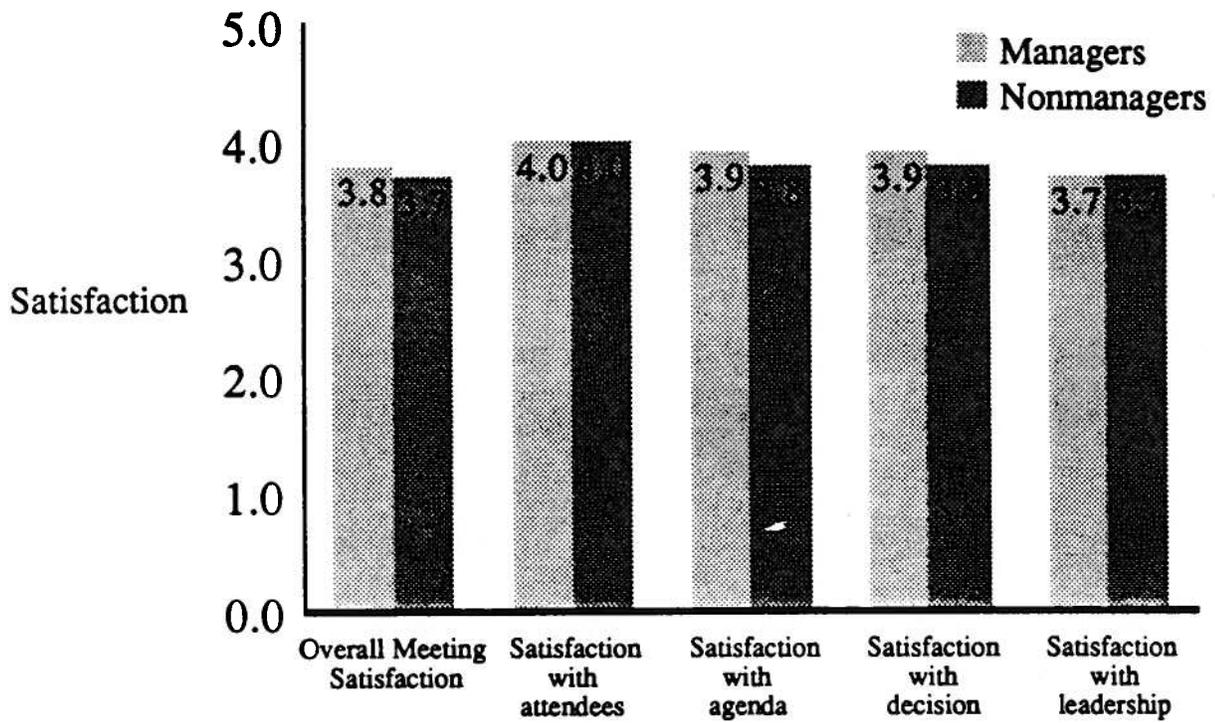
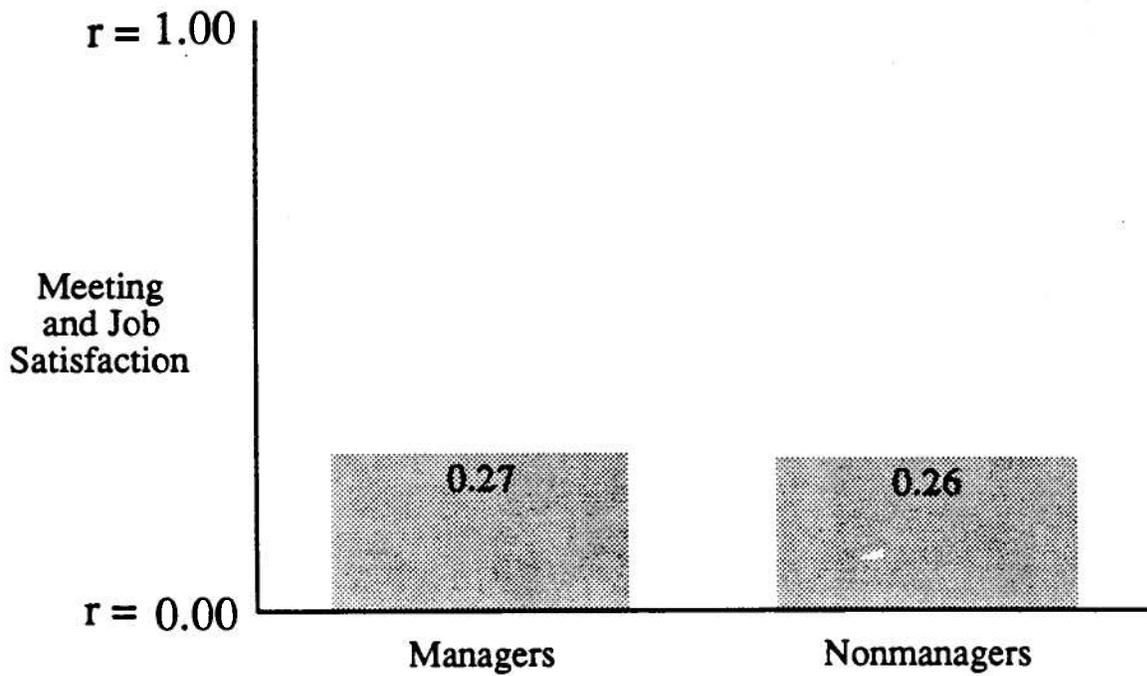Figure 51. Managers' and nonmanagers' satisfaction with meetings.

Figure 52. Correlation between meeting satisfaction and job satisfaction for managers and nonmanagers.

Table 7
<u>A Profile of Meeting Leaders</u>.

	<u>Leaders</u>	<u>Nonleaders</u>
Time in meetings per day:	1:54	1:17
Meetings attended per week:	4.7	3.0
Sex (male/female):	63%/37%	49%/51%
Managers:	62%	42%
Education (years of college):	4.1	3.8
Job tenure (years):	10.4	9.5
Time spent preparing for meeting:	0:30	0:10

meetings per week (almost two hours compared to an hour and a quarter), were more likely to be male (63%) than female (37%, nonleaders were 51% male and 49% female), were managers (62%) rather than nonmanagers (42%), had slightly higher education and job tenure, and spent more time preparing for meetings (30 minutes versus 10 minutes).

