

# Running effective meetings

Jean-luc Doumont

Cost of meetings =  $\sum_i n_i \Delta t_i$

meetings

number of participants

duration

"We are meeting too often  
with too many people  
for too long"

Consider alternatives. Ask yourself how you'd reach your desired outcome if meetings were forbidden.

Gauge each participant's anticipated contribution (what would we miss if he or she did not attend?) against his or her opportunity cost (what could he or she otherwise achieve during that period of time?).

For shorter meetings, work harder ahead of time: prepare better preread material and presentations (focus on the *so what*), clarify the desired outcome in invitations and at the start, to focus discussions.

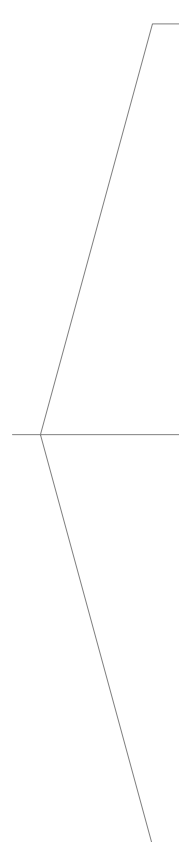
# Plan your meeting

Define your desired **outcome**  
(what you are hoping to achieve)

Decide whether a meeting is  
the best **approach** to reach it  
(consider alternative approaches)

If yes, allocate the **resources**  
needed to reach the outcome  
(otherwise, go for an alternative)

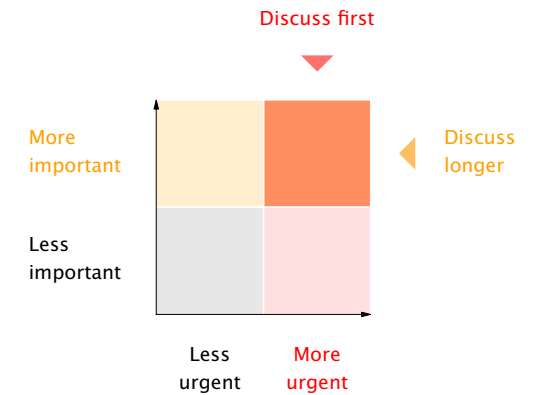
To be creative about alternatives,  
imagine meetings are forbidden  
or you can use only half the time:  
how would you reach your goal?  
Consider better written briefings  
(or even recorded presentations)  
when expecting little discussion,  
more (and shorter) one-on-ones  
when issues involve few people,  
and less frequent meetings just  
to keep an entire team up to date.



## Time

Define the target duration  
■ for the whole meeting  
■ for individual activities  
on the basis of importance

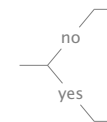
Sequence these activities  
based on relative urgency  
or on participants' availability



## Participants

Invite only those people who  
can add value to the meeting

Are they familiar  
with the topic(s)?



Technically (the content)  
Strategically (the context)

The participants will...

**require background**  
to contribute effectively

**benefit from a recap**  
to focus from the start  
on the desired outcome

## Channels

Select a space (real or virtual)  
and establish rules for its use

Balance any preread material  
and in-meeting presentations  
to avoid ineffective double work

You might impose seats,  
ask virtual participants  
to turn on their camera  
or to click on *raise hand*  
if they want to intervene  
(or in order to vote), etc.

## Meet

### Chairperson

The owner

### Participants

The contributors

### Report writer

(not the owner)

### Designated speaker

A participant (or guest)

#### Before

Invite and brief participants  
Secure a suitable setting, too  
(set up the room optimally)

Get clarity on what to expect  
Do your homework as asked  
If using technology, get set

Consult with the owner as needed  
Decide on a format for the report  
Prepare to take notes accordingly

Invest time in what you prepare  
to save time during the meeting  
meaning a global time economy

#### At the start

Clarify the desired outcome  
with background as needed  
and the process to get there

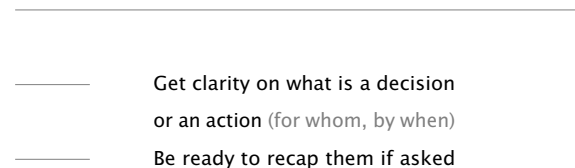
Help start things effectively:  
come prepared, be on time,  
ask for clarification if needed

Convey the *so what* in your story,  
in pre-read material and on slides

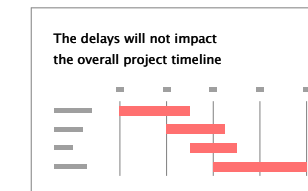
#### During

Facilitate: focus discussions,  
involve participants, discuss  
the process, watch the time

Present briefly, to the point  
Discuss items constructively  
Identify decisions or actions



Get clarity on what is a decision  
or an action (for whom, by when)  
Be ready to recap them if asked



State your message  
as a short sentence  
(two lines, top left)

Support it—visually

#### At the end

Take time to wrap things up  
End on time—if not finished,  
agree to extend/reschedule

Go away with a clear picture  
Take steps so you're on time  
for your next meeting, if any

Ensure readability when sharing  
your screen (spreadsheets, etc.)

#### After

Ensure the report gets sent  
Follow up on the next steps

Read the report for accuracy  
Carry out what was agreed

Create a (short) report promptly  
Send it to attendees (and others)

Send material to the report writer  
if it is to be included in the report

## Report effectively

For a useful report, keep in mind those readers who did not attend. Whereas participants might need no more than a list of decisions and actions, those who missed the meeting need the highlights (such as major announcements) and at least minimal justification for the agreed decisions/actions. Readers even less involved need to understand why the meeting took place and who participated (including, to a point, why them).

Beyond a clear **header** identifying the meeting and its participants, focus on **motivation** and **outcome** before going into the discussion. Specifically, for ease of reference, list decisions and actions upfront, not embedded in the discussion. Sort actions in a meaningful way, such as by owner, then deadline. If the list of attendees is lengthy, consider moving it to an appendix.

### Skalag antidote project review

Monthly meeting #27 | Mon 6 Dec 2021

	Present	Excused
<b>Skalag team</b>	Xiaoli Wang, lead Héctor García ⋮	Cédric Kabamba Nevena Đukić ⋮
<b>Folles Foundation</b>	Gini Contabile, Chief Financial Officer Carolina Panounou, Vice-president, R&D ⋮	

Through funding from the Folles Foundation, DevilsWorks Inc. developed a successful antidote against the poisonous bite of the six-horned skalag, using extracts of karotacea roots. Recent clinical trials of oral tablets show a slower absorption of the active ingredient in women. The skalag team proposes to address the issue by developing an injectable formulation.

The Folles Foundation endorses the proposed development, but requests an assessment of its impact on field usability, given that IV injections require qualified medical personnel.

Owner	Action	Deadline
Team	Select solvent for injection	March 2022
Mikhail	Submit estimation of costs	Next meeting
⋮	⋮	⋮

Identify your meeting explicitly: indicate periodicity (if applicable), number, date—possibly location.

List who attended and who didn't, but was expected to (if anyone). Clarify in what capacity they did: are they just member of a team or did they join because of their competences or responsibilities?

State your meeting's motivation: why was it called? For a periodic meeting, what was the agenda? The motivation should have been included in the invitation already; it can then simply be copied here.

State your meeting's outcome(s), in the form of decisions, actions, possibly highlights (news items).

For each action, state the owner (person or team) unambiguously and deadline, one way or another. Express the action itself by a verb.

© 2021 by Jean-luc Doumont

Digital version 1.00      December 2021

You have the right to download, print, and share the digital version of the booklet. You have no right to modify it or to use it for commercial purposes.