PM World Journal (ISSN: 2330-4480)
Vol. X, Issue IV – April 2021
www.pmworldjournal.com   Series Article

Managing Effective Meetings
Converting to Online Teaching
by John H. Cable

Converting to Online Teaching[1]
A series of short guidance articles for educators and institutions

Managing Effective Meetings
Virtual or In Person [2]

By John Cable, Director

Project Management Center for Excellence
A. James Clark School of Engineering
University of Maryland, USA

As the pandemic has forced us to meet virtually, I now hear complaints about being "Zoomed out"! People are past the fascination of learning how to physically setup and participate in a video conference and generally probably know the mechanics of proper lighting, camera angles, backgrounds, etc. But do they know the rudiments of running a meeting, starting with do we actually need a meeting?

There are many established forms of communication including written memos & reports, emails, telephone calls, and text messages are some of the examples. Each has an appropriate and effective use. We will go into this in much greater depth in an upcoming article on project communication. For now, the focus is either face-to-face meetings or virtual ones (ie videoconferences).

Do you spend too much time in meetings? How many hours per week do you spend? Are most of the meetings you attend engaging and energizing, or just a waste of time? Have you ever thought about how much labor cost there is in a meeting and how much money is wasted if the meeting isn't productive? Is the meeting worth it? When do you actually need the meeting? We have all experienced the regular meeting that is a carryover from the past, when it may have been needed or served a purpose. Or the non-routine meeting that wastes time and does not accomplish anything!

There are many different types of meetings, and they can serve a valuable purpose when planned and managed properly. Do you know how to effectively plan and manage them? This article will discuss both virtual and in-person meetings. The concepts for success are the same!

---

[1]This series of articles by the Director of the University of Maryland's Project Management Center for Excellence provides information and advice for converting from traditional in-person classes to online teaching, based on their experience before and during the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020. See Professor Cable's background at the end of this article.

[2] How to cite this paper: Cable, J. H. (2021). Converting to Online Teaching: A series of short guidance articles for educators and institutions – Managing Effective Meetings: Virtual or In Person, *PM World Journal,* Vol. X, Issue IV, April.

PM World Journal (ISSN: 2330-4480)
Vol. X, Issue IV – April 2021
www.pmworldjournal.com   Series Article

Managing Effective Meetings
Converting to Online Teaching
by John H. Cable

The first question you have to ask is "Do we need to meet?" Meetings should be used sparingly and only when necessary, but they certainly play an important role in communications and team building. Post-pandemic, video conferences will work very well for many purposes, but there will still be times when a face-to-face meeting may be essential.

Learning to be comfortable in both mediums directly leads to improved productivity. The primary value of face-to-face meetings is the ability to read body language and have side conversations at breaks or over lunch.

For the purposes of this article, I have organized the elements of a meeting into the following sections: PLAN THE MEETING, DURING THE MEETING, and AFTER THE MEETING. We will discuss each one below.

PLAN THE MEETING

The starting point for a successful meeting is to plan the event! My favorite saying is that "*Failing to Plan is Planning to Fail.*" This does not, however, mean to jump into a degree of detail that is inappropriate or makes assumptions that are not supported by the facts and information available.

For simplicity, there are three basic types of meetings: 1) a directed exchange; 2) a query-based session; and 3) collaborative solutions.

Directed Exchange (Push)

This type of meeting is one in which someone is to give instructions. It pushes information out! The speaker is not asking for feedback or discussion but simply providing a direction. Any associated discussion is limited to the purpose of clarifying what is intended. This type of meeting can often be eliminated and replaced with a memo, some other written directive, or perhaps even a pre-recorded video.

Query-Based (Pull)

This type of meeting is one in which the participants exchange information, give feedback, or coordinate. They are often short gatherings, possibly only 15 minutes, simply to exchange information and coordinate activities or assignments.

Collaborative Solutions

This meeting is intended for the group to plan, analyze, or solve problems. This meeting has the advantage of getting everyone's input, draw out the best ideas, and develop solutions to problems. A benefit is that, if run properly, everyone that participates generally "owns" the outcome and should have buy-in for the direction that takes place after the meeting.