Leaders' and Nonleaders' Views of Meetings. Overall, leaders' views of meetings was consistently more favorable than nonleaders' views. Figure 53 shows that leaders were more positive than nonleaders regarding agenda coverage, preparedness, participation, and personal influence over decisions.

Satisfaction with Meetings. The data were analyzed to determine how leaders and nonleaders compared in terms of their satisfaction with meetings. Figure 54 presents these results. In all five dimensions, leaders were more satisfied with meetings than nonleaders.

Leaders' and Nonleaders' Ratings of Presentation Aids. Figure 55 shows that nonleaders were more favorable toward five presentation aids than leaders : audio cassettes, film, posters, slides, and videos. In no case were leaders views of presentation aids statistically more favorable than nonleaders.

Selected Results for Small, Medium and Large Companies

The data were analyzed to determine if there were any significant differences attributable to company size. Most of the findings were not significant. This section reports the results for amount of time spent in
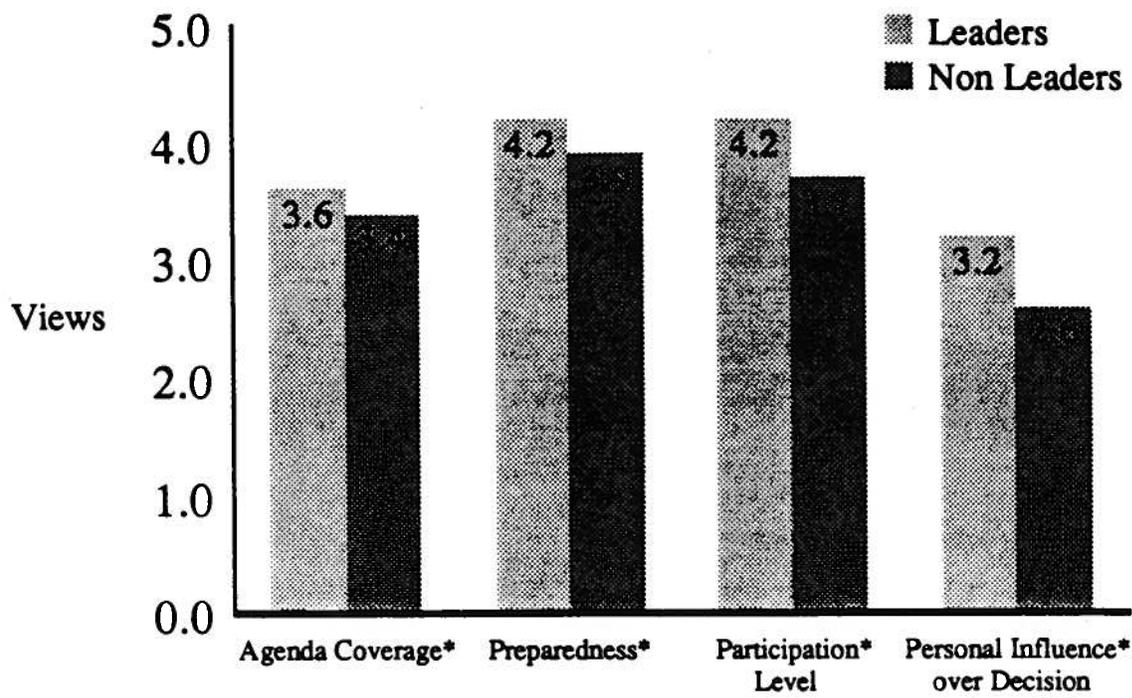
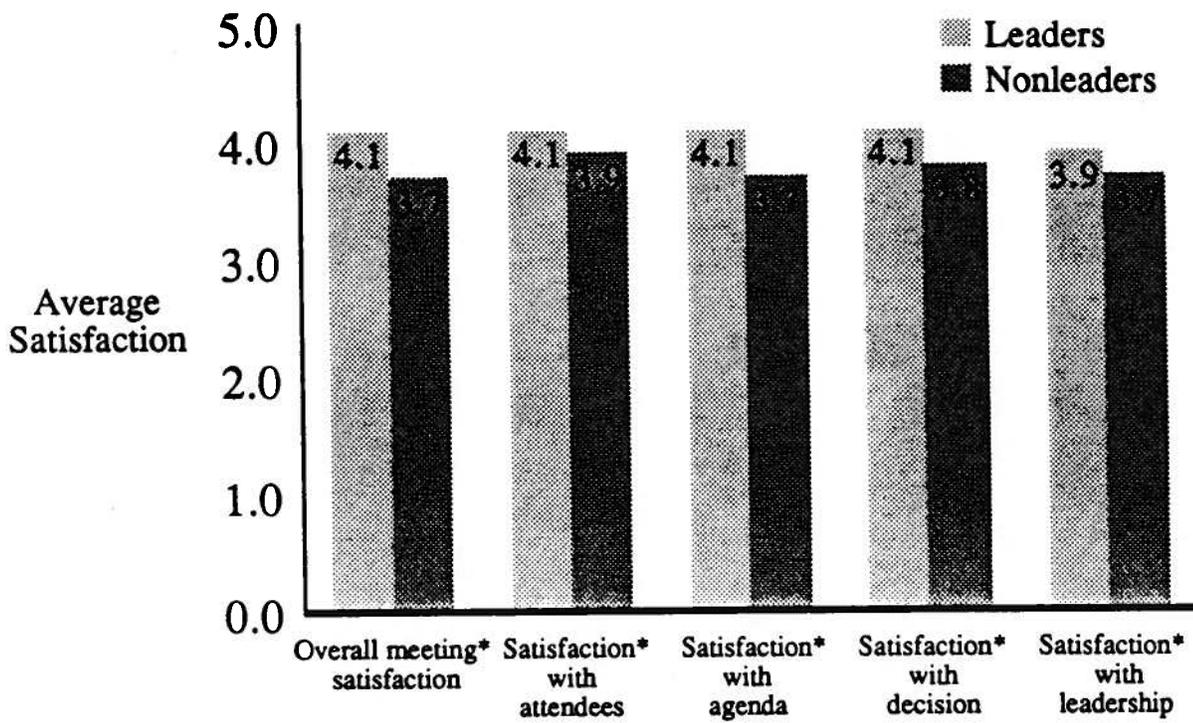Figure 53. Leaders' and nonleaders' views of meetings. * *p < .05*

