

Collaboration, Knowledge Transfer, and Business Meetings in the 21st Century

By: Marc Thuot, KSB & CAS '11

Capstone Advisor: Professor Richard Linowes

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Executive Summary

In the business world one of the most ubiquitous management, collaboration, and information transfer tools is the meeting. Given the frequency of meetings in the world, it is imperative to employ the proper techniques to facilitate meetings to prevent them from becoming a drain on morale, time, and money.

Factors which must be considered include:

1. The condition of the meeting space.
2. The layout of the meeting space.
3. The purpose and goal of the meeting.
4. The type of meeting being held.
5. Pre-meeting preparation tools.
6. The use of technology to facilitate collaboration and information transfer asynchronously.

This paper examines these issues in-depth and provides a field guide of sorts to meetings, giving tips and tactics to maximize the effectiveness of nearly every type of meeting. It also encourages investment in Web 2.0 technology to enhance an organization's intranet and allow for the aggregation of knowledge and collaboration to save time, money, and effort.

Collaboration, Knowledge Transfer, and Business Meetings in the 21st Century

Rarely is the question asked, “Are we having too few meetings?” The presence of meetings in business organizations is ubiquitous, and everyone agrees that to some extent, meetings are a vitally important tool for decision-making, collaboration, and information transfer. The question, particularly as technology continues to advance, is “how many meetings do we *really* need?” People fail to consider the true costs of most meetings, and twenty years ago, the average hourly rate of a mid-level manager at Intel was \$100. Therefore, a ten manager meeting for two hours cost Intel \$2000 in 1990. In 2010 terms, the cost would be nearly double this due to inflation. This is not unusual, but what is alarming is that while most expenditures of \$2000 need to be approved by more senior management, nearly anyone in an organization can call a meeting without an approval process.¹ Meetings serve many roles in organizations, but careful scrutiny should be applied to analyze if they are the most efficient use of resources for accomplishing a given task. Knowledge management as a field has resurfaced from the early 1990s, focusing on using technology to allow companies to “leverage and reuse knowledge and experience.”² As Web 2.0 has evolved, the practicality of employing robust knowledge management systems has greatly improved, and nearly every organization should give thought to how to incorporate these systems into its own informational structure.

This paper will begin by examining the costs of meetings, before moving on to cover room layouts, common meeting purposes, types of meetings, other techniques to improve meetings, and will conclude with two case studies in the implementation of a more sophisticated Web 2.0 style intranet and its potential for organizational information transfer.

¹Arthur H Bell, *Mastering the Meeting Maze*, (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1990) 6.

²Tommy Peterson, "Whaddayaknow? Knowledge Management Can Be an Organization's Key to Survival," *The Conference Board Executive Action Series* 304 (209), *Business Knowledge RESEARCH*.

The Real Costs of Meeting

Generally speaking, one of the primary contributors to the continued existence of meaningless and inefficient meetings is a lack of perspective on exactly how much convening a meeting costs.³ Constituent costs of meetings include the hourly wages or salaries (including benefits) of attendees, the wages of those not attending who assisted in preparing for the meeting, materials used in the meeting, overhead for the facilities and equipment, travel costs, and other expenses.⁴ Calculating the true cost of a meeting is complex because of the number of factors which must be taken into account, but a simplifying method that gives a reasonable estimate of the cost is to double the average hourly pay for those involved in the meeting.⁵ This is a conservative estimate, but should provide at minimum the necessary perspective to evaluate the cost of meeting. Organizations which employ incentive compensation may find that a multiplier of three or four times the base hourly rate is more appropriate. This also fails to take into account the intangible costs of ineffective meetings that harm employee morale and reduce productivity even outside of meetings.⁶

According to a study conducted in the mid 1990s, the “typical manager attends five meetings per week and averages two hours and 14 minutes each day in the meeting room.”⁷ Assuming a salary of \$60,000 per year, nearly 30 percent of the manager’s salary, or \$16,875 annually, is compensation for participating in meetings. Using the conservative multiplier of twice the hourly wage cost of the meeting, the meetings this manager attends cost \$33,750 per year. Assume that ten such managers attend each meeting and the costs quickly escalate.

³ Jeannine Drew, *Mastering Meetings: Discovering the Hidden Potential of Effective Business Meetings* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994) 10-13.

⁴ Drew 11.

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Bell 7.

⁷ Drew 11.

Meeting Layouts and Seating Arrangements

Before a meeting can be held, the convening space must be prepared and decided upon. There are a myriad of possibilities for seating arrangements, but too little thought is given to how the meeting space affects the productivity and outcome of the meeting. Some general rules:

1. Chairs should be comfortable and capable of providing support. In smaller meetings, “chairs that swivel and roll on casters make it easy for participants to interact” with one another.⁸
2. Temperature must be at comfortable levels – too hot or too cold of temperatures can inhibit effective communication and sap motivation.⁹
3. Lights should have multiple levels of control allowing specific lights to be turned off, particularly over a projector.¹⁰
4. Projection screens are typically placed in the center of the room, but they are much more effective when located in the corner at an angle because they are more visible. Having multiple screens is even more ideal.¹¹
5. Whenever possible, seating arrangements should be semicircular or curved to encourage collaboration and eye contact.¹²

There are numerous potential meeting layouts, each with different advantages and disadvantages. Below are some of the most common. Illustrations of each can be found in the Appendix.

⁸ Drew 35.

⁹ Eli Mina, *The Complete Handbook of Business Meetings* (New York: AMACOM, 2000) 78.

¹⁰ Drew 33.

¹¹ Drew 34.

¹² Drew 38.

