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Planning and Running Effective Meetings

How do I:

- ✓ Decide whether a meeting is necessary?
- ✓ Invite the appropriate people to a meeting?
- ✓ Get everyone prepared for the meeting?
- ✓ Keep meetings from exceeding the agreed-upon time allocation?
- ✓ Keep the meeting running smoothly?
- ✓ Keep team members on task during meetings?
- ✓ Ensure the next meeting will be effective?



Paul Atkins sold luxury new and preowned vehicles at a dealership on the East Coast. The money was pretty good, but there were some aspects of the job that always left him wondering what else he should do with his time and talents. One thing he hated was the hours—salespeople were typically scheduled for a minimum of 50 hours per week. This was especially bothersome since many hours, if not days, would go by with not a single customer walking in the showroom. Added to the boredom was another problem—the Monday morning all-hands sales meeting.

Going to a meeting wouldn't be so bad if it was useful. But this was rarely, if ever, the case. Ted, the general sales manager, would seemingly decide what he would do for the half-hour meeting on his way in. Some weeks he couldn't decide on an objective for the meeting (or chose instead to play golf), and the meeting was canceled—without notice to anyone. Other weeks, most participants left feeling their time was wasted. Paul, who sold only Mercedes and other European imports, would sit through videos on the Toyota Corolla—a car sold by the dealership next door yet owned by the same person. Still other times, the meetings were focused on selling techniques, some of which were about as archaic as you can imagine. Yet everyone was required to be there, even salespeople who were off or not scheduled to begin their day until noon (the dealership was open 9 A.M. to 9 P.M. Monday through Friday and until 6 P.M. on Saturdays).

When the European import dealership got its own sales manager (who reported to the general sales manager), the salespeople were relieved, believing that they would no longer have to waste their time at the Monday morning meetings. Unfortunately, that was not the case. In fact, the sales manager and the general sales manager frequently butt heads on this issue. After two successive weeks of last-minute meeting cancellations, the European import car staff decided enough was enough. They boycotted the meetings.

Eventually, the general sales manager put pressure on the sales manager and made them attend.

1. Many organizations have standing meetings. What benefits could be obtained from these meetings?
2. What are some potential downsides of a standing meeting?
3. Who should be required to come to the “all-hands meeting”? If you answer “it depends,” on what should this depend?
4. Assuming the general sales manager is unwilling to change this requirement, what would you recommend he do to improve the meetings?
5. When you rate a meeting you’ve attended as “useless” or just “bad,” what characteristics of the meeting caused this rating?
6. When caught up in a “bad” meeting, what are some things you can do to improve the situation?

Meetings are an important part of the business world. Meetings occur within organizations and between members of different organizations, for example, customers and suppliers. Managers use meetings to share necessary information and to train and coordinate efforts of their employees. Project teams, either school- or work-based, use meetings to set objectives, allocate resources, make decisions, schedule individual components of complex projects, discuss project progress, share needed information and status reports to ensure all are “on the same page,” and solve problems. Many firms and campuses even have the capability for **virtual meetings**, where members are not physically in the same place but are connected via video conferencing technology or e-mail. In this chapter we discuss the importance of meetings, the how-tos of running effective meetings, and tips and suggestions for making the most of meetings. At the end of the chapter is a series of exercises and activities to help you assess and enhance your skill in running meetings.

Types of “Virtual” Meetings

- Meetings via e-mail
- Project intranets and extranets
- Video conferences
- Chat groups
- Conference phone calls

The Importance and Benefits of Meetings

Meetings serve an important function. In this increasingly complex and competitive environment, members of a team or organization need to be kept abreast of critical functional, political, technological, and legal issues facing the firm. This becomes especially important in an empowered and team-based environment. When more work and decision making is being spread to team members and employees at all levels of the organization, meetings are used to ensure good decisions are made and others are kept apprised of progress and problems.¹ The need for meetings typically increases as the number of teams and team-based projects increases.

Problems with Meetings

“A committee is twelve men doing the work of one man”

John F. Kennedy

This quote underscores a common question contemplated by students and employees alike, namely, “Wouldn’t it be easier to fly solo?” A recent study found that in the average eight-person committee, each individual member wished that three of the other seven weren’t there.² And according to a *Harvard Business Review* study, the average executive spends three and a half hours weekly in formal committee meetings and at least a day each week in informal meetings and consultations.³ Some suggest this figure is understated—that meetings take up more than half of executives’ working hours.⁴ As you climb higher on the corporate ladder, meetings become more frequent and lengthier.⁵ A survey of middle managers showed the top three reasons for failed meetings are: they get off subject, they lack agendas or goals, and they last too long.⁶

A big cause of ineffective or useless meetings is the lack of preparation and planning. How many times have you walked into a meeting having no idea what the meeting was about or why it was called? Perhaps it’s a standing meeting, as in the case of the all-hands meeting chronicled in the opening scenario. Perhaps you have a general idea of what to expect; after all, it’s always been done this way. For example, the weekly status report, pep talk, or communication of the sales objective. In either case, meetings are doomed to fail when participants (and the person calling the meeting) neither know what to expect nor what to prepare for a meeting.

