

WORKPLACE MEETING OPTIMISATION: AN ACTION RESEARCH ON
FACTORS DRIVING MEETING EFFECTIVENESS

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my family for their endless love, prayers and support; and to everyone who has been my light, guiding and motivating me along this journey.

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The process of preparing my master's thesis has been the amazing learning experience I've ever had during my academic life. The completion of this MBA course marks the start of a new chapter in my life and a step closer to achieving my future goals.

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ABSTRACT

Meetings have become a hot topic of discussion for researchers and practitioners alike. Practitioners and researchers have examined how meetings should be designed and run in order to promote high-quality outcomes. Works of the literature found that effective meetings will have a greater impact on employee engagement and performance. Effective meetings will motivate employees to make more contributions and increase their commitment to their work. Given that meetings are the most common avenues of interaction among Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) employees, it is crucial to understand ways to promote meeting effectiveness. This action research aims to examine the extent to which meeting design characteristics influenced meeting effectiveness and provides practical recommendations on optimising the effectiveness of the meeting. A mixed-method consisting of quantitative and qualitative approaches was applied in this study. The findings revealed a significant relationship between meeting design characteristics and meeting effectiveness. The results showed that the meeting management toolkit intervention plan has successfully enhanced the meeting design and subsequently the effectiveness of meetings in MCMC. The findings of this study have implications impacting employees' meeting experiences and perceptions of meeting effectiveness. This study also provides a foundation and reference for researchers and practitioners who want to explore further into this subject.

ABSTRAK

Mesyuarat telah menjadi topik perbincangan hangat bagi para penyelidik dan pengamal. Para pengamal dan penyelidik telah meneliti cara mesyuarat harus direka bentuk untuk menggalakkan hasil yang berkualiti tinggi. Sorotan kajian mendapati bahawa mesyuarat yang berkesan akan memberi impak yang besar terhadap penglibatan dan prestasi pekerja. Mesyuarat yang berkesan akan mendorong pekerja untuk membuat lebih banyak sumbangan dan meningkatkan komitmen mereka terhadap kerja mereka. Memandangkan mesyuarat adalah saluran interaksi utama bagi membincangkan dan menyelesaikan sesuatu perkara atau isu di kalangan kakitangan Suruhanjaya Komunikasi dan Multimedia Malaysia (SKMM). Justeru, adalah penting untuk memahami cara untuk mempromosikan keberkesanan mesyuarat. Penyelidikan tindakan ini dijalankan dengan tujuan untuk mengkaji sejauh mana ciri-ciri reka bentuk mesyuarat mempengaruhi keberkesanan mesyuarat dan memberikan cadangan praktikal untuk mengoptimumkan keberkesanan mesyuarat. *Mixed-method* (kaedah gabungan) yang terdiri daripada pendekatan kuantitatif dan kualitatif telah digunakan dalam kajian ini. Hasil dapatan kajian menunjukkan terdapat hubungan yang signifikan antara ciri-ciri reka bentuk mesyuarat dan keberkesanan mesyuarat. Ini menunjukkan bahawa *toolkit* pengurusan mesyuarat berjaya menambahbaik reka bentuk mesyuarat dan seterusnya keberkesanan mesyuarat di SKMM. Hasil kajian ini mempunyai implikasi yang memberi kesan kepada pekerja terhadap pengalaman mesyuarat dan persepsi keberkesanan mesyuarat. Kajian ini juga memberi asas dan rujukan kepada pengkaji dan pengamal yang ingin meneroka lebih lanjut mengenai subjek ini.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

C&M	-	Communications and Multimedia
COVID-19	-	Coronavirus Disease 2019
GCC	-	Gulf Cooperation Council
GDP	-	Gross Domestic Product
HBR	-	Harvard Business Review
ICT	-	Information and Communication Technology
JENDELA	-	Jalanan Digital Negara
KPI	-	Key Performance Indicators
MCMC	-	Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission
MCO	-	Movement Control Order
RO	-	Research Objective
RQ	-	Research Question
SOP	-	Standard Operating Procedure
SPSS	-	IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences
UUM	-	University Utara Malaysia

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The topic of the research is “Workplace Meeting Optimisation: An Action Research on Factors Driving Meeting Effectiveness”. The chapter one of this research presents the background and research problem statement. This chapter also presented the rationale for conducting this research and outlined the research aim, objectives, and questions.