Conference Room Styles

By far the most common meeting room layout, conference room style layouts involve a single central table or other surface around which the entire group sits. The four most common seating arrangements in a conference room are the square table, circular table, oval table, and U-shaped table.

Both rectangular and oval tables emphasize the importance of the leader by placing him or her at the head of the table by him or herself.¹³ In descending order of effectiveness, a manager should prefer circular, oval, rectangular, and U-shaped layouts in a conference room. This is primarily because the sharp angles and lines formed by the U-shape and rectangle create seemingly natural “teams” which typically align along the sides of the table.¹⁴ Note taking is particularly easy in these configurations thanks to the easily accessible table.

Finally, it is important to note that viewing visual aids in a circular or oval seating arrangement is more difficult than other arrangements because it is impossible to have a universally visible screen without employing more than one screen.

Classroom Style

There are a number of permutations of a classroom style meeting space, but they are all variants of placing the leader at the front of the room facing other attendees in some kind of ordered seating arrangement, typically in two or more rows of small tables. As its name indicates, this style is well suited to training and other meetings where participants receive large amounts of information from a leader.¹⁵ It also has the advantage of being very easy for the participants to see visual aids and for note taking. The layout does, however, stifle collaboration and interaction among the audience.

¹³ Bell 89.

¹⁴ Bell 88-89.

¹⁵ Drew 36.

Theatre Style

Theatre style meeting spaces are varied in their precise layouts, but they share common characteristics with classroom style spaces in that the audience is facing the leader of the group. Theatre style spaces are best suited for larger groups, as they are designed to accommodate large numbers of people at once. This style suffers from the same issue of making participant to participant interaction more difficult, but steps can be taken to mitigate such issues. For example, replacing rows of chairs or even semicircles of desks with circular tables with seating only facing the presentation (known as crescent seating) captures the benefits of small table seating (discussed in the next section) while preserving those of the theatre style.

Due to the wider seating possibilities, theatre arrangements are categorically superior to the classroom, except for situations where the number of participants is relatively low. In order to improve the level of connectedness in a theatre style space, orient the room along its widest wall such that the farthest participant is closer to the speaker. Contrasting examples are available in Appendix A.

Small Group Styles

The last major category, small group style, includes circular seating without tables and small table seating. Circular seating is best for informal discussions thanks to their casual nature and the de-emphasis of leadership. It also encourages more free interaction thanks to the relative inability of participants to refer to handouts or take notes.¹⁶ These are, of course, also drawbacks in that note taking and visual aids are both very difficult to incorporate.

Small table seating captures many of the benefits of circular seating with a table, and expands it to a larger group of people. Participants in a small table style meeting should be

¹⁶ Bell 88.

encouraged to change tables periodically in order to increase the diversity of ideas and promote interaction since table-to-table interaction is relatively infrequent.

Meeting Goals and Purposes

There are a variety of purposes behind business meetings, which include: problem-solving, decision-making, problem identification, informational, presentational/review, and motivational.¹⁷ Different layouts are appropriate for different types of meetings and are identified below.

Problem-solving Meetings

Problem-solving meetings are intended to resolve specific issues which represent either crises or other negative events which require multiple perspectives to resolve. Problem-solving is typically a specialized endeavor which calls for a very small number of people with a significant degree of expertise in the field of the problem, and therefore should typically involve no more than five people.¹⁸ While it might seem worthwhile to bring as many minds as possible to bear on the issue, inviting more than five people greatly increases the odds that the attendees of the meeting lack some skill or knowledge necessary to resolve the issue quickly. This in turn leads to time being wasted by bringing the less knowledgeable members up to speed or having them make infeasible recommendations which then must be debated. Given the small meeting size and collaborative necessity of problem-solving, a circular or oval seating arrangement is ideal. This prevents the formation of psychological teams and encourages collaboration. A strong leader will prefer oval seating, as it generates more authority for the leader.¹⁹ If it is necessary to call a significantly larger problem-solving meeting, small table seating should be utilized to preserve some of the efficiencies of a smaller meeting size.

¹⁷ Drew 31.

¹⁸ Drew 31.

¹⁹ Bell 89.

Decision-Making Meetings

Decision-making meetings are the most common and are generally self-explanatory: a decision must be made and some method of consensus must be reached in order to find the best decision possible. An important distinction must be made in the case of decision-making between substantive decisions and procedural decisions. Procedural decisions govern the way that decisions themselves should be made, such as how decisions will be made and criteria for reasonable discussion. These decisions should be made before any meaningful substantive decisions in order to avoid an autocratic or anarchic meeting process.²⁰ Substantive decisions are, on the other hand, the decisions which decision-making meetings are typically called to make, such as taking a particular action plan or beginning a new initiative.

Decision-making meetings are also well-suited to relatively small attendance, with between five and ten attendees being optimal.²¹ It is important to keep in mind, however, that the specific attendees can be as important if not more so than the number. Ensure that multiple viewpoints are present at decision-making meetings to prevent groupthink and capitulation to one strong opinion. Similar to problem-solving meetings, circular and oval meeting layouts are optimal, though if groupthink is a problem in meetings for an organization, healthy conflict can be encouraged and/or cultivated through strategic use of a rectangular seating arrangement. A U-shaped seating arrangement is also appropriate, particularly for slightly larger meetings or those requiring visual aids.

There are three primary models of decision-making, with many means of arriving at these decisions. The first is the autocratic model, which takes very little time because it involves the input of only one person in making the decision. Disadvantages of the autocratic model include

²⁰ Mina 17-18.