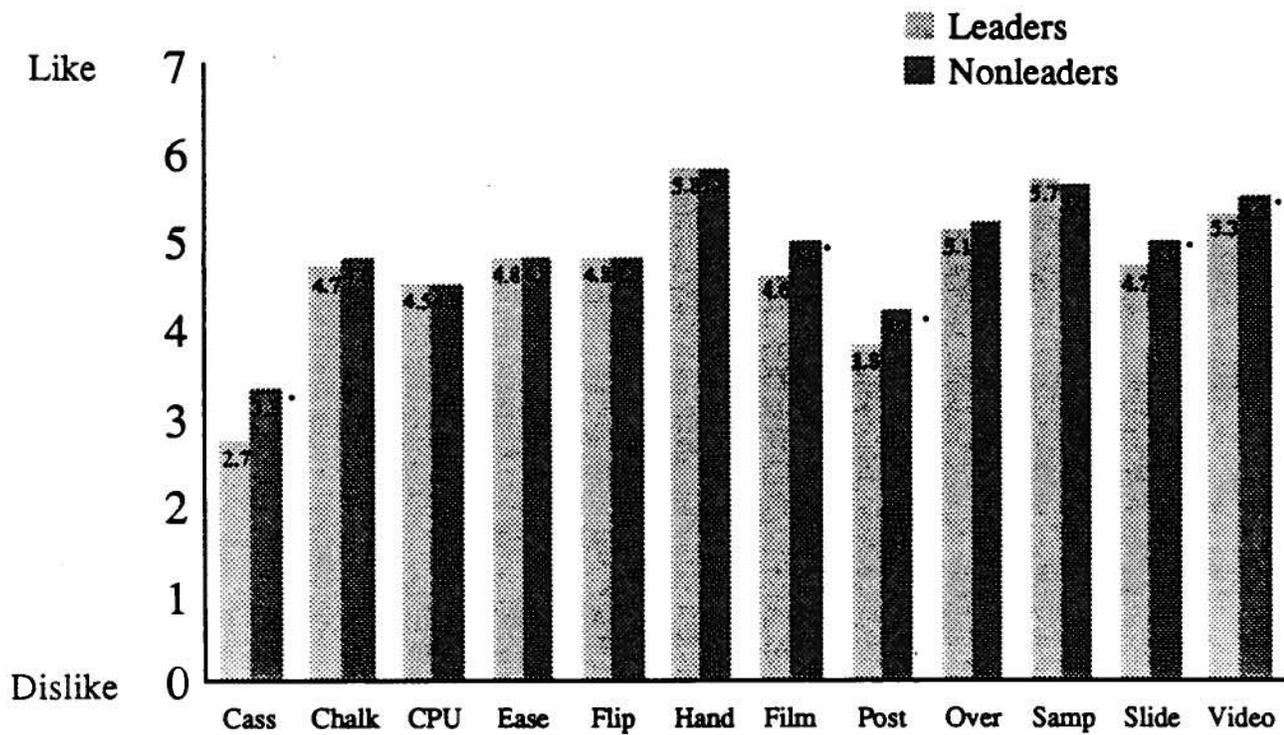Figure 54. Leaders' and nonleaders' satisfaction with meetings.   *p < .05

Figure 55. Leaders' and nonleaders' rating of
each presentation aid. *p < .05

meetings per day and the number of meetings per week. Also, there were a few differences in preferences for presentation aids.

Time Spent in Meetings Each Day. People reported the time at which the meeting they described began and the time at which it ended. These data were used to compute the length of time of meetings. Figure 56 shows that people in smaller companies spent much less time in meetings each day than people in larger companies. The average length of time of meetings that people in small companies reported was 54 minutes, while the average length of time for the meetings reported by people in large companies was an hour and 42 minutes. People in medium sized companies reported spending an hour and 16 minutes, an amount roughly half way between the small and large companies.

Meetings Attended per Week. The findings pertaining to the number of meetings attended each week in small, medium, and large companies is presented in Figure 57. On average, people in small companies attended 2.6 meetings per week, while people in medium companies attended 2.8 meetings. This difference is not significant. However, people in large companies attended an average of 4 meetings per week. This amount is statistically different from the number of meetings that people attended in small and medium sized companies.

