

SWEDES@ MEETINGS.SE



**COLIN
MOON**



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Swedes@meetings.se

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SWEDES ARE OBSESSED WITH MEETINGS

If there's a meeting Swedes will go to it. It's a national hobby.

Statistics show Swedes spend on average 25 % of their working time in a meeting. (And a recent survey reveals that 33 % of Swedes called to a meeting are wondering what they are doing there).

Yes, that's right. They spend a quarter of their working lives in meetings, and nearly as much time at coffee breaks – the famous *fika*. They often leave work early too. They have more holidays a year than an American has in a lifetime. Some of them work 'from home' several times a month. They're not in a hurry to make decisions.

And they are often away having babies.

So how on earth do Swedes continue to outperform most other industrialized nations?

It's a global mystery.

It must be all the meetings. So, let's have a closer look at Swedes @ meetings.

THE WEEKEND

Three words sum it up **FREDAGSMYS**,
LÖRDAGSGODIS, and **SÖNDAGSÅNGEST**.

Cosy and comfortable on Friday, sugary sweets on Saturday and, on Sunday, an anxious countdown to Monday morning.

MÅNDAGSMÖTET

The Monday morning meeting. Why have a meeting? Because it's Monday.



– LET'S SEE I'VE UNDERSTOOD THIS – YOU WANT TO DO 12 MONTHS WORK IN JANUARY AND THEN BE OFF FOR THE REST OF THE YEAR?

– YES, IF I SKIP THE COFFEE BREAKS, WORK THROUGH WEDNESDAY AND THURSDAY NIGHTS AND STAY AWAY FROM MEETINGS, I SHOULD MAKE IT.

SWEDES GIVE THEIR MEETINGS NAMES

ETT PLANERINGSMÖTE – a meeting to plan a lot of other meetings.

ETT FÖRMÖTE – a meeting to discuss the next meeting.

ETT START-UP MÖTE – a meeting to discuss what will be done.

ETT INFORMATIONSMÖTE – a meeting to discuss what is being done.

ETT UPPFÖLJNINGSMÖTE – a follow-up meeting to discuss what has been done.

ETT TELEFONMÖTE – a meeting to avoid meeting in a meeting.



**– IT'S A BIT QUIET IN HERE. I THINK I'LL TALK
LOUDLY ON MY MOBILE.**

ETT PERSONALMÖTE – a meeting to let staff know they are at the meeting.

ETT ARBETSMÖTE – a working meeting to prevent people from, well, working.

ETT BESLUTSMÖTE – a meeting to make a decision. (Just joking – this is Sweden).

ETT ÅRSMÖTE – an annual meeting. It comes only once year (rather like Bengt-Åke's sex life).

ETT KUNDMÖTE – a meeting with someone called a customer who wants something called service.

ETT SÄLJMÖTE – a meeting for sales people to do more of that thing which makes profits go up.

ETT KRISMÖTE – a crisis meeting to discuss why everybody is always at meetings.

ETT INSTÄLLT MÖTE – there is no meeting!
It's been cancelled. There's an ugly gap in
the schedule.

ETT EXTRAINSATT MÖTE – a new meeting to
fill that ugly gap in the schedule.

DEFINITION OF A SWEDISH ORGASM

En **DUBBELBOKNING** – two meetings at the same time.

PLANNING A MEETING

Planning is a way of life.

There are not many spontaneous meetings as spontaneity is hard to plan for. If you can't plan it, then it probably won't happen.

Most meetings are planned well in advance. This, in Swedish, is called '**FRAMFÖRHÅLLNING**'

Imagine two Swedes talking:

SWEDE 1: – Shall we plan a meeting during week 28 in the year 2022?

SWEDE 2: – *Vilken framförhållning!* (What fantastic long-term planning!)

It's the greatest of compliments.

ORGANISED CRIME IN SWEDEN



- OK, BENGT, I'VE GOT A WINDOW WEDNESDAY MORNING IN WEEK 34. ANY CHANCE OF A SQUEEZING IN ROBBERY?

THE INVITATION TO THE MEETING

It's called a **KALLELSE**, direct into your Outlook planner.

For many Swedes, a meeting is rather like family reunion. You may not really want to go, but you are upset if they are not invited.