²¹ Bell 31.

the lack of outside input and the potential for those affected by the decision to lack buy-in due to a feeling of having no control. This method is only appropriate for routine, minor decisions or decisions which must be made immediately with no time for a more in-depth assessment.²²

The second model is the majority-based voting model, which requires a majority vote in order for a decision to be implemented. This model is more inclusive than the autocratic model and creates the potential for healthy debate by allowing those in the minority to voice their opinions. The risk with a majority-based model, however, is the formation of “parties” which take an adversarial relationship towards one another and could result in an autocratic decision-making model disguised as one of the majority. Majority-based voting is more time-consuming than autocratic decision-making, but is much more appropriate for dealing with complex issues and those issues which could be controversial.²³

Finally, the consensus model involves a more broad degree of agreement than majority voting, resulting in a greater degree of buy-in and the best chance for in-depth deliberation. The downside of consensus building, however, is that it requires a significant amount of time in most situations, meaning that it is not well-suited to decisions with very strict time limits. There is also a potential for the minority to seize control by withholding approval until an unrelated issue is addressed, as well as the possibility of a proposal becoming so altered to appease all interested parties that it is effectively meaningless.²⁴

Problem Identification Meetings

Problem identification meetings are called when it is clear that an issue needs to be resolved, but the issue has not clearly been defined. For example, imagine that a retailer has been experiencing steady growth in sales for the past several months, when there is suddenly a large

²² Mina 25.

²³ Mina 25.

²⁴ Mina 25.

drop in sales for the most recent month. A meeting might be called to try and identify the cause of the sales drop. Problem identification meetings should be restricted to no more than ten people for many of the same reasons why problem-solving meetings should have restricted attendance.²⁵ The similar meeting size has the advantage of being easily converted into a problem-solving meeting should the issue be identified relatively quickly and not require additional research or preparation to resolve. If the meeting is intended to be a discussion and has fewer technical elements, circular seating with or without a table is ideal due to its encouragement of interaction and sharing of ideas. With more technical issues in which one participant is significantly more expert than the rest, an oval or even amphitheatre style arrangement could be most effective because it focuses the attention of the listeners on the expert of the group. Once a presentation on the issue has been completed, an amphitheatre meeting would be best converted into a different seating arrangement. Conflict is not necessary or ideal, so a rectangular seating arrangement would be very inefficient for this type of meeting.

Informational Meetings

Designed to share ideas, knowledge, and news, informational meetings are a staple of the business world and are likely the most over-utilized meetings in the workplace. With the exception of particularly complex information that would be prone to misunderstanding and require nearly every recipient of the information to ask clarifying questions, most information transfer is better suited for written distribution than in a meeting session. That being said, informational meetings should involve no more than 30 attendees, as beyond that the magnitude and frequency of posed questions becomes unmanageable.²⁶ Oval, circle, and small table seating

²⁵ Bell 31.

²⁶ Bell 31.

are best suited for informational meetings as they encourage dialogue and allow for clarity of information transfer.

As mentioned previously, information that is relatively simple and not extremely time sensitive is almost always better distributed through a written medium such as e-mail or a memorandum, as recipients can read them at their convenience rather than needing to interrupt the work flow to attend a meeting on the information.

Review/Presentational Meetings

Review/presentational meetings are a variant of the informational meeting in which communication is primarily one-way from an imparter of information to numerous recipients of information rather than there being a large number of distributors of information. These presentations can accommodate a large number of people, but in most organizations, communication tends to break down slightly when there are more than 30 people in attendance.²⁷ This is partially due to the fact that as the number of meeting attendees increases, the relative anonymity of each individual attendee also increases, encouraging social loafing and a lack of attentiveness. Theatre or amphitheatre seating is best suited for this type of meeting, while smaller review meetings could benefit from a classroom style meeting space.

Motivational Meetings

Finally, motivational meetings are intended to provide a morale boost or otherwise motivate and reenergize employees. These meetings usually involve a special speaker or leader giving a speech and possibly recognizing members of the audience for their performance. These meetings can have an unlimited number of attendees, as their motivational nature typically makes them engaging enough that the anonymity of attendees is not an issue.²⁸ This does, of

²⁷ Bell 31.

²⁸ Bell 31.

course, place a particular amount of burden on the speaker to keep the audience engaged regardless of attendance, because an uninteresting speaker will fail to motivate his or her audience. In smaller groups, a circular style is best, while larger groups are best suited in a theatre or amphitheatre arrangement.

Meeting Types

There are a number of different types of meetings, each of which requires different considerations and techniques to operate efficiently. The following is a summary of common meeting types and what meeting purposes they can fulfill. Purposes that are in bold below refer to purposes which these meetings are commonly used for that are not necessarily efficient uses of the meeting format. Underlined purposes are only appropriate in specific situations.

Routine/Standard Meetings

Routine/standard meetings are general purpose and can be applied in many situations, including many of those outlined in this section. Routine/standard meetings include ad hoc, staff, and committee meetings.

Ad Hoc Meetings – Problem-solving, Problem Identification, Decision-making, All Others

Ad hoc meetings are called spontaneously, giving short notice to its participants which allows practically no time for preparation. Frequently, these meetings have no set agenda and typically are “held for as long as necessary to resolve the problem.”²⁹ This is both an advantage and a disadvantage, as ad hoc meetings are typically more focused than their counterparts because they are usually called to resolve one purpose and have no sense of routine about them. On the other hand, by not allowing participants adequate preparation time, these meetings do not typically move as rapidly as they would have with more advance notice. Furthermore, a reliance

²⁹ Roger K Mosvick and Robert B. Nelson, *We've Got to Start Meeting like This: a Guide to Successful Business Meeting Management* (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman, 1987) 198.

on ad hoc meetings might signal that an organization is communicating poorly because these meetings should only be called in emergency situations. Constantly playing “catch up” by calling ad hoc meetings will only lead to organizations falling further and further behind the competitive curve.