Preferences for Presentation Aids. Figure 58 presents the results of preferences for presentation aids. There were almost no differences in preferences by company size. One major exception to this general finding occurred in the case of overheads. People in medium sized organizations
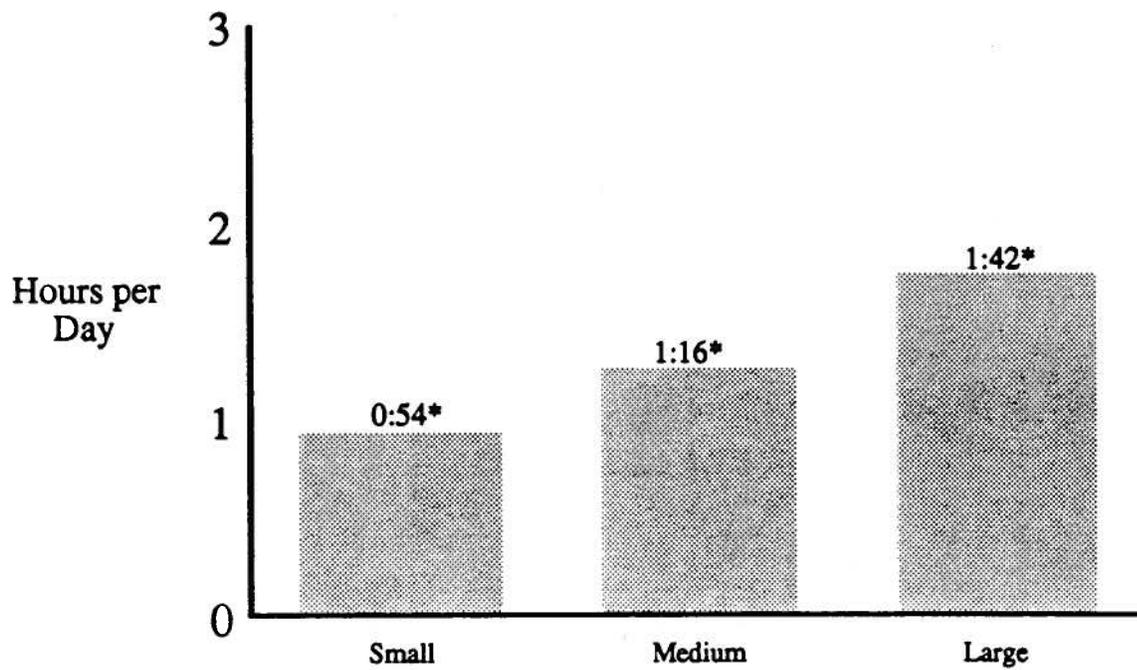
Figure 56. Amount of time people spend in meetings each
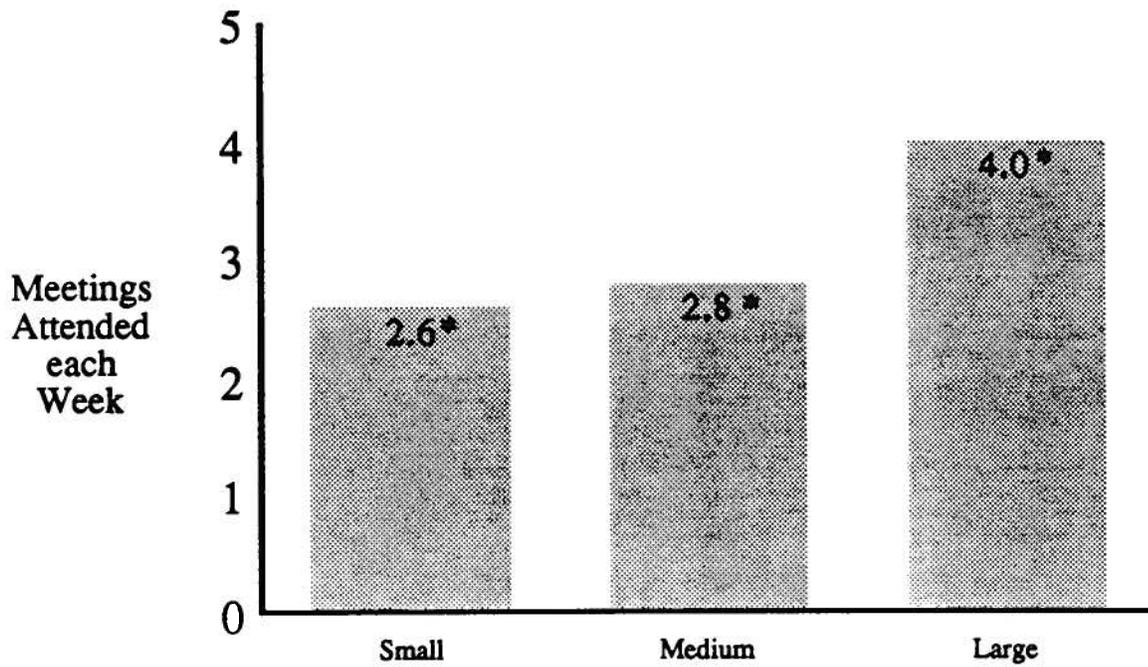day in small, medium, and large companies.   * $p < .05$

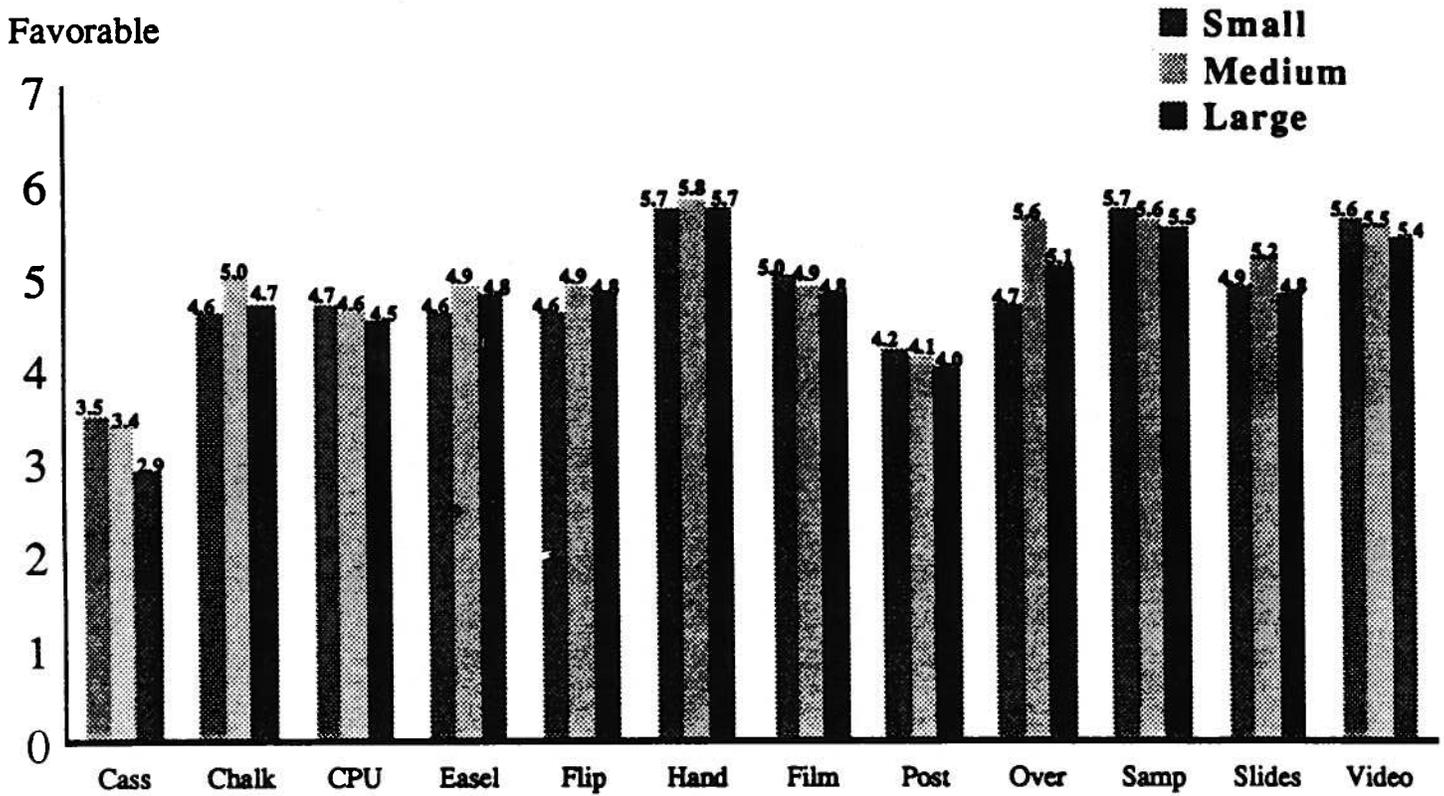Figure 57. Number of meetings attended each week in small, medium, and large companies. *p < .05

