Unit 4

Meeting Skills

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1   TO MEET OR NOT TO MEET

A meeting is a gathering of people to present or exchange information, plan joint activities, make decisions, or carry out actions already agreed upon. Almost every group activity or project requires a meeting, or meetings, of some sort.

There are good meetings and there are bad meetings. Bad meetings drone on forever, you never seem to get to the point, and you leave wondering why you were even present. Effective ones leave you energized and feeling that you have really accomplished something. One common complaint among professionals is that they find themselves attending far too many long meetings.

So what makes a meeting effective?

Effective meetings really boil down to three things:

1. They achieve the meeting's objective.
2. They take up a minimum amount of time.
3. They leave participants feeling that a sensible process has been followed.

If you structure your meeting planning, preparing, executing, and following up around these three basic criteria, the result will be an effective meeting.

1.1   The Meeting's Objective

An effective meeting serves a useful purpose. This means that in it, you achieve a desired outcome. For a meeting to meet this outcome, or objective, you have to be clear about what it is. Too often, people call a meeting to discuss something without really considering what a good outcome would be.

- Do you want a decision?
- Do you want to generate ideas?
- Are you getting status reports?
- Are you communicating something?
- Are you making plans?

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Any of these, and a number of others, is an example of a meeting objective. Before you do any meeting planning, you need to focus on your objective.

To help you determine what your meeting objective is, complete this sentence:

At the close of the meeting, I want the group to ...

With the end result clearly defined, you can then plan the contents of the meeting, and determine who needs to be present.

2. THE VIRTUAL MEETING

Virtual meetings allow participants to hold meetings over the internet and without travel. They allow users to see and hear each other as if they were in the same room and enable any user to share information on their computer with everyone else in the meeting.

Video and web conferencing have become a very popular means of sharing information amongst dispersed teams. Email meetings and discussions over the phone are also popular at the work place.

2.1 Choosing the Type of Meeting

The type of meeting to hold depends on the issues at hand and the purpose of the meeting. Some of the cases when face-to-face meetings will typically be needed are:

- When complex or technical data must be explained, as well as the full opportunity to ask questions.
- For large gatherings and conferences.
- For strategic-planning or team-building sessions, with discussion activities.
- When there is a need to develop social interaction.

Virtual meetings could be held to facilitate the following:

- Regular updates on progress or straightforward exchanges of information and ideas.
- Situations where the communication is mostly one-way.
- Routine and non-controversial decisions.
- Urgent decisions, when no time is available to organize a meeting, or when doing so would be too costly and disruptive.


Think through this…

Under each of the situations listed below, state whether 'face-to-face' meeting or 'virtual' meeting should be the choice.

	Situation	Type of Meeting
a)	For a purely task-oriented focus where no personal interaction is needed.	Virtual
b)	When sensitive data are to be exchanged or discussed, or confidential decisions are to be made.	Face-to-face
c)	For presentation of a new policy.	Virtual
d)	For controversial decisions requiring full interactivity.	Face-to-face

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3. PLANNING FOR THE MEETING

Once you have decided to hold a meeting, you must have a very clear idea of what is to be achieved. What is this meeting called for – to inform the members of new developments or progress, to receive and discuss reports, to make decisions, or a combination thereof? What issues need to be addressed? What questions need to be given collective answers?
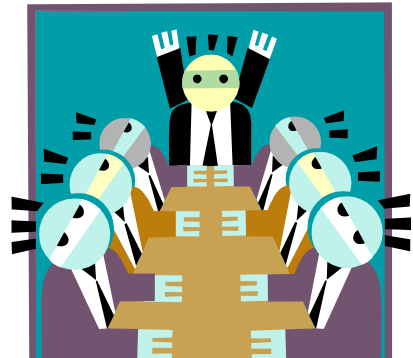
3.1 When To Meet ~The Best (and Worst) Times to Hold a Meeting

If a meeting is triggered by a crisis or immediate opportunity, you won't have much leeway in terms of scheduling. But whenever possible, carefully consider the timing of your meeting because it can have significant impact on the meeting outcome.

Here are some scheduling guidelines:

- Meet when participants are at their best.
- Allow ample time for preparation.
- Avoid surprise meetings.
  - On-the-spot meetings interrupt the flow of the workday, leave people insufficient time to prepare, and may cause most participants to enter the meeting room with a negative attitude.