THE AGENDA

A meeting without an agenda is like a restaurant without a menu. Swedes stick religiously to the agenda and you can always notice them at international meetings as they 'tick off' – **DE PRICKAR AV** – each point in order on the agenda after everybody has taken turns discussing it.

Not sticking to an agenda may cause the meeting to drag on – **ATT DRA UT PÅ TIDEN**. And that, my friends, is considered a corporate crime.

THE END OF THE MEETING

The next to last point on the agenda is a favourite among Swedes. It's the date and time of the next meeting.

Va' bra! Another meeting. It is proof that life will continue as they know and love it.

The last point on the agenda is 'any other questions' – **ÖVRIGA FRÅGOR**. To anybody who knows the Swedish code, this means 'Don't you dare!'. Spontaneous questions at the end of a meeting make people nervous.

If you had a question you should have asked it at the 'pre-meeting' – **FÖRMÖTE** – the meeting before the meeting.

THE LEG-STRETCHER

This is not time for a walk in the forest. This is a brief break. Someone once asked me if they could have a 'bone-stretcher'. (The Swedish word for leg and bone is the same).

THE SKYPE MEETING

You should only arrange a skype meeting if the other people are in Eslöv, Borlänge or Baghdad . You should always try to meet the people face-to-face if they are in Florida, Bermuda or Sydney.

FIKA

Swedes and their coffee ...

Saying 'I don't like coffee' in Sweden is as offensive as 'Puppies aren't cute' and 'Dolphins are tasty with noodles'.

There are three kinds of sin in Sweden – a big sin, a small sin and saying no to a coffee break.”

If a Swede had written the Bible then Jesus would have turned the water into coffee.

If you really hate coffee, then you have three choices (a) change your mind and start loving it (b) invent a very elaborate medical excuse for not drinking it or (c) say you're pregnant.



– WHILE WE'RE ON THE SUBJECT OF 'BEST PLACE TO WORK', MAY I REMIND YOU THAT THE COFFEE MACHINE HAS BEEN OUT OF ORDER FOR AN HOUR.

THE FIKARUM

Two pieces of advice when dealing with Swedes: Never delay the end of a meeting or the beginning of a coffee break.

They have their coffee break in the holiest of places – the **FIKARUM**,

The **FIKARUM** provides all the free team-building that companies otherwise pay thousands of kronor for at conferences.

In the **FIKARUM** Swedes talk informally about their work and their private lives. They listen to one another, freely discuss and keep calm. Imagine if they abolished the UN and set up a global **FIKARUM** instead. There would be world peace within 15 minutes.

CELEBRATION COFFEE

It's February and Karin's big birthday She has finally had to reveal her real age. Her colleagues are surprised to find out she is only 60. She offers everyone a Swedish delicacy. Monsieur de Villepain, from the French office, is paying a visit and is invited to join in. He takes one look at Karin's offering and says:

– *Ah! Des brioches suédoises garnies de pâte d'amandes et crème fouettée!*

In Swedish it's called a *semla*. It's a kind of delicious cream burger.

NO CONFLICTS PLEASE

They didn't make Rome a great empire by holding meetings. They did it by crushing all those who opposed them.

Two hundred years of neutrality have taught Swedes not to crush ... or to rush.

They have learnt how not to say yes or no to anything too quickly as this might lead to disagreement. This means that instead of saying *nej* or *ja* , they combine the two and say **NJA** which means 'yes-but-no-but-yes-but'. It's like a 'definite maybe'.

PERFORMANCE REVIEW



**GETTING FEEDBACK FROM THE BOSS CAN BE A
SENSITIVE BUSINESS.**

PEOPLE AT THE MEETING

HASSAN is on a government-financed-introductory-job-practice-scheme-for-the-newly-arrived and doesn't cost a krona. It's called **MÅNGFALD** – diversity in the workplace. Hassan is invited to all the meetings – it's called **INKLUDERING**.

MÅRTEN, the boss, is not a decision-maker. He suffers from what, in Swedish, is sometimes called **BESLUTSIMPOTENS** – basically he doesn't have the balls to say yes or no.

JOAKIM has a new title: Business Development Coordinator. And ...