Figure 58. Preferences for presentation aids in small, medium and large companies.

significantly prefered overheads (5.6) over those in small (4.7) and large (5.1) companies. Further, their preference for overheads was close to that of the most favored presentation aid, handouts (5.8) in medium sized companies.

Selected Results for Public and Private Sector Organizations

Like the results for company size, there were few differences in responses to the survey for people from different sectors of the economy. In particular, there were no significant results for preferences for presentation aids. The two interesting results are presented in this section. They pertained to time spent in meetings each day and to the number of days notice given for meetings.

Time Spent in Meetings each Day. Figure 59 reports results for amount of time people spent in meeting in private, public, and nonprofit organizations. People in nonprofit organizations spent nearly two hours per day (1:53) in meetings. People in private organizations spent an hour and a half (1:32) while people in public organizations spent 45 minutes. These amounts of time spent in meetings are all statistically different from each other.

Number of Days of Notification. Figure 60 indicates that public sector employees received the greatest notification of meetings (15.2 days). Nonprofit employees received twelve days (12.1) and private sctor firms gave approximately nine (8.9) days of notice.

Number of Meetings Attended. People in private organizations attended the largest average number of meetings per week, 3.7. People in
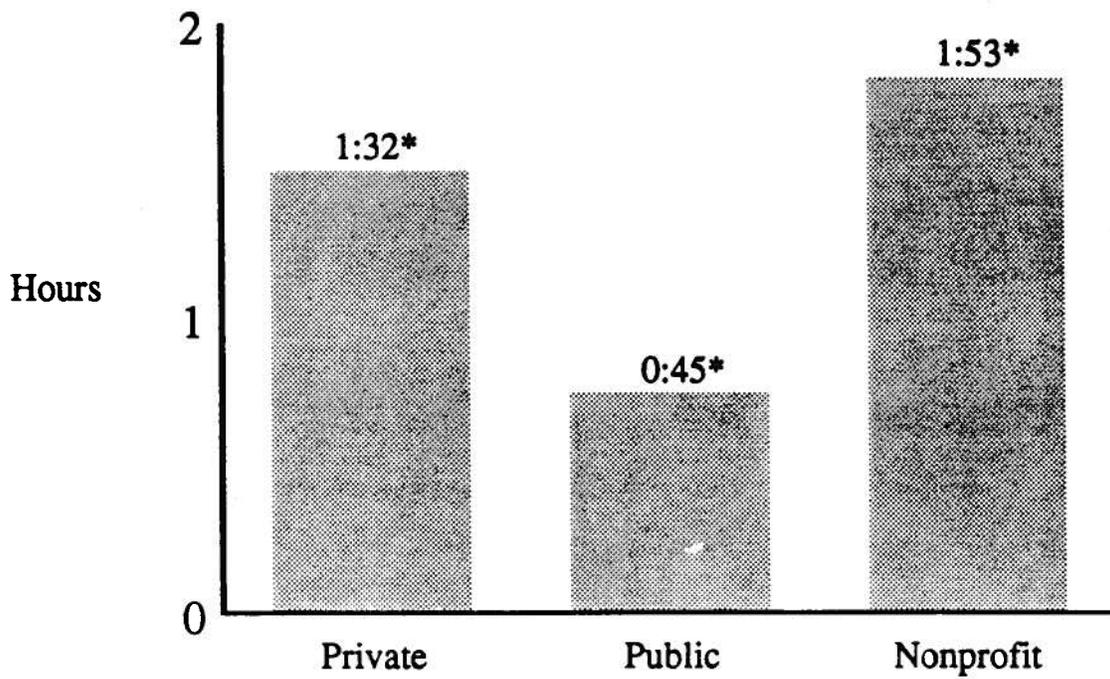
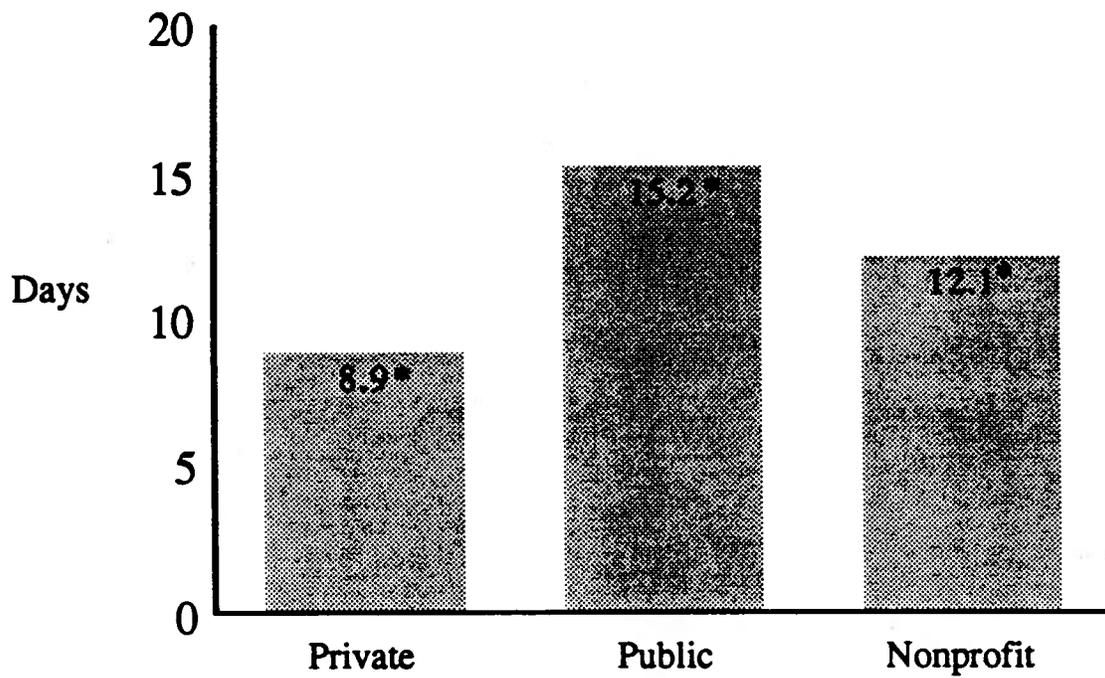Figure 59. Time spent in meetings each day in three sectors of the economy. *p < .05