Have you ever come to a meeting only to find it’s been canceled, rescheduled, or moved to another room? What if the goal of the meeting is to discuss complicated technical information, yet no one received any reports or documentation ahead of time? Valuable time is wasted getting individuals up to speed. More time still is wasted when the goal of the meeting—plus any previous decisions made—is not or has not been clearly communicated. If you walk into a meeting and can’t answer the question “Why am I here?” within the first few minutes, you can bet this meeting will not be optimal. If you meet because you’ve always met, that may not be a sufficient reason to have a meeting. What is the point of meeting? What do you want attendees to think, do, or feel as a result of the meeting?⁷ If there is simple information to transmit to a group of employees, a meeting may not be the best use of everyone’s time. For example, if human resources decides to add another provider to the list of HMOs currently available through employees’ health benefits plan, this information could be easily transmitted via a paper memo. If, however, human resources is leading a charge to modify the current performance appraisal and merit pay system toward one that accounts for not only individual performance but also individuals’ contributions in the many teams in which they work, a memo would likely be insufficient.

One lesson in this example is that despite what may seem as standard operating procedure, as in the case of Paul and the car dealership, meetings may be unnecessary and even costly, in terms of employees’ time and productivity taken away from other tasks and objectives.

Work becomes more complicated when you have to interact with others. You’re probably not alone if you’ve felt that you could do the work assigned to your group more easily than being one of five or six people working together on a project.

There are probably several explanations for this.

■ First, there’s the issue of interpersonal dynamics. When we work with others, our uniquenesses—work style, personality, preferences, values, and attitudes—often clash with those of others. Sure, others may have important information to offer, but they’re combative, overly analytical, or just plain critical. Couldn’t they just send the needed information via interoffice mail?

■ Second, in general, the more people involved in making a decision, especially a consensus decision, the more time it takes. Despite the benefit of others’ input, and the existence of **synergy**—the belief that two heads are better than one⁸—some wonder whether the costs (individuals’ time and energy) overshadow the benefits.

■ Third, there may well be redundancies—of people and effort. Someone might wonder, “If other members of my group are represented, why must I be here too?”

These three reasons may underlie why meetings are the source of frustration (and water cooler humor!) over the loss of work time⁹—an increasingly valuable resource. In one study, 70 percent of American executives surveyed considered many of the meetings

Figure 16–1
Strategies for
Effective Meetings

The Four P's of Effective Meetings ¹⁰	
Purpose	Determine if a meeting must be held Decide what the objective or outcomes of the meeting should be
Participants	Determine the appropriate size and the composition of the participants Consider the skills, knowledge base, and background of the participants Have a balance of task and process oriented members
Plan	Make logistical arrangements: time, place, equipment needs, visual aids, space Prepare and circulate an agenda Consult with participants before the meeting Decide on decision-making process
Process	Begin with review of past progress and clarify purpose of the meeting Establish ground rules Use visuals (flipchart or board) and denote progress and ideas Summarize meeting's accomplishments and review assignments

they attend as a waste of time.¹¹ Given the preponderance of poorly planned and executed meetings, it is easy to see why many view meetings as a necessary evil. Not surprisingly, the lack of a clear objective or purpose is a main reason for failed meetings, as evidenced by 89 percent of American executives who blame meeting failure on lack of proper planning and organization.¹²

If done effectively, however, meetings can be useful for dispensing or gathering information, morale building, decision making, creative brainstorming, and encouraging group action.¹³ As much as we might want to be left alone to do our work, many of us appreciate being in the fold—knowing what's going on and being involved in decisions and problem-solving efforts. Meetings don't have to be a waste of time or necessarily evil. By learning a few principles and practicing several techniques, meetings can be more efficient, productive, and possibly even enjoyable!

Strategies for Effective Meetings

Clarify the Purpose of the Meeting

The first principle in running effective meetings is clarifying the purpose. Whether or not a meeting should be held is completely dependent on the goal to be achieved. Employee input should be sought, and discussions—at multiple levels and parts of the organizations—need to occur.