MALIN, the new Strategic Optimization Director. Titles with more than three words are always impressive.

Today's visitor: **BERNARD B. DEMILL SR.**, member of the executive board, HQ California. The man's a genius. That's not just our opinion. It's his too.

METTE-MARIE MAELE is from somewhere outside the EU called Norway. It's nearly 4pm, so she's getting ready to leave the building.

ERIK is a **SKÅNING** – a Scanian, which is halfway between a Dane and a human being.

MEHMET considers himself an **IDÉSPRUTA**. Translated, it means he likes to ejaculate ideas.

WHAT TO DO WITH A PROBLEM

Save it for the **MÅNDAGSMÖTE**. There they can raise it – **LYFTA FRÅGAN**. They can own it – **ÄGA FRÅGAN**. Then they can see where it lands and then park it – **PARKERA DEN**. And then they do something quite curious. They marinate it.

This is modern Swedish business talk.

SOUNDS AT A MEETING

Swedes often take part in meetings by making sounds.

1. **JAJAJA** ... (yah-yah-yah) Thank you, I think we've got the picture.
2. **JAHAHA!** (ya-haaah) It's taken you 47 pp slides, but *now* I get what you're talking about.
3. **JODÅ** ... (you-doh) Oh yes it is.
4. **NEJDÅ** ... (neh-doh) Oh no it isn't.
5. **OJDÅ!** (oi-doh) I really wasn't expecting that.
6. **USCH DÅ!** (oosh-doh) Nasty.

7. **AJABAJA!** (*aye-ah-bye-ah*) I don't think you should be doing that.
8. **BLÄH!** (*bleh*) Is this coffee American?
9. **FY!*** That's horrible! Get it out of here.
- * To achieve this sound, try saying the word 'few' while leaving out the 'e' sound in the middle. You'll end up with a duck-face but then you'll know you're doing it right.
Or ask a Swede to help.)
10. **NJAAA** ... (*n-yaah*) Maybe no, maybe yes. Maybe perhaps.
11. **ÄSCH!** (*esh*) You mean *me*? Brilliant at my job? I just turn up every day.
12. **AJAJAJ!** (*aye-aye-aye*) That looked painful. Have you broken anything?

13. **NEJ MEN!** (*nay men*) Is it really you?
I've only ever seen you before in a
Skype meeting.
14. **NÅ?** (*naugh*) Do you have anything
worth saying in the matter?
15. **SÅDÄR JAI!** (*so-dare-yah*) That's it.
Slide 107 and my presentation is
ready.

P-WORDS

Swedes love buzzwords starting with 'p'. Favourites include *planering*, *process* and *projekt*.

LARS-ÅKE is an expert in people management, process management and project management. Basically if it starts with a 'p' he can clearly manage it.

If Swedes mention the word *process* then you'd better not be in a hurry.

Their most popular process is the process of getting everyone involved in everything whether they want to or not.

– **FÖRANKRINGSPROCESSEN**. The Americans call this 'getting all your ducks in a row'. This is a bit silly, as ducks would probably run and quack in all directions.

This process is of course followed by another – the slow process of making a decision – **BESLUTSPROCESSEN**. It is advisable to have some time on your hands for this. But, as Swedes say – **DET FÅR TA DEN TID DET TAR**, which means it has to take the time it takes. Like forever.

The climax of any process is actually doing it – **IMPLEMENTERINGSPROCESSEN**. After months of meetings someone says the magic **NU KÖR VI!**. They're off! And there's no stopping them. The world might change, but not the Swedes, not at this stage.

Oh, and then there's the **FÖRÄNDRINGS-PROCESS**. In English this is mostly referred to as change management. Someone once confused this with 'change the management', which seemed like a good idea at the time.

COMPANY VALUES



**OUR CORPORATE MISSION STATEMENT?
WE RAPE, WE KILL, WE STEAL.**

THE MEETINGS POLICY

Swedes also love the word '**POLICY**'. They have a policy for this and a policy for that. Some companies even have a policy for meetings – **EN MÖTESPOLICY**.

