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# Tricks of the Trade® Why Only Wimpy Project Managers Hold Status Meetings

by Rita Mulcahy, PMP

It is another busy day. As a project manager, you are pulled in many different directions and your day is spent in meetings. But does this need to be the case?

## Why Are Status Meetings Bad?

You have probably been to hundreds of these meetings, but have you ever thought about what is really going on? Each person, in turn, reports what he or she has been working on. The first person talks and talks, and no one really cares. The next person talks and talks, and no one really cares. The last person is sitting there, fuming, "This is just great. I'm sitting here wasting my valuable time for the next two hours until they get to me!"

Why do we hold such meetings? Wouldn't the WBS creation process decrease the need for them? How about a communications management plan and getting the team involved in the planning process? If a project is well-organized, using the international standards for project management, status meetings are just not necessary.

A project manager once said to me, "I need to hold status meetings to find out how the project is progressing!" I asked if he had a WBS, among other things. He said, "No." I asked if he ever thought about how his project was affected by these meetings. He again answered, "No," which is not a sign of a great project manager! Did he really need to take up so many hours of other peoples' days just to save himself a little time? Did he realize these meetings besmirch his reputation, decrease buy-in, decrease performance, and are considered a complete waste of time by his team?

## Signs You Have a Bad Meeting

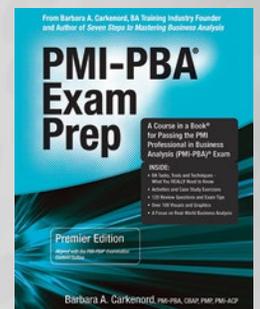
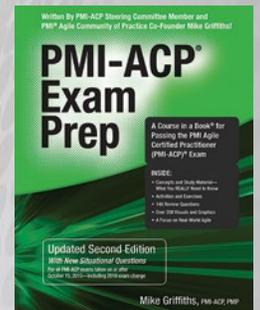
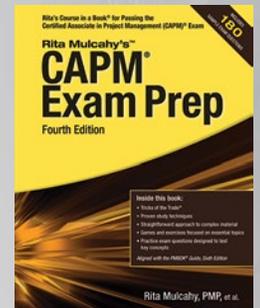
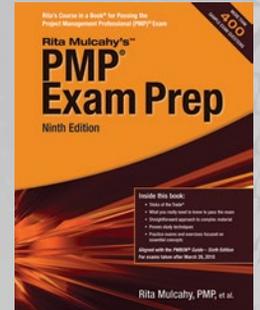
How do you know if you have a bad meeting? Your meetings are bad if they are similar to the type described above, or:

- People come in late or leave early
- People bring work to the meeting
- People fall asleep during the meeting (Did I really need to say this?)
- Those who need to make a decision are not present
- You do not have an agenda or follow the rules for effective meetings
- You cannot cover all the items on the agenda
- There are side conversations during the meeting
- There is a feeling of apathy in the room
- People do not participate, or they RUN out of the room when the meeting is over

## Rules for Effective Meetings

Check the following basic "rules" to see how well you manage team meetings:

- Set and keep to a time limit (1.5 hours maximum)
- Schedule recurring meetings in advance
- Meet with the team regularly; once a month should be all you need
- Have a purpose for the meeting



## Tricks of the Trade® Why Only Wimpy Project Managers Hold Status Meetings (continued)

- Create an agenda with team input
- Distribute agendas beforehand and stick to them during the meeting
- Remember, it is the project's meeting, not the project manager's
- Bring the right people together and detail their responsibilities in advance
- Chair and lead the meeting with a set of rules (raise your hand to speak, do not speak when someone else is speaking, speak for no more than five minutes, etc.)
- Assign deliverables and time limits for all activities that result from meetings
- Document and publish meeting minutes

## Why Do We Have So Many Meetings?

In a study I conducted about more than 400 project managers, team members, and others, the reasons for meetings were uncovered. They are not very encouraging. Here are some of them:

- Don't know what else to do
- No WBS
- Perceived need
- Activities are too large
- No sense of a team
- People are judged on work volume
- Team not involved in planning
- Not enough buy-in
- Many interrelated projects
- No milestones
- Volatile projects
- Incomplete scope statement

## Options to Avoid a Status Meeting

Think about this: How about having your team meetings (instead of status meetings) scheduled on a set day, such as, the third business day of each month? The project manager provides the team a short form asking for pertinent information on the status of each activity. The "status form" is due to the project manager on the 29th business day of each month. Once the status report is received from the team, the project manager may contact team members with any questions and issues and then update the project's monthly report. The report is sent to the team for comments before the next meeting. The final report is sent to all major stakeholders and team members' bosses after the team meeting.

What is left to address at team meetings? All the really important things, including risks, communicating data, reviewing the communications management plan, scope management plan, other management plans, coordination that cannot effectively be done outside a meeting, and reminding the team of the project manager's rules for working on the project (contact the project manager with problems within a day of their discovery). What can you do to get rid of those hated status meetings? Think about your situation, because the best project managers do not hold status meetings. Good luck!

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