Before the Meeting

Legitimate purposes for calling a meeting include generating ideas for a project, discussing the pros and cons of potential solutions to a problem, gaining employee input and buy-in for a program or company point of view, or deciding on a strategy or course of action.¹⁴ By clarifying the purpose or goal of a potential meeting, you will be able to determine whether the objective could be accomplished just as easily in a memo, e-mail, or article in the weekly newsletter. Consider whether the potential benefits of getting members together outweigh the costs.¹⁵

Evaluate whether a meeting should be held based on its stated purpose. Even if this evaluation is made, don't assume that invitees know this unless it has been clearly articulated before (and clarified during) a meeting. To say, "to have our all-staff sales meeting," is not clear enough, especially when this is a standing meeting. Without a clear understanding of why there's a meeting and how they can contribute, employees waste time contemplating the purpose and reason for being at a meeting instead of doing their normal work. Worse still, when a meeting is held without a clear, stated purpose, discussions meander about endlessly and with minimal if any closure. To ensure a successful meeting, decide on a clear achievable task¹⁶ and communicate this before the meeting begins. This task should support a project or task team's overall objective, which could come from management, the team members, or a combination thereof.

Four General Types of Meetings

- **Information Sharing**—several or all members share gathered information or report status on group or individual

progress. For example, a team designing a new minivan may include members from engineering, manufacturing, marketing, quality assurance, and legal. Subcommittees tasked with specific goals (e.g., gather data on consumer satisfaction, quality tests) may be asked to update the rest of the team on their findings to ensure the group that the subcommittees are on track as well as furnish the entire group with information needed for group decisions. These meetings tend to be relatively short, in that the purpose is to share information, and not solve problems or make decisions.

- **Information Dissemination**—used when critical information must be conveyed and shared with members. Typically, such information is too important for a memo and may require more in-depth explanation or discussion, as in the case of introducing a new reward system. Information dissemination meetings focus primarily on the relaying of information to the members or employees, with some time allocated to address the audience's questions and ensure they have a full and clear understanding of the information.

- **Problem Solving/Decision Making**—employees or members are assembled to solve a problem or make a decision. In contrast with the information dissemination meeting, a problem-solving meeting typically requires full participation of all members present, particularly if the outcome or disposition of the problem affects them. You might also include subject matter experts—those who have specific knowledge in a related area but may not be a member of the group that is meeting. Because of the time needed to make well informed, consensus decisions, it's important to carve out sufficient time for this type of meeting. Decision-making meetings require more time than information-sharing meetings.

- **Symbolic/Social**—used to celebrate a special event or share recognition for a job well done. When long-time or key employees retire, for example, it would be appropriate to invite those people with whom they have worked to recognize the retiree's contributions publicly. Or perhaps one of the customer service teams just completed one year of complaint-free service. A meeting or social event may be just the thing to recognize this accomplishment. Finally, meetings could be valuable when social interactions are needed and encouraged. One example is the holiday meeting or party. Another example is the case when two firms merge. It would be easy for each firm to continue operating autonomously (while gossiping about "the other guys" behind closed doors). However, if one of the reasons behind the merger is to gain synergy, it behooves the merged firm to encourage the kind of interaction that will increase trust and lead to cooperation among employees of the previously separate firms.

Decide Who Should Participate in the Meeting

The second principle for running effective meetings is to spend time considering who needs to be at a meeting. Whom do we invite? The answer: those who can best contribute to the objective.¹⁷ Returning to our opening case, if all you are planning to do is show a video and hand out updated brochures, perhaps all 40 salespeople should come. But if the purpose of the meeting is to get employees to generate creative ideas, 40 may be too many people. For this type of activity, the optimal size would be between 5 and 7, and no more than 10.¹⁸ Breaking up the group into four or five smaller groups, or having several smaller meetings, may better serve your purpose.

What if your top salesperson can't attend the meeting? Should you have the meeting anyway? If part of the meeting is being used to share and discuss sales tips and techniques, it might be best to postpone the meeting or, if deemed necessary and cost-effective, use videoconferencing to include a key person if he or she is in a different location.

What about support staff and people from a business function such as finance? Again, this depends on the purpose and intended benefit for those who attend. If the receptionist is interested and feels he can contribute based on his experience with call-in customers,

perhaps support staff should come. (They might even appreciate being asked!) What can the functional folks offer? Depends on their position and perspective relative to the purpose of the meeting. Multiple perspectives can help; they can also lead to communication challenges. Other considerations in answering the “whom to invite” question are organizational politics, need for objectivity, and potential for problems.¹⁹ Sometimes individuals are invited to meetings for political reasons, for instance, because they hold a particular title or have access to other important individuals in the organization. However, their presence could stifle lower-level employees’ creativity. Evaluate the trade-off, and consider whether a one-on-one meeting with this individual would do the trick.

Another consideration is the need for objectivity. Sometimes it is effective, depending on the meeting’s purpose, to have outsiders come to the meeting. While they might not be directly affected by the meeting’s outcome, they may be able to offer valuable, unbiased, and novel perspectives to the group. Finally, consider potential problems that may result from or during the meeting. For example, consider the company “troublemakers.” These are the individuals who have a knack for stirring up the pot needlessly or turning every issue into a power struggle. Perhaps their perspective is valuable, but the way in which they share it is not. If possible, you might want to exclude these persons from the meeting but schedule a time for you to meet with them one-on-one.