PM World Journal (ISSN: 2330-4480)
Vol. X, Issue IV – April 2021
www.pmworldjournal.com
Series Article

Managing Effective Meetings
Converting to Online Teaching
by John H. Cable

Typical types of meetings in the project management world might include planning the project; project kickoff; periodic check-in; status review, technical review; problem solving; or stakeholder coordination, to name a few.

Once the purpose and type of meeting is understood, then the next important step is to plan. Some considerations include:

- Who needs to be included?
- How much time is needed?
- What is the optimum time of day to conduct the meeting?
- If meeting in person, select a meeting room that is fit for the purpose of the meeting and has the space and technology to support the activities planned.
- What information do the participants need to prepare for the meeting?
- Provide read-ahead information in advance with sufficient time to prepare.
- Provide the agenda in advance. Prioritize 1st things 1st.[3]

If the meeting is virtual, be sure you know how to use any of the particular features of the platform you are expecting to use. For example, in Zoom, using the polling feature or the breakout rooms is easy but be sure you know how to do it. Zoom has good instructional videos and practicing ahead of time is always a good idea to make sure everything runs smooth during the meeting.

If the meeting is in person, make sure the room is suitable, has the features you may want (white board, flip charts, markers, etc), that the lighting, HVAC, and technology is all in good working order and that you know how to use / control everything. Nothing is more irritating to meeting participants than to have to waste time waiting for you to try and get something to work. Valuable time may be lost, particularly if on a tight shedule.

A feature that I always like for in-person meetings is if the host has provided water, coffee, tea and perhaps light refreshments for the meeting participants. It is a nice touch!

DURING THE MEETING

- Respect others time and always start on time. If the meeting is virtual open the VC room up 10 minutes early to allow participants to sign in. It is very easy to slip into the mode of waiting for latecomers to surface but this is disrespectful of participant's time. Do not waste it. Office traditions of always starting late can be changed and it only takes a few times of starting on time for people to acclimate. My rule is 5 minutes early is on time!

- If needed, designate a note-taker so that you can focus on managing the meeting. Don't try to manage the meeting and take notes. Online using Zoom, just record the meeting.

---

[3] *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, Stephen R. Covey, Simon & Schuster, 1989*

PM World Journal (ISSN: 2330-4480)
Vol. X, Issue IV – April 2021
www.pmworldjournal.com   Series Article

Managing Effective Meetings
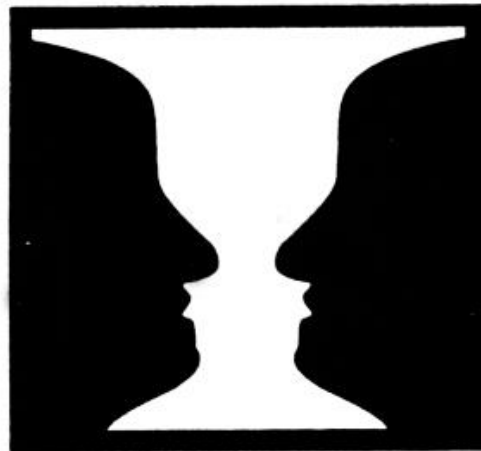*Converting to Online Teaching*
by John H. Cable

- Start the meeting by reviewing the agenda and asking for any amendments. Review the purpose of the meeting.

- Stick to the agenda and for each item:
    - State the issue.
    - Ask participants for their views. Encourage open discussion.
    - Keep focused on the topic. Use a "parking lot" for off topic ideas.
    - Seek to understand, and if conflicts erupt, work to resolve them.
    - Seek consensus and make decisions.
    - Facilitate do not dominate!

- Do not overrun the time scheduled, unless agreed to by participants.

- Don't be afraid to finish early – remember, respect time!

- Summarize decisions and assignments.

