

02

If a problem causes many meetings, the meetings eventually become more important than the problem.

Arthur Bloch, Murphy's Law

How do you ensure that meetings are kept to a minimum?

Learning objectives: Unit 2

Business communication skills Describing attitudes to and content of meetings; Paraphrasing information; Pointing out discrepancies; Dialogue-building using the language of meetings; Fluency: Breaking bad news and writing a report

Reading Meeting: breaking bad news

Listening A meeting; problems with a product; Five meetings: discrepancies; The language of meetings

Vocabulary Meetings

Grammar Conditionals

Phrase bank Debating issues

In company interviews
Units 1-2

Information exchange

- 1 Roughly how much of your working week do you spend in meetings?
- 2 Read the well-circulated web joke below. Is this anything like the meetings you take part in?

Lonely? Hate taking personal responsibility? Rather talk about it than do it?

Then why not **HOLD A MEETING!**




You can:

- catch up on the latest gossip
- complain about work
- flirt
- take a nap during PowerPoint presentations
- chat, tweet or email on your smart phone
- share whatever's on your mind
- practise all the latest buzzwords
- offload nasty jobs onto absent colleagues
- reschedule missed deadlines
- postpone decisions
- feel important

And all in work time!

MEETINGS The practical alternative to work

- 3 The language of business is constantly changing; phrases such as *face time*, *cloud computing* and *exit strategy* come and go. What are some of the current 'buzzwords' in your line of business?
- 4 With a partner, try to complete the buzzword dictionary definitions below by writing in the missing vowels.
 - 1 A change of **m _ nds _ t** means completely rethinking your attitude and approach to something.
 - 2 A company's **c _ r _ c _ mp _ t _ nc _ _ s** are its strengths, the things it does particularly well.
 - 3 **P _ r _ d _ gm shift** is a fundamental change in the way something is done.
 - 4 To be **pr _ _ ct _ v _** is to make things happen rather than waiting for them to happen. Always having Plan A, B or even C, if necessary!
 - 5 To **syn _ rg _ z _** means to combine strengths and benefit from working together as a team.
 - 6 To think _ _ **ts _ d _ th _ b _ x** is to think in totally new and creative ways.
 - 7 To **dr _ ll d _ wn** is to go into more detail.
 - 8 Getting **b _ y - _ n** from people means getting their support for a proposal or project.
 - 9 To take a business to **th _ n _ xt l _ v _ l** means to expand it and make it more competitive.
 - 10 You need to do a **r _ _ l _ ty ch _ ck** when you've lost touch with the real world.
 - 11 **Th _ b _ tt _ m li _ _** is the essential point in a discussion.
 - 12 Looking at **th _ b _ g p _ ct _ r _** is looking at the situation as a whole.
 - 13 To **b _ nchm _ rk** is to use a successful company's standards to measure and improve your own.
 - 14 To **r _ mp _ p** production or sales is to increase them.
 - 15 **Emp _ w _ rm _ nt** gives employees the confidence and authority to take control of their jobs.

5  **1.06** You're going to play a game that's become popular with bored executives the world over – buzzword bingo! First, turn to page 119 and choose a bingo card. Then listen to a manager in a corporate sales meeting and cross off the buzzwords as he uses them. The first person to cross them all off and shout 'Bingo!' wins the game.

6 Some of the things you might really want to discuss in an information-sharing meeting are listed below, but the second word in each pair has been switched with another in the same column. Switch them back. The first two have been done for you.

- | | | | | | |
|----------|-------------------------------------|----------|-------------------------------------|----------|-------------------------------------|
| a | 1 production margins | b | 1 quality campaigns | c | 1 customer budgets |
| | 2 balance appraisals | | 2 sales chains | | 2 recruitment setting |
| | 3 market channels | | 3 advertising control | | 3 salary support |
| | 4 staff sheets | | 4 cost development | | 4 training relations |
| | 5 profit methods | | 5 supply projections | | 5 price procedures |
| | 6 distribution trends | | 6 product cutting | | 6 IT reviews |

7 Work with a partner. Take turns to explain one of the terms in 6 and see if your partner can guess which one it is. How many can you get right in two minutes?

It's predicting how many products you think you'll sell.

'Market trends'?

No.

Oh, you mean 'sales projections'?

Right.

Making things clear

1 How direct are people from your country when it comes to doing business? Complete the diagram below with the nationalities in the box. Then check your answers on page 137.

American Brazilian British Chinese French
German Indian Italian Japanese Russian



2 In meetings, especially in indirect cultures, people are sometimes reluctant to say exactly what they mean – especially if they have bad news! Match the vague statements to their blunt equivalents.