1.2 Information About the Case Company

The Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) was established on 1 November 1998. The MCMC is a statutory body, entrusted with the role of regulating the communications and multimedia industry and enforcing the communications and multimedia laws in Malaysia. The MCMC regulates and promotes the communications and multimedia industry encompassing telecommunications, broadcast, Internet services, postal and courier services, and digital certification. At the time MCMC was established, the regulator role was the regulation of the communications and multimedia industry based on the powers provided for in the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission Act 1998 and the Communications and Multimedia Act 1998. Pursuant to these Acts, MCMC role also implementing and promoting the Government's national policy objectives for the communications and multimedia sector, encouraging and promoting self-regulation, and balancing the overall interests of the consumer, industry, and investor. The 10 national policy objectives are the regulatory basis of MCMC’s regulatory framework, which include, economic regulation, technical regulation, consumer protection, social regulation, postal regulation and certification authority regulation.

1.2.1 PEST Analysis

PEST is a model used to analyse four key factors (Political, Economic, Social and Technological) in the external environment that can affect organisation performance. The study used PEST model to evaluate how these four external factors impacting the Communications and Multimedia (C&M) industry.

a) Political Factor

Political uncertainty and change in the Government will impact the C&M industry as any new policies or regulations introduced by the Government will directly or indirectly impact the C&M industry development. It also affected investors' trust and determination to invest in Malaysia. Whether it is attracting foreign direct investment, encouraging new entrants, or connecting rural and remote areas, each has a different impact on the industry development. As MCMC is an agency under Ministry of Communications and Multimedia, sudden changes in policies will affect the direction and work scope of MCMC. Therefore, the level of effectiveness needs to be constantly improved to cope with unpredictable changes.

b) Economic Factor

The rapid development of the Malaysia C&M industry has led to high population coverage and penetration rates, benefiting the national economy. The Information and Communication Technology (ICT) industry comprises telecommunications and media in Malaysia contributed RM289 billion to the national economy in 2019, representing 19.1% of total Gross Domestic Product (GDP), compared with RM213 billion, representing 18.1% of GDP in 2015 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020b). The industry has a substantial impact on employment levels, employed 1.14 million people in 2019, an increase of 0.8% from 1.06 million in 2015 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020b). The unexpected outbreak of COVID-19 has posed a significant impact on the Malaysian economy. Stimulus and

policy measures played a crucial role in cushioning the COVID-19 shocks to the Malaysian economy and supporting growth recovery. Recognising the significant economic impact of the pandemic, the government has announced a series of stimulus packages worth RM305 billion (20% of GDP) to support the economy (Bank Negara Malaysia, 2021). In addition, the government recognised telecommunications services as third utility (Ministry of Finance Malaysia, 2020) and allocated RM9.4 billion to close the digital divide (Bernama, 2020) based on the Budget 2021 announcement. Hence, digital connectivity continues to be significant towards government priority.

c) Social Factor

Malaysia's population is expected to reach 32.7 million in 2020, up 0.4% from 32.5 million in 2019, with a median age of 29.2 years (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020a). As a result, the younger population rate and expanding population benefitted the C&M industry. Since the emergence of the mobile phone, with the advent of 3G, 4G and the upcoming 5G, consumers' demand for Internet access has increased dramatically. Internet usage became a lifestyle for most Malaysian, including senior citizens. In 2020, 57% of those aged 60 years and above used the Internet, up from only 43.8% in 2019. The Internet usage among youth aged 15 to 24 years old was more than 90% in 2020 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2021). This indicated a good level of digital literacy and digital lifestyle among Malaysians, thus strengthened C&M industry.

d) Technological Factor

The outbreak of COVID-19 has caused a rapid change in how consumers spend and businesses operate. In the new normal, virtual services are becoming more common. Since the pandemic of COVID-19 outbreak, employees were required to work from home during Movement Control Order (MCO). The requirement necessitates employees to work remotely or conducting meeting online in which MCMC also faced no exceptions on this matter. In order for the economy to adapt to

the new normal quickly, technology and innovation adoption is accelerated to drive and sustain future growth. Several initiatives were implemented towards expediting digitalisation and the rollout of fast and reliable digital connectivity will unlock new growth sources while increasing future productivity and incomes. These included implementing a national digital infrastructure plan (Jalinan Digital Negara or JENDELA) to boost Malaysia's digital connectivity and lay the foundation for the 5G technology.

