



Extras: On Meetings and Questionnaires

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On Meetings

- (derived from 3M Anatomy of a great meeting)
- **Why Meet?**
 - Move group actions forward by:
 - Presenting information to others
 - Collaborating -review, evaluate, discuss, problem solve and decide
 - Social Reasons:
 - Need to belong
 - Need to achieve, have an effect (success)
 - Desire to communicate, share common reality
 - Social and task needs must both be met

Most of this is straightforward and it will go without comment save for the fact that meetings are a fact of life and doing them well and efficiently is much appreciated by all participants and will save you tons of time over your career. Following these tips will make you more successful in running meetings and will give back months of your life.

Meetings - focus on task

- Be clear about meeting's objective
- Create a solid agenda with realistic time budget for each item - should be tied to objective and items should be assigned priorities
- Prepare in advance, especially if you are running or are a key participant in the meeting

Pretty straightforward. There is no substitute for preparation!

Meetings - focus on people

- Who is invited?
 - Information providers
 - Decision makers
 - Necessary collaborators (buy-in)
 - **Avoid lurkers**
- Ground rules:
 - Start and end on time
 - One conversation at a time (caucus time)
 - Honor all points of view
 - Don't interrupt

Lurkers are folks who have no stake in the meeting but often derail the meeting so that they can participate.

Meetings and people-2

- Clarify the decision process to all members
 - Autocratic-leader makes decision
 - Democratic-each participant votes, majority rules
 - Consensus - everyone agrees to move forward
- Roles:
 - Facilitator
 - Recorder - careful here
 - Leader
 - Participant

The recorder/scribe should take care to make sure that the points made are accurately recorded, it is necessary to be a very active listener asking for clarification.

Before and After Meeting

- Before:
 - Advance agenda
 - Participants
 - Time and place (directions, reach numbers)
 - Preparation of materials
 - Pre meeting materials
 - A/V equipment available
 - Special needs?
- After, **crisp meeting notes** and followup:
 - Decisions
 - Action items
 - Open issues
 - Parking lot

Just a list and please make those meeting notes crisp (short and to the point) and informative. No one will read 10 pages. If you must have long notes, provide a 1/2 page summary. The “parking lot” is a place for ideas/topics that will be considered in future meetings.

Heuristic Meeting Methods

- The dry board marker as Talking Stick
 - Usual suspects
 - Designate a leader
 - Solicit others
- **Prepare, prepare, prepare**
- Roles, goals and strategy for a meeting
- Gather consensus before the meeting

There are always certain predictable people who try to monopolize the meeting by grabbing the chalk or marker. Try to wrest the chalk from their grip (not literally) or preempt them by appointing someone to record notes and serve as the scribe with the chalk. Good meetings need work before the meeting! If you want a decision to move in your favor, work on it before the meeting, lobbying stakeholders.

Questionnaire Design

- Much of the information derived from "A brief guide to questionnaire development" by Robert Frary
- Questionnaire preparation:
 - Focus on the information desired, write as few questions as possible, avoid "nice to know"
 - Have an analysis plan - arrange for a manageable number of ordinally scaled variables
 - Prototype it, including post questionnaire critique
 - Field trial of mailed questionnaire - response rate, question applicability (if trial shows same response for everyone, may be redundant)
 - Question performance

Okay, from discussing Gurus to questionnaires. One of the things that I will do throughout the course is intersperse slides with skill sets that will be valuable to you in the future. The neat thing about questionnaire, is that doing it right will make you a valuable asset not only for software engineering but also in everyday lives with clubs and sports teams, ... anywhere you would like to poll opinions.

You can find the Frary article on the web, here's one of the urls: <http://www.testscoring.vt.edu/fraryquest.html>. It tends to move around so you may have to google his name.

Questionnaires are useful in getting information from users -- it is worth understanding the basics.

One key in questionnaire development is to focus on what you need to know and ask as few questions as possible. The shorter the form, the more likely it will get completed. Also understand what you will do with the information, the analysis plan. After you design the questionnaire, test it on a few friends or coworkers. Mailed questionnaires are useful but if you are doing consumer software (games), expect a very low return rate! Also if a question always results in the same answer it is not very effective -- it does not provide information. An effective question provides information and its performance has to be relative to other questions. For instance you may discover that democrats feel differently about an issue than republicans. These are really the essentials of building a questionnaire. The next few slides provides further heuristics.

Q2

- Avoid open ended questions - try blank completion
 - If all else fails, place open ended questions at the end, with a predetermined scoring strategy to max inter-rater reliability
- Objective questions
 - Avoid "other" - exception is if categories are clear-cut, few in number and some responders might feel uncomfortable
 - Avoid category proliferation - get the information you need. If you are interested in Windows XP users only, ask Win XP or other.
 - Ordering of categories - go from lower level to higher level, e.g., never, seldom, occasionally and frequently

Open ended questions take more time to score and they certainly cannot be automatically scored. If you must ask for an indeterminate number of responses to a question try to limit it to blank completion, of a word or so. If you provide multiple choice questions, avoid other as a response -- it does not tell you much except that it was not any of the other choices. One exception is if the range of answers cannot be comprehensive -- for instance political party -- there are actually many political parties in the US, but we mostly hear about two. Other provides an answer for the smaller political parties. One good use of other is the WinXP question, it focuses on the categories of interest.

Also provide "natural" ordering of categories, e.g, high to low or low to high depending on the category. Usually prototyping the questionnaire will catch these difficulties.

Q3

- Scale points
 - Avoid scale point proliferation ... 4 to 5 points is usually sufficient and never go for more than 6 or 7. - JNDs, just noticeable differences. This is true even if only the endpoints are labeled.
 - The use of a scale midpoint (odd number) be careful. May indicate: ignorance, lack of cooperation, reading difficulty, reluctance to answer, inapplicability. In most instances there will be a high number of neutral (midpoint) responders.
 - Without a midpoint (neutral) response, responders may avoid responding, try:
 - Encourage skipping if no response
 - Word responses so that a firm stand may be avoided, but a direction indicated, "tend to disagree"
 - Include options clarifying reluctance - not applicable, prefer not to answer
 - However, sometimes a midpoint is justified, "the amount of homework for this course was: too little, reasonable, too much"

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Too many scale points do not provide additional information -- There is a psychological concept of Just Noticeable Difference (JND) which defines the minimum perceivable gap between two points.

Also heed the advice on whether to use a midpoint (rate from 1-5, where 3 is midpoint or rate from 1-4 where there is no midpoint). I prefer no midpoint, but the homework question on the slide provides a rationale for using midpoints in some situations.

Q4

- Response category language:
 - "strongly agree" is redundant, use agree
 - Agree/disagree vs agree, tend to agree, ...
 - Read your questions carefully and test for hidden assumptions
- Avoid ranking if possible, and at most rank 6 or less things
- Apple pie phenomenon - rating everything at one end of the scale - have them rate both positive and negative statements

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Agree is agree, you either agree or you don't for questionnaire purposes (strongly agree provides no additional information it is used more as a rhetorical device) be critical of your own questionnaires. Ranking is really tough - avoid it or keep it to a few things, e.g., rank these car manufacturers from worst to best, rank your professors from worst to best (oops no don't do that it may be too easy!).

Make sure that you construct questions so that they are forced to use the scale -- if not some folks get lazy and after a few questions just circle the same choice for the rest.