Vague

- a I'm sorry to report that the project has not been a complete success.
- b Technically speaking, we have run into negative profit.
- c I think there's a general lack of consumer confidence.
- d You know we've always been a market-driven organization.
- e Now is not the time to expand, but to consolidate.
- f There will have to be some restructuring of the department.
- g We may also have to consider outsourcing production to cut costs.
- h Of course, we won't be able to finalize anything today.

Blunt

- 1 Our assembly plant may be closed down too.
- 2 Sales are falling.
- 3 People are going to lose their jobs.
- 4 It's failed.
- 5 We'll have to hold another meeting!
- 6 We've made a loss.
- 7 Let's do nothing.
- 8 We've never had an original idea.



3 **1.07** A computer games company has had problems with its latest product. Listen to an extract from their meeting and check your answers in 2.

4 Summarize the meeting you just listened to using the notes below. Listen again if you need to.

Quasar Online Gaming System

Considerable investment in design and marketing – project not a complete success – negative profit – disappointing sales – lack of consumer confidence – Sony and Nintendo innovate – we clone technology – do it cheaper – a market-driven organization – market massively oversupplied – bad time to expand – good time to consolidate – departmental restructuring necessary – possibly outsource – cut costs – assembly plant closure likely – schedule another meeting – final decision

5 Work with a partner. Take turns to read out the vague statements below. The other person should paraphrase them in a more direct way using the expressions in the box and the words in brackets.

In other words, ... So what you're (really) saying is ...
What you (really) mean is ... You mean ...

- a The results so far have been rather disappointing. (disastrous)
- b We may currently be overstaffed in the customer relations department. (lay-offs)
- c Head Office's reaction to the idea has not been as positive as we hoped. (hate)
- d Sales have not yet matched our original projections. (not selling)
- e The market doesn't seem to be as buoyant as it used to be. (dead)
- f The project is likely to cost rather more than we anticipated. (over budget)

Queries and comments

1 **1.08** Listen to short extracts from five meetings. Each contains one piece of information that doesn't make sense. When each extract pauses, work with a partner and decide what the discrepancy is. Then listen to the rest of the extract and check.

2 Work with a partner to practise pointing out discrepancies. Speaker A see page 119. Speaker B see page 128.

3 **1.09** Listen to an extract from a meeting. A CEO is breaking some bad news to the board. When the conversation pauses, write the board members' queries and comments using the notes in brackets to help you. Then continue listening and check. The first one has been done for you as an example.

- a (say/fall short/projections again?)
Are you saying they've fallen short of projections again?
- b (suggest/introduce/price cuts?)
- c (surely/not say/time/phase them out!)
- d (this mean/should/invest more/new technology?)
- e (tell us/could be lay-offs?)
- f (mean some kind/job-share scheme?)
- g (so/say/should/spend more/R&D)
- h (this mean/think/centralize distribution?)
- i (hope/not suggest/situation/hopeless)

4 The following phrases and expressions were all in the meeting you just listened to. Reverse the meaning of each by changing the word or words in bold. The first one has been done for you as an example.

- | | | |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| a disappointing figures | d run at a loss | h overseas distributors |
| <i>encouraging figures</i> | e phase them out | i inflated prices |
| b fall short of projections | f the unions oppose it | j volatile markets |
| c miss our targets | g slide into debt | |

- 5** Turn to page 141. Look at the listening script of the meeting you listened to in 3 and answer the questions.
- a** How many examples of conditional sentences and expressions are there?
 - b** Apart from *if*, which three words are used to link the conditional to the main clause?
 - c** Only one of the conditional sentences refers to the past. Which one?
 - d** Why is the past tense used in the following example from the meeting?
Even if we decided to do that, and it's a big if, it would take time to implement.
 - e** *If only it was that simple* (line 29) means:
I wish it was that simple. I doubt it's that simple.
 - f** *We're not really in a position to invest in anything, even if we wanted to* (lines 30–32) means:
We don't want to invest in anything.
Wanting to invest would make no difference.

The language of meetings


1 Work with a partner. One word will complete each of the following extracts from meetings. Can you agree what it is? If you need help, turn to page 122.