In summary, the C&M industry development was influenced by the political, environmental, social and technological factors. As the Government accelerated the plan to improve digital connectivity nationwide, the level of effectiveness within the organisation also needs to be improved to cope with unpredictable changes and contribute towards becoming a high performing organisation.

1.2.2 SWOT Analysis

The SWOT analysis in Figure 1.1 was conducted to evaluate MCMC's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats affecting organisation performance.

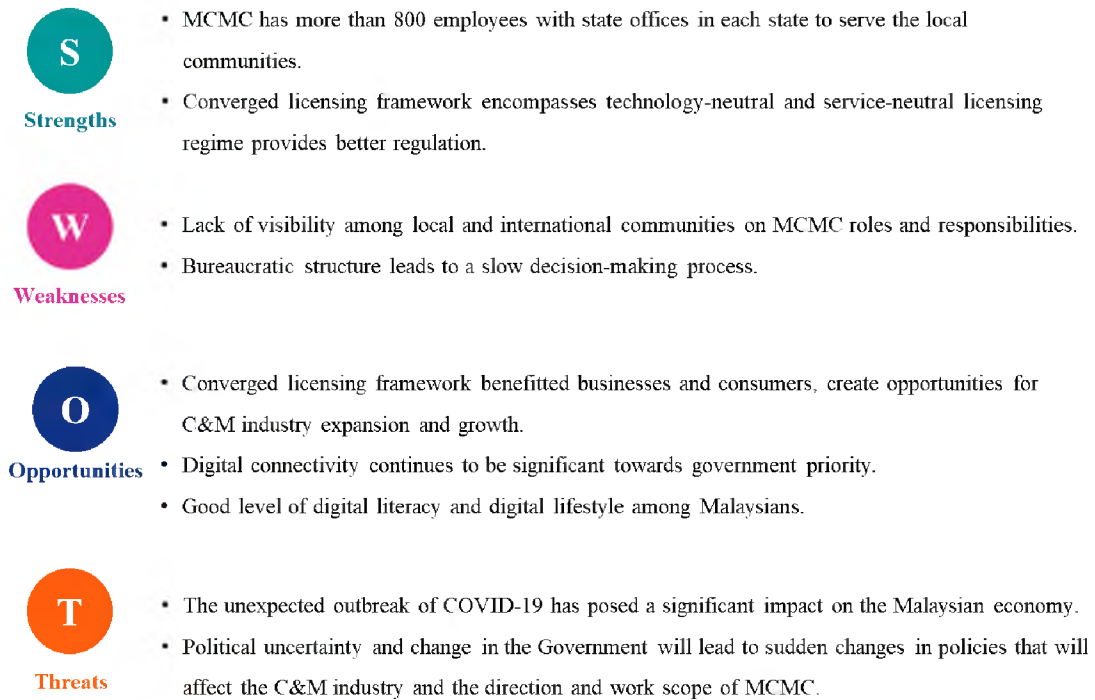


Figure 1.1 SWOT Analysis

Source: Self-developed

1.3 Problem Statement

Meetings have become a hot topic of discussion for researchers and practitioners alike. Practitioners and researchers have examined how meetings should be designed and run in order to promote high-quality outcomes. Publishers such as Forbes, Harvard Business Review (HBR), MIT Sloan Management Review, Wall Street Journal have published popular practitioner-oriented meeting best practices. As meetings formed a substantial portion of staff workday in many organisations, optimising meeting effectiveness could benefit organisations and make the workplace

a better environment to collaborate and retain employees. Unfortunately, empirical evidence tends to point to widespread inefficiency and ineffectiveness in workplace meetings, whereby meetings are rated as “poor” or “time-wasters” by attendees (Mroz et al., 2018; Thanh et al., 2020).

Findings showed that employees look forward to a meeting with clear objectives, productive with relevant information shared, timely or punctual (Allen et al., 2012). Survey responses have demonstrated that unsuccessful meetings are often due to poor meeting planning and poor meeting leadership. A study by Allen et al. (2020) found that effective meetings will have a greater impact on employee engagement and performance. Attendees who are the most active are the ones who feel that meetings are the most effective and satisfying (Rogelberg, 2019). Effective meetings will motivate employees to make more contributions and increase their commitment to their work (Thanh et al., 2020).