The ideal meeting size of an ad hoc meeting depends on its purpose. It is important to limit the number of attendees at an ad hoc meeting because of its spontaneous nature. An ad hoc meeting’s typical lack of organization inhibits an effective management of time when more people are involved. Except in the most extreme cases, ad hoc meetings should never involve over 10 people to prevent confusion and disorganization from reaching an unmanageable level.³⁰ Ad hoc meetings are not effective when covering topics other than decision-making, problem-solving, or problem identification because they are indicative of poor planning and coordination in an organization.

*Staff Meetings – Problem-solving, Decision-making, Problem Identification, Presentation/Review, Motivational, **Informational***

Staff meetings are, in contrast to ad hoc meetings, regularly scheduled over intervals of time. The topics covered in these meetings are more general than ad hoc meetings, and often involve a larger number of people who typically work with one another and include various levels of seniority in the organization.³¹ These meetings encourage healthy communication in an organization and allow its members to stay abreast of any problems being experienced by colleagues. This function was particularly useful in a pre-Web 2.0 world, when there was not a more efficient way for problem-solving expertise and past experiences to effectively come together to solve current problems.

³⁰ Drew 31.

³¹ Mosvick 198.

The primary disadvantage of a staff meeting is that its routine nature can lead to the meeting being treated nonchalantly by its attendees. These meetings tend to suffer from a lack of specific purpose during meeting intervals when no major issues have arisen. Staff meetings can be a valuable and effective use of time, but managers should ensure they only last as long as necessary and that a sense of urgency is preserved so time is not wasted.

Staff meetings will experience rapidly diminishing returns beyond 30 participants, though as mentioned previously, many meeting purposes lose effectiveness at smaller meeting sizes.³² Staff meetings are typically not as effective as motivational meetings except in special circumstances. Their routine nature limits the motivational impact of a special meeting, though sales teams can benefit from regular motivation as a part of sales meetings.³³ Staff meetings are ill suited for informational purposes because complex information is more effectively conveyed through an Educational meeting format, while routine information is more efficiently communicated through in written form.³⁴

*Committee Meetings– Problem Identification, Problem-solving, Decision-making, **Informational***

Similar to staff meetings, committee meetings are routinely scheduled meetings, though the composition of its members and its purpose differ from staff meetings. Committee meetings are intended to address a small number of recurring issues which regularly arise throughout the year or an operating period. The members of the committee typically represent a greater range of expertise and functional areas within an organization than a routine staff meeting.³⁵ Committee

³² Drew 31.

³³ Bell 31.

³⁴ Bell 10.

³⁵ Mosvick 199.

meetings are also more likely to have a more formal structure and official rules of procedure than ad hoc or staff meetings given their official nature.³⁶

These meetings serve an important purpose in allowing a critical issue to be routinely and regularly addressed by a cross-section of internal and external experts. Attendees are much less likely to regularly work with one another outside of the capacity of their committee membership, so this opportunity for collaboration and information exchange is valuable. Care must be taken when establishing committees because, like staff meetings, they have a tendency to lose focus and intensity over time. Plans should also be made for the dissolution of committees once their purpose has been fulfilled, as they otherwise become an immense drain on participants' time and resources.³⁷

Committees should normally not consist of more than 10 people to maximize effectiveness. Committee meetings tend to become informational meetings when the purpose of the committee has lapsed and there is no other progress to be made. Committees that become informational in nature should be eliminated.

Educational Meetings

Educational meetings are special formats that differ from standard formats and are intended to provide new information on various topics to participants. They are frequently employed to teach new skills or raise awareness about more complex issues. Types of educational meetings include symposiums and instructional groups.

Symposiums – Informational, Training Seminar

In a symposium, a small group of lecturers speak on a specific topic for an uninterrupted amount of time. Symposiums are typically moderated or otherwise facilitated by an additional

³⁶ Mosvick 199.

³⁷ Mosvick 199.

participant, and after each speaker, the audience is given opportunities to ask questions.³⁸

Information transfer and communication in a symposium is almost always one-way, with knowledge flowing from the panel to the audience without any meaningful reciprocation taking place. This format facilitates the explanation of reasonably complex information, as speakers are allowed to clearly and firmly organize their thoughts into a cohesive narrative. However, this format can quickly degenerate into being a complete waste of company time and money if the panelists are not skilled at speaking or are revealed to be less competent in the field on which they are lecturing than originally believed.³⁹ Symposiums should be held infrequently and only on topics of great importance and complex enough that the audience must understand the relevant issues before any collaborative work can be done.

Symposiums can involve a large number of people, though the problems associated with one-way information flow are exacerbated as attendance grows. Employing a symposium as a training seminar for an exceptionally complex topic is a tricky endeavor. The one-way and uninterrupted flow of communication could result in the speaker losing the participants early in his or her speech due to a poorly explained topic with no opportunity for immediate follow-up and clarification.

Instructional Groups – Training Seminar

Instructional groups are a much smaller, interactive variant of the symposium in which meeting participants are led by a facilitator to discuss and learn new topics and skills.⁴⁰ These meetings are equipped to cover extremely complex information and skills, instead of teaching skills which come reasonably easily to people.⁴¹ Another disadvantage is that these groups

³⁸ Mosvick 200.

³⁹ Mosvick 200.