3.2   How Long To Meet

The attention span of people is restricted. Meetings lasting all morning or all afternoon, or even worse, all day, are much less likely to achieve effective results than short, impactful meetings.

Time is a precious resource, and no one wants their time wasted. The golden rules on timing include:

- Keep the meeting as short as possible bearing in mind the business to be achieved.
- If the number of items is likely to produce a very long meeting (more than an hour), split the items into groups and hold more than one meeting.
- The greater the number of participants, the shorter the meeting should be. In a large meeting, interaction is restricted, and it's more difficult to maintain interest.

" MAYBE WE SHOULD ADDRESS THE PROBLEMS OF JET-LAG . "

Guidelines in scheduling meetings:

- Meet when people are at their best
  - Do not call a meeting on Monday morning or Friday afternoon, when participants are likely to have little motivation.

  - Don't schedule a meeting for the hour immediately after lunch, when most people feel lethargic.

- Try starting at an unusual time, and end at a natural break point
  - Choose an unusual starting time (e.g. 9:10 or 15:40) and participants are more likely to show up on time.
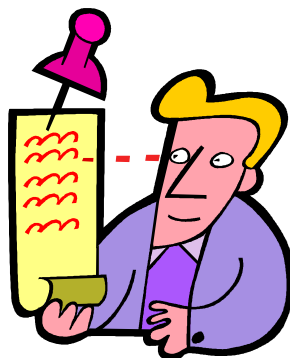
3.3 Agenda

To ensure you cover only what needs to be covered and you stick to relevant activities, you need to create an agenda. The agenda is what you will refer to in order to keep the meeting running on target and on time. It helps to:

- Inform the members regarding the matters to be dealt with
- Alert members regarding preparations needed for the meeting
- Ensure that the meeting stays "on track"
- Provide a structure for the meeting

To prepare an agenda, consider the following factors:

- Priorities – what absolutely must be covered?
- Results – what do need to accomplish at the meeting?
- Participants – who needs to attend the meeting for it to be successful?
- Sequence – in what order will you cover the topics?
- Timing – how much time you will spend on each topic?
- Date and Time – when will the meeting take place?
- Venue – where will the meeting take place?

3.2.1 Agenda Guidelines

- It should be circulated to the invited members sufficiently in advance of the meeting (at least 3 days) to allow/ encourage them to consider the agenda items in advance, form some views, and ensure that they have material or data to support the item and its discussion.

- The agenda should clearly specify:
  ~Type of meeting
  ~Date, time and venue

- Normally, the chairperson before the actual meeting decides the items in the agenda. However, to promote shared responsibility, members should be given opportunities to help design the agenda. This will increase their sense of ownership and commitment to the agenda and its completion.

- Establishing the order of agenda items:
  - Deal with routine items first (e.g. approval of minutes and routine updates and reports).

  - Schedule items that require creativity when the best concentration can be achieved, for example, early in the morning and not after a heavy lunch.

  - Important items deserve early position so that a realistic time allocation can be given to them.

  - Avoid scheduling too many substantive items in succession and intersperse lighter items to give the brain a rest.

  - Include enough detail in the agenda so that participants understand exactly what you want to accomplish.

Think through this…
An agenda is shown below. Try to improve on the ordering of the agenda items:-

	Agenda	Re-ordering of items
1.	Date, time and venue of next meeting	(7)
2.	Results of survey on computer upgrading	(4)
3.	Brainstorming ways of motivating staff	(3)
4.	Staff recruitment	(5)
5.	Matters arising	(2)
6.	Minutes of last meeting	(1)
7.	A.O.B.	(6)

Think through this…

Listed below are two examples of agenda items for a meeting. Discuss which one, (I) or (II), is a better representation.
(a)   Agenda Item: Personnel Matters
(b)   Agenda Item: Recruitment of new clerk & Appraisal system

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Agenda – Sample (I)

1. Minutes of last meeting
2. Matters arising
3. Finance matters
4. Personnel matters
5. Computer upgrade
6. Staff recognition program

Agenda – Sample (II)

Information Technology Department Meeting (20 March 2013)

12.45pm	:	Registration, refreshments, networking
1pm sharp	:	Meeting begins
4pm (or sooner)	:	Adjournment
Location	:	Seminar room Number 2

1pm sharp:

1. Opening remarks   Pauline
2. Approval of minutes
3. Matters arising
4. Reports:
    4.1   Finance   Derek Ng   For information only
    4.2   Personnel   Joan Sim   Proposal: Hire a new secretary

