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Jessica Pryce-Jones
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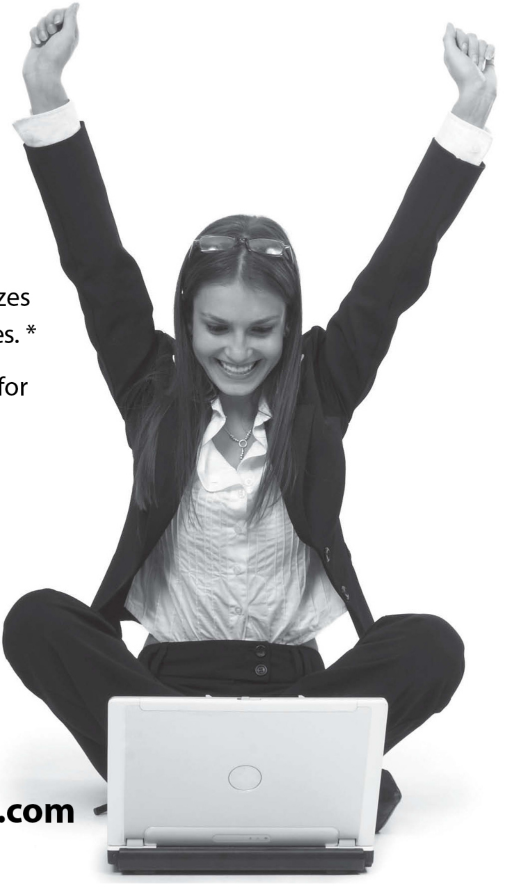

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by Jessica Pryce-Jones
&
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Published by:
John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.,
The Atrium, Southern Gate,
Chichester,
`www.wiley.com`

This edition first published 2014

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Registered office

John Wiley & Sons Ltd, The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ,
United Kingdom

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A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-1-118-77046-7 (hardback/paperback) ISBN 978-1-118-77044-3 (ePDF)
ISBN 978-1-118-77043-6 (ePub)

Printed in Great Britain by TJ International, Padstow, Cornwall

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Introduction

Welcome to *Running Great Meetings & Workshops For Dummies,* a book that will help you get the most out of the time you invest with your colleagues, coworkers, clients or customers.

If you're reading this book, it's probably not because you regularly attend lots of fantastically efficient, effective and energising meetings or workshops. But this book is for you if you are keen to make running brilliant meetings and workshops a core skill, and you want people to walk away from events you lead saying, 'That was fantastic. I can't believe the time passed so quickly. When are we next getting together?'

Every chapter is designed to help you understand a different aspect of workshops or meetings, from the planning and preparation through to the delivery and follow-up.

The information we present has been honed by years of leading successful meetings and workshops and by making many mistakes along the way. We've written about all of it, so you can fast-track your journey to excellence.

About This Book

Reading this book will give you a really solid blueprint for running great meetings and workshops. But reading is a tiny part of the process. Your challenge will be to go away and do some hard work to put it all into practise. That way, you'll make the fastest progress and get the quickest results while building community, commitment and contribution – for everyone you work with.

This book is written from the point of view of a practitioner – which means it's professional and practical.

We've written this book in a rough order to help you plan, prepare and deliver a session; then we've added on information about how you can develop your practise. That means more complex ideas and techniques come later in the book. But you can read the chapters in any order you like or just turn to what happens to matter to you.

To make it even easier, there is some material you don't need to read at all:

- **Sidebars:** In most chapters, there are sidebars of grey shaded text. They contain case studies that illustrate points we make or additional information. Read them if you like; skip them if you prefer.
- **Thanks:** This is interesting to friends, colleagues and family, but maybe not to you.

To help you navigate this book, we used a few conventions:

- *Italics* are used to introduce new terms.
- **Bold text** highlights important actions or insights.
- Case studies in grey boxes (the sidebars) are real situations we have experienced.
- *Session* is the word that we use to cover both meetings and workshops.
- *Participants* is the word we use to cover anyone who attends either meetings or workshops.

Foolish Assumptions

In writing this book, we assumed some things about you. These are that you

- Are up for learning and would love to lead great meetings or workshops
- Are not a total novice so you know something of the world of work, meetings and workshops

You might be reading this because you

- Got a promotion or a new job and want to make a great first impression with your team.
- Have been asked to run your first workshop and want to feel really confident in what you are doing.
- Have heard negative comments about the group sessions you run.
- Find that you are bored with what you do and want some new ideas to make your sessions positively different.
- Like practical information without too much theory attached.
- Want to know what works in a pragmatic and easy-to-read style.
- Don't have a whole lot of time.
- Are really focused on what to do and how to do it.

Icons Used in This Book

Throughout the margin of this book are small pictures, or *icons.* Here's what each one means:

TIP

This icon highlights shortcuts or information that will make easy work of running great meetings and workshops. You won't want to miss any of these fabulous tips.

REMEMBER

Remember this information, and your meeting or workshop will be a success.

WARNING!

Heed our warnings, and you'll save yourself time and trouble in the long run.

Beyond the Book

To help you, we also provide some downloadable tools and bonus articles. Here's what you can find at `www.dummies.com`:

- **Cheat Sheets:** You'll find help with remembering what you need to do to prepare for any workshop as well as a reminder of the key skills you need to put into practise as you lead any meeting or workshop. You'll find them at `www.dummies.com/cheatsheet/rungreatmeetingsworkshops`.
- **Dummies.com online articles:** You also have access to three online articles. One article explains the pros and cons of different room setups. Another article helps you understand the basics of learning by doing and getting direct experience. The final article gives you ten practises that can help you lead excellent meetings and workshops. You can find these articles at `www.dummies.com/extras/rungreatmeetingsworkshops`.
- **Companion files:** In addition to the material in the print or e-book you're reading right now, this product also comes with some access-anywhere goodies on the web (`www.dummies.com/go/rungreatmeetingsworkshops`). These include
    - A worksheet with questions to help you build a great project plan
    - A worksheet to help you articulate your workshop outcomes
    - A sample running order
    - Sample joining instructions
    - Answers to the closed-open question exercise
    - Two breathing exercises
    - Tips for working well with different behavioural styles in meetings or workshops
    - Self-reflection documents for after your workshop
    - Sample worksheet for observers watching a role play

Where to Go from Here

Of course, we'd like you to give this book to anyone who has to run a meeting or at least recommend it so that meetings everywhere get better. And workshops achieve a real return on investment.

Failing that, we recommend that you just turn to whatever chapter piques your interest or helps you with an upcoming need and go from there. Alternatively, when you are in full crisis and it's the night before a big day, just open up the section you need. That's what the book is for – to be used in any way that works for you.

If you want to get really good, there's another option: Come and learn from us. We teach people the craft of leading meetings, leading workshops and facilitating groups with an emphasis on 'learning by doing.'

Finally, we'd love to meet you, just to say 'hi' and to thank you for buying this book. Please do connect on LinkedIn if you want to get in touch.

Part I

Getting Started with Meetings and Workshops

getting started
with
meetings and
workshops

For Dummies can help you get started with lots of subjects. Visit `www.dummies.com` to learn more and do more with *For Dummies*.

In this part . . .

- ✓ Understand why it’s critical that you run great workshops and meetings.
- ✓ Plan a meeting that maximises your time.
- ✓ Run a workshop that keeps people coming back for more.
- ✓ Mind all the details, from guest list to room setup, to prepare for your workshop or meeting.

Chapter 1

The Business Case for Better Meetings and Workshops

In This Chapter

- Reviewing why people hate meetings
- Recognising when people get a lot from their workshops
- Understanding meetings and workshops: similarities and differences

Everything important that you'll ever do at work involves other people. Even if a large chunk of your working day is solitary, at some point, colleagues, contacts, critics or clients come into the equation. They check in with you or you with them because everyone wants to be clear about who's on track, who needs help, or who's made fantastic progress. But doing this one person at a time is inefficient.

So you have a meeting.

In most of our organisations and certainly those where interesting knowledge-work is being done, complexity is the order of the day. What we all do has become more specialised, more process-oriented and more project-driven. This means lots of complex problem-solving and continuous learning as everyone pulls together to meet deadlines, respond to changing environments and maximise both performance and productivity. You simply cannot do this one person at a time.

So you get together for a workshop.

When you leave a meeting or a workshop having done really great work in a group, you'll feel buzzed and motivated. But the problem is that many meetings achieve just the opposite: Participants walk out deflated, de-energised and sometimes desperate. This chapter outlines the reasons for those negative feelings and then points you in the right direction for fixing them.

Reviewing Why People Hate Meetings

If you don't enjoy your meetings, you're part of a very large worldwide club. Many people feel the same as you. But here's the strange thing: Even when you hate your meetings, when you emerge feeling frustrated and furious, you still brace yourself and trudge off to attend the next one. Then you schedule yet more.

Too many of us are on meeting treadmills believing that poor meetings are a necessary evil of business life. We go to them because we feel we have to; we go to them to be seen. But we don't enjoy them because they suck. They're poorly planned, badly run and add zero value.

And we all sit quietly back colluding while colleagues make it much worse when they fail on the preparation front. The result is that because nothing much gets done, more and more participants behave badly, but no one ever puts it right.

So what needs changing?

Being clear about what everyone dislikes

To clarify what people dislike most about their meetings, we decided to run a small research project. We asked a class of 80 executive MBA students doing a part-time degree what their top reasons for disliking meetings were. Then we collated the most repeated themes and put them into a questionnaire.

We ran that questionnaire online and face-to-face in Kenya, Singapore, South Africa, The Netherlands and the UK. In the end, we had 675 answers from 28 different nationalities, all of whom were running teams. Some were supervisors, and others were senior managers. Table 1-1 lists the top seven reasons they gave for disliking their meetings.

Table 1-1 Top Seven Reasons People Hate Their Meetings

I Dislike Meetings Because . . .	*Percentage of Answers*
They are poorly structured	21
They go off-topic	18
They are too long	17
There isn't an agenda	16
Others don't prepare	16
The presentations are boring	6
We don't do feedback	6

Poorly structured

This item is a travesty. It takes about five to ten minutes tops to create a decent structure to a meeting; it's not a lot of hard work. All it involves is knowing the items you want to deal with and putting them into some kind of sensible order without leaving the toughest subject to last.

That this appears at the top of the list shows you that meeting leaders aren't bothering to do even a tiny amount of thinking before getting into a room. If they don't, why should anyone else? (See Chapter 2 for how to design a great agenda.)

Go off-topic

What this implies is that meeting management skills are poor and that people running meetings can't steer productive participation. What we see in practice is that the chair or manager of a meeting often gets caught up in the conversation. So they are talking rather than thinking about what's happening and how to keep it all on track. (Read Chapter 4 for the skills it takes to keep a meeting on track.)

Too long

We all work with people we love and sometimes with those we love to hate because my, how they talk. Many meeting leaders and participants don't bother to think before they speak and develop their thoughts out loud. Listening to a windbag isn't fun, and Occam's razor needs to shave everything every time. (Occam was a 14-century monk who said, 'Entities should not be unnecessarily multiplied,' meaning 'keep it short and simple'.)

In other words, running last week's meeting and dragging in any new subject isn't helpful. And if you fail to close down irrelevant conversations, you simply prolong the agony. (Chapters 5 and 6 help you get this right.)

No agenda

Every meeting you walk into should have an agenda that considers the best use of time, energy and attention. If you don't have an agenda, any subject's on the table and that approach is absolutely off the menu.

Of course, sometimes it's hard to be that planned, but you can still take the first five minutes of a meeting to make and agree on an agenda and good outcomes. (Chapter 7 helps you manage a lot of the things that can derail a meeting, so you can stick to your agenda.)

Others don't prepare

We're sure that you spend a lot of time getting ready (we're optimistic here) while others don't. They haven't read their documents, have failed to investigate the information they said they would and have not completed their part of the bargain.

If that's a regular occurrence, what norms have been set up? What have you all agreed to? This suggests that there's some meeting governance that needs readjusting and the simplest way to tackle this is with ground rules. Chapter 7 deals with troubleshooting, while Chapter 8 helps you reflect on the meetings you run, what works and what could be better.

Presentations are boring

Yup, we're with you there. Participants who prepare slide-decks in font size 10 and then read every single thing to you in a monotone are the end. At best, you check email or drift off; at worst, you plan idle revenge. Any way you look at it, you're not participating.

The solution? Video them and make them watch it and working through. (Chapter 9 helps you manage that.)

No feedback

Once you've sat through a dull and dreary meeting, lots of you gather up your belongings and leave without addressing the elephant in the room. But without feedback, you are condemned to repeating the cycle over and over. Just knowing that you're doing nothing to tackle the situation is morale-crushing and doesn't make you feel good about returning to the next meeting with the same participants. (You can get insights about reviewing face-to-face and remote meetings in Chapters 6 and 12 respectively.)

Recognising how many meetings are unproductive

It's clear that meetings the world over waste time and reduce productivity. Because we strongly suspected that, when we designed our survey we asked people what percentage of their meetings were productive, neither productive nor unproductive or just unproductive.

Table 1-2 shows you what we found.

Table 1-2 Percentage of Time in Productive and Unproductive Meetings

Perception	*Percentage of Time*
Productive meetings	39
Neither productive nor unproductive	31
Unproductive meetings	30

At least most people are going to meetings that are more productive than unproductive, which is good news.

But these numbers get more interesting when you start asking everyone what percentage of their week everyone spends in meetings.

When we averaged out the amount of time these 675 respondents spent in meetings, it came to 34 per cent of their working weeks. By the way, that ranged from a tiny 10 per cent up to a stonking 90 per cent.

Let's make an assumption about the data. Assume that most people average a 40-hour working week (and there's bags of evidence including lots we've got that this is the case). That means your average professional is spending about 13.5 hours in meetings every week. Of those meetings, 30 per cent of them are unproductive. That means four hours a week, or 10 per cent of their regular working life, is wasted. Over a year, that adds up to a horrendous five weeks, if you assume a 48-week working year.

Now factor in meetings, which are a bit 'meh' because they are neither productive nor unproductive. They give you *another* five weeks: so all in all, we've got ten weeks a year, or 2.5 months of work. Per professional.

Think what an incredible difference that would make in your organisation if you could just make the majority of your meetings efficient and effective. The cost of all this lost productivity is ferocious.

Working out the incredible costs of poor meetings

The cost obviously varies depending on what you earn and where you're based. But Table 1-3 lists the cost of wasted time based on a national average salary in the UK and United States.

Table 1-3 Cost of Wasted Time

Country	*Salary**	*5 weeks*	*10 weeks*
UK average employee	£26,500	£2,548	£5,096
UK frontline manager	£35,300	£3,394	£6,788
USA average employee	$40,500	$3,894	$7,788
USA frontline manager	$49,300	$4,740	$9,480

** Based on data from the ONS, National Management Survey, Chartered Management Institute, US Census Bureau and Bureau of Labor Statistics 2013*