- Use an action item list with citing task, person responsible, and due date. Many organizations keep preprinted action item notepads available.
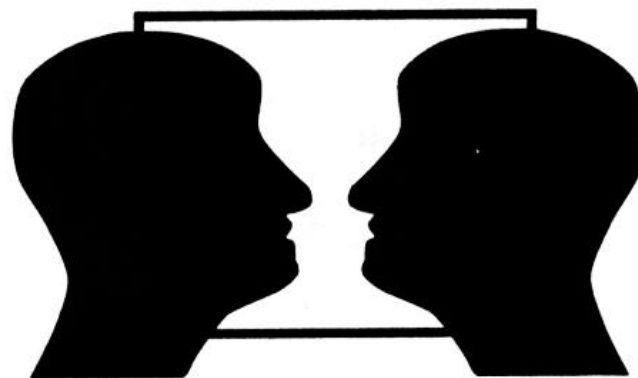
EXAMPLE ACTION ITEM LIST

ID	Action	Priority	Assigned to	Status	Due Date
1	Build ePM website	Medium	JJ	In design	4/15/2021
2	Write March article	Low	JC	Drafted	2/22/2021
3	Design sponsor flyer	High	KF / Brooks	Started	2/15/2021
4					
5					

Communications

The purpose of a meeting is to have some type of communication between the parties. This exchange of information has the risk of misunderstanding. Remember the image:

PM World Journal (ISSN: 2330-4480)

Vol. X, Issue IV – April 2021

www.pmworldjournal.com   Series Article

Managing Effective Meetings

Converting to Online Teaching

by John H. Cable

What do you see when you look at this? Is it a vase? Is it two opposing faces? Perhaps this second image clarifies:

The point is that we can all look at the same information but see it differently! The same is true for listening. The basic communication model, shown below, consists of two parties, a sender and a receiver.
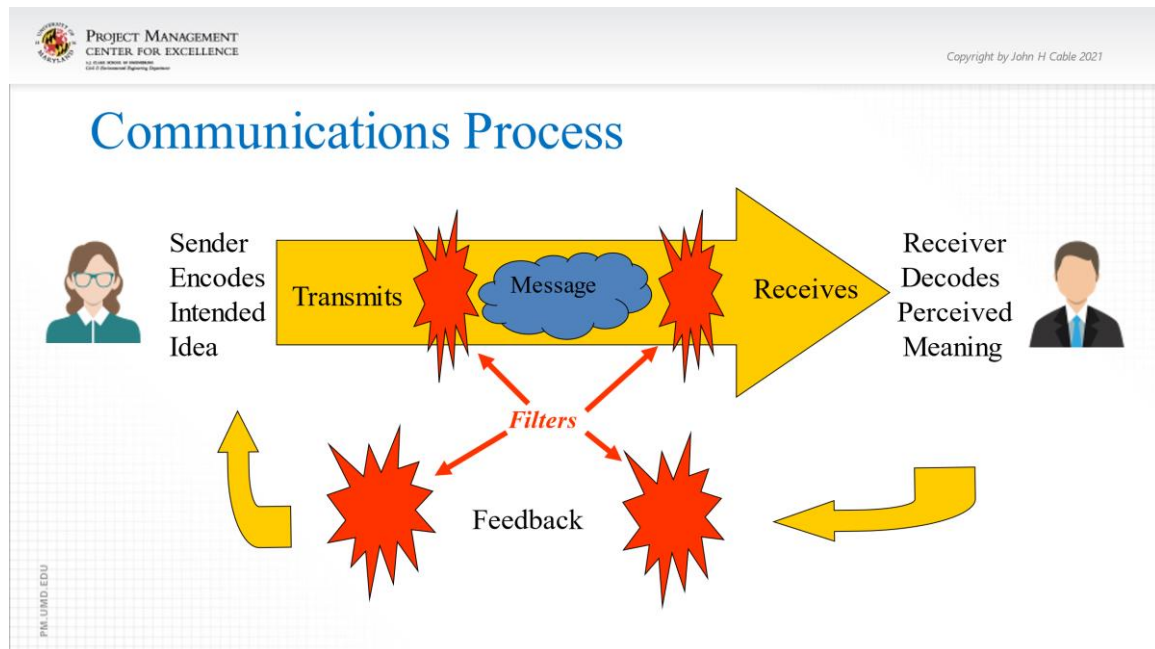
The sender encodes a message, transmits it, and the receiver decodes the perceived meaning. But, based on the filters (real experience and bias) each has, the sender may have meant one thing, but unfortunately the receiver understood something entirely different.