- a** A scheduling meeting
A Right. Basically, the is this: the contract is ours if we want it.
B But we're not in a to take on another project right now, are we?
A I know. Jan, what's your on this?
- b** An IT meeting
A Look, it's not just a of software, Alessandro.
B Of course not. It's also a of hardware. The entire system needs upgrading.
A But that's out of the . We can't afford that kind of capital outlay.
- c** A marketing meeting
A Sales are down. One would obviously be to cut our prices.
B That's no longer an for us. We're barely breaking even as it is.
A Well, then we've no but to rethink our whole marketing strategy.
- d** An HR* meeting
A Well, there's no easy to this, but how about voluntary redundancy?
B I don't think that's the but maybe we could reduce people's hours.
A That might have been the if we didn't already have a strike on our hands!
- e** A strategy meeting
A Now, let's not make a out of this. What if we just pulled out of Sudan?
B Well, I've no with that, but our partners won't be happy.
A No, but that's not our is it? The political situation is just too unstable.
- f** A CRM** meeting
A I'll get straight to the We're getting too many customer complaints.
B I agree with you. But the is we don't have the staff to deal with them.
A That's beside the We shouldn't be getting them in the first place!
- g** A crisis meeting
A I'm afraid the is serious. And if the press get hold of the story, ...
B Look, we'll deal with that if and when it arises. Let's not panic just yet.
A You're right. What this calls for is calm and careful planning.
- h** A budget meeting
A The is, we're simply not spending enough on R&D.
B As a matter of we've doubled our R&D budget this year.
C That may be so, but the remains we're losing our technological lead.

* Human Resources

** Customer Relationship Management



2  **1.10** Listen to the meeting extracts in 1 and check your answers.

3 Now decide which of the words in the box on page 122 will complete the following sentences and match them to what they mean.

- | | |
|--|---------------------|
| a That's a matter of _____. | You're wrong! |
| b I think that raises a different _____. | I disagree! |
| c Yes, but look at it from my point of _____. | That's unimportant! |
| d Actually, that might not be a bad _____. | That's irrelevant! |
| e That's not an _____. | Good point! |
| f What gave you that _____? | What about me? |

I've been asked to inform you that ...
 It seems/appears that ...
 I'm afraid that ...
 It's felt that ...
 The following options are being explored ...
 The suggestion is that ...
 The basic idea is to ...
 In addition, what's being proposed is ...
 This would obviously mean ...

Breaking the bad news

1 Your company was recently acquired by a former competitor in a hostile takeover. The new board of directors has decided it's time for a serious shake-up. Each of you has been chosen to announce at a special interdepartmental meeting some of the changes they would like to see implemented. Speaker A turn to page 118. Speaker B turn to page 128. Speaker C turn to page 133. The phrases on the left may help you to prepare.

2 When you're ready, take turns in your group to present the proposals. They could be controversial, so:

- put them forward one step at a time and get reactions from the group before moving on to the next step
- invite discussion of each proposal and take notes on any comments or alternative suggestions
- even though you yourself may not be in favour of the proposal you put forward, you should at least initially show loyalty to your new bosses by sounding positive.

3 Write a memo to the board outlining the reactions to the proposals you presented at your meeting.

 **In company interviews**
 Units 1-2



02 Information exchange

Vocabulary

Meetings

Metaphor: discussion is a journey

1 A lot of the language of discussion refers to journeys. Read the conversation and underline the references to movement and travel. There are 20.

Ian returns to the boardroom to find the meeting in chaos ...

- Ian** Sorry about that. Had to take a phone call from Bangkok. So, are we any nearer a decision?
- Erik** Not yet, but we're getting there. I think we're more or less on the right track, anyway.
- Sonia** Are we? I'd say we've got a long way to go yet. We just seem to be going round in circles.
- Erik** Well, we were making good progress before we got sidetracked, Sonia. Now, returning to the question of logistics ...
- Ella** Sorry, but could I just go back to what I was saying earlier about freight charges?
- Sonia** Hang on, hang on. Aren't we getting ahead of ourselves here? We haven't got as far as discussing transportation yet, Ella ...
- Erik** We don't seem to be getting very far at all!
- Ian** The conversation seems to have drifted a little while I was away ... I can't quite see where all this is heading.
- Erik** We've certainly wandered away from the main topic. Now, logistics ...
- Sonia** I was just coming to that. In my opinion, this whole plan is totally impractical.
- Ian** I don't think I like the direction this discussion is going in. Okay, look, we've covered a lot of ground this morning, but I think that's about as far as we can go at the moment.
- Erik** Now, just a minute! We haven't come this far to break off now, surely ...