Figure 60. Days notification that meeting would take place in three sectors of the economy. * *p < .05*

nonprofit organizations attended an average of 3.3 meetings per week. People in public sector organizations attended only 2.3 meetings per week. All differences reported in Figure 61 are statistically significant.

Percent of Time that Graphics were Used. Graphics were used much more frequently in private sector than in nonprofit or public organizations. As Figure 62 indicates private section organizations used graphics nearly 17% of the time while nonprofit organizations used them 13% and public sector organizations used them only 10% of the time.

Selected Results for Presentation Aids

A number of interesting results have already been reported about presentation aids, e.g., different preferences for presentation aids between managers and nonmanagers. This section describes a few additional results.

Correlation of Meeting Satisfaction with Presentation Aids. Figure 63 reports the findings on the relations between meeting satisfaction and the effectiveness of various presentation aids. Four items were based on a very small number of responses and should be interpreted with caution: audio cassettes, computer displays, motion pictures, and posters. As Figure 63 shows actual samples ($r = .50$), handouts ($r = .49$), overheads ($r = .45$), and videos ($r = .44$) were the presentation aids most highly associated with meeting staisfaction. Chalk boards ($r = .21$) were least highly associated with meeting satisfaction.

Correlation of Preparation and Effectiveness of Presentation Aids. Figure 64 shows the correlation of amount of preparation with ratings of
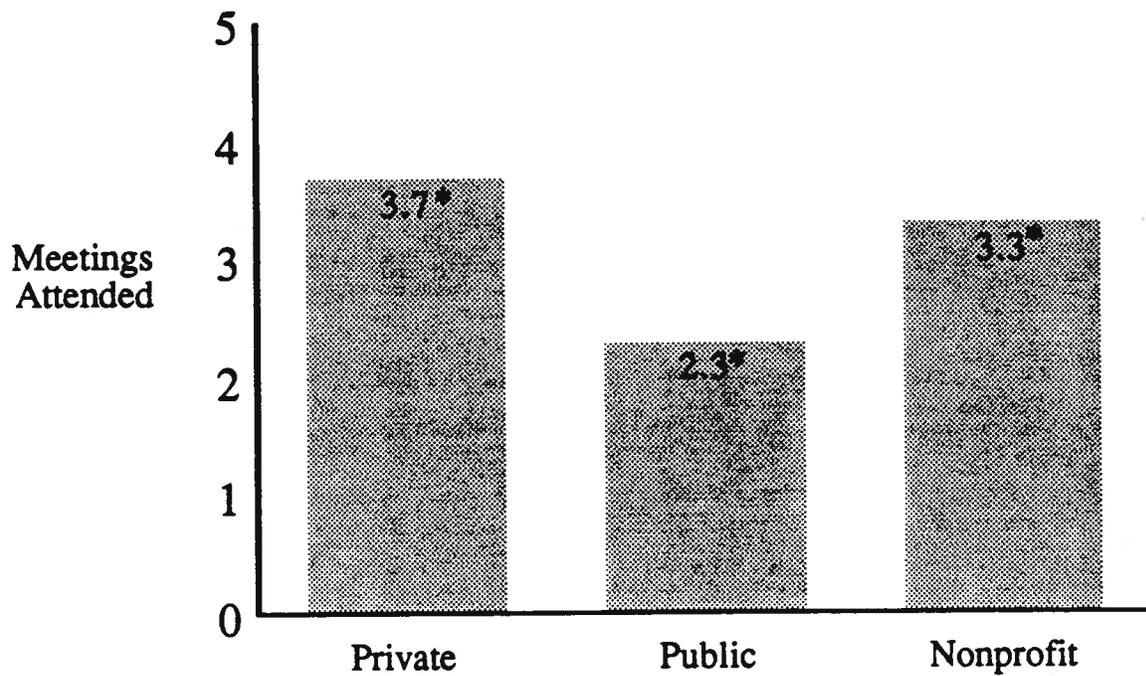
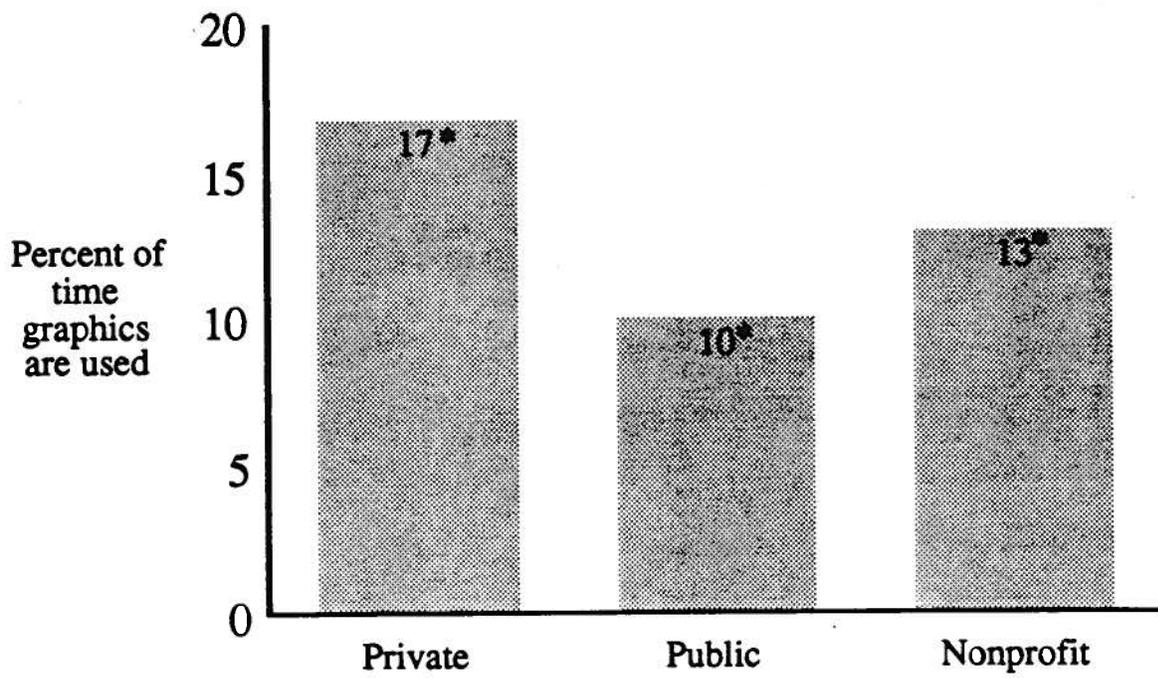Figure 61. Number of meetings normally attended in a week by sector of economy. *p < .05