According to meetings experts (and there are many) this policy means that before arranging a meeting you have to ask yourself five questions:

1. **IS THIS MEETING NECESSARY?** (At a guess, probably not.)
2. **WHAT DO I WANT TO ACHIEVE?** (Surely not a decision?)
3. **WHO NEEDS TO BE THERE TO ACHIEVE IT?** (Half the people on the list minus the last two.)

4. **DO I HAVE THE PHYSICAL SPACE AND MATERIALS TO RUN A MEETING?**

(Preferably a meeting room bigger than the size of a shoe box. It's difficult to think 'outside the box' when you're sitting in one.)

5. **IS THE TIMING RIGHT?** (Not on a Friday afternoon, thank you.)

REASONS NOT TO ATTEND A MEETING

PIA VABBAR: she is at home taking care of her sick kids.

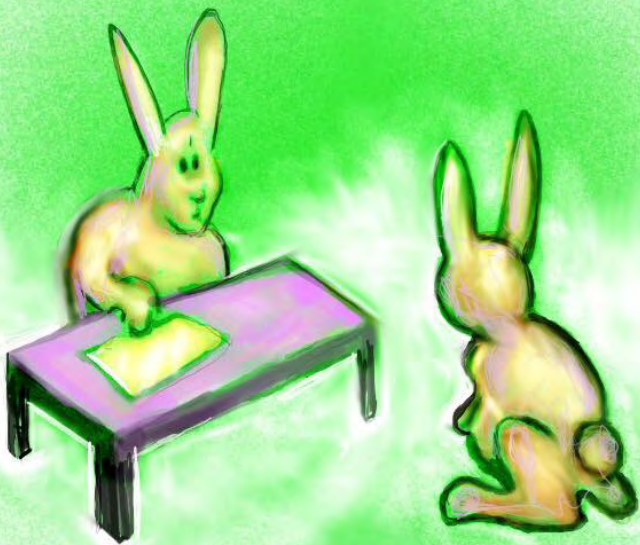
LARS VOBBAR: he is at home with sick kids but still answers mails.

CAMILLA VOFFAR: she is at home with her sick dog.

ANITA ARBETAR HEMIFRÅN: she works hard but nobody has actually seen her do it very often.

STEFAN is late because of the unexpected snow in November. It's called **SNÖKAOS**.

LENA only works 75 % of the time.



**- WHAT? PATERNITY LEAVE AGAIN?
THAT'S THE FIFTH TIME THIS YEAR!**

ANGELIKA is on permanent maternity leave. Nobody has seen her for the past three and a half years.

BERTIL is on a course. It's called **PROCESS-HANTERING**. There is a **PROCESS** for everything so someone has to learn how to deal with them all.

HASSAN has been stuck on a non-moving train between a suburb and Stockholm Central for four hours. It's called **STOPP I TRAFIKEN**.

LENA from Logistics is away and according to rumour she has outsourced herself to a Baltic state.

SVERKER is in another meeting. He has many balls in the air. It's called **MÅNGA BOLLAR I LUFTEN**.

TOMAS has **UTMATTNINGSDEPRESSION**: he is stressed out and has walked into the wall. (It's a Swedish thing).

This is **CARINA'S** week with kids from marriages 1 and 2 and her ex-mother-in-law from relationship 3. It's called **VARANNAN VECKA**.

STIG is at the monthly meeting of the local **RESTLESS LEGS FÖRBUNDET** (society). Swedes often meet up to share suffering.

STEN was last heard of on Twitter at 2.20 this morning with an update from Tallinn.

A MEETING HELD IN ENGLISH

Swedes are brilliant at English. However, they may at times be somewhat confused with business buzzwords that fly around at international meetings.

The monolingual **BERNARD B. DEMILL SR**, from HQ in Seattle, is in Sweden on a visit.

– Once we get all our ducks in a row, we are going have to push the peanut on this one, he says.

It sounds like English but not as Swedes know it.

Several people at the meeting have mentally left the building.

– OK, can we park this issue and keep our engine running?, says **BERNARD B.**

The Swedes would rather marinate it.

THE LUNCH MEETING

It's 11.27 – **ETT LUNCHMÖTE.**

Today's choice of lunches – a vegetarian dish, a GI option, a guaranteed gluten-free alternative, salad of the day, and a lunch which is just an ordinary lunch with brown sauce over it.

MARIE is a vegetarian and won't eat anything that can have children.

