

Directions: In this section, you are going to read a passage with ten statements attached to it. Each statement contains information given in one of the paragraphs. Identify the paragraph from which the information is derived. You may choose a paragraph more than once. Each paragraph is marked with a letter. Answer the questions by marking the corresponding letter on *Answer Sheet 2*.

Blame your worthless workdays on meeting recovery syndrome

- A) Phyllis Hartman knows what it's like to make one's way through the depths of office meeting hell. Managers at one of her former human resources jobs arranged so many meetings that attendees would fall asleep at the table or intentionally arrive late. With hours of her day blocked up with unnecessary meetings, she was often forced to make up her work during overtime. "I was actually working more hours than I probably would have needed to get the work done," says Hartman, who is founder and president of PGHR Consulting in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.
- B) She isn't alone in her frustration. Between 11 million and 55 million meetings are held each day in the United States, costing most organisations between 7% and 15% of their personnel budgets. Every week, employees spend about six hours in meetings, while the average manager meets for a staggering 23 hours.
- C) And though experts agree that traditional meetings are essential for making certain decisions and developing strategy, some employees view them as one of the most unnecessary parts of the workday. The result is not only hundreds of billions of wasted dollars, but an annoyance of what organisational psychologists call "meeting recovery syndrome (MRS)": time spent cooling off and regaining focus after a useless meeting. If you run to the office kitchen to get some relief with colleagues after a frustrating meeting, you're likely experiencing meeting recovery syndrome.
- D) Meeting recovery syndrome is a concept that should be familiar to almost anyone who has held a formal job. It isn't ground-breaking to say workers feel fatigued after a meeting, but only in recent decades have scientists deemed the condition worthy of further investigation. With its links to organisational efficiency and employee wellbeing, MRS has attracted the attention of psychologists aware of the need to understand its precise causes and cures.
- E) Today, in so far as researchers can hypothesise, MRS is most easily understood as a slow renewal of finite mental and physical resources. When an employee sits through an ineffective meeting their brain power is essentially being drained away. Meetings drain vitality if they last too long, fail to engage employees or turn into one-sided lectures. The conservation of resources theory, originally proposed in 1989 by Dr Stevan Hobfoll, states that psychological stress occurs when a person's resources are threatened or lost. When resources are low, a person will shift into defence to conserve their remaining supply. In the case of office meetings, where some of employees' most valuable resources are their focus, alertness and motivation, this can mean an abrupt halt in productivity as they take time to recover.
- F) As humans, when we transition from one task to another on the job—say from sitting in a meeting to doing normal work—it takes an effortful cognitive switch. We must detach ourselves from the previous task and expend significant mental energy to move on. If we are already drained to dangerous levels, then making the mental switch to the next thing is extra tough. It's common to see people cyber-loafing after a frustrating meeting, going and getting coffee, interrupting a colleague and telling them about the meeting, and so on.

- G) Each person's ability to recover from horrible meetings is different. Some can bounce back quickly, while others carry their fatigue until the end of the workday. Yet while no formal MRS studies are currently underway, one can loosely speculate on the length of an average employee's lag time. Switching tasks in a non-MRS condition takes about 10 to 15 minutes. With MRS, it may take as long as 45 minutes on average. It's even worse when a worker has several meetings that are separated by 30 minutes. "Not enough time to transition in a non-MRS situation to get anything done, and in an MRS situation, not quite enough time to recover for the next meeting," says researcher Joseph Allen. "Then, add the compounding of back-to-back bad meetings and we may have an epidemic on our hands."
- H) In an effort to combat the side effects of MRS, Allen, along with researcher Joseph Mroz and colleagues at the University of Nebraska-Omaha, published a study detailing the best ways to avoid common traps, including a concise checklist of do's and don'ts applicable to any workplace. Drawing from around 200 papers to compile their comprehensive list, Mroz and his team may now hold a remedy to the largely undefined problem of MRS.
- I) Mroz says a good place to start is asking ourselves if our meetings are even necessary in the first place. If all that's on the agenda is a quick catch-up, or some non-urgent information sharing, it may better suit the group to send around an email instead. "The second thing I would always recommend is keep the meeting as small as possible," says Mroz. "If they don't actually have some kind of immediate input, then they can follow up later. They don't need to be sitting in this hour-long meeting." Less time in meetings would ultimately lead to more employee engagement in the meetings they do attend, which experts agree is a proven remedy for MRS.
- J) Employees also feel taxed when they are invited together to meetings that don't inspire participation, says Cliff Scott, professor of organisational science. It takes precious time for them to vent their emotions, complain and try to regain focus after a pointless meeting—one of the main traps of MRS. Over time as employees find themselves tied up in more and more unnecessary meetings—and thus dealing with increasing lag times from MRS—the waste of workday hours can feel insulting.
- K) Despite the relative scarcity of research behind the subject, Hartman has taught herself many of the same tricks suggested in Mroz's study, and has come a long way since her days of being stuck with unnecessary meetings. The people she invites to meetings today include not just the essential employees, but also representatives from every department that might have a stake in the issue at hand. Managers like her, who seek input even from non-experts to shape their decisions, can find greater support and cooperation from their workforce, she says.
- L) If an organisation were to apply all 22 suggestions from Mroz and Allen's findings, the most noticeable difference would be a stark decrease in the total number of meetings on the schedule, Mroz says. Less time in meetings would ultimately lead to increased productivity, which is the ultimate objective of convening a meeting. While none of the counter-MRS ideas have been tested empirically yet, Allen says one trick with promise is for employees to identify things that quickly change their mood from negative to positive. As simple as it sounds, finding a personal happy place, going there and then coming straight back to work might be key to facilitating recovery.
- M) Leaders should also see themselves as "stewards of everyone else's valuable time", adds Steven Rogelberg, author of *The Surprising Science of Meetings*. Having the skills to foresee potential traps and treat employees' endurance with care allows leaders to provide effective short-term deterrents to MRS.
- N) Most important, however, is for organisations to awaken to the concept of meetings being flexible, says Allen. By reshaping the way they prioritise employees' time, companies can eliminate the very sources of

MRS in their tracks.

36. Although employees are said to be fatigued by meetings, the condition has not been considered worthy of further research until recently.
37. Mroz and his team compiled a list of what to do and what not to do to remedy the problem of MRS.
38. Companies can get rid of the root cause of MRS if they give priority to workers' time.
39. If workers are exhausted to a dangerous degree, it is extremely hard for them to transition to the next task.
40. Employees in America spend a lot of time attending meetings while the number of hours managers meet is several times more.
41. Phyllis Hartman has learned by herself many of the ways Mroz suggested in his study and made remarkable success in freeing herself from unnecessary meetings.
42. When meetings continue too long or don't engage employees, they deplete vitality.
43. When the time of meetings is reduced, employees will be more engaged in the meetings they do participate in.
44. Some employees consider meetings one of the most dispensable parts of the workday.
45. According to Mroz, if all his suggestions were applied, a very obvious change would be a steep decrease in the number of meetings scheduled.