⁴⁰ Mosvick 201.

⁴¹ Mosvick 201.

rapidly lose effectiveness as the number of participants increases. If a large number of people must learn the topic, multiple iterations of instructional groups may be needed.

Instructional groups are only suited to training seminars. Any other application of this meeting format will result in an inefficient meeting. Like all training seminar meetings, this meeting type should involve no more than 15 people.

Cutting to the Chase – Making Meetings Work

In addition to the pre-meeting activities discussed above, there are a number of strategies proven to make meetings more effective and shorten the amount of time required for meetings. Prior to holding a meeting, it is important to inform the invitees of the Five Ws. Every meeting announcement should announce Who is invited, Where the meeting will be held, When it will convene and how long it will take, What is going to be discussed, and Why it needs to be discussed.⁴² The Five Ws give participants an opportunity to adequately prepare for the meeting and enable them to effectively schedule their other work around the meeting. Meetings must adhere to their established purposes and should not run over time or start late. Showing a lack of respect for the time and energy of the people at the meeting can have long term consequences, such as employees dreading meetings rather than being excited about the opportunity to work collaboratively.

Agendas are a simple yet underutilized tool for meetings. Illustrating this point, a study in the mid-1990s concluded that only one out of three business meetings had a written agenda distributed in advance to participants.⁴³ Benefits of an agenda include providing a framework for keeping discussion on track, maintaining a meeting's schedule, and providing sub-decision

⁴² Bell 14.

⁴³ Drew 9.

waypoints to evaluate the progress made throughout the meeting.⁴⁴ Items which are contentious, difficult, or urgent should be addressed early in the agenda in order to resolve them when the energy level in the room is at its highest.⁴⁵ An added benefit of using agendas that answer the Five Ws is that it forces management to consider whether the meeting is necessary and whether each invitee is needed at the meeting to reach a decision.⁴⁶ Finally, by distributing an agenda in advance, each participant is aware of the issues at hand and has had the opportunity to consider them before the meeting takes place.

Following up on meetings is another underutilized practice which can, over time, lead to significant improvements. Follow-ups can be as simple as passing out note-cards on which participants rate the meeting on a scale of 1-10 or otherwise indicate their perception of the meeting's value, with space for specific comments and recommendations for improvement.⁴⁷ Follow-ups can also be as elaborate as a full-page questionnaire, though this level of detail is probably too fine for regular use. Through regular solicitation of feedback on meetings, particular problem areas can be identified and attempts can be made to devise solutions to improve future meetings.

Digital Age Communications

Until now, this paper has primarily addressed meetings as viewed in a traditional, stand-alone sense. However, as technology continues to march forward, new opportunities arise to improve communication and productivity both during meetings and in lieu of them. Intranets as an information technology infrastructure are not new, but recent developments in Web 2.0 in particular make evaluating an organization's current intranet an important task. Web 2.0 is the

⁴⁴ Mosvick 100.

⁴⁵ Drew 28.

⁴⁶ Bell 16.

⁴⁷ Drew 47.

advent of internet infrastructures which support collaborative work and two way interaction rather than the old format of content creation and consumption that existed until the mid- 2000s online. Twitter, Wikipedia, and other sites which rely on users to generate content provide the best examples of the potential of Web 2.0 for application as a knowledge management and collaboration tool in the business world.

When implementing new technology, it is imperative to involve those who would resist change to ensure maximum functionality. The generation currently entering the workforce, Generation Y, will feel right at home operating in Web 2.0 interfaces, but older generations are likely to exhibit some resistance.⁴⁸ These cross-generational issues are unavoidable, but by being aware of the challenges faced by older workers and ensuring they are addressed, the groundwork can be laid to allow the future managers of organizations to flourish.

The following case studies provide a perspective on some of the early adopters of Web 2.0 intranets and the functionalities they commonly implemented. The case studies also address how these organizations managed the technology proficiency gap within their organizations. Finally, it is the goal of these cases to demonstrate the value of implementing an intranet can bring to an organization.

Case Study: Intranet of the Jenkins Law Library

In July 2001, the Jenkins Law Library in Pennsylvania implemented an intranet that provided basic but bland functionality. Documents were uploaded without much thought to organization, and within four years, the intranet became cluttered and disorganized. Despite the vast wealth of knowledge contained on the intranet's servers, it was so difficult to access needed information that the intranet fell into disuse. Many traditional intranets share these characteristics:

⁴⁸ Sheri Rothman, "Social Networking: How Companies Are Using Web 2.0 to Communicate with Employees," *The Conference Board Executive Action Series* 315 (2009), *Business Knowledge RESEARCH*, 2.

visually unappealing, organized in a way that divides departments in an organization, and an arcane user interface that is as difficult to use by employees with little computing experience as well as more competent users.⁴⁹

Management of the library identified the need for a change, so they set about creating a new intranet to foster collaboration and reorganize information in a way to make it more accessible and useful. Visual aesthetic was improved in order to make the intranet more welcoming to those who resisted its use. In particular, a great advantage of intranets is that branding is not necessary because intranets are entirely internal, allowing employees to customize the appearance of their own interface. This further fosters a sense of universal ownership of the intranet and encourages greater use. Other features of the Jenkins Intranet included reorganizing data by relevant tasks rather than departments to encourage different areas of the library to work with one another and share information across departmental lines. The intranet incorporated more graphics and less text in the navigation process and created blogs, a shared office calendar, and wiki-style editing interfaces that allowed employees to update and comment on the work of other employees.⁵⁰

Implemented in early 2006, the intranet enabled employees to create blogs tracking the progress of individual projects and store information in an easily accessible, editable form rather than having to hunt for old e-mails and other correspondence. Employees were empowered to stay abreast of one another's work and if a particular problem was encountered which another employee had dealt with before, solutions could be shared. Human resources (HR) information such as emergency contact numbers, birthdays, etc. were made available, increasing familiarity

⁴⁹ Nicole C. Engard, "Intranet 2.0: Fostering Collaboration," *Online* (2006), *ABI/INFORM*, 16.

⁵⁰ Engard 16-18.

of the staff with one another and removing the need for employees to spend time talking with HR to make routine updates to their information.⁵¹

In implementing the new intranet, managers encouraged employees to practice editing content on Wikipedia to become familiar with the style of the new intranet. They also held workshops regularly during the first months of the new intranet to train employees on various facets of the intranet to ensure that everyone was capable of consuming and contributing information.⁵²

Case Study – ING Group “ING Wiki”

In 2006, ING officially launched its “ING Wiki,” an augmentation of its existing intranet that brought Web 2.0 functionality to the intranet in the form of allowing user-generated and edited content to be uploaded to the intranet. In order to encourage opponents of the change to use the system, ING created a simple two minute tutorial explaining how to use the already user-friendly interface’s general functions. Additionally, ING implemented a series of rules governing acceptable content for the intranet and appointed a section editor to monitor each section of the intranet. These rules included adherence to compliance, remaining relevant to the organization, posting recent and verifiable information, showing respect for the system and others, and being available to communicate and defend edits.⁵³

Functionalities of ING’s intranet include a seven-section taxonomy breaking entries out into areas such as: Knowledge Management, Finance, Geography, and Risk. Further subdivisions facilitate the retrieval of information, and articles are capable of linking to one another to enable more fluid transitions for more in-depth reading. This style of organization is considered to be

⁵¹ Engard 21-23.

⁵² Engard 23.

⁵³ Anonymous, “Enhancing Collaboration at ING Group,” *Knowledge Management Review* (2007), ABI/INFORM, 20-22.

vastly superior to the old intranet's general lack of categorization, and employees were extremely enthusiastic about how the search functionality "cut through the clutter" of the old intranet. An area also exists that allows employees to create wiki pages for specific projects. A glossary of ING terms and concepts is available, allowing employees to clarify basic issues in correspondence without contacting another person and taking additional time to do.⁵⁴

Once implemented, employees found that recognition was needed for contributors, as without any kind of reward from managers, people felt their time spent contributing to the wiki was viewed as wasting time by their managers. They also determined that the brief tutorial was inadequate as people were still unsure of how to best interact with the new system. The primary value found by the employees, in addition to the better searchability, was the collaboration that occurred between offices when, upon researching a project, employees discovered that their colleagues in other offices were working on similar projects. The intranet enabled them to pool their efforts and generate results more quickly and efficiently than if they had worked alone.⁵⁵

Web 2.0 as a Meeting Tool

Intranets such as the ones discussed in the Jenkins Law Library and ING Group can be incorporated into meetings to improve information flow and reduce the time needed in meetings. Since the purpose of many meetings is to gather a number of viewpoints or collaborate on a problem or idea, the multiple-editor functionality of a wiki enables collaboration but with the benefit (and drawback) of the work being asynchronous. Similarly, it allows information that would normally be shared in a meeting to be conveyed in a manner that allows collective clarification without necessarily requiring a significant amount of time from those who understand the information. Using a wiki-style intranet for information transfer also carries the

⁵⁴ "Enhancing Collaboration at ING Group," 20-22.

⁵⁵ "Enhancing Collaboration at ING Group," 21-22.

benefit of a built-in record-keeping process that allows any interested party to review takeaways at his or her leisure and reduces the possibility of miscommunication through poor note taking.

Since the mid-2000s, even more complex features have been introduced such as the ability to upload video or audio recordings and to use Skype-like voice and video chat to conduct discussions and other business. This is especially welcome news for those who prefer to learn through media other than written word, and provides yet another tool for asynchronous information transfer and collaboration to improve the sophistication and efficiency of the workplace.

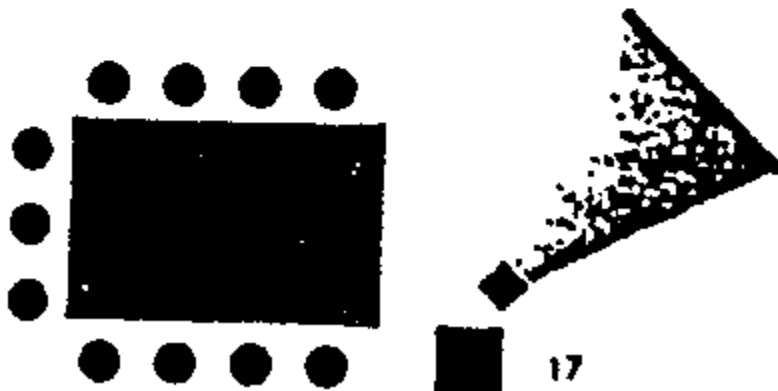
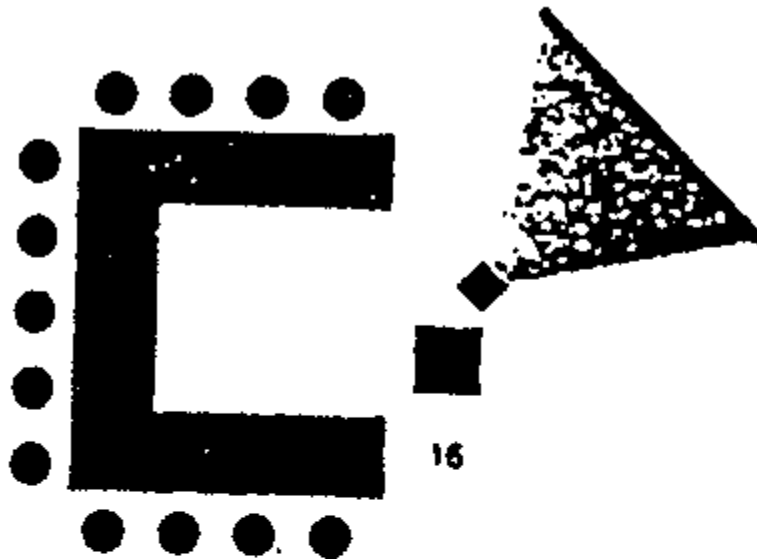
Conclusion

Meetings will always have a place in the organizational process and hold a significant amount of value when employed properly. The key, as demonstrated in this paper, is to ensure that the strategies and purposes employed in the meetings aid in the collaborative process rather than hinder it. New technologies present exciting opportunities to reach new levels of communication and collaboration in an increasingly globalized world. In person meetings are not always feasible when dealing with a multinational organization, and technology can help to bridge the communication gap.

Particularly in service economies such as the United States, a great deal of the value of a firm is derived from its human capital. Knowledge management systems and a judicious use of the time of that capital will preserve, nurture, and attract more and more valuable human capital, allowing those organizations which properly harness the expertise and experience of employees to gain a competitive edge in the evolving marketplace.

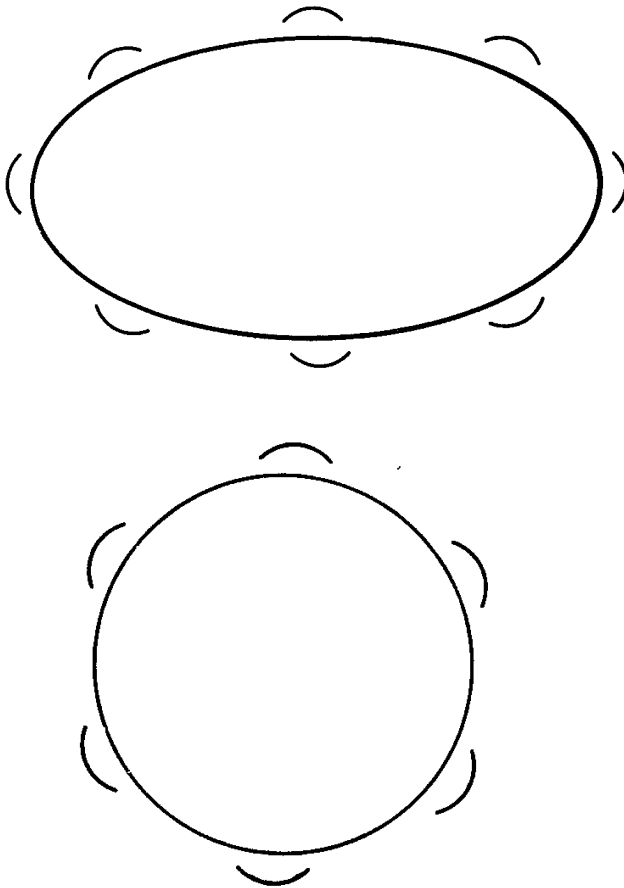
Appendix – Meeting Room Layouts

*U-shaped and Rectangular Conference Room Layouts*⁵⁶

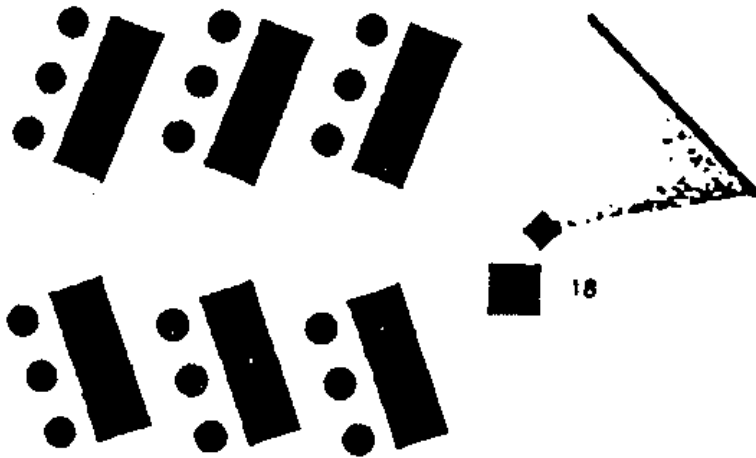


⁵⁶ Drew 36.