Inviting the right people—those who have a stake in the outcome or who own the problem, those affected by the outcome, subject matter experts, problem solvers, and idea people²⁰—helps ensure that the purpose is served and time-wasting diversions are minimized. For example if you suspect that the meeting’s objective and discussion centers on financial impacts, you might invite representatives from accounting or finance and meet them in advance to gain insight into their attitudes, opinions, or hidden agendas.²¹ In addition, it is a good idea to know the participants ahead of time. If you know that Mary in accounting has experience in a particular industry and that her insights would be valuable if shared, you can plan when and how you solicit that input should she not share without prodding.

Develop a Plan for the Meeting

Next, develop plans that will ensure the success of the meeting. First, create and distribute an **agenda** or specific plan for the meeting. The meeting agenda (see Figure 16–2 for a guide) clarifies the goal and lists the points of discussion and their priority for the meeting. A well-defined agenda spells out the tasks, estimated time allocated to each task, the decisions to be made, and expected outcomes or deliverables.²² It also includes logistical information, such as where and when the meeting will be held and the roles individuals will play.

Circulating a specific agenda to invitees prior to the meeting is important, but it’s also important to be flexible about potential changes. By soliciting their input on potential additions or modifications to the agenda, you can increase participants’ ownership in the meeting and its purpose.

In planning the meeting and preparing the agenda, decide on a time and place that is likely to suit the schedules and needs of the invited participants. If manufacturing is typically busy with month-end inventory, it might be best to wait a week, if possible, to ensure manufacturing can and will participate in a meeting in which their input is necessary. If you are planning a lengthy planning or team-building meeting, for example a half-day or full-day session, you might want to consider having the meeting at another location to minimize distraction and interruptions. Based on the purpose of the meeting, select a site that has adequate space, visual tools, and resources (e.g., copy machine, clerical staff). Select a temperature (a little cooler is better than too warm), seating arrangement (discussions are best when all participants can see one another), and schedule (i.e., include breaks and coffee) that will facilitate lively participation.²³ Include specific directions and a phone number to ensure everyone makes the meeting—and on time.

Figure 16–2
Sample Agenda

Start and End Time: _____
Place: _____

Stage one (# of minutes): _____

- Clarify objective
- Agenda overview, vision and goal clarification
- Introduction of members

Stage two (# of minutes): _____

- Review of last meeting's minutes
- Review of roles for today's meeting
 - Facilitator—
 - Time keeper—
 - Scribe—
 - Other—
- Set ground rules or operating guidelines
- Continuing business
 - Progress reports from committees, etc.
- New business
 - Information to be shared
 - Decisions to be made

Stage three (# of minutes): _____

- Review accomplishments
- Summarize

Stage four (# of minutes): _____

- Process check
- Preparation for the next meeting
 - Action items
 - Roles, next agenda
 - Time and place verification
- Future meeting

“Be sincere . . . be brief . . . be seated.”

Theodore Roosevelt

Pay Attention to Process during and after the Meeting

During the Meeting

When you preside over a meeting, your role is to make the discussion lively, proactive, creative, and focused.²⁴ To make this happen, think of the meeting as a collection of tasks or services—communicating, facilitating, documenting²⁵—and consider who can assist you in performing those services. The more you do to control the meeting, the more other participants will look to you for this control. Instead, encourage the participants to take an active part in contributing to and controlling the meeting. There are many ways you can do this during the meeting. To simplify matters, we'll divide the meeting into four stages.²⁶

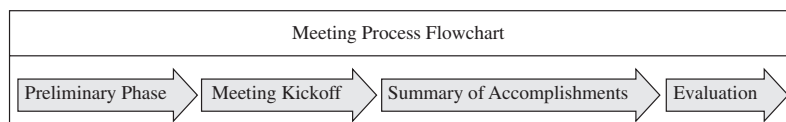


Figure 16–3
Ground Rules

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- We will use an agenda, time keeper, and meeting leader for each meeting.
 - Meetings will start on time (with a review of the agenda) and end on time (with a process check), unless there is team consensus to extend it.
 - Team members who have been absent or tardy must take measures to “get up to speed.”
 - Team members will practice active listening.
 - It is OK to talk about/address the inappropriate use of power by team members.
 - A time-out can be called if the meeting is off track or otherwise ineffective.
 - Items identified as sensitive will be kept confidential.
 - Silence by team members indicates a need for further inquiry.
 - The meeting’s facilitator should remain neutral but may formally step out of the role to contribute to the discussion.
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1. The preliminary phase. In the first few minutes of the meeting, clearly articulate the meeting purpose and objectives. Then proceed with a general overview of the agenda to set the tone and give members a feel for how the meeting will be conducted. Next, explain why the participants were selected and invited to the meeting. These three steps help establish clear expectations for what will occur.²⁷ If members do not know one another, briefly allow members to introduce themselves and the department for which they work.