Idiomatic expressions

2 In the fixed expressions below, delete the word you wouldn't expect to hear.

- a** So, what do you **reckon** / **guess**?
- b** I wouldn't go quite as **far** / **much** as that.
- c** Where do you **stand** / **sit** on this?
- d** Well, that goes without **saying** / **speaking**.
- e** I don't mind **either** / **each** way.
- f** I'm afraid it's not **so** / **as** simple as that.
- g** Any **responses** / **reactions**?
- h** The way I **view** / **see** it is this.
- i** I **wouldn't** / **couldn't** say that.
- j** **Yes and no** / **No and yes**.
- k** I **can't** / **couldn't** say, to be honest.
- l** I'd like us to **share** / **spare** our views on this.
- m** Oh, come **on** / **off** it!

- n** Well, I haven't **given** / **taken** it much thought.
- o** I'm **for** / **with** you there.
- p** To my **meaning** / **mind**, it's like this.
- q** To **a point** / **an extent** you're right.

3 Categorize the expressions in 2 according to their purpose.

- | | | | | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 asking for an opinion | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2 giving an opinion | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| 3 giving no opinion | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| 4 agreeing | <input type="checkbox"/> | | | |
| 5 disagreeing | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| 6 half-agreeing | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | |

Grammar

Conditionals

Put a cross next to the ending (1–3) which isn't grammatically possible and then correct it. The first one has been done for you.

- a** As long as we're well prepared, ...
- 1** we've got nothing to worry about. ✓
- 2** we couldn't go wrong. ✗
we can't go wrong.
- 3** we'll be fine. ✓
- b** I'll send them an email ...
- 1** if you'll tell me what I should say.
- 2** if you think it's worth it.
- 3** provided I hadn't lost their address.
-
- c** If you're going out, ...
- 1** you're going to miss the meeting.
- 2** you'd better take an umbrella.
- 3** I come with you.
-
- d** Do that ...
- 1** and you'll regret it.
- 2** if you'll get the opportunity.
- 3** – we'll lose business.
-
- e** I'd stay and help you ...
- 1** if I'm not going out this evening.
- 2** if I hadn't promised Jo I'd meet her.
- 3** if you asked me nicely.
-
- f** I'd be grateful ...
- 1** if you could sort this out for me.
- 2** if you'd keep this to yourself.
- 3** if you don't tell anyone about this.
-

- g** If he actually said that to her, ...
- 1** she'd kill him.
 - 2** I'd have been very surprised.
 - 3** he must have been mad.
-
- h** I wouldn't have asked you ...
- 1** unless I trusted you.
 - 2** if I'd known this would happen.
 - 3** if you didn't say you wanted to do it.
-
- i** If it hadn't been for him, ...
- 1** I'd still be working at Burger King.
 - 2** I'd have got that job.
 - 3** I hadn't had a chance.
-

You can use any tense in either half (clause) of a **conditional sentence**.

As well as *if, unless, as long as* and *providing/provided (that)*, you can also use *and* as a conjunction in a conditional (*Do that **and** we'll get complaints*) or no conjunction at all (*Do that – we'll get complaints*).

Conditional clauses can come either first or second in the sentence. However, with *and* or no conjunction, conditional clauses come first.

You can put *will* or *would* in the conditional clause (*If you'll wait here, I'll go and get her for you; **I'd** be grateful if you'd give this matter your serious attention*), but this is unusual.

The **Past Simple** in a conditional can refer to the past (*Even if I **did** meet her, I'm afraid I don't remember her*), to a future possibility (*If I **resigned** tomorrow, I could get another job within the week*) or to an unreal situation (*If I **spoke** Italian, I'd phone her myself, but I don't*).

Conditionals with the **Past Perfect** can refer to the effects of the past on the more recent past (*If you'd **made** a backup, we wouldn't have lost the whole document*) or on the present (*If I'd **got** that job, I could be earning a fortune now*).

Phrase bank: Debating issues

A small number of words account for quite a lot of the language of meetings and discussions. One noun will complete each of the sets of expressions below:

- a** _____
- I agree with you up to a _____.
- That's beside the _____.
- That's not the _____.
- That's just my _____.
- The _____ is ...
- Okay, _____ taken.
- I'll get straight to the _____.
- Good _____.
- b** _____
- That's out of the _____.
- Good _____!
- It's not a _____ of that.
- It's not just a _____ of ...
- It's also a _____ of ...
- The (real) _____ is ...
- c** _____
- We're not in a _____ to ...
- What's your _____ on this?
- This puts us in a very difficult _____.
- I'm in no _____ to ...

- d** _____
- The _____ is ...
- The _____ remains that ...
- As a matter of _____, ...
- In actual _____, ...
- Despite the _____ that ...
- In view of the _____ that ...
- e** _____
- We've no _____.
- That's not an _____.
- One _____ would be ...
- _____ two would be ...
- Another _____ would be ...
- f** _____
- There's no _____.
- What's the _____?