STIG is once again trying LCHF.

PERNILLA has gone stone-age and not eating anything people have eaten since 2000 BC.

LENA is basically allergic to food.

KAJSA has started on her 5:2 diet and today she is eating half a grapefruit whereas yesterday she ate half the pizzeria.

MALIN is environmentally aware and won't eat anything that has been transported outside a 30 km radius.

JAN-ERIK is simply just intolerant.

PIA is not allowed to eat fish as she thinks she is pregnant again.

MARIE is allergic to nuts and to **JAN-ERIK**.



**- YES, I AM AWARE IT'S WEEK 8 LARS,
SO THANKS FOR COMING IN AT SHORT NOTICE.**

QUOTES FROM AN INTERNATIONAL MEETING IN SWEDEN

"TAKE IT OR LEAVE IT? Are there any other options?"

"WE CALL IT FIKA. For us Swedes it's like black crack with a sweet treat."

"TYPICAL DANES, agree to everything at the meeting and then they go home and do something completely different."

"THE FINNISH GUY hasn't said a word all day. They say his name is Antti."

"IT'S PRECISELY 16.03. The Norwegians have left the building."

“NO, LUIGI, IT'S NOT A POLE DANCE. It's a picture of Swedish Midsummer.”

“No, Dimitri, **AW** is not short for Advanced Warfare.”

“You must come back to Sweden in the summer, it's the warmest day of the year.”

FRIDAY AFTERNOON

Of all the meetings this week this one will be the shortest. Guaranteed.

There's not much time-consuming consensus-seeking on a Friday afternoon. If they ran meetings like this all week every week, Swedes could probably leave for the weekend as early as Thursday lunchtime.

THE KICK-OFF

The mother of all meetings. In the early autumn or in early in the New Year Swedes go on their annual kick-off conferences.

Every kick-off has a theme such as 'Winning together', or 'Moving forward together' or 'Together we are one'. It's very often something they are supposed to do together. This time it's 'Coming together', which sounds like good fun.

THE CONFERENCE ROOM

Excessively large round tables. In theory: to promote group discussion.

(**IN PRACTICE:** half the people will always be facing the wrong way and half the people will never hear what the other half say).

THE MODERATOR

Last appeared on TV4 in 2006.

FIRST THING SAID BY MODERATOR

Mår ni bra?

Yes, we were fine, thank you.

(We're off to a brilliant start).

THE VIDEO GREETING

Pre-recorded welcome speech from alien CEO at HQ in Nevada. He says how valuable everybody is to the business, how this event is all about 'coming together' and why this meeting is so important.

(But he unfortunately can't be there himself).

A LONG PRESENTATION – THE BOSS

Message: the staff are the most valuable resource.

(Sure, baby, that's why he then takes 45 minutes to talk about digitalisation, robotization and IA).

A VERY LONG PRESENTATION – THE CIO

Message: The opportunities of globalization.

(Basically, whatever it is you do, some young person in India can do it more cheaply on a laptop).

A VERY, VERY LONG PRESENTATION – THE CFO

Figures, percentages, results and forecasts

(Aka paralysis by analysis).

COFFEE BREAK – FIKA! Priiisa GUUD!

REPEAT PRESENTATION FROM LAST YEAR, REPEAT PRESENTATION FROM EVERY YEAR – THE HR DIRECTOR

Message: Repeat core values:

Motivate through fear, Exploit for profit,
Cheat on clients, and Screw suppliers.

(Joke. It's the usual 'Commitment, Customer-focused and Creative' crap.

THE PANEL DISCUSSION (It's the law)

ON STAGE: Three tall round tables and a nervous management team. Mr. Moderator asks remarkably relevant questions and, amazingly, the team have clearly never heard them before!

(The hand mick is passed from one to another like an embarrassing dildo, held somewhere down by the navel).

Any questions from audience?

(No, Mr Moderator, there aren't. Ever).

THE MOTIVATIONAL SPEAKER 1

A sports personality from 1998. He's full of life-changing clichés – 'Everything is possible', Every journey starts with the first step'. 'The dream is in the team'.

(Message: Look at me, I once won a medal but you lot never will).

