Tampere University of Applied Sciences

Enhancing the Effectiveness of Subject Department Meetings: Strategies and Best Practices

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this study was to collect information based on the strategies implemented within an educational setting for conducting subject department meetings. The study was carried out within a Mathematics department, in a Post-Primary school, using both qualitative and quantitative analysis. This was conducted via the observation and recording of two subject department meetings and administering a survey to the subject department meeting attendees to gather quantitative data on their attitudes, perceptions, and behaviours related to effective meetings.

The preliminary findings revealed a negative perception toward the existing structure of subject department meetings, leading to the absence of goal attainment within the allocated 60-minute timeframe. There was a consensus among the attendees that these meetings should be optimised to yield more constructive outcomes, with the implementation of follow-up actions upon the conclusion of the subject department meeting, thereby ensuring a more effective utilisation of their time.

The key findings from the study resulted in specific strategies that can be implemented to enhance the effectiveness of subject department meetings. These strategies included, generating and distributing an agenda document for the attendees to add their items for discussion, the establishment of a standing environment, the frequency of the meetings be increased to bi-weekly or monthly, each with a time limit of 20-minutes per meeting, and the recognition of the role of humour within the subject department meeting to develop a positive environment, thereby promoting collaboration and communication.

Further research is required to develop and refine strategies that cater to the distinct needs and objectives of every department. Such research should comprehensively explore factors affecting each department, including departmental size, faculty composition, and institutional context.

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2 INTRODUCTION

In the introduction section, background information regarding "subject department meetings" will be discussed, along with the research context and questions to be investigated.

2.1 Background.

Subject department meetings play a crucial role in ensuring that teachers are well-equipped with the necessary knowledge, skills, and resources to deliver high-quality instruction to their students (Jay 1982). However, not all department meetings are created equal, and ineffective meetings can lead to frustration, lack of collaboration, and a waste of time. Therefore, this thesis aims to provide strategies and best practices to run effective subject department meetings that promote collaboration, communication, and continuous improvements.

The unproductive nature of a 60-minute meeting raises significant concerns and necessitates an urgent call for change. Time is a precious resource, and wasted on fruitless gatherings undermines productivity, team morale, and overall organisational effectiveness (Jay 1982). In today's fast-paced world, where every minute counts, it is paramount that meetings serve a clear purpose and yield tangible outcomes. They should provide a platform for collaboration, decision making, and progress towards shared goals. Engaging in off topic discussions without any actionable outcomes not only hampers individual productivity but also drains the energy of the attendees. By re-evaluating the purpose, structure, and participants of meetings, organisations can create an environment that values efficiency, fosters meaningful changes, and ensures that everyone's time is respected and well utilised (Weber 2003). Embracing change in this regard can unlock a new era of productivity and drive success for both individuals and the organisation as a whole.

Case Study: Subject department meeting

Participants: Mr. B, Mrs. Q, Mr. P, Mr H, and Mrs M.

At the beginning of the academic year a group of qualified professionals from the mathematics department attended their subject department meeting. The agenda that was shared, which was distributed from top management, outlined the topics to be discussed. The room was filled with optimism, but soon the meeting turned into a monotonous exercise in futility.

The meeting began with a subject department member introducing the first agenda item to all attendees sitting at a large table (Figure 1). As various ideas and perspectives were shared, it became apparent there was a lack of focus and direction. The discussions veered off course repeatedly, with participants becoming entangled in unrelated tangents and personal anecdotes. The allotted time for each topic slipped away, wasted on trivial matters that have no relevance to the objectives at hand.
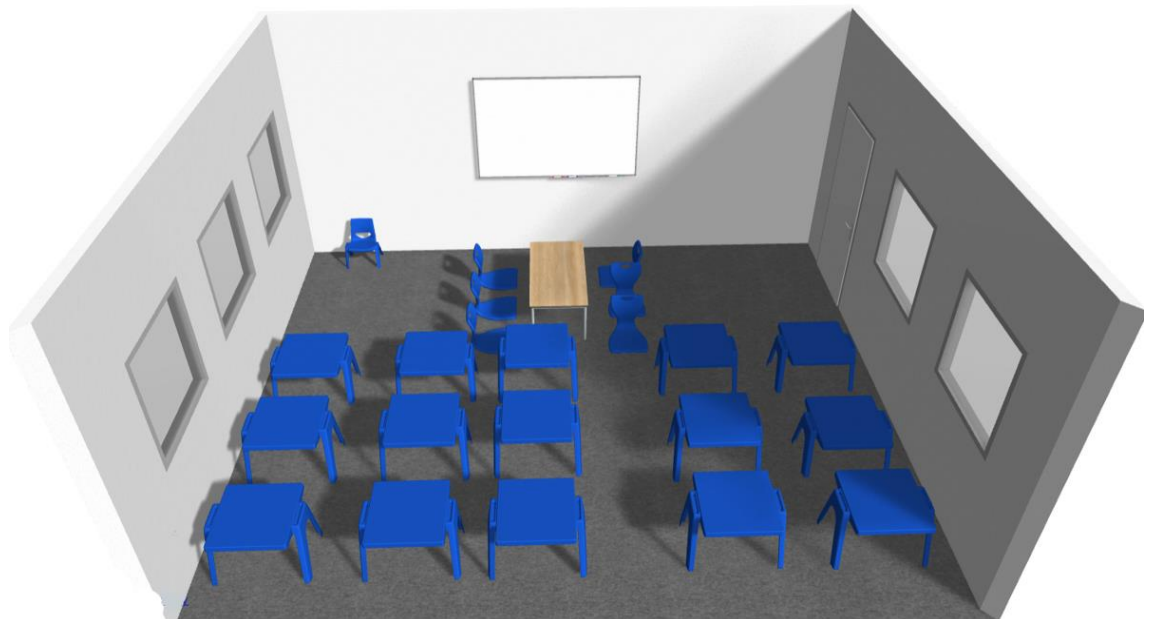
Figure 1: Standard subject department meeting room layout

While some individuals passionately expressed their opinions, others disengaged, doodling on notepads, or checking their smartphones. The room's energy gradually dissipated as the clock mercilessly advanced. Despite attempts to regain control to steer the conversation back on track, the meeting descended into a chaotic jumble of half-hearted suggestions on unresolved issues and no further actions were outlined to be taken.

Exiting the meeting, the attendees couldn't help but reflect on the wasted opportunity. The valuable time that could have been used for meaningful work had been squandered. The lack of structure, clear objectives, and effective facilitation had sabotaged their chances of reaching tangible outcomes. They yearned for a more purposeful and efficient approach to meetings, one that would harness their collective expertise, drive innovation, and lead to results.

The team recognised the need to establish meeting guidelines, improve agenda setting practices, and foster an environment that encourages active participation and accountability.

2.2 Research Context.

The justification for creating a thesis on how to run an effective subject department meeting is because it is an important aspect of school administration and has a significant impact on the success of a school and the development of its teachers and students (Oxendine et al. 2022). Running an effective subject department meeting requires strong leadership, clear communication, and efficient use of time and resources. By having a well-run meeting, department members can discuss important issues, make decisions, and plan for the future, which can improve collaboration and morale, increase teacher effectiveness, and promote student learning. Additionally, it is also important to ensure that meetings are inclusive, engaging, and effective for all members, regardless of their role or background.

A thesis on how to run an effective subject department meeting can provide valuable insights, practical tips, and recommendations for school leaders and department members, and contribute to the development of best practices in school administration (Oxendine et al. 2022). Furthermore, it can also be a useful resource for researchers and policymakers in the field of education and help inform the development of effective policies and programs that support the work of teachers and schools.

1) Importance of meetings: Department meetings play a crucial role in the functioning of a subject department. They provide a platform for the members to communicate, collaborate, and to make important decisions (Oxendine et al. 2022).

2) Lack of effective meetings: Despite their importance, many department meetings are ineffective and do not achieve their intended goals. This results in a waste of time and resources and can also lead to low morale among members (Jay 1982).

3) Need for improvement: There is a need for improvement in the way department meetings are conducted. A thesis that focuses on how to run an effective subject department can provide practical solutions to common problems and help departments to achieve their goals more efficiently (Oxendine et al. 2022).

4) Contribution to the field: A thesis on how to run an effective subject department meeting can contribute to the field of education and management by providing new insights and best practices for conducting meetings ("Running Effective Meetings" 2010).

5) Career advancement: Conducting research and writing a thesis on this topic can help the author to advance their career and gain recognition as an expert in the field (Oxendine et al. 2022).

Therefore, creating a thesis on how to run an effective subject department meeting is justifiable as it addresses a real-world problem, has the potential to contribute to the field, and can provide career advancement opportunities for the author.

2.3 Research Questions.

The research questions of this thesis are as follows:

- What are the key objectives, goals, and most effective methods for structuring and organising subject department meetings, whilst ensuring active participation and engagement of all department attendees?

- What are the potential challenges or barriers to running effective subject department meetings, and how can they be overcome?

- How can technology and best practices be leveraged to enhance collaboration, teamwork, and improve outcomes during subject department meetings?

2.4 Research Aims and Methods.

This thesis aims to investigate and propose strategies to optimise the effectiveness of subject department meetings in educational institutions. Subject department meetings play a crucial role in fostering collaboration, sharing best practices, and improving teaching and learning outcomes (Oxendine et al. 2022). However, many meetings often fall short of achieving their intended goals. This research study seeks to identify the key factors that contribute to successful subject department meetings and develop practical recommendations to enhance their efficiency and effectiveness.

3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

This section will discuss and review the published literature and theories regarding subject department meetings in an educational institution.

3.1 Literature Review.

The literature suggests that effective subject department meetings are characterised by several key elements, including clear objectives, an agenda that reflects the goals of the meeting, active participation by all members, and a focus on improving teaching and learning outcomes (Oxendine et al. 2022). Additionally, research has shown that effective meetings are those that are well organised, time efficient, and result in actionable outcomes (Hoekstra and Newton 2017). Therefore, in order to run effective subject department meetings, it is essential to have a clear understanding of these key elements and to implement them in practice.

The author's motivation to delve into this topic stems from a deep concern for the well-being of educators and the quality of education they provide. Recognising that time is one of the most precious resources for teachers, the persistent inefficiencies in subject department meetings results in a significant opportunity cost. This loss of time and energy could otherwise be directed towards improving teaching methodologies, supporting students, or engaging in professional development.

The area of best practice for subject department meetings is one that has not been highly researched, however there are many links and crossovers that can be taken from meetings in a business or software development environment. The adaption from traditional dictatorial agenda setting towards collaborative, inclusive daily scrums is ever growing (Stray et al. 2020).

The ability to run an efficient meeting begins before the meeting has begun. In order to be efficient the meeting elements or agenda should be outlined and agreed upon, giving each attendee the opportunity to contribute to the meeting by adding their own topics to be discussed to the agenda (MTD Training 2010). Every meeting should have a goal that is common to all attendees, a common

goal will increase productivity and contribution (MTD Training 2010), and a set time limit for the meeting. MTD Training (2010) details that meetings can be up 90 minutes, but this paper will outline the benefits of capping the meeting at 20 minutes to improve productivity and collaboration.

The daily stand-up meeting is an agile practice that is commonly used within departments in the software industry. The aim is to have a brief meeting providing all attendees the opportunity to update team members on their progress and ask for support where required (Stray et al. 2016). This is a similar characteristic that this paper will evaluate and incorporate into running an effective subject department meeting, by having a short meeting with all attendees. The opportunity for daily meetings in an educational setting may be unrealistic and therefore the discussion for fortnightly or monthly meetings will be examined.