Figure 62. Percent of time that graphics are used in
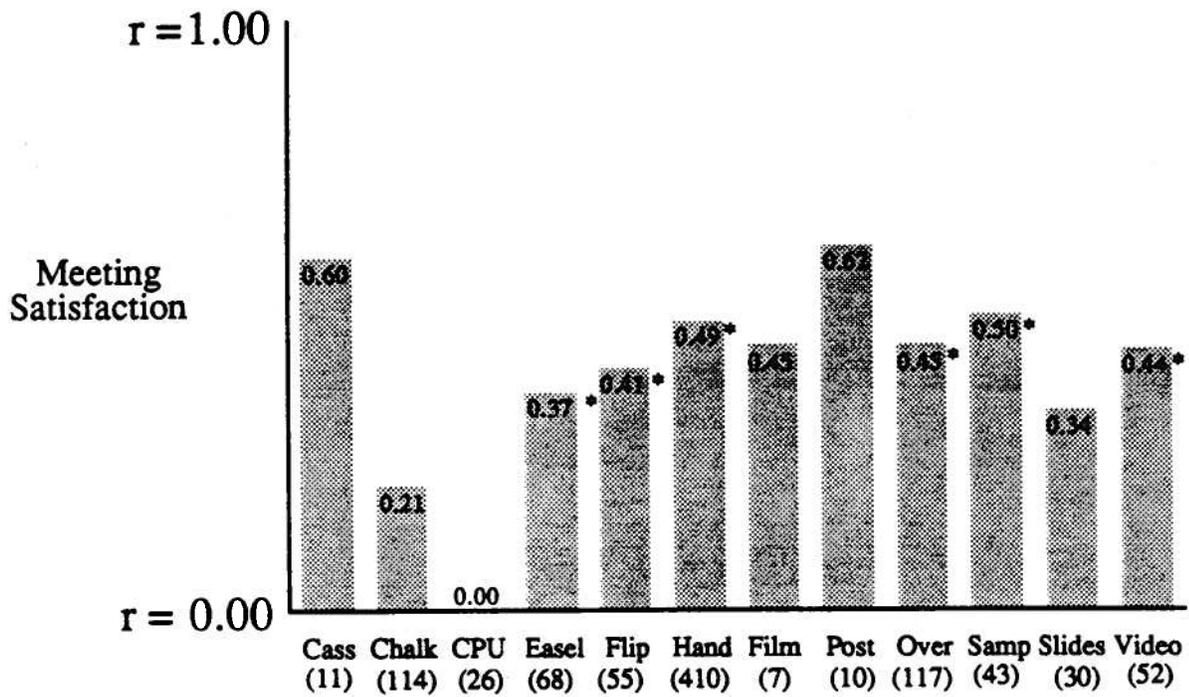three sectors of the economy.   * *p < .05*

Figure 63. Correlation of meeting satisfaction with effectiveness of presentation aids. *p < .05
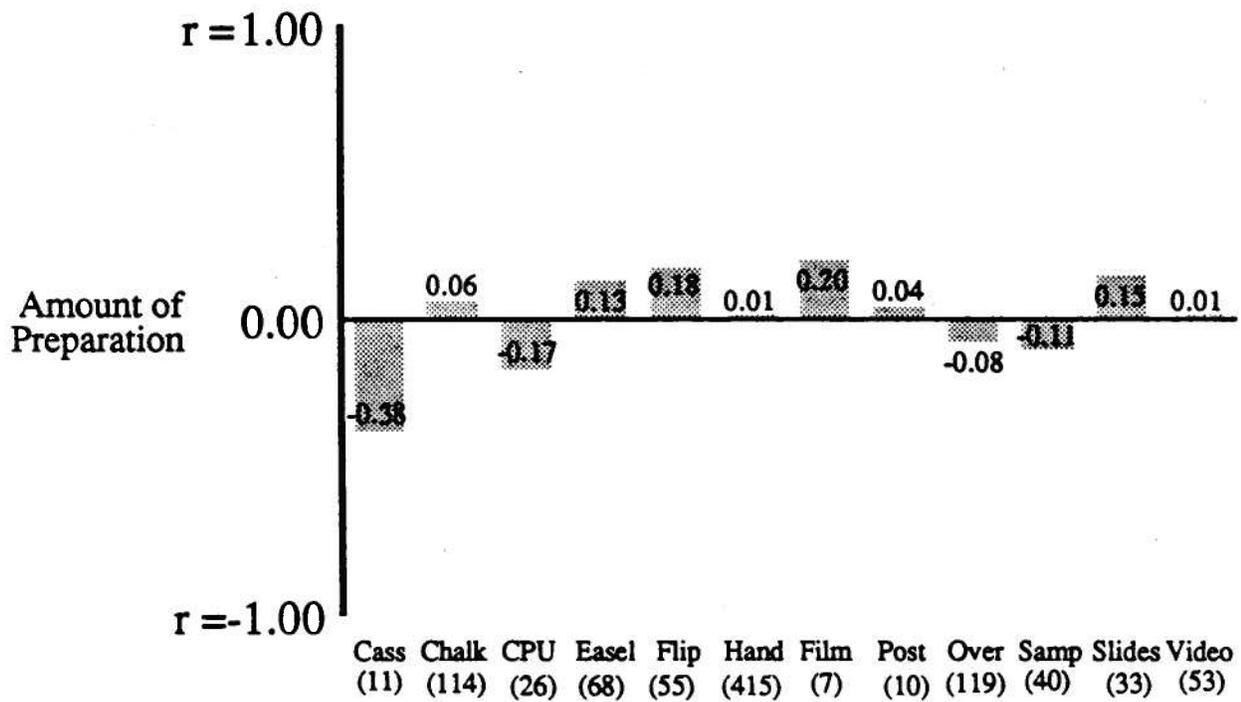
Figure 64. Correlation of amount of preparation with effective use of presentation aids. (all nonsignificant)