GROUP WORK – AKA THE 'WORKSHOP' OR THE 'BREAKOUT SESSION'

Discuss three questions for what seems like forever and for no particular reason with people whose opinions mean very little.

THE MOTIVATIONAL SPEAKER 2

A real Kinder egg! A speaker, a podcaster AND an author all in one! Swish at the ready as she's going to sell you her books during the next break.

You name it, she can talk about it
– **ARBETSGLÄDJE, POSITIV ÅTERKOPPLING,
FÖRÄNDRINGSARBETE, TEAMWORK,
MÅLSÄTTNING, LEDARSKAP** and she'll throw
in a little **STRESSHANTERING** if you ask for
it.

Sign up for her newsletter with 'concrete
tips' on how YOU should run YOUR life.
Need more? She's everywhere – Facebook,
Insta, Twitter, Youtube, TV4 and Tinder.

(Message: You can always try to be as
fantastic as I am, with the emphasis on 'try').

WRAP UP AND INFO REGARDING THE EVENING.

(And just when you think it's all over ...)



- WHY DO I HAVE TO GO FIRST?
- THERE'S NO "I" IN TEAMWORK, LENA.

TEAMBUILDING

THE PHILOSOPHY: people love a non-threatening change of pace and research shows that fellowship and playing games and finding solutions improves physical and mental health, lowers stress and blood pressure, produces endorphins, boosts our immune system and promotes a feeling of togetherness and belonging.

COUNTER PHILOSOPHY. As a team we're given challenges and create problems which we spend one and a half hours solving, problems none of us would have caused as individuals.



- I NEVER KNEW TEAM-BUILDING COULD BE SUCH FUN.

DRINKS, DINNER AND DISCO

Don't forget your drink coupons. They're in the plastic pouch hanging round your neck.

A FINAL WORD FROM ME BEFORE YOU RUN OFF TO YOUR NEXT MEETING

'What's the difference in English between 'EFFICIENT' and 'EFFECTIVE?' I am sometimes asked.

'EFFICIENCY is doing things right. EFFECTIVENESS is doing the right thing', I answer.

It's a justified question. In Swedish there is only one word – **EFFEKTIV**.

Swedes need only one word. They are excellent at both.

Swedes constantly go to meetings. In spite of this or because of this, people working

in Sweden are generally hard-working, diligent, industrious, reliable, dependable, steadfast, productive, committed, dedicated, and conscientious. Not bad, eh?

So, how do they do it?

Somehow, they fit in work around all the meetings and disturbances during the working week – and that is hard work! And hard work is something Swedes are good at.

Well, except on Friday afternoons. And preferably not on Wednesdays after 16.00 as Ingela has choir practice. And not early on Mondays as that's when they have their **MÅNDAGSMÖTE**.

When God gave out efficiency, Swedes were among the first in the queue.

Gotta love 'em. Puss och kram,

Colin



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

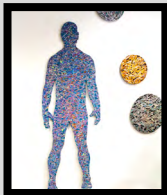
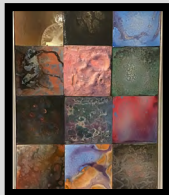
COLIN MOON HAS BEEN ON THE INTERNATIONAL SPEAKER CIRCUIT FOR OVER 20 YEARS. AWARDED 'SPEAKER OF THE YEAR' IN SWEDEN IN 2012, COLIN IS NOW SEMI-RETIRED. HOWEVER, HE WISHES IT TO BE KNOWN THAT HE OCCASIONALLY MAKES A GUEST APPEARANCE AS KEY-NOTE SPEAKER AT COMPANY EVENTS. PERHAPS YOURS IS THE NEXT ONE? FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE VISIT

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ABOUT THE ARTIST

LEIF JACOBSSON, GUEST ILLUSTRATOR, IS IN FACT A WELL-RENOWNED SWEDISH ARTIST. HIS WORKS INCLUDE METAL SCULPTURES, PAINTINGS AND A WHOLE LOT MORE. HIS PIECES OF ART ENHANCE THE WORKING ENVIRONMENT, ADORN HOME INTERIORS AND GRACE THE PUBLIC SPACE. VISIT LEIF'S HOMEPAGE AND INSTAGRAM AND LET YOURSELF BE INSPIRED.