Research suggests that in face to face (including video conferences) meetings only about 7% of the content is transmitted verbally and 93% is contained in tone of voice, body language and posture.[4]

Effective communications build trust and nurtures efficiency. Remember the communication flow process and strive to keep your messages simple and easy to

---

[4] Dr. Albert Mehrabian's "*Rule of Personal Communication*" Nagesh Belludi, October 4, 2008

PM World Journal (ISSN: 2330-4480)
Vol. X, Issue IV – April 2021
www.pmworldjournal.com   Series Article

Managing Effective Meetings
Converting to Online Teaching
by John H. Cable

understand. Half of effective communication is listening and striving for understanding. Remember this when managing any type of meeting.

AFTER THE MEETING

- Circulate notes or key point minutes as soon as possible. These are not transcripts.
- Coordinate with others as appropriate.
- Implement decisions.
- Schedule action items and check in with others responsible for items.
- Follow-up!

SOME CLOSING THOUGHTS

In the highly regarded book "*The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*" by Stephen Covey[5], he proposes eight principles for managing meetings:

1. Be proactive – initiative and desire to succeed.
2. Begin with the end in mind – clear objectives.
3. Put first things first – set priorities.
4. Think win/win – cooperation & collaboration.
5. Seek to understand before being understood – listening and questioning.
6. Synergize – facilitating group dynamics.

---

[5] *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, Stephen R. Covey, Simon & Schuster, 1989*

7. Sharpen the saw – continually improve the process.
8. Lead with respect – suspend judgement.

I like to review these points when preparing for a meeting. Thinking about these in our effort to continually improve the efficiency and effectiveness of our meetings is a constant journey because the variables always change. However, it can mean that meetings are not boring and a waste of time but, instead, achieve the goal with a positive outcome.

TWO RECOMMENDATIONS FOR READING

1) "*The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People,*" by Stephen R. Covey, Simon & Schuster, 1989

2) "*The One Minute Manager*", by Kenneth Blanchard, PhD and Spencer Johnson, M.D., Berkley Books, 1981

Previous Articles in this Series

Cable, J. H. (2021). Converting to Online Teaching: A series of short guidance articles for educators and institutions – Individual Time Management, *PM World Journal,* Vol. X, Issue III, March. Available online at https://pmworldlibrary.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/pmwj103-Mar2021-Cable-individual-time-management-converting-to-teaching-online-11.pdf

Cable, J. H. (2021). Converting to Online Teaching: A series of short guidance articles for educators and institutions – Can you Increase Student Engagement? A Beta Test of Yellowdig! *PM World Journal,* Vol. X, Issue II, February. Available online at https://pmworldlibrary.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/pmwj102-Feb2021-Cable-increase-student-engagement-with-yellodig-FINAL.pdf

Cable, J. H. (2021). Converting to Online Teaching: A series of short guidance articles for educators and institutions – **Do You** M**OOC?** *PM World Journal,* Vol. X, Issue I, January. Available online at https://pmworldlibrary.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/pmwj101-Jan2021-Cable-do-you-mooc-converting-to-teaching-online-9.pdf

Cable, J. H. (2020). Converting to Online Teaching: A series of short guidance articles for educators and institutions – Video Production Guidance, *PM World Journal,* Vol. IX, Issue XII, December. Available online at https://pmworldlibrary.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/pmwj100-Dec2020-Cable-converting-to-teaching-online-8-video-production-guidance.pdf