2.30pm:
    Refreshment break

2.40pm:
5. Computer Upgrade   Norman Tan   Proposal: Option A (see report)
6. Staff recognition program   Everyone   Brainstorm for ideas

4pm: Adjournment

(II) is a better representation as it gives participants the specific information they need to prepare for the meeting. It indicates more information on:
- *Whether the item is for information only, for discussion, or for decision making.*
- *Who is responsible for presenting the item and taking questions on it.*
- *What support documents are attached.*
- *What the options are for decision-making.*

4. MEETING ROLES: HOW TO LEAD OR PARTICIPATE

4.1 Leading the Meeting

The quality of the leader has an enormous impact on the outcome of the meeting. The leader should adopt a '*we*' approach and descend from his self-imposed ivory tower. He should be in touch and in tune with the members to earn their respect and support. A '*we*'-oriented leader:

- Facilitates decision-making and builds consensus especially when the decisions are significant and affect many parties.

- Knows when and how to let go and share control.

- Is always in tune with the members and is in the habit of ascertaining their expressed and unexpressed wishes and responding to them.

- Engages the members in collective decision making not only on substantive issues (e.g., an important expenditure) but also on procedural ones (e.g. the amount of time to set aside for a discussion).

Leading a meeting is a delicate balancing act. Meeting leaders must influence the group's thinking – not dictate it. They must encourage participation but discourage domination of the discussion by any single member. They must welcome ideas but also question them, challenge them, and insist on evidence to back them up. They must control the meeting but take care not to over control it.

List of things that a leader should do *before*, *at* and *after* a meeting:

Before the meeting:

- Define the purpose or objective of the meeting
- Decide on participants
- Circulate related documents (if any) together with the notice of meeting
- Prepare the issues to be discussed and decide on `agenda
- Set the time, date and venue for the meeting.

During the meeting:

- Start and end the meeting smoothly and on time
- Resolve all conflicts effectively
- Clarify issues for members' understanding
- Summarise or recap decisions
- Ensure that the minutes are taken
- Set the date and time for the next meeting if appropriate
- Begin with an appropriate opening statement.
- Follow the items on the agenda closely.
- Allocate responsibilities and set deadlines.

After the meeting:

- Review on-going items; check progress against deadlines
- Decide if further discussions or meetings are needed
- Be available to give support, guidance and feedback to members
- Receive feedback and take appropriate actions
- Review minutes for accuracy before they are circulated.
- Check if goals are met.

4.1.1 Understanding ineffective roles of participants

Knowing the various roles played by group members assist the leader in knowing how to react and how to handle role statements made during a meeting. Here are some suggestions for leaders on handling difficult participants.

- *The non-participating member*

  First, ask this person a question he can answer by a simple "yes" or "no". Then whenever possible, ask this member to give the participants some information that he is sure to know because of job, training or experience. Thank and praise the person as much as you can. He may then be more likely to enter the discussion confidently.

  - *The "know-it-all"*

  This person has something to say about everything. Whenever possible, ask other participants for their opinions of his statements. Sometimes, if necessary and when you feel the majority are annoyed by this person's arrogance, you may tactfully quieten the person by asking for a show of hands from the group, which strongly outvotes the know-it-all's suggestions.

- *The long-winded speaker*

  You may thank this excessive talker when he is at the end of a sentence. Or you might move the discussion to another important point, perhaps with a statement like, "Well, we have two more points to consider before we wind up this meeting, so let's move along to the next topic."

  - *The erroneous member*
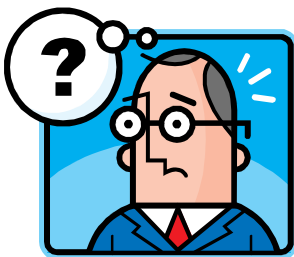
  If the other members, out of respect, are reluctant to correct this person, an especially tactful comment by you, the leader, may be required. Avoid direct criticism, sarcasm, or ridicule. Shield the person's pride. "When praising people, single them out; when criticising them, put them in a group."

- *The participant who shows personal animosity*

  Though rare, sometimes an angry member shouts hateful, tactless comments towards another member or members. You can show an attitude of calm understanding and turn him or her off by directing a question to another participant.