The traditional meeting setting of having a front leader speaking and providing information rather than a discussion is a measure that this paper is looking to eradicate and move towards a harmonious meeting with all participants standing at a whiteboard discussing the pre-agreed agenda items (see Figure 2, 3, and 4 for sample room layout, based on a standard classroom setup see Figure 5). The move towards standing in the meeting is to erase the element of superiority combined with the 20 minute limit to encourage participation and open communication (Chim et al. 2021).
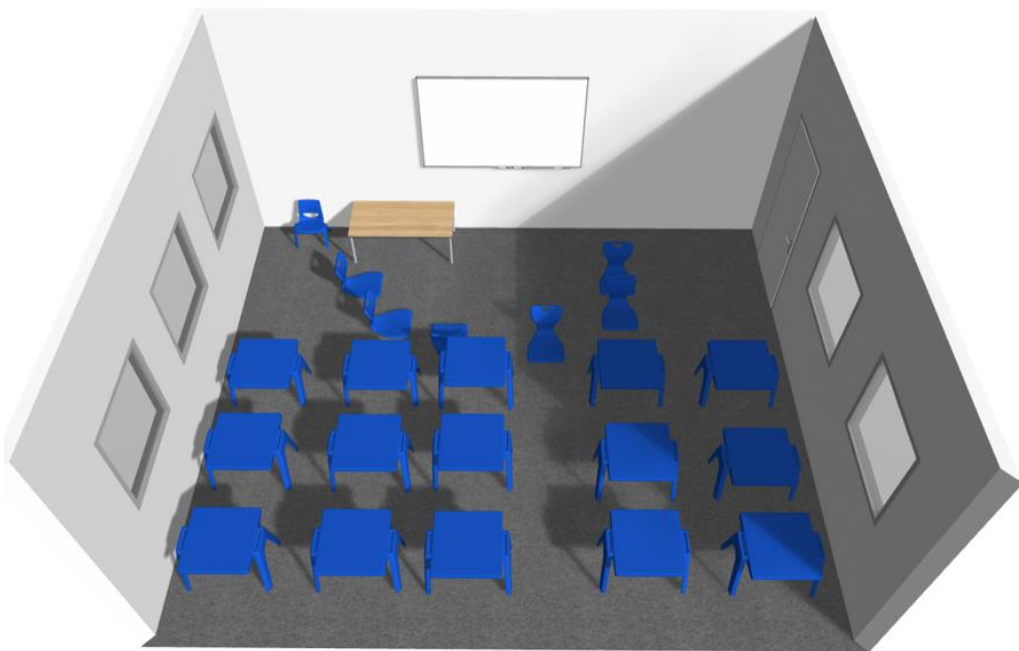
Figure 2: Exemplar subject department meeting room layout
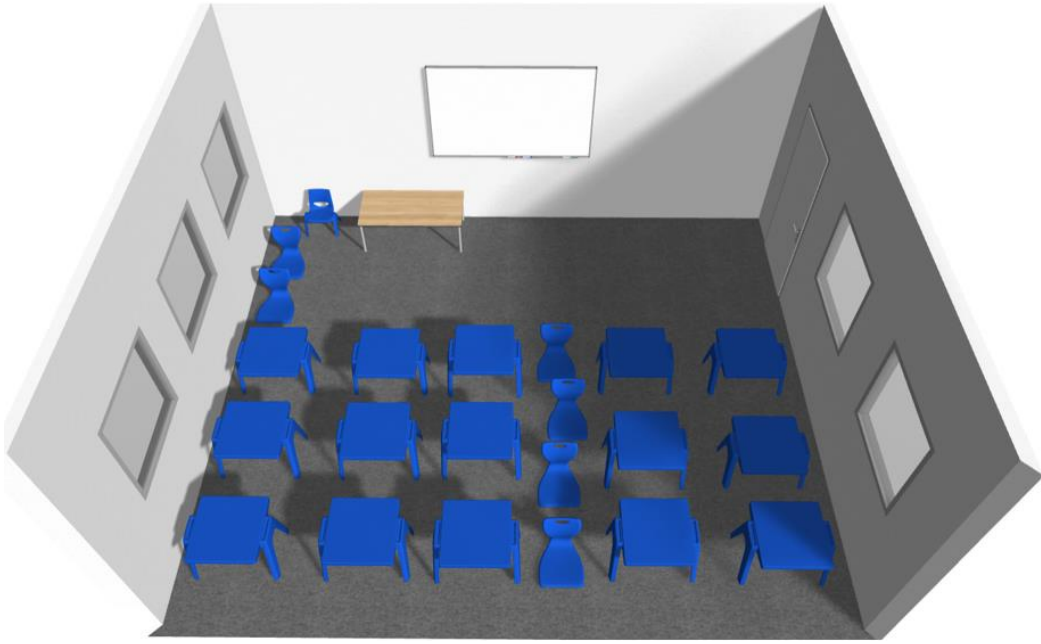
Figure 3: Exemplar subject department meeting room layout

Figure 4: Exemplar subject department meeting room layout

Figure 5: Standard classroom layout

The importance of human interaction, face-to-face versus virtual, in a meeting environment is a key element that must not be overlooked. The popularity of platforms, such as Microsoft Teams and Zoom, offer an invaluable alternative to face-to-face meetings. The ability for attendees to be present via an internet connection, contribute to the meeting and connecting employees worldwide is a great resource but this paper will delve into the importance of the personal and physical element of a meeting also (Chim et al. 2021).

The ability for platforms, such as Microsoft Teams or Zoom, to host meetings and conferences online has been an important recent development that was utilised during the COVID-19 pandemic (Bergmann et al. 2023). However, due to the overuse of technology for meetings, it has created a video-conferencing fatigue (Riedl 2022) leading to increased stress levels amongst staff. As stated by Wiederhold (2020), the use of online platforms for hosting meetings removes the human interaction element and attendees use "precisely timed vocalisations, gestures, and movements to communicate, and (the host) relies on precise responses from others to determine if they are being understood", thus removing the human element and "craic" that a face-to-face meeting claims.

The term "craic" is often used in Irish and Scottish English to describe the fun, banter, and enjoyable social interaction that can occur during informal gatherings or conversations (Ireland 2014). While it is not a standard business term, bringing the "craic" into a meeting can be a valuable way to enhance the human element and create a positive, engaging atmosphere. However, it is important to strike the

right balance. Too much "craic" can lead to meetings becoming unfocused and unproductive. It is crucial to ensure that the humour and banter are appropriate for the context and that the meetings objectives are still being met. Incorporating the human element of "craic" into meetings requires a degree of social awareness and an understanding of the team's dynamics (Lehmann-Willenbrock and Allen 2014). The goal is to create a positive, enjoyable atmosphere that supports team building, creativity, and effective communication, all while achieving the meetings objectives.

3.2 What is a subject department meeting.

Subject department meeting refers to a gathering or session where the faculty members or teachers who specialise in a specific subject come together to discuss various matters related to that subject (Oxendine et al. 2022). These meetings are common in educational institutions such as schools, colleges, or universities.

The purpose of a subject department meeting can vary, but some common objectives include (Hoekstra and Newton 2017):

1) Curriculum planning: Teachers discuss and plan the curriculum for the subjects, ensuring it aligns with educational standards, learning objectives, and the overall goals of the institution.
2) Sharing best practices: Educators exchange ideas, teaching strategies, and resources to enhance their instructional methods and improve student learning outcomes. They may discuss innovative approaches, successful classroom activities, or new technologies that can be integrated into their teaching.
3) Assessments and evaluation: Teachers discuss assessment methods, the grading criteria, and evaluation of student progress. They may analyse test results, share insights on student performance, and discuss ways to address challenges or improve assessment practices.
4) Professional development: Subject department meetings often serve as a platform for professional development. Teachers may attend workshops,

training sessions, or presentations on pedagogical techniques, new research, or advancements in their subject area.

5) Collaborative projects: Educators may collaborate on interdisciplinary projects or initiatives that involve multiple subjects. They can brainstorm ideas, coordinate efforts, and share resources to create a well-rounded education experience for students.

6) Problem solving: Subject department meetings provide an opportunity to address challenges or concerns related to the subject. Teachers can discuss common difficulties faced by students, share strategies for differentiation or inclusion, and explore solutions to enhance teaching effectiveness.

Subject department meetings play a vital role in fostering collaboration, sharing knowledge, and ensuring the overall quality of education within a specific subject area.

3.3 What is a standup meeting.

A stand-up meeting, also known as a daily scrum or daily stand up, is a short, daily, weekly, or bi-weekly meeting. The goal of the stand up meeting is to give a quick update on the status of a project, identify any obstacles that need to be addressed, and coordinate the work of team members (Stray et al. 2016). The term "stand up" reflects the practice of holding the meeting while attendees are standing in order to keep it short and focused (see Appendix 7, 8, and 9 for sample room layout).

This simple format keeps the meeting focused and ensures that everyone stays on track and is aware of what their colleagues are working on. The stand-up meeting is usually held daily, weekly or bi-weekly and typically lasts 15 to 20 minutes (Stray et al. 2016). In an educational environment, the stand-up meeting would ideally be scheduled bi-weekly or monthly, as discussed by Stray et al. (2016) that the frequency of the meetings are very important because if the meetings are too frequent they lose their value and become monotonous.

The stand-up meeting is an effective way to improve communication and collaboration within your subject department. It helps to identify any roadblocks early

on and ensures that everyone is working towards the same goals (Stray et al. 2016). Additionally, it helps department members to stay accountable for their work and progress (Chim et al. 2021). It is important to keep the stand-up meeting short and focused, as it is meant to be a quick update rather than a lengthy discussion. Participants should come prepared with their updates and be ready to listen to their colleagues' updates. The meeting should also be held in a place where everyone can easily stand, and it is best to avoid any distractions (Chim et al. 2021). The creation of a shared document with the agenda for the stand-up should be distributed within the subject department before the stand-up meeting begins ("Running Effective Meetings" 2010). This gives each department member the opportunity to add their own agenda items that they want discussed at the meeting.

3.3.1 Room layout design

The images used to illustrate the room layout were created using the website www.classroomdesigner.spaceforme.com.

- Standard classroom layout (Appendix 4).
- Standard subject department meeting room layouts (Appendix 5 and 6).
- Exemplar subject department meeting room layouts (Appendix 7, 8, and 9)

3.4 Technology

Technology plays a crucial role in subject department meetings, enhancing collaboration, communication, organisation, and overall productivity (Sox et al. 2016).

1) Communication collaboration.
2) Presentation and sharing.
3) Document sharing and storage.
4) Note taking and documentation.
5) Data analysis and reporting.
6) Curriculum planning and resource management.

Overall, the use of technology in subject department meetings enhances efficiency, promotes collaboration, and empowers educators to make data-driven decisions, ultimately benefiting the teaching and learning process.

3.5 What technology can be used.

There are several technology tools that can be used in a subject department meeting:

1) Video conferencing tools: Tools such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, etc. can be used for virtual meetings or to connect with remote attendees.

2) Presentation software: Tools like Microsoft PowerPoint, Google Slides, etc. can be used to create and share presentations and visual aids during the meeting.

3) Collaboration tools: Tools such as Google Docs, Microsoft Teams, etc. can be used for real-time collaboration on documents and action items.

4) Screen sharing tools: Tools like Microsoft Teams, Zoom, etc. can be used to share the contents of your computer screen with the attendees of the meeting.

5) Surveys and polls: Tools like SurveyMonkey, Google Forms, Microsoft Forms, etc. can be used to gather opinions on feedback from attendees in real-time.