*Oval-shaped and Circular Conference Room Layouts*⁵⁷



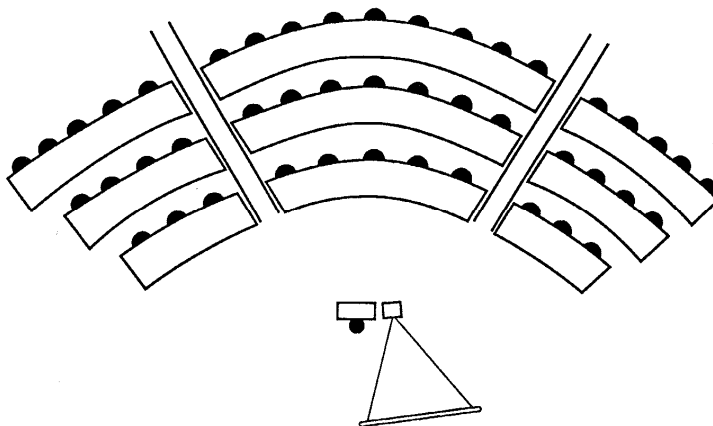
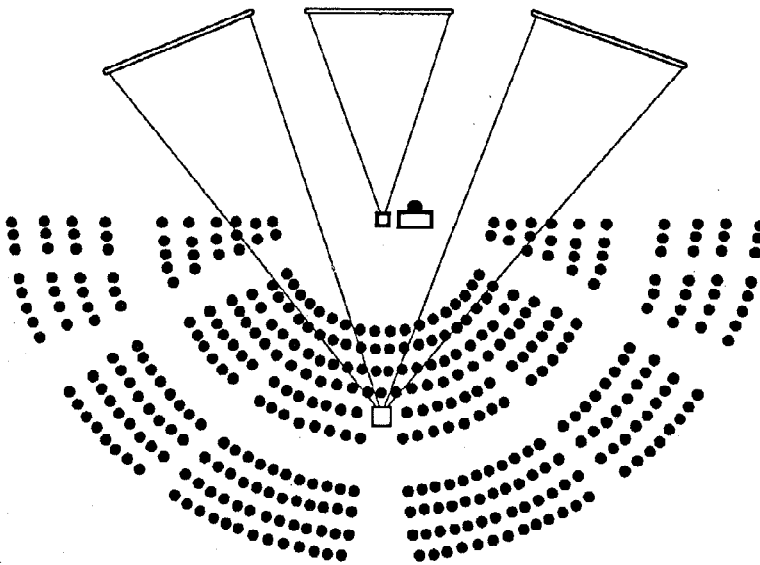
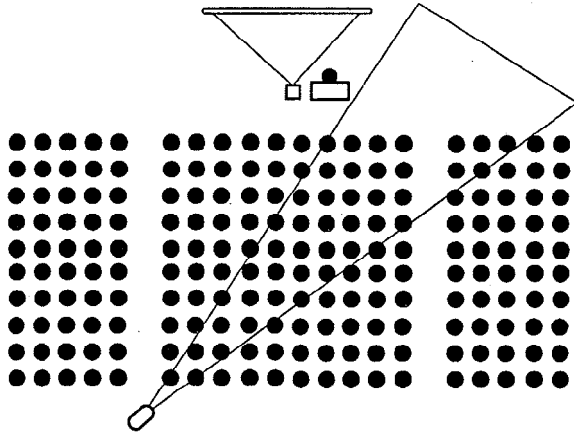
*Classroom Layout*⁵⁸



⁵⁷ Bell 88-89.

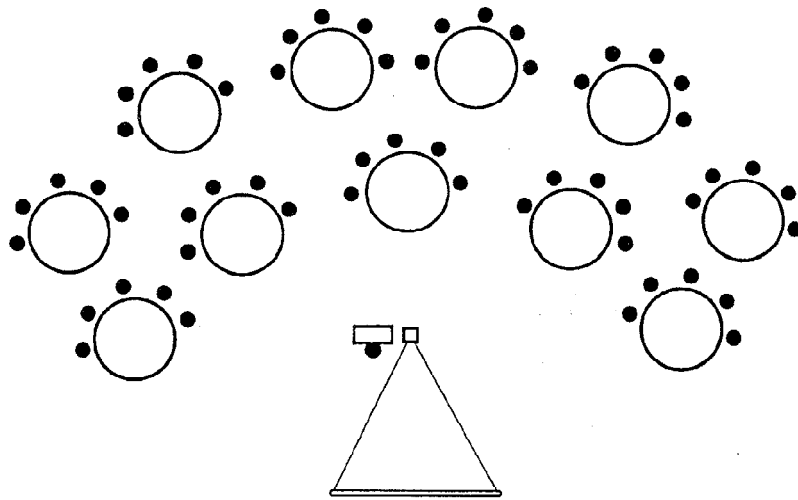
⁵⁸ Drew 36.

*Theatre/Amphitheatre Layouts*⁵⁹

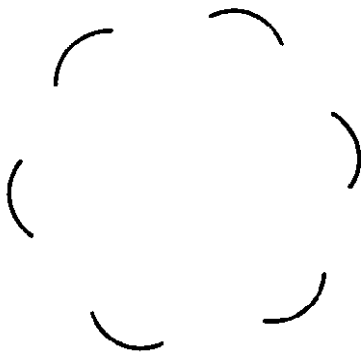


⁵⁹ Drew 39-41.

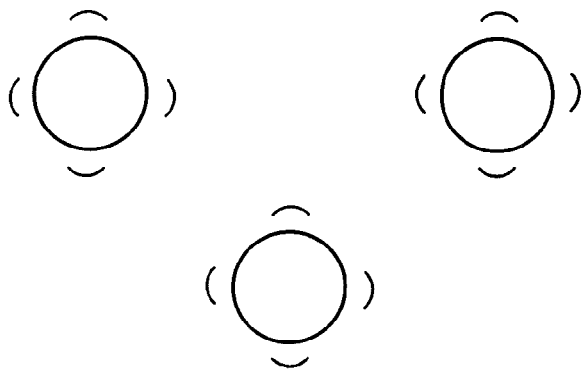
*Crescent Layout (Special Theatre Layout)*⁶⁰



*Circular Seating without Tables*⁶¹



*Small Table Seating*⁶²



⁶⁰ Drew 41.

⁶¹ Bell 87.

⁶² Bell 89.

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