2. Meeting kickoff or the heart of the meeting. If a group of individuals will be meeting on a regular basis, it is important that they establish operating guidelines, or the standard or set of norms to which they will be held, collectively. Operating guidelines are the rules of engagement for meetings.

These guidelines establish how meetings should be run, how members will interact, and what kind of behavior is acceptable.²⁸ A sample set of operating guidelines appears in Figure 16–3. While some of the guidelines may sound like common sense or common courtesy, the fact that the group collectively believes in and articulates the importance of starting and ending meetings on time, and not interrupting others, makes the implied explicit. It also gives members the ability to “call each other” on behaviors that violate the operating guidelines and therefore undermine the group’s ability to effectively operate and achieve its goals. After the guidelines are created, post them where members can see them. By helping the group establish operating guidelines, you help create common expectations among members, encourage desirable behavior, and enhance the group’s ability to be self-managing.²⁹ Good managers not only plan and run effective meetings, they also teach and encourage their employees to do the same.

Encouraging individuals to perform meeting roles also facilitates self-management. Early in the meeting (or in the previous meeting), establish who will play which role—scribe, timekeeper, facilitator, or meeting leader. Typically, groups rotate these roles so that all members develop each of these skills. The recorder or scribe publicly takes notes—using a flip chart or white board—on issues discussed, key decisions made, and action items assigned. The timekeeper keeps track of the time as it relates to the agenda, and reminds the group when it is about to exceed the agreed-upon time allotment for a particular topic or discussion. The group should then decide whether the time should be extended (and for how long) or the discussion should be tabled for a future meeting. The meeting leader is tasked with keeping the discussion task oriented and in line with the agenda. The facilitator helps ensure that participation is balanced, communication is effective, and the process is smooth. Many problems are avoided when members take responsibility for using these meeting roles.³⁰

The purpose of the meeting is what the team is attempting to accomplish. The process describes how members go about their task. Do members yell and scream when they don’t get their way? Do they belittle others who offer opposing views? Does the group go off on tangents, discussing items that are neither important nor on the agenda?

Some Meeting Process Suggestions Include:

- Encourage the clash of ideas, not personalities. One way to do this is alternate pros and cons. After hearing a proponent's views on a subject, ask for any other or opposing views.³¹

- Maintain focus and stick to time frames. When appropriate, stick to the agenda—it's the plan to which all members agreed. While there are times when unforeseeable issues arise between meetings and must be addressed at the meeting, it is important to bring the potentially divergent discussion to the attention of the group and check whether adjustments should be made. If the group decides that an issue is important but does not require immediate discussion, make use of a "parking lot" or a visual bin (such as a piece of newsprint on a blackboard) where issues are collected and stored for future use. Alternatively, you can ask the scribe to record the issue under "next meeting." By taking one of these steps, as opposed to just noting an issue's irrelevance, you demonstrate to the person who suggested that idea that it was heard, noted, is important to the group, and will be discussed in the next meeting or handled outside of the meeting.³²

3. The **summary of accomplishments** or wrap-up stage. In this stage, the team leader—with the help of the scribe's notes—will review decisions made and summarize the key points discussed. This can be done during the meeting, as you move through and complete agenda items, as well as near the end of the meeting. By summarizing each point before moving to the next item, you help ensure that everyone is in agreement, that members remain focused, and the scribe takes clear meeting notes.³³ By summarizing at the end, you allow another opportunity for clarification or agreement and help bring closure to the meeting as well as clarify the group's accomplishments. Knowing you've completed all or most of the agenda items often gives group members a sense of satisfaction.

4. **Evaluation** and closing remarks. This step is often missed in meetings and could negatively impact future meetings. First, determine whether the meeting objective has been met. One way to do this is by having members do a **process check**. Each person might share a comment or two on how she or he felt about what was accomplished and how it was accomplished. What did the team do well? For example, "We got through all our items, we kept focused, and we came to agreement on a tough issue." What can the team do better next time? One person may note that despite all that was accomplished, he felt his input wasn't valued when he was frequently interrupted. Another may note that the meeting lasted longer than the agreed-upon hour. By having an opportunity to air concerns like these, issues are more likely to be nipped in the bud before they escalate into full-blown conflicts. If the person who didn't feel valued didn't say so, and if no one else noticed and addressed the interrupting behavior, this person is likely to dislike the group, find ways to avoid coming to the meeting, or give the appearance that they are on track while secretly planning to sabotage the team's efforts. Process checks also tend to minimize the need for the meeting after the meeting. These are the impromptu, out-in-the-hallway, or in-the-bathroom exchanges in which real feelings and issues are discussed. Again, these processes may undermine the team's objective by weakening the trust and confidence members have in each other's ability and desire to achieve the objective.