In MCMC, meetings were the most common avenues of interaction among MCMC staff and between external stakeholders. There were more than 13,600 meetings have been conducted a year or 37 meetings per day at MCMC Headquarters. Based on the primary data collected by the researcher through questionnaire, 43% of the MCMC employees spent an average of 5 – 10 hours of meetings per week, and 17% of them indicated they spent more than 11 hours of their time in meetings per week (Figure 1.2). When asked about their feelings on these meetings they have attended, 17% of the employees expressed that their meetings were spent discussing irrelevant issues, 15% found that their meetings were unproductive and inefficient, 11% indicated meetings were wasting time and 8% found meetings are frustrating.

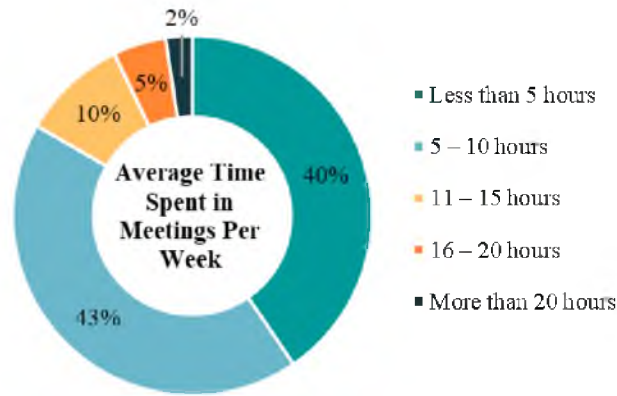


Figure 1.2 MCMC Employees Average Time Spent in Meetings Per Week

Source: Self-developed

Most of the time, the director plans and organises these meetings spontaneously without the input of the meeting participants. As a result, the meetings often fail in areas where only a few objectives were accomplished, or no objectives are achieved, inefficient, and wasting time.

In terms of meeting design, meetings were not provided with proper agenda, meeting rules or having meeting minutes to keep records for further follow-up. The quality of the meetings differs depending on meeting types and meeting leaders. There is no standard design on how meetings should be organised. In fact, it is up to each meeting leader to decide how a meeting should be conducted. Therefore, effective meeting skills are essential because if meetings are planned and led well, they can serve various important purposes. However, many people are not taught how to plan or conduct meetings effectively. These issues have prompted the researcher to do this action research to determine how meetings are organised in MCMC and propose practical interventions from meeting design perspectives to optimise meeting effectiveness in the organisation.

1.3.1 Problem Diagnosis

The problem found in MCMC has been further diagnosed by using Fishbone (Ishikawa) Diagram, as shown in Figure 1.3.