Cable, J. H. (2020). Converting to Online Teaching: A series of short guidance articles for educators and institutions – Can Virtual Classes be Better than in Person? *PM World Journal,* Vol. IX, Issue XI, November. Available online at https://pmworldlibrary.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/pmwj99-Nov2020-Cable-can-virtual-classes-be-better-than-in-person.pdf

Cable, J. H. (2020). Converting to Online Teaching: A series of short guidance articles for educators and institutions – Facilitating Virtual Classes, *PM World Journal,* Vol. IX, Issue X,

PM World Journal (ISSN: 2330-4480)
Vol. X, Issue IV – April 2021
www.pmworldjournal.com   Series Article

Managing Effective Meetings
Converting to Online Teaching
by John H. Cable

October. Available online at https://pmworldlibrary.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/pmwj98-Oct2020-Cable-facilitating-virtual-classes.pdf

Cable, J. H. (2020). Converting to Online Teaching: A series of short guidance articles for educators and institutions – Blended Learning Classroom Guidance, *PM World Journal,* Vol. IX, Issue IX, September. Available online at https://pmworldlibrary.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/pmwj97-Sep2020-Cable-converting-to-teaching-online-5-blended-learning.pdf

Cable, J. H. (2020). Converting to Online Teaching: A series of short guidance articles for educators and institutions – The Future of Academia in a Virtual Environment, *PM World Journal,* Vol. IX, Issue VIII, August. Available online at https://pmworldlibrary.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/pmwj96-Aug2020-Cable-converting-to-teaching-online-4-future-of-academia.pdf

Cable, J. H. (2020). Converting to Online Teaching: A series of short guidance articles for educators and institutions – Tips for Working at Home, *PM World Journal,* Vol. IX, Issue VII, July. Available online at https://pmworldlibrary.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/pmwj95-Jul2020-Cable-converting-to-teaching-online-3-working-at-home2.pdf

Cable, J. H. (2020). Converting to Online Teaching: A series of short guidance articles for educators and institutions – Video Conference Etiquette, *PM World Journal,* Vol. IX, Issue VI, June. Available online at https://pmworldlibrary.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/pmwj94-Jun2020-Cable-teaching-online-series-2-video-conference-etiquette.pdf

Cable, J. H. (2020). Converting to Online Teaching: A series of short guidance articles for educators and institutions - Introduction, *PM World Journal,* Vol. IX, Issue V, May. Available online at https://pmworldlibrary.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/pmwj93-May2020-Cable-converting-to-teaching-online-1-introduction.pdf

About the Author

John Cable

Project Management Center for Excellence
University of Maryland, College Park, MD, USA

John Cable is Director of the Project Management Center for Excellence in the A.James Clark School of Engineering at the University of Maryland, where he is also a professor and teacher of several graduate courses in project management. His program at the University of Maryland offers masters and PhD level programs focused on project management. With more than 1,300 seats filled annually with students from many countries, including more than 40 PhD students, the program is the largest graduate program in project management at a major university in the United States.

John Cable served in the newly formed U.S. Department of Energy in 1980, where he was involved with developing energy standards for buildings, methods for measuring energy consumption, and managing primary research in energy conservation. As an architect and builder, Mr. Cable founded and led John Cable Associates in 1984, a design build firm. In 1999 he was recruited by the University of Maryland's Department of Civil & Environmental Engineering to create and manage a graduate program in project management. In his role as founder and director of the Project Management Center for Excellence at Maryland, the program has grown to offer an undergraduate minor, master's degrees, and a doctoral program. Information about the Project Management Center for Project Management at the University of Maryland can be found at www.pm.umd.edu.

In 2002, PMI formed the Global Accreditation Center for Project Management Educational Programs (GAC). Mr. Cable was appointed to that inaugural board where he served as vice chair. In 2006, he was elected as chairman, a role he held through 2012. As Chair of the PMI GAC, John led the accreditation of 86 project management educational programs at 40 institutions in 15 countries in North America, Europe, the Middle East, Latin America and the Asia Pacific Region. John was awarded PMI's 2012 Distinguished Contribution Award for his leadership at the GAC. He can be contacted at jcable@umd.edu.