These are just a few examples of how technology can be used in subject department meetings. The choice of technology will depend on the specific needs and objectives of the meeting, as well as the preferences and comfort levels of the attendees (Sox et al. 2016).

3.6 Affordances of technology.

The use of technology in a meeting setting can offer several affordances, including:

1) Improves communication: Technology can enhance communication by allowing real-time decision discussion and collaboration, even with participants who are located remotely.
2) Increase productivity: Technology can streamline the meeting process, and allow participants to access and share information, data, and presentations quickly and easily. This can help reduce the time needed for meetings and increase overall productivity.
3) Enhanced record keeping: Technology can automatically record meeting minutes, making it easier to keep track of decisions, action items, and follow-up tasks.
4) Better collaboration: With the use of interactive whiteboards, document sharing platforms, and project management tools, technology can facilitate more effective collaboration and idea sharing.
5) Increased accessibility: Technology can make meetings more accessible for individuals with disabilities, for example, through the use of closed captioning or audio descriptions.

However, as discussed by Sox et al. (2016), it is important to keep in mind that technology is not a silver bullet and its use should be balanced with the need for face to face interaction and human connection in meetings. Over reliance on technology can also lead to distractions and reduce the effectiveness of meetings.

3.7 Microsoft Office Products

Subject department meetings in educational institutions are crucial for effective curriculum development, pedagogical discussions, and assessment planning. To maximise the productivity and efficiency of these meetings, it is essential to have access to tools and platforms that promote collaboration, streamline document

sharing, and facilitate communication (Wahyuni and Kusumawati 2021). Microsoft Office 365, a cloud-based suite of productivity tools, offers a comprehensive solution to address these needs (Căruțașu and Pirnau 2017).

According to The Software Report, Microsoft is the leading software company in the world (Jirehl 2021) leading the way in cloud-based suites. Microsoft Office 365 is free for teachers within an institution making it the most popular choice ("Microsoft Office 365 In Schools"). It enables staff to collaborate with each other and communicate beyond the staffroom.

Figure 6: Microsoft Office platforms

3.7.1 Microsoft Teams

When considering the use of Microsoft Teams for a subject department meeting, it is important to assess its affordances, including both the benefits and potential negatives.

Benefits of using Microsoft Teams for a subject department meeting:

1) Collaboration and communication: Microsoft Teams provides a platform for real-time collaboration and communication. It allows participants to

chat, share files, and collaborate on documents during the meeting, fostering a sense of teamwork.

2) Accessibility: Microsoft Teams can be accessed from various devices (computers, smartphones, tablets), making it convenient for participants to join meetings from anywhere with an Internet connection.

3) Integration with Office 365: Teams seamlessly integrates with other Microsoft Office 365 applications like Word, Excel, and PowerPoint, making it easy to share and collaborate on documents related to the subject matter.

4) Scheduling and calendar integration: Teams offers scheduling capabilities and integrates with Outlook calendars, simplifying the process of setting up and managing department meetings.

5) Recording and transcription: Teams offers the option to record meetings for those who could not attend and use automated transcription services to generate meeting minutes, improving documentation and accessibility.

6) Security and compliance: Microsoft Teams provides robust security features and compliance options, which can be crucial for protecting sensitive departmental information.

Negatives of using Microsoft Teams for a subject department meeting:

1) Technical issues: Like any online platform, Microsoft Teams may encounter technical glitches such as poor audio or video quality, or dropped connections, which can disrupt meetings.

2) Learning curve: Some participants, especially those less familiar with digital tools, may find Microsoft Teams initially challenging to use, which can lead to frustration.

3) Privacy concerns: Users should be cautious about sharing sensitive data in a virtual environment and ensure that appropriate security settings are in place to protect confidential information.

4) Overwhelming notifications: Microsoft Teams can generate a significant number of notifications, emails, and messages, which can be distracting or overwhelming for some users.

5) Limited offline access: Microsoft Teams primarily relies on an internet connection, which may pose challenges for participants in areas with poor connectivity or during network outages.

6) Meeting etiquette: Virtual meetings can sometimes lead to disruptions or lack of engagement, and it may require clear meeting guidelines and etiquette to maintain productivity.

Microsoft Teams offers numerous affordances for subject department meetings, including enhanced collaboration, accessibility, and integration with other Microsoft tools. However, it also comes with potential negatives such as technical issues, a learning curve, and privacy concerns. The decision to use Microsoft Teams should consider the specific needs and preferences of the department, ensuring that the benefits outweigh the drawbacks.
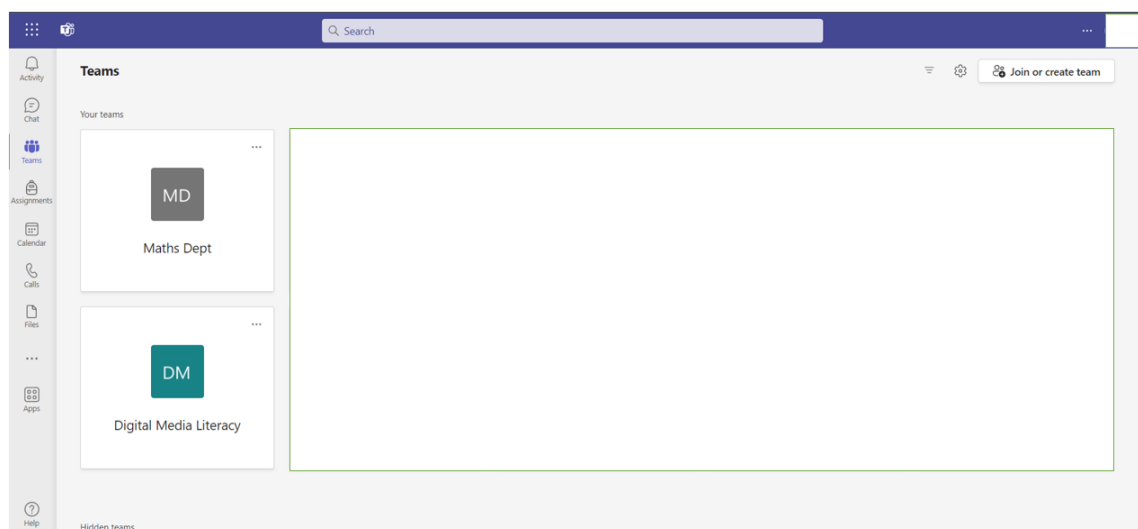
Figure 7: Microsoft Teams screenshot

3.7.1.1. Microsoft Teams – Chat Function

In a situation where a subject department meeting must be held online, the Chat function is a valuable resource that can be utilised, yet it can also be detrimental to the meeting goals.

Benefits of Microsoft Teams Chat function during a subject department meeting.

1) Real-time communication: The chat function in Teams allows participants to communicate in real-time during a meeting. This can be useful for sharing quick commands, questions, or providing additional context without interrupting the speaker.

2) Quiet participation: Introverted or shy participants may feel more comfortable using chat to contribute to the discussion, promoting inclusivity in the meeting.

3) Document and resource sharing: Participants can share links, documents, or other resources through the chat function, making it easy for everyone to access relevant materials during the meeting.

4) Record of conversations: Chat messages are recorded, providing a written record of the meeting's chat discussions. This can be helpful for reviewing discussions, tracking action items, or clarifying information after the meeting.

5) Private conversations: Teams allows participants to have private one-on-one chats during a meeting, which can be useful for side discussions or troubleshooting without distracting the entire group.

Negatives of Microsoft Teams Chat function during a subject department meeting.

1) Distraction: Chat notifications can be distracting, especially if many participants are actively chatting during the meeting. This can get divert attention away from the main discussion.

2) Multitasking: Participants may become tempted to multitask or focus more on the chat than the meetings content, potentially leading to reduced engagement.

3) Loss of context: Important discussions or points made in the chat may not be immediately connected to the main conversation, leading to a loss of context for participants who are not following the chat closely.

4) Overwhelming volume: In large meetings, especially those with a lot of participants, the chat can become flooded with messages, making it difficult to keep up with the conversation.

5) Privacy concerns: Depending on the organisation's settings, chat messages may be archived or monitored, potentially raising privacy concerns, especially when discussing sensitive topics.

6) Miscommunication: Without the benefit of tone of voice and body language, there is a higher risk of miscommunication in text-based chat, leading to misunderstandings or conflicts.

7) Technical issues: Technical problems such as chat not working, messages not sending, or lagging can disrupt the chats effectiveness during a meeting.

To maximise the benefits of using the chat function in Microsoft Teams during a meeting, it is important to establish clear meeting etiquette and guidelines, encourage participants to use the chat cautiously, and ensure that the chat complements the main discussion without overshadowing it.
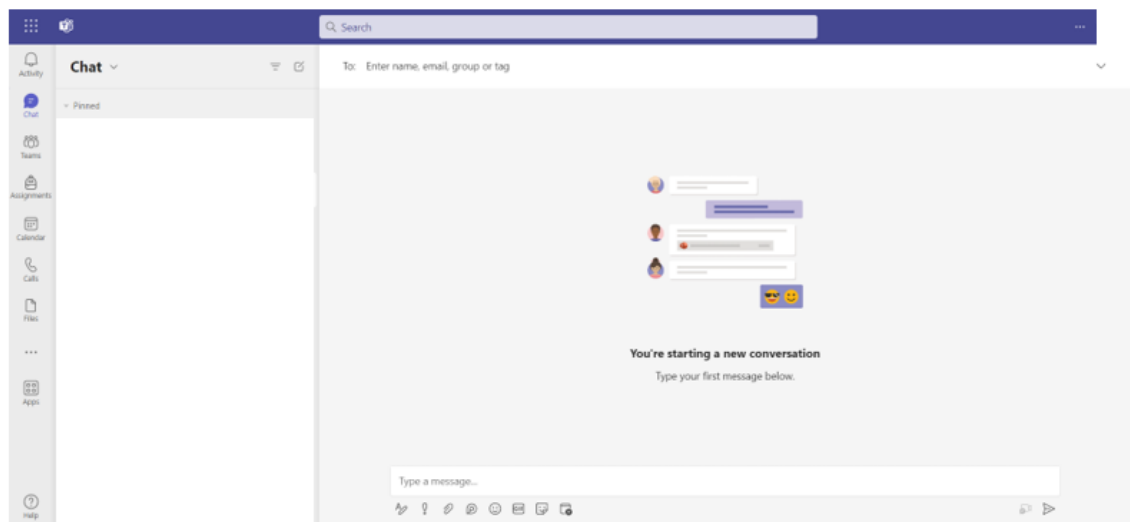
Figure 8: Microsoft Teams Chat function screenshot

3.7.2 Microsoft Word

Benefits of using Microsoft Word for a subject department meeting:

1) Documentation: Microsoft Word is a powerful document creation and editing tool, making it suitable for creating agendas, meeting minutes, and other important documents related to the meeting.
2) Familiarity: Many people are familiar with Microsoft Word, reducing the learning curve for participants in terms of using the tool effectively.
3) Formatting control: Microsoft Word provides robust formatting options, allowing users to create professional looking documents with headings, bullet points, tables, and more.

4) Collaboration: Microsoft Word online and OneDrive integration enables real-time collaboration and documents, allowing multiple participants to edit and comment simultaneously.

5) Accessibility features: Microsoft Word offers various accessibility features, such as the ability to convert Word documents to PDF format, making it suitable for creating documents that meet accessibility standards.

6) Integration with outlook: Microsoft Word can easily integrate with outlook for scheduling and sending meeting invitations, making it convenient for setting up department meetings.