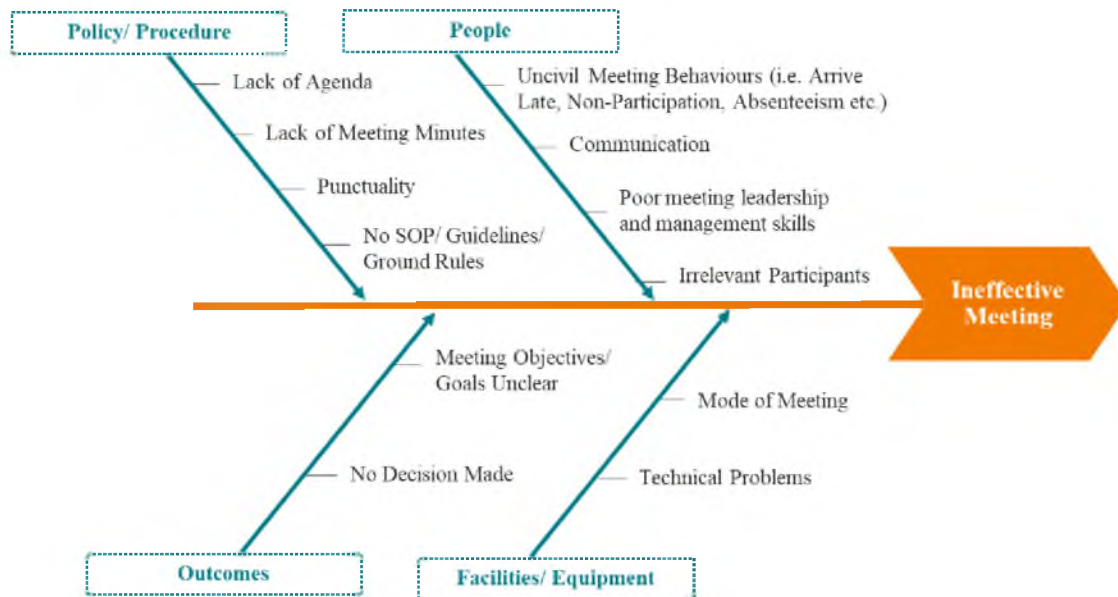


Figure 1.3 Problems Diagnosis using Fishbone Diagram

Source: Self-developed

1.3.2 Theoretical Gaps

According to Web of Science analysis, there were 34 records for research on “meeting effectiveness” topic. Refer to Figure 1.4, about two studies on meeting effectiveness published per year on average. The researcher noted that the year 2020 had seen an increasing trend in meeting effectiveness publications, signifying meetings have become a hot topic of discussion for researchers.

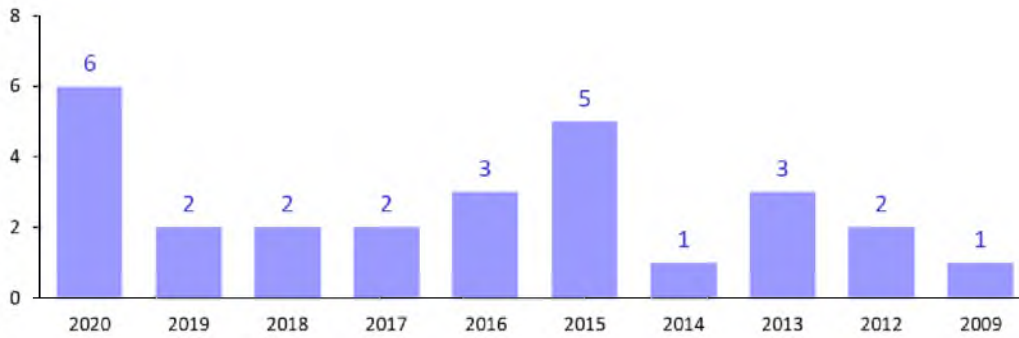


Figure 1.4 Web of Science Analysis on the Number of the Meeting Effectiveness Studies by Publication Years

Source: Web of Science, data extracted on 4 May 2021

The majority of the research was from the management and psychology applied field, as shown in Figure 1.5. Based on this, the number of references seems low. Hence, this research is important in developing knowledge in the management field.