effective use of each presentation aid. None of the correlations were statistically significant indicating that amount of preparation was not related to ratings of effectiveness.

Use of Presentation Aids for Different Amounts of Meeting Notification. The data on use of presentation aids were analyzed for different amounts of notification of meetings. Figure 65 presents the results for the four aids that were significant: easel, handouts, overheads, and slides. Those people who used these presentation aids had received several more days notification than those who did not use them. Length of notification was not a factor in the use of the other presentation aids.

Conclusion

The research presented in this report provides a comprehensive, detailed picture of meetings in corporate America. This includes a profile of the typical meeting, a description of essential characteristics of meetings, evaluations of various presentational aids, a profile of meeting leaders, and assessments of factors that lead to satisfaction with meetings.

Taken together, these results support the view that meetings are complex, interactive systems of control. They constitute one of the primary tools for accomplishing the work of an organization. Meetings occur frequently in organizations. They consume a considerable amount of time. They are focused on a wide variety of topics and purposes and produce many different kinds of outcomes. Satisfaction with meetings is closely related to satisfaction with work. And there are important differences in the ways meetings are managed.
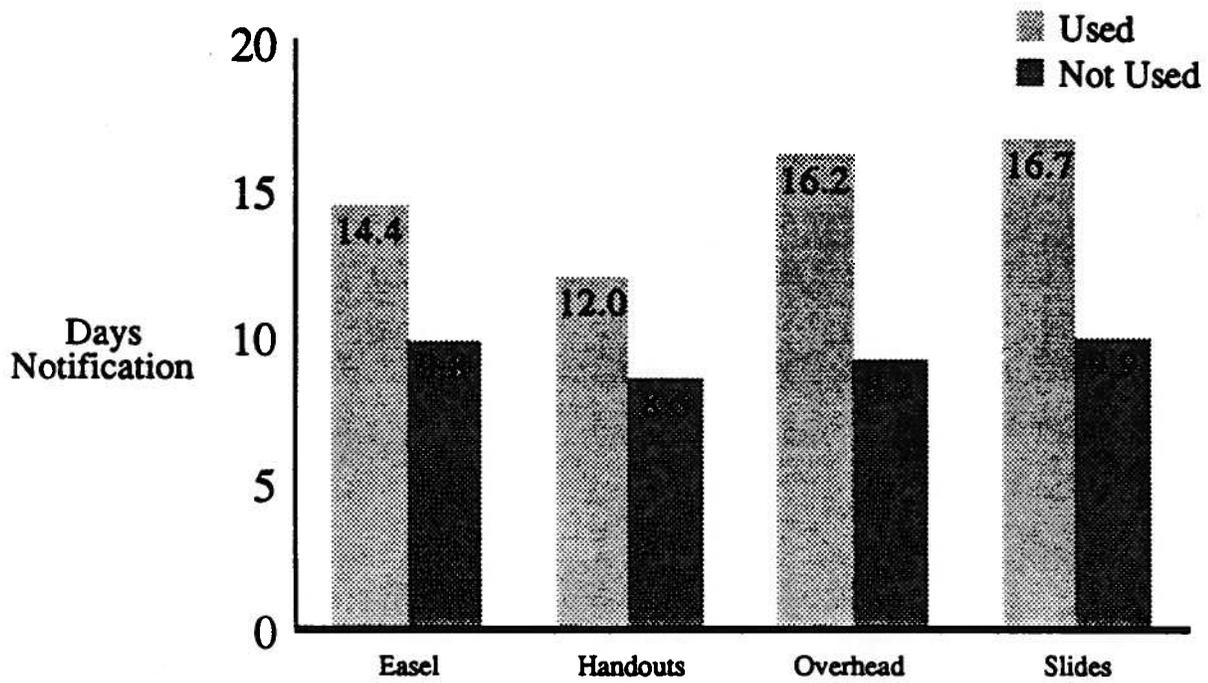
Figure 65. Use of presentation materials by amount of notification.
(All four significant at $p < .05$; all other differences nonsignificant)

Despite the richness of the picture provided by this report, it is only a start. The data constitute the conceptual equivalent of a snapshot of meetings taken at a single point in time. More dynamic and longitudinal research should be conducted. For example, if meetings are to be viewed as control systems, then meetings that are linked by important decisional topics should be studied together. Decision making is one of the primary outcomes of meetings, yet it often requires a series of meetings to define the nature of the issue, obtain the required information, negotiate outcomes, and implement the decision. Our understanding of how meetings work will always contain major gaps until a full set of meetings that constitute the entire system are studied together.

Meetings were defined in this research as a scheduled gathering of three or more people to conduct business relevant to their organization. This definition excluded two person meetings. Yet much business is conducted in the one-on-one context. Research should be conducted on two person meetings to augment the findings of the present report. Further, the notion of "a scheduled gathering" focused people on face-to-face meetings. Electronic forms of meetings are becoming an important aspect of meetings in many companies. Future research should focus on the electronic form of meetings.

The research presented in this report provided a large descriptive taxonomy of meetings in corporate America. Now that the essential basic facts have been established, future work should focus on narrower aspects

of meetings. Studies should develop predictive models of meeting effectiveness and other important aspects of meetings.

Schwartzmann's (1987) observation that meetings will become an essential focus of organizational study was perceptive. The limited research available so far, including the present research, indicates that there is yet much to learn about meetings. Further, it suggests that what there is to learn is likely to have high payoff.

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