After the process check, plan the next meeting. While the discussion and decisions are fresh, decide what should be covered in the next meeting, as well as the logistics of when, where, and meeting roles. If parking lot items neither made it to the current or next meeting, capture its contents in a section known as "future meetings" or "future action outside of these meetings." At this point, review the action items. Will there be sufficient time to complete them? Should resources be made available to the actionee? Bring closure to these items to ensure that members are sufficiently prepared and ready for the next meeting.

After the Meeting and between Meetings

So far, by following the tips and techniques we've shared, you're likely to plan and run meetings that are effective in accomplishing the objectives you've set. This is great, but don't stop there. There is a tendency to slack off at this point, yet the follow-up after the meeting and before the next meeting is essential in maintaining effective meetings and active progress toward the group's goals.³⁴

To maximize the group's effectiveness, consider implementing the following after- or between-meeting strategies:

- Immediately after the meeting, have the minutes (summary of key points and decisions) and next meeting agenda typed up and distributed in advance of the next meeting. Request that members review these immediately to ensure accuracy and again just before the next meeting to be prepared for and ready to contribute to the next meeting.
- As appropriate, send out checkpoint memos or e-mails, especially if external team issues may impact the team's objective or ability to achieve it. Offer support resources for actionees, such as whom they might contact or where they might get certain information.
- Make sure members have phone, fax, and e-mail lists of all members. When things come up that may preclude someone's attendance, contacting other members of the team should be easy. Also, by having the list, members are able to contact others for clarification or assistance with action items.
- If appropriate, use the time between meetings to meet with individual members to ensure they are clear about and committed to the goals of the team. Depending on the work or communication styles of some group members, it may be hard to gauge whether or not this is the case from their meeting behavior. Off-line you may get a different response. Depending on the experience level and track record of members, it may be necessary to ensure that action items are carried out. If not, offer assistance. Tread carefully however. It is important to show members that you trust them and have confidence in their abilities. Saying you do is not the same as showing it. If the individual comes to the next meeting without a completed action item, the lack of progress—for whatever reason—may deter the progress of the group. Talk to the person about this and ensure he or she understands the need to follow through on commitments made to the group so that this doesn't happen again.
- Minutes may not always be the best way to disperse important information about a meeting. Perhaps the team can design a meeting summary form that meets its particular needs. It might include places in which to capture what tasks were decided on, who is going to do the tasks, the deadlines for these tasks, as well as a running record of key points made throughout the meeting. If the form is simple to use, it may be possible to complete the form during the meeting and make copies members can take with them upon departing the meeting. Doing this helps confirm everyone's responsibilities, clarifies assignments, and establishes accountability.
- Be sure to send meeting notes to those members who could not be present and let them know of any action items they may have been assigned in their absence. Taking this important step helps ensure that those who missed the meeting can get up to speed, and have a record of what was done, and lets everyone have equal access to the process.
- Have subcommittee meetings if necessary. Remember, not all work needs to be done by every member of the team. In fact, this is rarely the case in effective teams given time and expertise constraints. Typically, a subcommittee may go off to develop a draft—a suggested process, a working set of objectives—as a starting point for other members' input and ideas. Using subcommittees can be a highly effective use of time and energy.
- Track progress against a milestone chart. The process checks can help you determine how the team is doing relative to its task. It can also uncover potential problems or deficiencies. By examining the trend of evaluations, you can strategize and plan for corrective action, if necessary, before the group gets irrevocably off course.
- Keep key stakeholders informed of team progress and setbacks. Perceptions of a team's effectiveness (or lack thereof) are not only impacted by what and how they accomplish their objectives; they are also a function of how well informed those

external to the process are kept.³⁵ In an environment where teaming and empowerment are the norm, it is easy to take the ball and run with it—and never inform others who may have a need to know. This may include other departments, top management, customers, or suppliers. By ensuring communication flows freely within the team, as well as beyond the team’s boundaries, perceptions and support of the team are likely to remain positive.

Other Helpful Meeting Hints

Following are some additional tips and hints to help you in future meetings. Try implementing some of these ideas in future meetings.