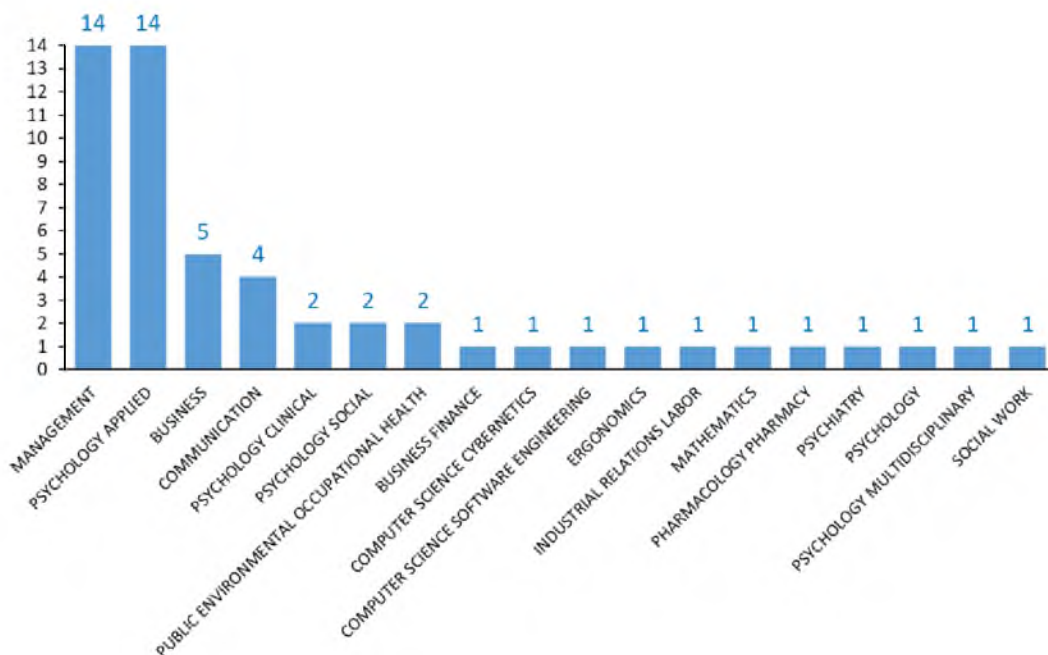


Figure 1.5 Web of Science Analysis on the Number of the Meeting Effectiveness Studies by Field and Categories

Source: Web of Science, data extracted on 4 May 2021

The Web of Science analysis also showed that most of the research is in the western context rather than Asia or Malaysian context. As shown in Figure 1.6, only one study from Malaysia published in 2015 was reported in Web of Science. However, this research from University Utara Malaysia (UUM) studied the effectiveness of board meetings in relation with board diversity (in terms of educational level and nationality) and intellectual capital performance in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries banking sector instead of Malaysia. The findings of this study show that more effective meetings can be achieved by providing directors with adequate information, particularly on strategic concerns like intellectual capital, which could help board members be more prepared and more participating in meetings (Al-Musali & Ismail, 2015). Therefore, this paper cannot count as a study in the Malaysia context despite the paper was published by UUM in Malaysia.

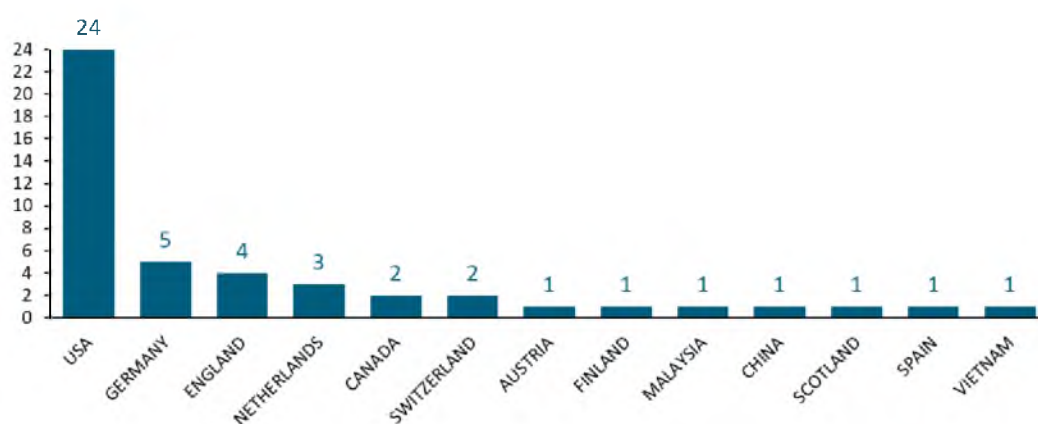


Figure 1.6 Web of Science Analysis on the Country that Conducted Research related to Meeting Effectiveness

Source: Web of Science, data extracted on 4 May 2021

In addition, when conducting literature search through Mendeley, there were 99 results related to “meeting effectiveness” topic, but there was no result found for research conducted in Malaysia. In Google Scholar, there are 2,080 results found, with 74 results related to Malaysia. However, these studies conducted in Malaysia mostly do not relate to meeting design and meeting practices improvement to enhance meeting effectiveness.

Hence, this research will help to increase the numbers of research in Malaysia and contribute to developing the body of knowledge in the management field and enhancing literature associated with meeting design in relation to meeting effectiveness in Malaysia context. The findings of this research is expected to provide a positive impact and benefit to researchers and academicians.

1.3.3 Practical Gaps

From the practitioners' context, there are minimal articles related to improving meeting that originates from Malaysia. This research serves as a reference for organisations in Malaysia, who want to increase employee satisfaction, motivation and transform their organisation into a better work environment. The conducted study could become one of the intervention programmes by acknowledging factors affecting meeting effectiveness that helps employees to develop proper meeting practices by considering design aspects that will potentially increase the effectiveness of their meetings. Therefore, this study can be the initial step for other organisations to evaluate their current meeting practices to optimise meeting effectiveness.

1.4 Research Questions

This study identified the following research questions based on the problems that arise:

- RQ 1. What are the meeting problems and factors that lead to ineffective meetings?
- RQ 2. What are the proposed intervention strategies to improve meeting practices?
- RQ 3. What are the impacts of the intervention strategies on improving meeting practices?

1.5 Research Objectives

In order to address the research questions, a total of three research objectives have been developed. The research objectives of this study are:

- RO 1. To identify the meeting problems and factors that lead to ineffective meetings.
- RO 2. To propose intervention strategies to improve meeting practices.
- RO 3. To evaluate the impacts of the intervention strategies on improving meeting practices.

1.6 Researcher's Role

A researcher roles go beyond designing and conducting the study in action research. In action research, the researcher has a dual role as both researcher and implementer of the topic studied. As a researcher in this study, the researcher acted as an observer, studying and observing the meeting practices in MCMC, facilitating the research process, reporting findings, and acting as implementer bringing changes that are deemed beneficial to MCMC.

1.7 Research Ethics

Ethical considerations in research are growing in importance among academicians and practitioners for greater credibility and fairness in conducting research. The researcher will ensure ethics remains a top priority throughout the study. The research participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity to increase their willingness to participate in this study. For the quantitative data collection, the researcher took respondents' confidence that the questionnaire data will keep confidential and for research purposes only. For the qualitative data collection, the date and time for interviews were negotiated with the participants. Before the interview, the consent form was given to the research participants, obtaining informed consent from the participants. This is to reassure that their participation in the research is voluntary

and free to withdraw at any point. Confidentiality is reviewed with the participant as part of the consent. The researcher ensured not to ask questions not related to this research scope from the interview participants.

1.8 Significance of the Research

This action research provided unique knowledge about the contribution of meeting design characteristics to meeting effectiveness. It is critical in terms of improving organisational meeting practices. Conducting this research and introducing improvements would benefit the organisation. The significance of this research is explained in theoretical and practical ways.

1.8.1 Significance to Theory

This study will provide information and knowledge on the impact of considering meeting design aspects in administering meetings, which would likely increase meeting effectiveness. There is limited research in the academic field that directly explores how meeting design characteristics influence meeting effectiveness, especially in Malaysia. Thus, this has left an identifiable knowledge gap. This action research added to the body of knowledge and could become one of the few studies to look at meeting design directly as a moderator in promoting or improving meeting quality. Subsequently, the study is expected to give other researchers' recommendations for increasing meeting effectiveness.

1.8.2 Significance to Practice

This study goes beyond examining factors contributing to meeting effectiveness alone. It also looks at practical practices for improvement. This study reported research evidence about meeting design characteristics to provide a foundation and add knowledge for those responsible for administering and leading

meetings. Furthermore, this study demonstrated the benefit of providing MCMC employees a better working environment as meetings formed a substantial portion of staff workday in MCMC. This, in turn, improved employees' meeting practices, with the potential to see changes in meeting quality perceptions and cultural changes.

1.9 Definition of Key Terms

In order to explain the key terms used in this study, the researcher use definitions based on previous studies, as shown in Table 1.1

Table 1.1 Definition of Key Terms

Term	Definition
Workplace Meeting	A scheduled gathering with some advance notice that involved two or more individuals for a work-related interaction, which on average last 30 to 60 minutes, can be conducted face-to-face or in distributed settings (i.e. conference calls) or a combination of the two modes (Allen et al., 2015; Geimer et al., 2015).
Meeting Effectiveness	The degree to which meetings achieve their intended outcome and fulfil the objectives, purposes, and goals set forth initially (Geimer et al., 2015; Rogelberg et al., 2006; Thanh et al., 2020).
Meeting Design Characteristics	Refer to the characteristics such as agenda use, meeting minutes, punctuality, facilities, and chairperson for designing and executing an effective meeting design (Leach et al., 2009).
Meeting Management Toolkit	Toolkit is a set of tools designed for a particular purpose, to solve a problem or facilitate intervention implementation (Collins English Dictionary, n.d.; Thoele et al., 2020). The meeting management toolkit in this study refers to a set of tools and templates designed to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of meetings.

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