4.2   Being a Member

There are three kinds of people:
~ those who make things happen
~ those who watch things happen
~ those who have no idea what
happened.   - Mary Kay Ash

Before a meeting, members should:

- Review the agenda
- Study the meeting materials
- Gather necessary information to present at the meeting
- Note the questions, ideas and comments to contribute during the meeting

During a meeting, members can make a difference in these ways:

- Arrive on time and be there for the full duration of the meeting.
- Speak up and offer insights and ideas.
- If you tend to be dominant, hold your comments back and make space for others to participate.
- Raise valid concerns, even at the risk of sounding stupid or being unpopular. The meeting is not a popularity contest but a collective effort to make the best decisions for the organization.
- Insist on logical and deliberate decision making.
- Know when to be quiet, sit back, listen to others, and learn from them.
- Avoid interrupting others in mid-sentence. Let them finish and truly hear them out.
- Have a pen handy so that you can make note of your thoughts while listening attentively to other points of view.
- Help maintain order and decorum.
- Avoid personal attacks and shouting matches.
- Help to introduce a light touch, especially when people seem to be taking things too seriously.

After the meeting, members should:

- Take follow-up actions on jobs assigned
- Note the deadlines and ensure that they are met

4.2.1 Effective participant roles in meetings

Participants play the role of the organiser, clarifier, questioner, factual contributor, energiser, idea creator, critical tester, conciliator and helper.

Effective roles played by participants in meetings:

- Organiser: steers the group back to main issues.

- Factual Contributor: makes substantial contributions to the discussion.

- Conciliator: seeks to find a middle ground in the midst of disagreements and restructures positions so that they are acceptable to opposing parties.

- Helper of Others: helps those who feel inadequate or frustrated.

- Questioner: asks questions for further information.

- Clarifier: points our misunderstandings and clarifies complex ideas.

- Energiser: keeps discussion moving and stimulates members to reach their goals when gloom or frustration has set in.

- Idea Creator: injects creativity in problem solving.

- Critical Tester: challenges tactfully the validity and reasonableness of contribution.

You rarely will use all the nine roles in a single meeting, nor should you be expected to. But to be proficient in perhaps four of them would be making a significant participant contribution to a group meeting.

5.   MINUTES OF A MEETING

Minutes are official written records of business transacted and of decisions made at meetings. The minutes are written by the secretary of the committee or by anyone appointed to do so at the meeting. Before the minutes are circulated, the chairperson verifies it.

5.1   Purposes of Minutes

Minutes serve the following important functions:

- Providing a permanent official record
- Reminding participants of what happened at the last meeting
- Providing a basis for checking on "matters arising" at the next meeting
- Enabling absentees to know what had taken place

5.2   Principles for Minutes Taking

- **Objectivity**

Minutes should focus primarily on the collective decision-making process and much less on the actions or statements of individuals. Subjective language and interpretations should be avoided. Just stay with the facts.

- **Accuracy**

Minutes should be an accurate reflection of what took place and not what someone wishes had taken place.

- **Clarity & Brevity**

It is essential that minutes are as brief as possible. The words used should be simple and sentences should be kept short. Care must be taken with the use of jargon, acronyms or abbreviations. Minutes are intended to be read: long documents face the risk of not being read.

5.3   Format of Minutes

Most organisations have a preferred style and format for writing minutes. When taking notes at the meeting:

- Record decisions, e.g. what was agreed to, the resolutions made
- Record delegations of responsibility, e.g. who was assigned to various tasks
- Review and evaluate the content as you go along to ensure that notes are accurate
- Clarify any unclear points immediately and amend notes right away
- Summarise important ideas and concepts.

An example of a set of minutes is shown. Note the following:

- **Title of Minutes:**
  This may include basic facts about the meeting such as the type of meeting, the name of the group, the date, time and place of the meeting.

- **Attendance:**
  List members who are present and absentees are identified. Usually an Apology is noted. The Chairperson's name is placed first. The person who records the minutes (secretary) will place his name second or last. If there is no specific and undisputed order, members should be listed alphabetically. Sometimes, it will be helpful to show the department or appointment of those present.

- **"Action" column:**
  This records the names of members who are responsible to follow-up on actions set in motion at the meeting. These persons are required to give an update under Matters Arising in the agenda at the next meeting.

- **Agenda Item ~ Minutes of the last meeting:**
  A brief note of any amendments which must be made to the minutes of the last meeting due to drafting errors or because some members feel that they have been wrongly represented.