- Write down the cost per minute of the meeting (total all salaries of those present and divide by the number of participants) on the flipchart. This can have a focusing effect; it is an effective way to illustrate that time is money, so let’s not waste either!
- Announce the adjournment time right when the meeting starts. This clearly informs participants how long they will need to focus and will help them adjust their comments to fit the schedule.³⁶
- Set rules for debating if one is likely to ensue. For example, “No one can speak for more than five minutes,” or “No one can speak twice until everyone who wants to speak has had a turn.”³⁷ It’s easy for a meeting to denigrate into a one-person show or a case where “those who talk the longest and loudest win.” By establishing these rules up front and encouraging all members to adhere to them, this problem is less likely to surface.
- Try to schedule all internal meetings for 30 minutes or less, unless a key decision must be made. This relatively short meeting period forces members to be prepared if they plan to accomplish anything and puts pressure on members to focus.³⁸
- Have a meeting standing up. Researchers at the University of Missouri’s College of Business and Public Administration found that meetings involving creativity and judgment held with members standing up were 34 percent shorter than those in which members were seated. This, and their finding that the shorter, stand-up meeting resulted in the same quality of and satisfaction with decisions made,³⁹ suggests that shorter meetings may be more efficient and effective.
- Preestablished timetables should be followed unless the situation warrants change. Start and end the meeting on time, but be open to change if needed. If you run a tight ship but it runs aground, you have not achieved your objective. Be firm but flexible and get member input on proposed time changes.
- If possible, complete the meeting summary and send it out the same day while it is fresh in everyone’s mind.⁴⁰ This aids closure and ensures action items are completed and members are prepared for subsequent meetings.
- Demonstrate management support and commitment to the team and its tasks. Ask if you can come to team meetings periodically. Remove or reduce impediments (policies, individuals, insufficient resources) to show your commitment to a team’s success. Provide the team with adequate time and logistical arrangements to have effective meetings.
- Have fun. When the goal of a meeting is for people to be creative and innovative, they need to loosen up to think in different ways to gain better perspectives.⁴¹ To do this, encourage an off-site meeting and casual dress, have food, and intersperse activities (appropriate physical or experiential exercises) to lighten up the mood and reenergize the members.

Summary

So many people find meetings to be a waste of time. It’s not surprising. If you’ve ever been in workplace meetings, or perhaps have had meetings for a class project assignment, you’re likely to agree. When done well, meetings can fulfill multiple, important purposes. When poorly planned and executed, meetings become the source of wasted time, humorous water cooler talk, and plain old misery. With so much to do in such little time,

wasting time in useless meetings is not an option. Today’s manager must be skillful not only at running meetings, but also in deciding whether a meeting is necessary. Planning is essential and can prevent many problems from occurring. If they do occur, you’ll be better equipped to resolve these problems and help groups have and run their own effective meetings.

Key Terms and Concepts

Agenda	Process check
Evaluation (meeting stage)	Summary of accomplishments (meeting stage)
Information-dissemination meeting	Symbolic/social meeting
Information-sharing meeting	Synergy
Meeting kickoff (meeting stage)	Virtual meeting
Preliminary (meeting stage) phase	
Problem-solving/decision-making meeting	

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Exercise 16-A Assessing Yourself

Circle the response that most closely correlates with each item below.

	Agree	Neither	Disagree
	1	2	3 4 5
1. When deciding whether to hold a meeting, I first clarify its purpose and determine whether my objective can best be met by holding a meeting or by some other means such as writing a memo.			
2. I vary the type of meeting I hold based on the purpose and audience.	1	2	3 4 5
3. I give careful thought to who should be invited and invite those who can contribute to the objective directly, those who have special expertise, those who have useful contacts and experience, or those who offer a fresh perspective.	1	2	3 4 5
4. I limit the size of the group invited to a meeting to a manageable number or divide a large group into small groups to facilitate participation and discussion.	1	2	3 4 5
5. I assess potential problems that might develop between personalities in group meetings and develop a strategy for ensuring a smooth, successful meeting.	1	2	3 4 5
6. I plan and distribute an agenda in advance of meetings I am leading.	1	2	3 4 5
7. I prepare in advance for meetings and ensure relevant materials are sent ahead of time to participants.	1	2	3 4 5
8. I let participants know in advance if a meeting has been cancelled, rescheduled, or moved to a different location.	1	2	3 4 5
9. I clearly communicate the purpose of meetings and the ways participants can contribute to the meeting.	1	2	3 4 5
10. I schedule meetings at times and in places that are convenient for participants' schedules.	1	2	3 4 5
11. I encourage participants to rotate the roles of leader, facilitator, scribe, and timekeeper.	1	2	3 4 5

