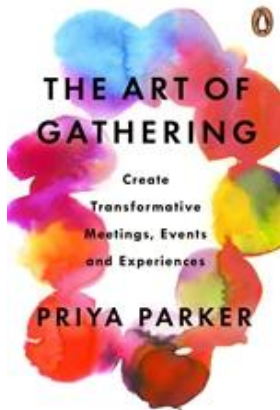


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## PM WORLD BOOK REVIEW <sup>1</sup>



**Book Title:** *The Art of Gathering: How We Meet and Why It Matters*

**Author:** Priya Parker

**Publisher:** Riverhead Books

**List Price:** \$18.00      **Format:** Audio Book, 320 pages

**Publication Date:** May 2018      **ISBN:** 9781594634932

**Reviewer:** Sandra Rojas, M.Ed., PMP

**Review Date:** June 2026

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### Introduction

Project managers live in meetings. From kickoffs and retrospectives to stakeholder reviews and working sessions, calendars fill quickly, and the expectation is clear: bring people together, make decisions, and move the work forward. Yet even well-run sessions can miss the mark.

In *The Art of Gathering: How We Meet and Why It Matters*, author Priya Parker argues that the category of a meeting is not the same as its purpose. For example, while the logistics of a kickoff are important in informing key individuals, the sessions can also be the first time a team gathers. In this case, the purpose may be to inform and connect a team. Until organizers define why people are coming together and what should be different when they leave, meetings risk becoming routine exercises that fill calendars without moving anything forward.

### Overview of Book Structure

*The Art of Gathering* is organized into eight chapters, each addressing a distinct phase of a gathering, from the decision to convene through planning, execution, and closure. Each chapter title signals Parker's approach and sets the tone for what follows. For example, a chapter called *Never Start a Funeral with Logistics* challenges the habit of opening sessions with housekeeping and logistics, arguing that how you begin signals what kind of experience the gathering will be. Parker draws from experiences ranging from large-scale gatherings to intimate dinner parties. For project managers who think in terms of process stages, the structure feels immediately familiar.

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<sup>1</sup> How to cite this work: Rojas, Sandra (2026). Art of Gathering: How We Meet and Why It Matters, book review, *PM World Journal*, Vol. XV, Issue VII, July.

## Highlights

Three ideas stood out as particularly relevant to project management practice:

**Start with a Purpose.** A gathering should name the specific need, tension, or decision it exists to address, not just the topic on the agenda. For project managers, this means asking: what needs to be true at the end of this session that is not true right now? Who is invited, what the invitation communicates, how the session is named, and how the space is arranged all shape how people show up before a single word is spoken. For project managers, it means these are not administrative details. These details communicate to participants what kind of gathering this will be and what to expect.

**Play the host.** The host's job is to protect the purpose of the gathering and adjust when something is not working, whether that means serving as a directive facilitator or distributing leadership across smaller groups. Lean into the role of a host and adjust according to the need and environment. For project managers, a written agenda manages the topics, but it does not manage the room. Knowing your group and being willing to redirect are what separate a facilitated session from a routine one.

**Close with intention.** How you end a session shapes what people remember and carry forward. For project managers, it means ending each session with a clear direction, whether it is a list of action items or a set of open challenges to bring to the next retrospective. How you end determines how the work continues.

## Highlights: What I Liked

Two ideas stayed with me longest. The first is Parker's argument that inclusion does not require inviting everyone. For project managers who often default to broad distribution lists and open invitations, this principle offers both permission and relief. Selective participation is not exclusion; it is intentional design, and it extends inward as well. Not every meeting requires your presence, and recognizing that creates space to trust your team's judgment about when to pull you in.

The second idea was Parker's treatment of environment as a design decision. I saw this firsthand while planning our team's annual retreat. Earlier retreats followed a familiar format: a conference room, a structured agenda, and discussions centered on roadmaps and organizational priorities. They were productive but predictable. Applying Parker's principles, I paid close attention to the purpose rather than the agenda.

In our case, we had new members, new leadership, and a need to define what innovation could mean for us moving forward. That clarity drove every decision. Different team members facilitated portions of the retreat, shifting ownership from me to the group. Individual lunch boxes replaced the usual catered meal, which sounds minor but changed the social dynamic entirely: people moved, mixed, and had conversations that a fixed seating arrangement rarely produces. The day ended with a team escape room as a deliberate way to surface how we solve problems together

before tackling harder organizational challenges. The retreat ended with existing and newer staff genuinely connected across levels, and that sense of trust carried into the following months.

### **Who Might Benefit from the Book**

Project managers at any stage of their career will find value here, though what they take away may differ. An experienced project manager will recognize the situations Parker describes and find language and frameworks for instincts they may have already developed. A newer project manager will find a way of thinking about meetings and gatherings that most PM training never covers. Both will leave with something actionable.

That said, how much you can immediately apply depends on your organizational context. Being selective about invitations, designing productive controversy into a session, and taking a directive facilitation role all require either positional authority or a high degree of psychological safety. In a highly hierarchical organization, some of Parker's principles may feel aspirational before they feel practical. That is not a reason to skip the book. It is a reason to read it with your environment in mind and identify where you already have room to move.

### **Conclusion**

*The Art of Gathering* is not a checklist or a step-by-step guide to running better meetings. Some ideas can be applied in your very next meeting. Others may change how you think about team retreats, workshops, and other gatherings over time. The book is a worthwhile read for anyone who regularly brings people together in service of a goal, which, in this profession, is nearly everyone.

Parker's principles do not require a specific title or a large budget. They require intention. For more information about the author and her work, visit <https://www.priyaparker.com>.

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To learn more about this book visit the book's pages on publisher's website at <https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/319055/the-art-of-gathering-by-priya-parker/>

## About the Reviewer



### **Sandra Rojas**

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**Sandra Rojas**, M.Ed., PMP, is a Project Manager at the McCombs School of Business Office of Instructional Innovation at The University of Texas at Austin. With over a decade of experience leading enterprise initiatives across systems implementation, operational transformation, and process improvement, she specializes in turning organizational priorities into actionable plans and measurable outcomes. Her work sits at the intersection of people, processes, and change, with deep experience in instructional design and educational technology environments. Sandra is a PMI Dallas Chapter member and an active participant in the local project management community. Connect with her on LinkedIn at [www.linkedin.com/in/sandraerojas](https://www.linkedin.com/in/sandraerojas)

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