- **Agenda Item ~ Matters Arising:**
  This item will record participants' updates of their follow-up actions on tasks assigned to them at the previous meeting.

- **Agenda Item ~ Any Other Business (AOB):**
  This item is usually included to invite any members to raise any matters, whether or not it has anything to do with the current business of the meeting.

- **"Vetted By" & "Recorded By"**
  Usually, both the person who records the minutes (the Secretary) and the person who vets and approves the minutes (the Chairperson) sign the minutes.

- **Linguistic features**
  To take down what happened during the meeting, use reported speech. The main verb of the sentence is usually past.

  Example 1:
  Selene <u>highlighted</u> that the Plaza Ballroom is too small to accommodate 500 guests.

  Example 2:
  Interest <u>was expressed</u> in the current numbers of foreign students. It <u>was agreed</u> that an analysis of foreign students by country of origin <u>would</u> be circulated with the Minutes.

More tips

- It is a good idea to sit as close as possible to the chair of the meeting. This will allow you to hear everything and to ask for clarification without having to raise your voice.

- Consider using a laptop. This will help you record the minutes in a timely and accurate fashion.

- Make note not only of the concerns, but also of any accomplishments discussed in the meeting.

- Even though you are taking notes, you may still participate in the debates.

- Type up your minutes immediately after the meeting ends. It's best to do this while the events are still fresh in your mind. It's also important that participants get a copy of their action items as soon as possible after the meeting.

- Don't be afraid to interrupt and ask for clarification at any time.

- Send the completed minutes to the chairperson for vetting.

- Distribute the vetted minutes to all participants within the same week.

**Minutes of the 2ⁿᵈ Annual Staff Conference Committee Meeting
held on Thursday, 21 March 2013 in the Conference Room at 1020 hrs**.

Present   **Absent with apologies**
Velly Ong – Chairman   Jard Chua
Bler Wan
Bo Eng
Ken Aw
Ally Gan - Secretary

Matters discussed	Action by
The chairman welcomed members to the 2ⁿᵈ Committee Meeting. **1. Minutes of Previous Meeting** The minutes of the 1ˢᵗ meeting were approved subject to the following amendment: the date of the Staff Conference 2012 should be 10 -11 December 2012 & not 2011. **2. Matters Arising** Item 3.4: The meeting was informed that the General Manager has approved the budget of $30,000 for the Staff Conference. Item 5.2: Bler Wan has been nominated to represent the Production Department in this Committee Meeting. **3. Venues for Staff Conference** Velly pointed out that the Staff Conference would be held either locally or overseas over a 2-day period. Members were encouraged to suggest suitable venues for the event. 3.1 Ken raised a concern that if the staff conference was held overseas, married female staff with young children might not be able to make it. 3.2 Bo raised the issue of whether it is compulsory for staff to stay overnight. 3.3 In addressing Ken's concern, Velly pointed out that staff is welcomed to bring along their spouses and children. Family members would be charged subsidised rates. As to whether it was compulsory to stay overnight, Velly pointed out that it would depend on whether the venue was local or overseas.	

Matters discussed	Action by
3.4. The meeting discussed possible venues for the Conference :	
3.4.1 Bintan Lagoon Beach Resort was proposed as the beach is lovely and the seafood is reasonably priced there. Bo, however, was of the opinion that the resort might be too expensive for such a big group. Other cheaper alternatives such as Batam View Resort or Holiday Inn Resort were suggested.	
3.4.2 Desaru Golf Resort was proposed. It is reasonably priced and accessible by both car and ferry.	
3.4.3 The meeting ruled out Batam Island as the venue due to malaria incidents that were reported in the newspapers recently.	
3.4.4 A local venue – Resorts World Sentosa was proposed and unanimously agreed upon.	
3.5 Bler was assigned to arrange for price quotations of some hotels in Malaysia and Singapore. A table of comparison reflecting rates, seminar charges, transport costs and food should be submitted to Velly in 2 weeks' time.	Bler
4. Attendance All 100 staff members were encouraged to attend, together with their families. Department Heads would have to gather feedback from staff and submit the number of staff attending to chairman.	Department Heads
There being no further matters, the meeting ended at 1130 hrs.	

Recorded by: **Vetted by:**

AllyG.   *VOng.*

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Ally Gan (Secretary)   Velly Ong (Chairman)