	Agree	Neither	Disagree
	1	2	3 4 5
12. I encourage participants to establish operating guidelines and norms to which all are held collectively.	1	2	3 4 5
13. I conduct meetings that are lively, proactive, creative, and focused.	1	2	3 4 5
14. I encourage the clash of ideas, not personalities.	1	2	3 4 5
15. I maintain focus and stick to time plans.	1	2	3 4 5
16. I wrap up and summarize key points and decisions toward the end of a meeting.	1	2	3 4 5
17. I allow time at the end of a meeting for participants to evaluate and debrief the meeting and make plans for the next meeting.	1	2	3 4 5
18. After meetings I send out checkpoint notices and offer support resources for participants and meet with participants to make sure they're clear about and committed to the goals of the group.	1	2	3 4 5
19. I don't monopolize meetings.	1	2	3 4 5
20. I collect and disseminate contact information on meeting participants.	1	2	3 4 5
21. I ensure the group has a system set up to deal with participants who have to miss meetings for whatever reason.	1	2	3 4 5
22. I encourage a large group to divide into subcommittees.	1	2	3 4 5
23. I announce the meeting adjournment time at the outset of the meeting.	1	2	3 4 5
24. I keep key stakeholders informed of team progress and setbacks.	1	2	3 4 5
25. I track group progress against a milestone chart and share this with participants.	1	2	3 4 5
26. I set rules for debating if one is likely to occur.	1	2	3 4 5
27. I try to schedule internal meetings for 30 minutes or less.	1	2	3 4 5
28. I demonstrate management support and commitment to a team and its task.	1	2	3 4 5

Sum your circled responses. If your total is 84 or more you might want to explore ways to improve your skill in the area of working in teams.

**Exercise 16-B
Committee Meeting**

You are the chairperson of the social event committee for your school or community-based organization. Much is riding on you and your committee, as you begin making preparations for the annual dance/celebration. This annual event is one of the biggest in your town and typically brings in between \$1,000 and \$2,000 that can be spent on resources, travel, and outreach efforts. It's very important that the dance go smoothly. It has for the last 15 years.

You are about to call a meeting of the social event committee to discuss arrangements for the dance. In this meeting, which is about six weeks away, you'll have to decide on location, food, music/entertainment, tables and chairs, decorations, and admission fee. You might even look for corporate sponsors to help fund the event.

1. What needs to be handled in your meeting? _____

2. Who should be invited? _____

3. What preparation work should be done? _____

4. What could you do before the meeting to ensure everyone will come with ideas and enthusiasm? _____

5. What should you do during the meeting to ensure that you get closure on the key issues? _____

6. After the meeting, what can you do to ensure that other committee members follow up on their promises to complete certain tasks? _____

Exercise 16–C
Prepare an Agenda for
a Team Meeting

Prepare an agenda for your next project group meeting.

Exercise 16–D
Plan and Have a
Meeting

Working in groups of four to six, you will be given a topic and a block of time in which to plan and have a meeting. Consider the meeting's topic (see list below) and:

1. Prepare an agenda. Be sure to include:
 - Issues to be discussed.
 - The amount of time allocated to each issue.
 - Role assignments (e.g., scribe, timekeeper, leader, facilitator).
 - Time for a process review.
2. Have the meeting. Record key points and decisions on a flip chart or other "public" device. Plan to have one or more members present the findings of your group.
3. Do a process review. Discuss what worked well and could be improved in this meeting.
4. Report out on your group's outcomes (what recommendation or conclusions your group offers) and processes (how your group got to that point).

Topics

- Feedback on this course: What elements are effective in terms of your ability to learn and apply what's being taught, as well as suggestions for strengthening elements that could be improved.
- The role of technology in your team's next presentation. What options are available? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the options? What recommendations would you make for future team-based presentations?
- Add your own.

Exercise 16–E
Try This . . .

1. Observe a meeting in your workplace or school (group project, school organization meeting). Overall, how well was this meeting executed? Take notes on what happened (and didn't happen) during and immediately after the meeting so that you can answer the following questions.
 - What was the purpose of the meeting? How do you know this?
 - Was the purpose or objective met? How do you know this?
 - What were some specific things that were effective? Explain and cite examples.
 - What made the meeting ineffective? Explain, citing specific examples.
 - If you were to lead the meeting, what would you have done differently and why?
2. Watch a meeting that occurs in a sitcom, video/movie (e.g., *Tucker*, *Barbarians at the Gate*, *Working Girl*, *Wall Street*, *The Firm*), or news program (e.g., *Crossfire*, *The Lehrer Report*, or *Politically Incorrect with Bill Maher*). Take notes on what you observed during and immediately after the "meeting" and answer the following questions.
 - What was the purpose of the meeting? How do you know this?
 - Was the purpose or objective met? How do you know this?
 - What were some specific things that were effective? Explain and cite examples.
 - What made the meeting ineffective? Explain, citing specific examples.
 - If you were to lead the meeting, what would you do differently and why?

Exercise 16–F
Reflection/Action Plan

This chapter focused on meetings—why they’re important and strategies for planning and running effective meetings. Complete the worksheet below upon completing all reading and experiential activities for this chapter.

1. The one or two areas in which I am most strong are:

2. The one or two areas in which I need more improvement are:

3. If I did only one thing to improve in this area, it would be to:

4. Making this change would probably result in:

5. If I did not change or improve in this area, it would probably affect my personal and professional life in the following ways:
