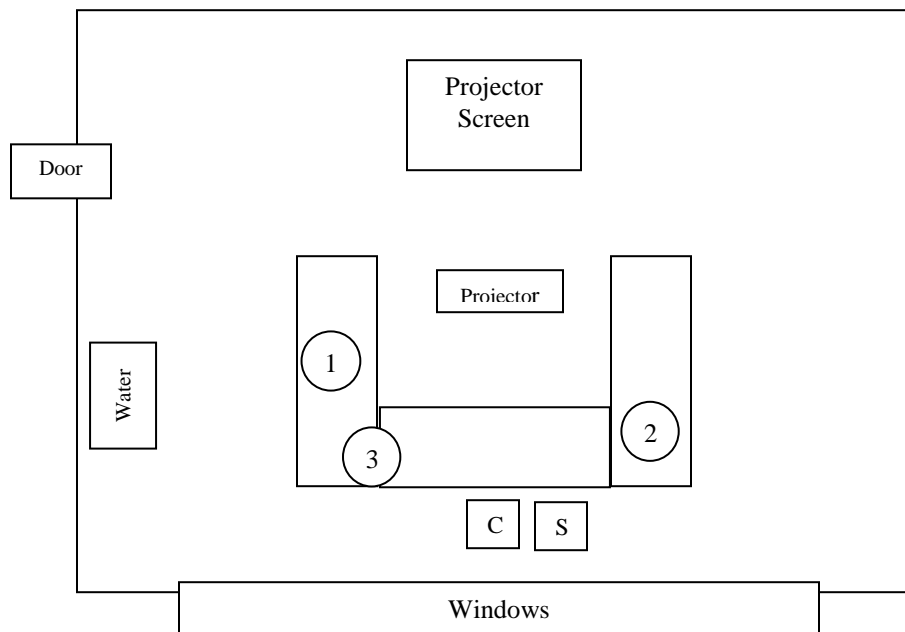


Observing and Interpreting a Meeting

1. **Observation:**

How is the room set up? Who is sitting where? (Draw a rough diagram of the set up, noting where the chair/moderator, members, participants, visitors, etc. are sitting and the location of any kinds of presentation materials (white board, projector, newsprint).)



The diagram above (not to scale) shows the general arrangement of the room. The tables and chairs are arranged in a rectangular “U” shape. It is open seating (first come, first sit) with the exception of the two squares noted at the bottom of the “U” where the committee chairperson (C) and secretary (S) sit. The tables are “standard” meeting tables and hard plastic chairs. There is a water dispenser filled with water and some paper cups in the meeting room. There is a projector and screen setup for the meeting. The meeting room is on the second floor and at the end of the hallway. The windows face onto the street.

What is going on before the meeting? (Who is talking to whom? What is the mood? What kinds of interactions occur? Is there a written agenda? Did members have materials beforehand or did they receive them as they arrived? Are there refreshments? What are they? Who takes them?)

The meeting is set to start at 7:00 pm. Committee members begin to arrive about 15 minutes before the meeting. The committee chairperson is the first to arrive. The secretary is one of the last people to arrive. The mood in the room is generally light. There is discussion among committee members before the meeting – casual discussion not related to committee business.

The agenda for the meeting and the minutes from the prior meeting were distributed to the committee members in advance of the meeting.

There are not refreshments in the room, but there is a water dispenser and paper cups in the room. Some committee members brought with them a cup of coffee or a water bottle. One or two people do take a cup of water prior to the meeting.

How does the meeting begin? (Who calls the meeting to order? How does it get started? What are the initial comments or items of business? Note both the official start to the meeting and any other comments and how this shapes the course of the meeting and the mood of the room.)

The meeting began at approximately 7:05 pm. There were a few committee members who arrived at or slightly after 7:00 pm which was the starting time of the meeting. There were a number of conversations going on in the room when the committee chairperson called the meeting to order. When the chairperson called the meeting to order, the conversations stopped. While the mood in the room had not changed per se, everyone's focus shifted to the meeting. The meeting agenda was projected on the screen (no handouts, but the meeting agenda had previously been sent to everyone). The first item on the meeting agenda was to open with prayer and the committee chairperson asked if there were particular joys or concerns. Several committee members requested prayers (mostly concerns). One person came late to the meeting, but had notified the chairperson in advance that he would likely be late and this was announced at the start of the meeting.

What happens during the meeting? (Note two or three significant events or decisions that were made. Describe the process by which those decisions occurred.)

The committee agenda included the review and approval of minutes from the last meeting. The process by which this was done was the most formal decision of the meeting. The chairperson asked for a motion to approve the minutes, a second and a vote by the committee. The remaining agenda items were "status" reports on committee activities and were handled less formally. Reports were verbally given and there were no actions that required a decision. The meeting was closed with prayer at 8:00 pm (on time) as expected as it was planned to be a one hour meeting.

II. Analysis:

What are your impressions of the meeting (Was it orderly? Was it worthwhile? Was there energy in the room? Were the people engaged in the meeting?)

The general impression of the meeting was positive. It was orderly, yet not too formal. There was a meeting agenda and it was followed. The committee meets monthly and in this particular meeting, most of the time was spent on discussing work in-progress or reporting on completed activities. There were questions and advice offered from other committee members, but this was done in a collegial way. The committee members were definitely engaged. Everyone spoke at least once during the meeting. People appeared to be comfortable in the meeting. Several people got up during the meeting to get a cup of water.

What process was used to make decisions? Was there more than one?

There were two processes that the committee made to make decisions. One was the formal process of approving the minutes of the previous meeting. This required a formal motion, second and committee vote.

The second process actually occurred approximately a week after the meeting when the committee chairperson emailed committee members notifying them that information came in after the meeting and a decision was required before the next scheduled meeting, so the chairperson was asking for a vote via email.

Additionally, while it was a decision-making process, as various committee members reported on work projects other committee members would offer comments or suggestions. This was all done informally and conversationally -- sometimes in the middle of the report and at other times after the status report was complete.

What are the outcomes?

The outcome of the formal vote was to approve the minutes from the previous meeting. There were no objections and no one abstained from the vote. I do not know the outcome of the email vote. It would be interesting to attend the committee meeting next month and see the results of the suggestions and recommendations that were made.

How did people treat one another?

People treated one another in a respectful way. There was appropriate humor and laughter in the meeting. There was constructive discussion and when suggestions or recommendations were made, they were made in an attempt to be constructively helpful. Everyone participated and no one seemed left out or unengaged. There were some side conversations going on during the meeting that were somewhat distracting but they were relatively short in duration.

Was there conflict? How was it handled?

In this particular meeting, there wasn't any conflict or disagreement, but I expect that was due, in large part, to the fact that this meeting did not include many decisions. Based on the status reports given, there will be committee decisions required in the next several meetings.

What was the role of moderator/chair? (How did she/he function in the meeting?)

The committee chairperson was clearly “in charge” of the meeting. The chairperson followed the meeting agenda and kept the meeting on track. There was a tendency on the part of the committee to engage in lengthy discussions and the committee chairperson focused on facilitating the meeting and bringing the group back on track. When the chairperson needed to bring the committee back on track, the committee quickly responded.

III. **Synopsis:**

Write a one page synopsis of the key dynamics of this meeting – both the overt decisions/processes and the underlying organizational issues that you observe. How well did the person leading do? What suggestions would you make? If you were the overall leader of this organization, what steps would you take after this meeting?

The overall sense of the interpersonal dynamics in this meeting appeared to be positive. In terms of seating there were three “groups” of people that caught my attention. Looking at the diagram of the room the approximate location of the first “group” of people is noted by the circle with the number “1.” This was a group of five who, as they arrived, immediately began talking and continued to talk with one another until the meeting began. Group number “2” were relatively new committee members and gravitated to another section of the table and talked amongst themselves. Group number “3” was where those who were late, or the people arriving latest to the meeting sat.

While everyone spoke in the meeting and there was a designated chairperson for the meeting, there was an unofficial leader in the group. This individual sat in “Group 1” and the group looked to this person for comments and suggestions. It was a friendly exchange and they were teasing this individual about being highly organized. The chairperson facilitated the group through the complete meeting agenda in the specified meeting time, gave committee members an opportunity to speak and the meeting did not seem rushed nor was anyone abruptly cut off. The agenda for this meeting was atypically light as the committee had not met in the prior month. (The church takes two months in the year off from committee meetings – December and August.)

The chairperson and the committee members seem to have a good rapport with one another. There was an interesting dynamic with the committee secretary, who would periodically interrupt the meeting to get clarity around a discussion item in order to

record meeting minutes. Initially I thought this was somewhat disruptive and controlling, but with further thought on the matter, I think it was just an attempt on the part of the individual to be sure that the minutes were complete and correct. It would be interesting to observe additional meetings to see if, in fact, this is the case or if there is something more to the dynamic.

With respect to suggestions and next steps after the meeting, I would pay attention to the location where people sit. If committee members tend to sit in the same location each meeting, I would give some consideration to figuring out ways that people would be able to sit beside people that they don't typically sit beside in order that everyone get to know one another better. This seems like a rather "social" group, and I would give some consideration as to how best to capitalize on this strength within the group for committee work. Given that things were a bit informal in the reporting on some of the upcoming work projects, if I were the committee chairperson, I would probably check in with everyone prior to the next meeting to make sure that the work is progressing and on track.

Observing this committee, the overall impression was that it functioned well, but was not highly structured and formal when they conducted their meeting. The committee did act more formally when approving minutes for the previous meeting, but due to the meeting agenda, there were no other decisions that were required at this particular meeting, so I was not able to observe other decisions. There were discussions about specific work that was completed and in the planning stages. Committee members appeared to feel comfortable in sharing with the committee their progress and some of the open items that would be requiring decisions. Committee members also appeared to feel comfortable offering suggestions to their colleagues.

In looking at the Running Meetings book as a point of comparison and referring to the "Preparing for Your Meeting" section of the book, this meeting did comply with the meeting preparation checklist (p. 39-40) as applicable: a specific purpose, an agenda, invitations sent to participants, information (e.g. agenda, previous meeting minutes) sent in advance to participants, and meeting room including projector and screen setup in advance with the projector and screen in good working order.

For the execution of the meeting, the section "Leading Your Meeting" lists some key points taking from pages 44-59:

Key Point from "Leading Your Meeting"	Comments from Meeting Observation
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Begin meeting on Time	Meeting started five minutes late, so some improvement could be made in starting more promptly.
Introduce the Meeting	The chairperson called the meeting to order and gave some opening comments
Establish Ground Rules	This was not done as that meeting, but the committee meets monthly and has established ground rules in place
Keep the meeting moving	The chairperson kept the meeting moving. While providing discussion, did not let the discussion linger on anyone agenda item too long.
Make sure all points of view are heard	All committee members spoke at one time during the meeting. Not everyone had something to say on each agenda item. The chairperson allowed appropriate discussion time for each item and no one was cut off or excluded from discussing an agenda item if they had something to say.
Manage Multitaskers	The attention level to the meeting was good. People were generally engaged and there was not anyone there who was completely engaged. That said, I did observe people with smart phones and periodically looking or texting but it did not seem to be overly distracting.
Closing the Meeting	The last item on the meeting agenda was closing prayer and adjournment. This was lead by the committee chairperson.