7) Templates: Microsoft Word provides a variety of templates, including meeting agenda and minutes templates, which can save time while preparing meeting materials.

Negatives of using Microsoft Word for a subject department meeting:

1) Limited real-time collaboration: While Word supports real-time collaboration, it may not be as seamless as dedicated collaboration programs like Microsoft Teams. Simultaneous edits can sometimes lead to conflicts.

2) Version compatibility: Different versions of Microsoft Word may have compatibility issues when editing and sharing documents, which can lead to formatting problems.

3) Not ideal for live presentations: Microsoft Word is primarily a document editing tool and may not be the best choice for delivering live presentations or interactive discussions during a meeting.

4) Lack of real-time communication: Microsoft Word does not offer real-time chat or video conferencing features, so it may require additional tools or platforms for communication during the meeting.

5) Storage and accessibility: Access to meeting documents may be limited to those who have access to the specific files, and they may not be as easily accessible as files shared in dedicated collaboration platforms.

Microsoft Word can be a useful tool for creating and managing documents related to subject department meetings, offering strong formatting capabilities and familiarity. However, it may not provide all the features needed for real-time collaboration, and communication, which could require the use of additional tools or platforms to complement Microsoft Word's functionality.
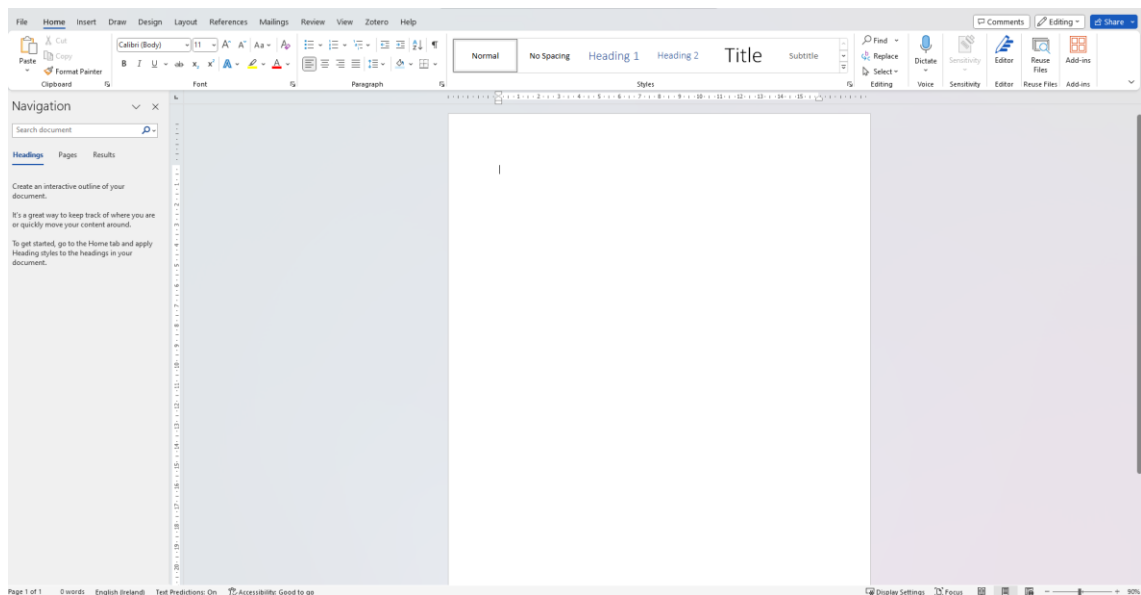
Figure 9: Microsoft Word screenshot

3.7.3 Microsoft PowerPoint

Benefits of using Microsoft PowerPoint for a subject department meeting:

1) Visual presentation: PowerPoint is a visual presentation tool that allows you to create engaging slides with text, images, graphs, and multimedia elements. This can be useful for presenting team information, data, and key points during a meeting.

2) Structured content: PowerPoint's slide-based structure encourages presenters to organise their content in a clear and structured manner, making it easier for both presenters and participants to follow along.

3) Customisation: PowerPoint offers a wide range of design and formatting options, allowing you to tailor your presentation to the subject matter and audience.

4) Multimedia integration: You can easily embed multimedia elements like videos and audio clips into PowerPoint presentations, enhancing your ability to convey information effectively.

5) Accessibility features: PowerPoint includes accessibility features such as slide narration, helping ensure that presentations are inclusive and engaging.

6) Presenter notes: PowerPoint allows presenters to add speaker notes to each slide, providing additional context and reminders during the presentation.

7) Handouts: This option generates handouts and printouts of your PowerPoint slides for distribution to meeting participants, which can serve as reference material.

8) Animation and transitions: PowerPoint offers animation and transition effects that can be used to create engaging and dynamic presentations.

Negatives of using Microsoft PowerPoint for a subject department meeting:

1) Linear structure: PowerPoint forces a linear structure, which may not be suitable for all types of content or discussions. It may not support branching discussions or nonlinear exploration of topics.

2) Overuse of visuals: Over reliance on visuals in PowerPoint presentations can sometimes lead to information overload, distracting from the main message.

3) Potential for boredom: Lengthy or poorly designed PowerPoint presentations can lead to participant disengagement and boredom.

4) Technical issues: Technical problems, such as file compatibility issues, font discrepancies, or malfunctioning multimedia elements, can disrupt the presentation.

5) Lack of real-time collaboration: PowerPoint is primarily a tool for creating and presenting slides, it does not offer real-time collaboration features or tools for interactive discussions during a meeting.

6) Version compatibility: Different versions of PowerPoint may have compatibility issues, affecting the rendering and functionality of presentations.

7) Time consuming preparation: Creating a well-designed PowerPoint presentation can be time consuming, which may not be feasible for last minute or frequent meetings.

8) Limited interactivity: While PowerPoint has some interactive features, such as hyperlinks and clickable elements, it may not be as interactive as dedicated collaboration or meeting platforms.

Microsoft PowerPoint can be a valuable tool for subject department meetings, allowing for structured and visually engaging presentations. However, it is important to use it judiciously, considering the content objectives of the meeting, and to be aware of its limitations in terms of real-life collaboration and nonlinear discussions. Complimenting PowerPoint with other tools or platforms for discussion and collaboration may be necessary to ensure a productive and engaging meeting.
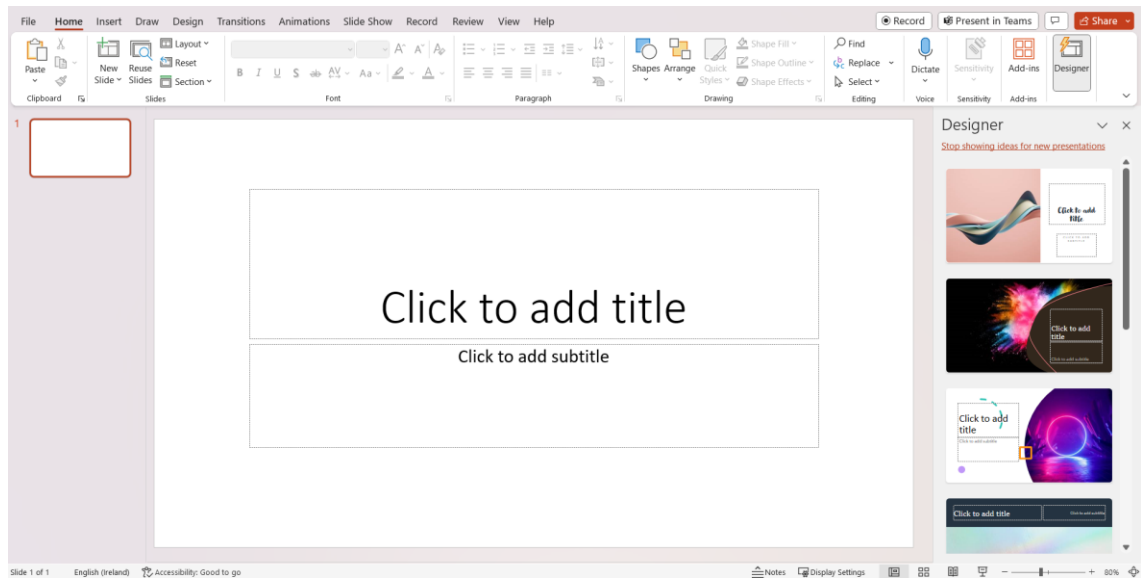
Figure 10: Microsoft PowerPoint screenshot

3.7.4 Microsoft OneDrive

Benefits of using Microsoft OneDrive for a subject department meeting:

1) File storage and sharing: OneDrive provides cloud-based storage, allowing you to store and share meeting related documents such as agendas, minutes, presentations, and reports.

2) Collaboration: OneDrive integrates with other Microsoft Office applications and allows real-time collaboration on documents for multiple users to co-edit documents simultaneously, which is useful for collaborative content creation.

3) Version control: OneDrive automatically tracks changes made to documents and offers version history, making it easy to review and revert to

previous versions if necessary. This is especially valuable when collaborating on meeting materials.

4) Accessibility: OneDrive allows you to set access permissions for files and folders, ensuring that only authorised participants can view or edit documents. This helps maintain document security and confidentiality.

5) Accessibility features: OneDrive, like other Microsoft Office 365 products, includes accessibility features such as support for screen readers, enhancing the inclusivity of meeting materials.

6) Mobile accessibility: OneDrive can be accessed from various devices, including smartphones and tablets, providing flexibility for participants who prefer mobile access.

7) Integration with Microsoft Teams: If your department uses Microsoft Teams for meetings, OneDrive integrates seamlessly, making it easy to share documents within the team's environment.

8) File synchronisation: OneDrive offers synchronisation with desktop folders, ensuring that files are up to date and accessible across multiple devices.

Negatives of using Microsoft OneDrive for a subject department meeting:

1) Internet dependency: Access to OneDrive and its files is reliant on an internet connection, which may be problematic for participants in areas with poor connectivity.

2) File compatibility: Users must have compatible software to view and edit documents stored in OneDrive. Compatibility issues may arise if participants are using different software or versions.

3) Learning curve: Some participants may be less familiar with cloud-based storage and collaboration tools, requiring education and training to use OneDrive effectively.

4) Storage limitations: The amount of storage space in OneDrive may be limited, especially in free or lower tier accounts. This can be a concern if your department generates a large volume of documents.

5) Data security: While OneDrive offers robust security features, it is crucial to configure settings properly and educate participants on data security to prevent unauthorised access or data breaches.

6) Access control management: Managing access permissions for a large group of participants can be time consuming, especially if you need to regularly update permissions.

Microsoft OneDrive offers several benefits for subject department meetings, including fire storage, collaboration, and version control. However, it is important to be aware of potential drawbacks related to internet dependency, file compatibility, and the need for proper access control management. These considerations can help you determine whether OneDrive is a suitable choice for your specific meeting needs.
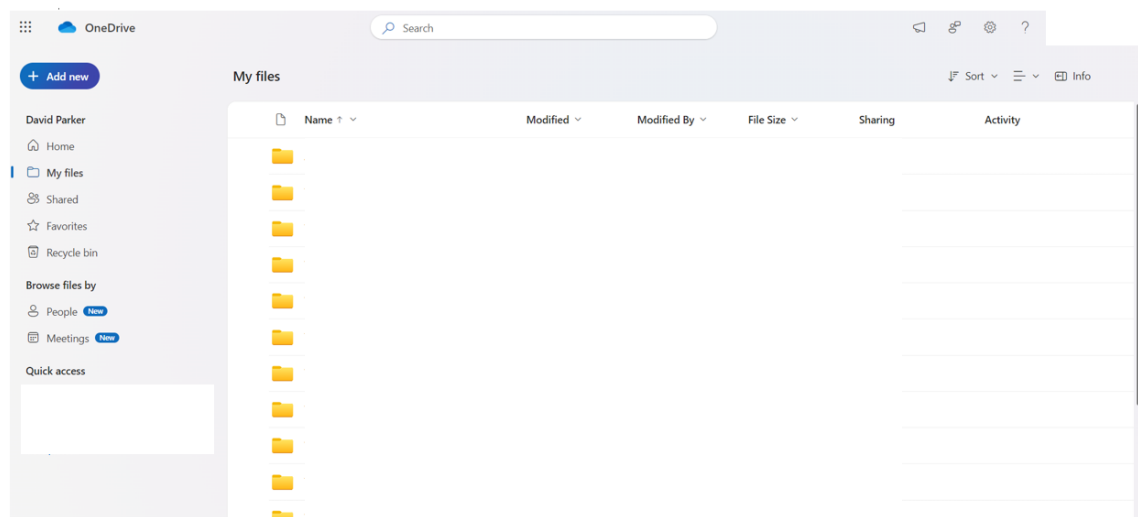
Figure 11: Microsoft OneDrive screenshot

3.7.5 Microsoft Forms

Benefits of using Microsoft Forms for a subject department meeting:

1) Easy survey creation: Microsoft Forms provides a user-friendly interface for creating surveys and questionnaires, making it simple to gather input and feedback from meeting participants.
2) Customisable questions: Users can create a wide range of question types, including multiple choice, text, and rating-scale questions, allowing you to collect diverse types of information from participants.

3) Response tracking: Microsoft Forms automatically collects and compiles responses in real-time, providing instant access to meeting related data and feedback.

4) Data analysis: Microsoft Forms offers built-in data analysis tools, such as charts and graphs, which can help you visualise and interpret survey results.

5) Anonymous responses: The creator has the option to collect responses anonymously, which can encourage honest feedback from participants on sensitive topics.

6) Integration with Microsoft 365: Microsoft Forms seamlessly integrates with other Microsoft 365 applications, such as excel, allowing you to export survey data and perform further analysis or reporting.

7) Accessibility features: Microsoft Forms includes accessibility features, such as support for screen readers and keyboard navigation, to ensure that all participants can provide input.

8) Ease of distribution: Microsoft Forms can be easily shared with participants via a link or embedded in other Microsoft applications, like Microsoft Teams or outlook, streamlining the distribution process.

Negatives of using Microsoft Forms for a subject department meeting:

1) Limited real-time interaction: Microsoft Forms are typically used for collecting feedback and responses before or after a meeting, which means they do not support real-time interaction and discussion during the meeting itself.

2) Limited formatting options: Microsoft Forms have a simple and standardised format, which may not be suitable for conveying complex information or visual content.

3) Learning curve: While Microsoft Forms is generally easy to use, participants who are not familiar with the tool may require some guidance or training.

4) Data privacy and security: When collecting data using Microsoft Forms, it is important to consider data privacy and security regulations, especially if sensitive information is being gathered.

5) Offline access: Microsoft Forms typically require an internet connection for participants to submit responses, which may be a limitation in areas with unreliable connectivity.

Microsoft Forms can be a valuable tool for gathering feedback and information from meeting participants in a straightforward and efficient manner. However, it is important to recognise its limitations, especially its lack of real-time interaction and the need for a stable Internet connection. Consider your specific meeting goals and requirements when deciding whether to use Microsoft Forms for a subject department meeting.
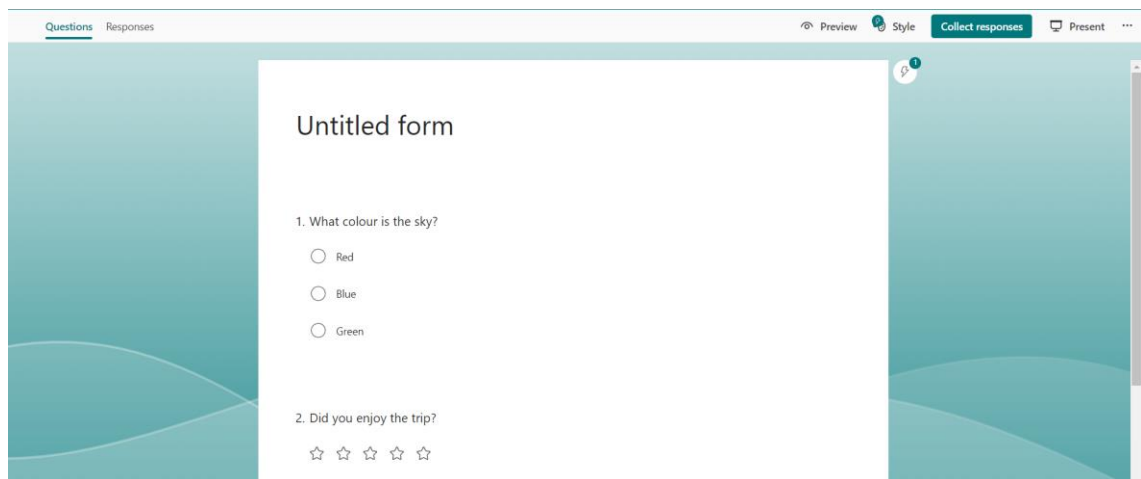
Figure 12: Microsoft Forms screenshot

3.7.6 Microsoft OneNote

Benefits of using Microsoft OneNote for a subject department meeting:

1) Digital note-taking: OneNote provides a digital notebook platform that allows participants to take notes during the meeting, making it easy to organise and search for information later.
2) Collaborative note-taking: Multiple participants can collaborate on a shared OneNote notebook in real-time, fostering teamwork and collective knowledge sharing.

3) Structured organisation: OneNote allows you to organise meeting notes into notebooks, sections, and pages, making it easy to categorise and find information related to different topics or meetings.

4) Rich media integration: Users can easily insert diverse types of content into OneNote, including text, images, drawings, audio, and video, which can enhance the quality and depth of meeting notes.

5) Accessibility features: OneNote includes accessibility features such as support for screen readers and the ability to create accessible content, making it inclusive for participants with disabilities.

6) Offline access: OneNote allows users to work offline and sync their changes when an Internet connection is available, ensuring access to meeting notes regardless of connectivity.

7) Version History: OneNote automatically tracks changes in colour so you can review previous versions of notes and see who made specific edits.

Negatives of using Microsoft OneNote for a subject department meeting:

1) Learning curve: OneNote interface may be unfamiliar to some participants, requiring training or familiarity with digital note taking tools.

2) Organisation challenges: While OneNote provides structured organisation, users need to be diligent in maintaining a clear and consistent structure to ensure that notes remain organised and easily searchable.

3) File size limitations: Large multimedia files, especially video and audio, can increase the size of OneNote notebooks, potentially leading to performance issues or storage limitations.

4) Security considerations: Managing access permissions and ensuring the security of meeting notes and documents is essential to prevent unauthorised access or data breaches.

Microsoft OneNote can be a powerful tool for organising and collaborating on meeting notes in a digital environment. However, it is important to be aware of potential challenges related to the learning curve, and organisation. Assess your department's specific needs and familiarity with digital note taking tools to determine if OneNote is a suitable choice for your subject department meetings.
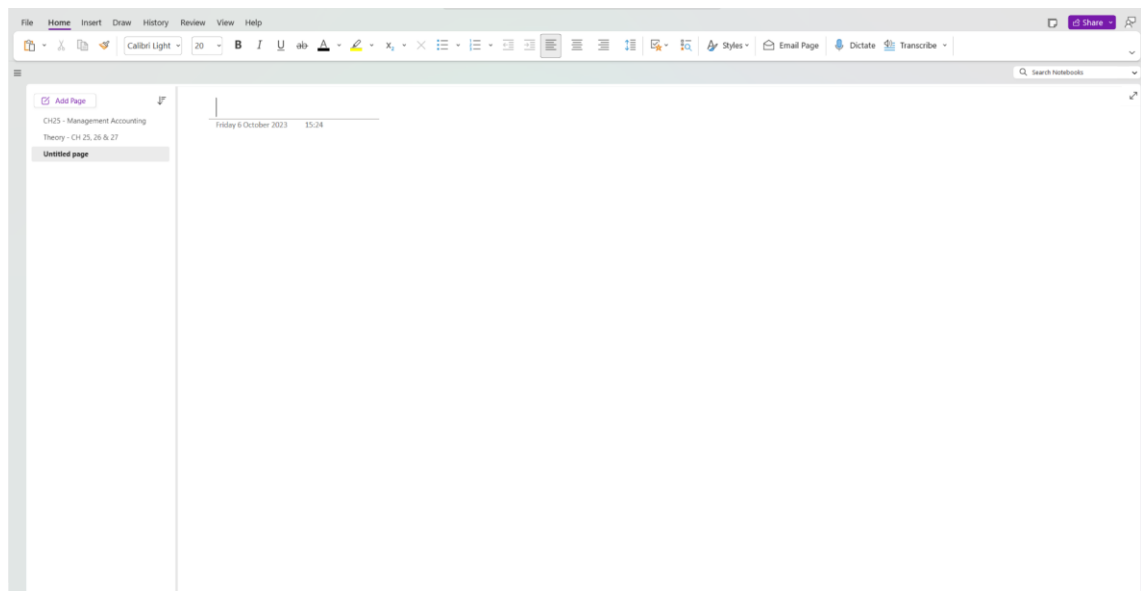
Figure 13: Microsoft OneNote screenshot

3.7.7 Microsoft Teams for people with disabilities

Microsoft Teams, like many digital platforms, offers several affordances that can be beneficial for people with disabilities when participating in subject department meetings.

1) Accessibility features:
   - Screen readers: Microsoft Teams is compatible with screen reader software, enabling individuals with visual impairments to navigate the interface and read chat messages, documents, and notifications.
   - Keyboard navigation: Teams can be fully operated using keyboard shortcuts, making it accessible for individuals who cannot use a mouse.
   - High contrast mode: Teams supports high contrast mode, which can help individuals with visual impairments distinguish content more easily.
2) Live captioning and transcription:
   - Teams offers real-time captioning during meetings, which benefits participants who are deaf or hard of hearing. Captions can be generated automatically or by a third-party service.
   - Meeting recordings can also be transcribed, providing written records for those who may have difficulty following the spoken language.
3) Customisable fonts and text sizes:

- Users can adjust font sizes and styles in Microsoft Teams, allowing individuals with impairments to customise the interface for readability.

4) Speech-to-text and text-to-speech:

- Teams supports dictation and voice commands, which can assist individuals with mobility impairments who may find typing challenging.

5) Closed captioning and subtitle support:

- Users can add closed captions or subtitles to prerecorded videos or presentations, improving accessibility for those who rely on written text.

6) Integration with accessibility tools:

- Microsoft Teams integrates with other Office 365 apps, such as Word and PowerPoint, which often have accessibility features like template document structures that benefit individuals with disabilities.

7) Assistive technology compatibility:

- Microsoft Teams is designed to work with various assistive technologies, making it compatible with specialised hardware and software that individuals with disabilities may use.

8) User education and awareness:

- Educating all meeting participants about accessible meeting practices and features ensures that everyone is aware of how to make meetings more inclusive.

9) Accessibility settings and policies:

- Organisations can configure accessibility settings and policies within Microsoft Teams to ensure that meetings and content adhere to accessibility standards.

While Microsoft Teams provides many affordances for people with disabilities, it is essential that organisations and meeting organisers actively promote and practice inclusive meeting principles. This includes ensuring that materials and presentations are designed with accessibility in mind, creating awareness among participants about available accessibility features, and addressing individual needs when required.

3.8   Microsoft Software Table – Summary

Microsoft Office 365 suite comes with its own set of advantages and disadvantages. This comprehensive table summary will explore the pros and cons of the above-mentioned Microsoft software platforms, shedding light on their capabilities and potential limitations. By understanding the nuances of these platforms, individuals and organizations can make informed decisions about which tools best align with their goals and requirements.

Benefits	Drawbacks
Microsoft Teams	
- Collaboration and communication - Accessibility - Integration with Office 365 - Scheduling and calendar integration - Recording and transcription - Security and compliance	- Technical issues - Learning curve - Privacy concerns - Overwhelming notifications - Limited offline access - Meeting etiquette
Benefits	**Drawbacks**
Microsoft Teams – Chat	
- Real-time communication - Quiet participation - Document and resource sharing - Record of conversations - Private conversations	- Distraction - Multitasking - Loss of context - Overwhelming volume - Privacy concerns - Miscommunication - Technical issues

Benefits	Drawbacks
Microsoft Word	
• Documentation • Familiarity • Formatting control • Collaboration • Accessibility features • Integration with Outlook and Office 365 • Templates	• Limited real-time collaboration • Version compatibility • Not ideal for live presentations • Lack of real-time communication • Storage and accessibility
Benefits	**Drawbacks**
Microsoft PowerPoint	
• Visual presentation • Structured content • Customisation • Multimedia integration • Accessibility features • Presenter notes • Handouts • Animation and transitions	• Linear structure • Overuse of visuals • Potential for boredom • Technical issues • Lack of real-time collaboration • Version compatibility • Time-consuming preparation • Limited interactivity

Benefits	Drawbacks
Microsoft OneDrive	
- File storage and sharing - Collaboration - Version control - Accessibility - Accessibility features - Mobile accessibility - Integration with Microsoft Teams and Office 365 - File synchronisation	- Internet dependency - File compatibility - Learning curve - Storage limitations - Data security - Access control management
Benefits	**Drawbacks**
Microsoft Forms	
- Easy survey creation - Customisable questions - Response tracking - Data analysis - Anonymous responses - Integration with Microsoft Office 365 - Ease of distribution	- Limited real-time interaction - Limited formatting options - Learning curve - Data privacy and security - Offline access

Benefits	Drawbacks
Microsoft OneNote	
- Digital note-taking - Collaborative notetaking - Structured organisation - Rich media integration - Accessibility features - Offline access - Version history	- Learning curve - Organisation challenges - File size limitations - Security considerations

Comparison of Microsoft Office platforms' benefits and negatives attached in appendix 10 and 11.

3.9 Microsoft Office products versus Google platforms

The world of productivity software and collaboration tools has been reshaped significantly by two technology titans: Microsoft and Google. Both companies offer a range of applications and platforms designed to enhance productivity, streamline work processes, and facilitate effective communication and collaboration. Microsoft, with its long-established Microsoft Office suite, and Google, with its cloud-based Google workspace, represent two major contenders in this arena.

Microsoft Product	Google
Microsoft Teams	Google Meet
Microsoft Word	Google Docs
Microsoft PowerPoint	Google Slides
Microsoft OneDrive	Google Drive
Microsoft Forms	Google Forms
Microsoft OneNote	Google Keep

Both Microsoft Office products and Google platforms offer powerful tools for productivity and collaboration. The choice between them largely depends on your specific needs, preferences, and existing technology infrastructure. Microsoft office suite may appeal to users deeply entrenched in the Windows and Microsoft ecosystem. Carefully assessing the features, pricing, and integration capabilities of each will help you make an informed decision that best suits the organisational objectives.

3.10 Alternative to Microsoft Office and Google platforms

Microsoft Office has long been the dominant player in the office productivity software markets. However, in recent years, there has been a growing interest in exploring alternatives to Microsoft Office products and Google platforms with the introduction of new software companies to the market.

Microsoft Product	Google	Alternative
Microsoft Teams	Google Meet	Zoom
Microsoft Word	Google Docs	Dropbox Paper
Microsoft PowerPoint	Google Slides	Prezi
Microsoft OneDrive	Google Drive	Dropbox
Microsoft Forms	Google Forms	SurveyMonkey
Microsoft OneNote	Google Keep	Evernote

While Microsoft Office remains a formidable option, there is a growing environment of alternatives that cater to various user preferences, budgets, and requirements. The choice between Microsoft Office and its alternatives depends on factors such as cost, compatibility, collaboration needs, and personal preferences. Organisations and individuals should explore these alternatives to determine which one aligns best with their specific needs and goals.

3.11   Humour

Humour is a universal language that transcends cultural and linguistic bounda-ries, making it a powerful and indispensable tool in various facets of our lives. Its significance extends far beyond simply eliciting laughter. Humour plays a crucial role in shaping our society, fostering a positive work environment, and enhancing the dynamics of meetings. In this fast-paced and often stressful world, humour serves as a means of connection, stress relief, and problem-solving. According to Aaker and Bagdonas (2020) "the frequency which we laugh or smile each day starts to plummet around age twenty-three", as illustrated in Figure 14, when we "enter the workforce, and suddenly become serious and important people, trading laughter for ties and pantsuits". From promoting a sense of camaraderie in the workplace to diffusing tense situations in meetings, humour is a versatile and essential element that brings joy, relaxation, and cohesion to our personal and professional lives.
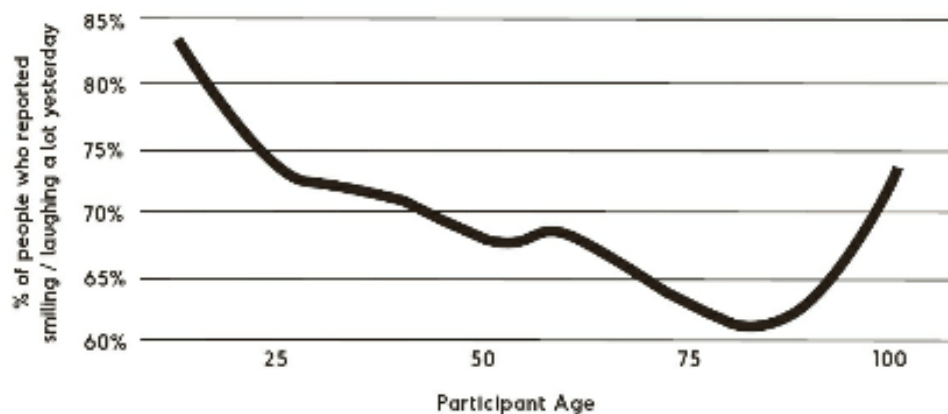

Figure 14: Aaker and Bagdonas (2020) graph representing the decline in smiling/laughing to age.

3.11.1 Effect of humour in subject department meetings

Humour can play a crucial role in subject department meetings for various reasons:

1) Ice-breaker and stress relief: Subject department meetings can sometimes be tense and formal. Humour serves as an icebreaker, helping to relieve tension and create a more relaxed atmosphere. This coincides with Aaker and Bagdonas (2020) statement "it's vital that the first few moments of our gatherings clear away those distractions". It can make attendees feel more comfortable, leading to more open and productive discussions.

2) Engagement and participation: Humour can make meetings more engaging and enjoyable. When people are having fun and laughing, they are more likely to actively participate and contribute to the discussion. This can lead to a more inclusive and collaborative meeting environment.

3) Enhancing creativity and innovation: Humour can stimulate creativity and innovation. When people are in a positive and relaxed mode, they are more likely to think outside the box, come up with new ideas, and explore unconventional solutions to problems.

4) Building team cohesion: Sharing a laugh with colleagues can foster a sense of camaraderie and team spirit. It strengthens interpersonal relationships and builds trust among team members. A cohesive team is more likely to work well together and support one another.

5) Effective communication: Humour can be a powerful tool for effective communication and "setting a tone of levity" (Aaker and Bagdonas 2020). It can help convey complex ideas in a more relatable and understandable manner. Using analogies or humorous examples can make educational or administrative matters more accessible.

6) Breaking the monotony: Meetings can often become monotonous and routine. Introducing humour can break the monotony and make the meetings more interesting. This can also help in maintaining the attention of participants.

7) Stress management: Staff can experience high levels of stress and humour can serve as a stress management tool, helping people cope with the challenges and pressures they face in their work.

8) Promoting a positive work environment: A work environment that embraces humour tends to be more positive and welcoming. It can contribute to job satisfaction and staff retention.

9) Boosting morale: Subject department meetings can sometimes involve discussing difficult topics. Injecting humour can uplift the spirits of attendees and maintain their motivation and enthusiasm.

However, it is crucial to use humour with caution in professional settings, as it can backfire if not used with sensitivity. As "we all have different tastes and sensibilities when it comes to humour" (Aaker and Bagdonas, 2020), inappropriate or offensive humour can alienate attendees and harm morale. Additionally, the balance between humour and professionalism should be maintained to ensure that the objectives of the meeting are not overshadowed by jokes and light-heartedness. Humour has a significant role to play in subject department meetings, contributing to a more positive and productive work environment. When used thoughtfully, it can foster creativity, collaboration, and team cohesion while keeping participants engaged and motivated.

4 METHODOLOGY

4.1 Methodological Approach

Refers to the overall approach or strategy used to conduct research or carry out a study. It includes the techniques, procedures, and tools employed to gather and analyse data.

- Observational method: In this method, the researcher observes and records behaviours and events without intervening or manipulating variables.
- Survey method: This method involves collecting data through questionnaires. They are conducted through an online service using Microsoft Forms.

4.2 Participants and Ethical considerations

Participants, also known as subjects or respondents, are individuals who take part in a research study. The selection of participants depends on the research objectives, methodology, and population under investigation.

The participants, who participated in this study, are teachers who are currently employed in the school within the mathematics subject department. Participation in the study was anonymous and voluntary, and the respondents were informed of the purposes of the research by means of verbal communication. The attendees were informed of their right to have their responses removed from study at any time. The data was collected and stored on OneDrive for business.

Ethical considerations are crucial in research to protect the rights, welfare, and dignity of participants.

- Informed consent: Participants will be fully informed about the purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits of the study before providing their consent to participate. They will have the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

- Confidentiality and anonymity: The researcher will ensure that participants' personal information and data are kept confidential, and their identities are protected. Anonymity will be maintained whenever possible unless explicit consent is obtained.

- Debriefing: The researcher will provide participants with a debriefing session to explain the purpose of the study, address any concerns, and provide additional information as needed.

4.3 Quantitative Data Collection

This approach will involve administering a survey to the subject department meeting attendees to gather quantitative data on their attitudes, perceptions, and behaviours related to effective meetings. The survey (Appendix 2) data can then be analysed using statistical methods to identify patterns and trends.

4.4 Quantitative Data Analysis

The first phase of the research was conducted via an online survey system (Microsoft Forms), as a means to assess the current perceptions of the school's subject department meetings.

The responses were collected using the Likert scale to incorporate each respondent's opinion (strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree) and the numerical values ranging from 0-10. This scale was chosen for several reasons. By increasing the response range from 0-5 to 0-10, it allows for greater detail in the interpretation of the responses provided, whilst reducing the possibility of response clustering (Bernstein 2015). The option to add seven categories (i.e. extremely agree, extremely disagree) was disregarded because people tend to not select extreme categories, not wanting to appear extreme in their views ("Likert scale | Social Science Surveys & Applications | Britannica," 2023).

4.5 Qualitative Data Collection

This approach will incorporate observing and recording a subject department meeting to gather information on the current state of meetings and identify areas for improvement. The data collected would then be analysed to identify patterns and themes that can inform recommendations for conducting more effective meetings.

4.6 Qualitative Data Analysis

The attendees, prior to the recordings, provided their consent for the use of voice recording platforms during the two subject department meetings. The recording of each subject department meeting was conducted anonymously via the Recording program on a laptop.

The information shared during the subject department meetings is confidential and was utilised for the purpose of this research study only. All personal information such as school names, and identities of the attendees were anonymised in the written analysis.

Throughout the data collection and subject department meetings, it is important that I, as the researcher, demonstrate full awareness of ethical considerations to reduce bias and assumptions. Since I am a current employee within the school, I am aware of the common traits and flow of subject department meetings, therefore it was important, for the purpose of research, that I participate in the meetings objectively to ensure validity and reliability of the results accrued.

5   RESULTS

The purpose of this report is to present the results obtained from a survey and observation conducted during two subject department meetings. The survey and observation aim are to gather valuable insights into the dynamics, discussions, and outcomes of the meeting, as well as to collect feedback from the attendees.

The subject department meeting serves as a crucial forum for collaboration, decision making, and information sharing among the attendees. By conducting a survey and observation, the author sought to understand the overall effectiveness of the meeting, identify areas of improvement, and gauge the level of engagement and satisfaction among the attendees.

Through the survey, attendees were provided with the opportunity to express their opinions, provide feedback, and share their experiences related to the meeting. The observation, on the other hand, allowed for a direct assessment of the meeting dynamics, including the interaction between attendees, the level of participation, and the overall productivity of the session.

The analysis of the survey and observation results will provide valuable insights into various aspects of the subject department meeting. The author will explore the key findings from the survey responses, including the attendees' perceptions of the meeting structure, content, and effectiveness. Additionally, the observation results will shed light on the overall dynamics of the meeting, the level of collaboration, and any notable observations made during the session.

By combining the survey and observation data, the author aims to present a comprehensive overview of the subject department meeting, highlight its strengths and areas for improvement, and provide actionable recommendations to enhance future meetings. The insights gained from this analysis will assist in fostering a more efficient and productive environment within the subject department, ultimately contributing to the department's overall success.

5.1 First meeting

The first subject department meeting observed was run as normal (see Figure 15 for room layout used) with no input as to how to structure or run the meeting. The meeting lasted 60+ minutes, and there was no agenda provided for the meeting nor the option for the attendees to contribute to the agenda. There was no teacher or coordinator appointed to lead the meeting prior to it beginning.
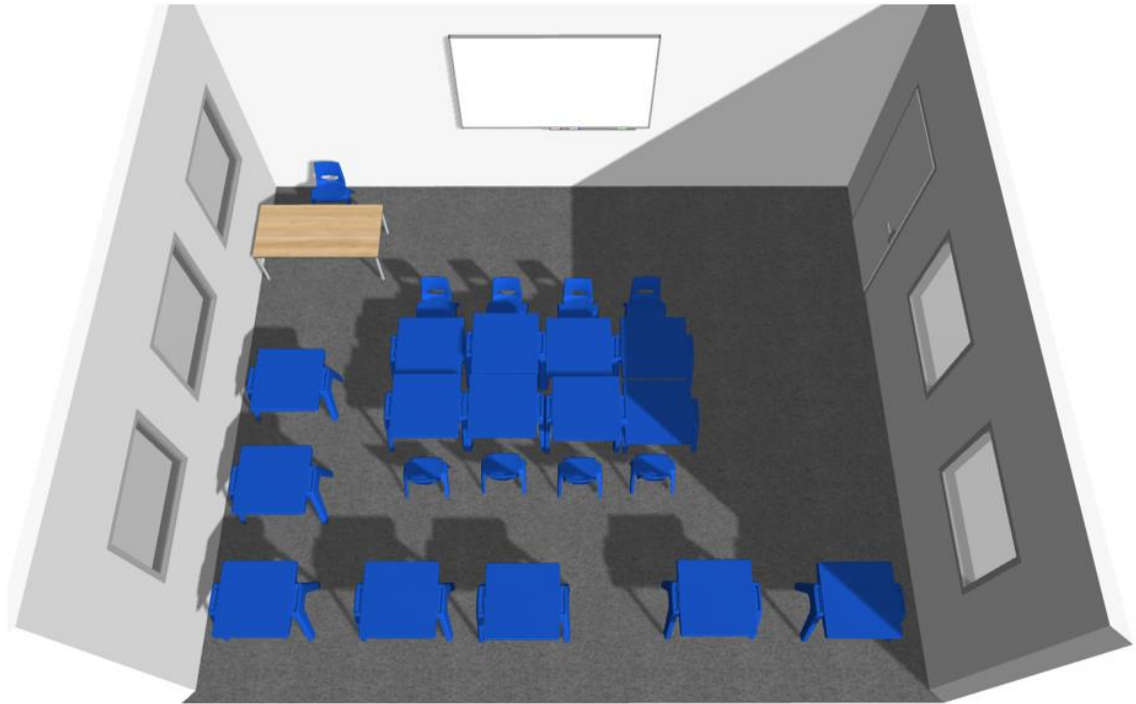
Figure 15: Standard subject department meeting room layout

In relation to whether the department meeting was effective, a list of responses shows the negative view on the meeting:

- "No, we didn't get through much content." (Mr. H)
- "No, it was very long, and we only talked about summer exams." (Mr. B)

The attendees noted that the meeting outcomes were not clearly communicated, and the next steps were not defined.

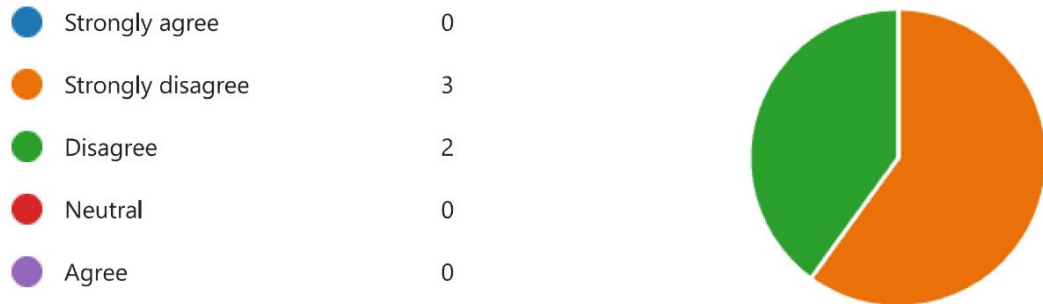10. The meeting outcomes were clearly communicated, and next steps were defined.

● Strongly agree	0	
● Strongly disagree	3	
● Disagree	2	
● Neutral	0	
● Agree	0	

Figure 16: 1st meeting "meeting outcomes clearly communicated".

The use of technology was not evident in the meeting, indicating it was a verbal meeting. Overall, the meeting received a rating of 4.40 out of 10, in relation to satisfaction with the meeting and what was accomplished during the meeting.

The attendees highlighted some adjustments that they would like to see going forward for their subject department meetings:

- "A team leader to organise the meeting and ensure we are productive, not just chat about issues in the school." (Mrs. M)
- "I would like there to be a lead for each meeting and an agenda decided on before the meeting begins." (Mrs. Q)
- "I want there to be a plan before we go in, so we can tick off a list of topics we discussed. Be more productive and achieve something as a group by the end of it." (Mr. B)
- "Better organised and more chances for everyone to talk. We did not get much covered and it was very unproductive. There were no next steps outlined." (Mr. H)

5.2 Second meeting

The second meeting was conducted with the same attendees as the first meeting. Following from the feedback in the first meeting and research by the author, several changes were made to the second meeting.

1) An agenda template was created and distributed via a shared document on Microsoft Word (Appendix 1). The document was shared 7 days prior to the meeting, giving all attendees the opportunity to add to the agenda.
2) There was a time limit cap of 20 minutes for the meeting.
3) There was a time limit cap of 2 minutes per agenda item.
4) The attendees were all standing for the meeting (see Figure 17 for room layout), with the agenda displayed on a whiteboard. Each attendee was given a whiteboard marker so they could add their initials beside agenda items they were going to take on and, also to add any further actions for an agenda item if required (Appendix 3).
5) A leader was appointed before the meeting began.
6) A timekeeper was appointed to limit each agenda item to 2 minutes.

Figure 17: Exemplar subject department meeting room layout

The meeting lasted a total of 19 minutes, and the agenda was created entirely by the attendees of the subject department meeting. The agenda was shared via a shared document created on Microsoft Word and each attendee contributed to the agenda. The attendees voted a leader and an attendee volunteered to take on the role of timekeeper. The leader role was initially voted on and it was discussed that this role would rotate for every meeting.

The meeting structure had a positive impact on the overall meeting as evident from the attendees' comments:

- "Yes, we covered all the agenda items in a timely manner. There was an action plan for each item and a follow-up time set also." (Mr. P)
- "Yes, we covered all the agenda items, 2 minutes per topic max. and it was very efficient." (Mrs. Q)
- "It was very effective. We talked about all the items on the agenda and had an action for each. Very productive and inclusive." (Mr. H)
- "Yes, because we talked about every item for 2 minutes, which was plenty of time, and we added a further action plan beside the item for the teachers that it involved to discuss between themselves at a different time, instead of everyone listening to 2 teachers discuss something that wasn't relevant to them." (Mr. B)
- "I found it great because it was short and engaging, we were standing up discussing the items and everyone got to add their thoughts. Much more open environment than everyone sitting behind their laptop in a room spaced out." (Mrs. M)

The meeting outcomes were clearly communicated, and next steps were defined.

● Strongly agree		4
● Strongly disagree		0
● Disagree		0
● Neutral		0
● Agree		1

Figure 18: 2nd meeting "meeting outcomes clearly communicated".

The use of technology during the meeting was limited to:

- Laptop: To display the shared agenda on a whiteboard.
- Projector: To display the shared agenda on a whiteboard.
- Smartphone: To time each agenda for 2 minutes.

The overall satisfaction gained from the meeting was rated 9.40 out of 10, indicating a highly informative meeting. The attendees highlighted adjustments that they would like to see going forward for their subject department meetings:

- "I would like to keep the meetings to 20 minutes with a clear agenda outlined. There is no need for focusing on items that involve only 2 teachers out of the 5 that attend the meeting. I would like to have more frequent meetings for 20 minutes to replace the current 1 hour meeting every few months." (Mr. P)
- "More frequent meetings instead of meeting every few months. Agenda distributed a week prior to the meeting and being allowed to add to it before we meet." (Mrs. Q)

- "Shorter more frequent meetings like this structure. We covered all items and had a plan going forward. It cut out all the chit chat that we have become accustomed to." (Mr. H)

- "I would add a minimum of 1 department meeting every three weeks to make sure everyone is still on plan. The 1 hour meeting every few months doesn't do much for teaching and learning during the year, it's like a tick the box assignment for management." (Mr. B)

- "Agenda sent out early in the week and all teachers must add at least one item to it. Cap the time at 20-30 minutes to keep everyone engaged and, also to have a leader to make sure we stay on point." (Mrs. M)

Key takeaways:

1) Agenda created prior to the meeting allowing attendees to add their items.
2) Time limit of 20 minutes per subject department meeting.
3) Time limit of 2 minutes per agenda item.
4) The frequency of meetings to increase i.e., bi-weekly, or monthly.

5.3 Comparison

The results of this study highlight several key strategies and best practices that can be used to run effective subject department meetings. These include setting clear objectives and goals for the meeting, creating an agenda that reflects these goals, actively involving all members in the discussion and decision-making process providing opportunities for collaboration and feedback, and establishing a culture of continuous improvement. Additionally, the results suggest that effective meetings are those that are well organised, time efficient, and result in actionable outcomes.

5.4 Limitations

- Sample Size: The small sample size of the subject department may result in a limited sample size for the survey. This can lead to a reduced representation of the overall population and potentially affects the generalisability of the findings. The smaller the size, the higher margin of error and the lower the statistical power of the survey.

- Selection bias: There is a possibility of selection bias if the survey participants are not randomly selected. In a small department, it may be challenging to ensure a truly representative sample due to limited options.

- Limited variation with a small subject department: There may be limited variation in responses or perspectives. This can make it difficult to draw meaningful conclusions or identify patterns in the data. The lack of diversity in opinions and experiences within the small group can limit the depth and breadth of the survey results.

- Confidentiality and anonymity: Ensuring confidentiality and anonymity of survey responses may be more challenging in a small subject department. Due to the smaller number of participants, it may be easier to identify individuals based on their responses, potentially leading to concerns about privacy and reluctance to provide honest answers.

- Limited resources: Small departments often have limited resources, including time and personnel, which can impact the design, implementation, and analysis of the survey. It may be more difficult to allocate dedicated staff or financial resources to support survey administration, data collection, and analysis.

- External validity: The findings of the survey conducted within a small subject department may have limited external validity. The specific characteristics, dynamics, and context of the department may not be representative of other departments or the larger institution as a whole.

Despite these limitations, conducting a survey within a small subject department can still provide valuable insights and feedback that can inform decision making and improvements within that specific department. It is important to be aware of

these limitations and interpret the findings, accordingly, considering the unique context of the departments being surveyed.

6   DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the findings of this thesis highlight several key takeaways that should be incorporated into future subject department meetings. It is crucial to create an agenda prior to the meeting, which allows attendees to add their items. This promotes inclusivity and ensures that all relevant topics are addressed during the meeting, fostering a collaborative and comprehensive discussion.

Implementing a time limit of 20 minutes per subject department meeting encourages efficiency and productivity. By allocating a specific duration for each meeting, participants are motivated to stay focused and prioritise the most important matters, leading to effective decision making and action plans being created.

Setting a time limit of two minutes per agenda item promotes concise and streamlined discussions. This constraint encourages attendees to present their ideas and proposals concisely, avoiding unnecessary tangents and digressions. It also allows for a more inclusive participation environment, ensuring that all agenda items receive due attention and discussion within the allocated time frame.

Humour has a vital role to play in subject department meetings, even when time constraints are a factor. Its ability to engage, reduce stress, improve communication, strengthen teams, and enhance creativity makes it a valuable tool for creating more effective and enjoyable meetings.

The frequency of subject department meetings should be increased. Considering options such as holding meetings bi-weekly or monthly allows for more regular communication and collaboration among team members. This enhanced frequency enables timely decision-making, ensures ongoing progress, and facilitates effective coordination within the department.

Technology undoubtedly plays a valuable role in modern meetings, offering convenience and accessibility. However, an over-reliance on technology can have negative consequences, including a loss of personal connection, distractions, and communication barriers. Therefore, it is important to strike a balance and recognise the critical role of human interaction and "craic" in fostering collaboration, trust, and effective communication in meetings.

Incorporating these takeaways into future subject department meetings will foster a more efficient, inclusive, and productive environment. By leveraging the benefits of an agenda driven approach, time constraints, and increased meeting frequency, organisations can enhance communication, streamline the decision-making processes, and drive overall progress and success.

7 SUBJECT DEPARTMENT MEETING POSTER.

7.1 Poster 1

7.2 Poster 2 - Front
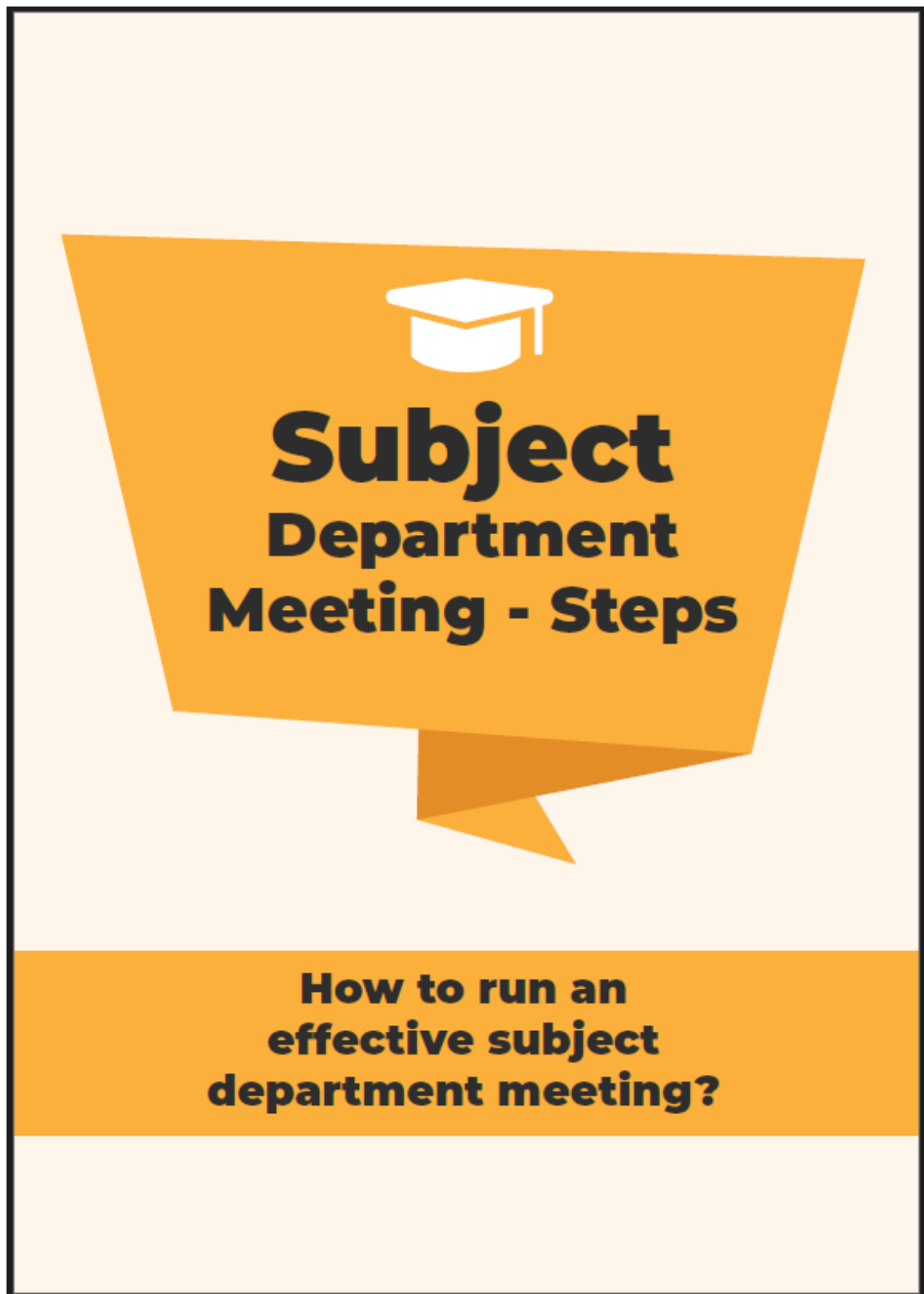
7.3 Poster 2 - Back
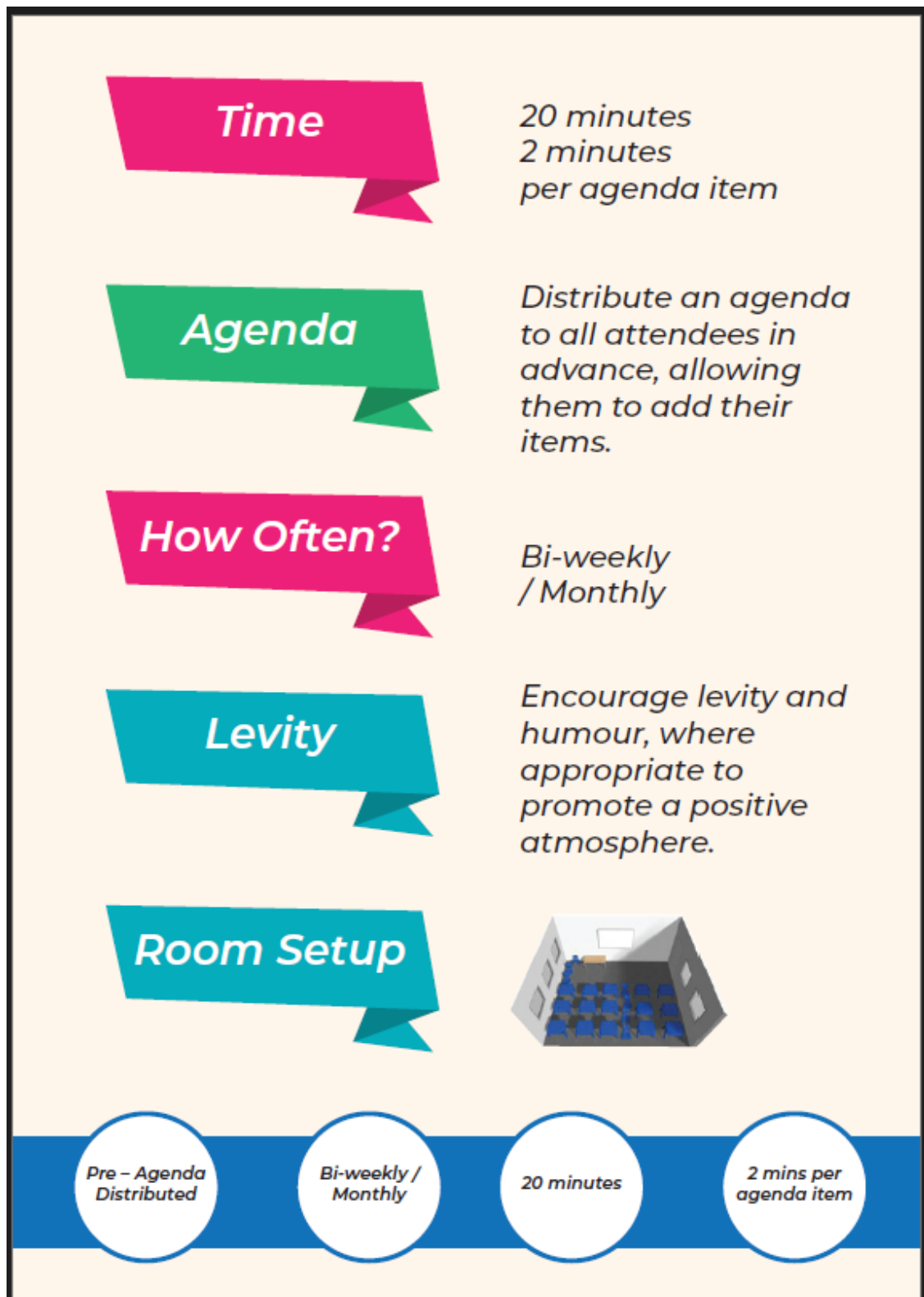
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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Agenda

Subject Department Meeting	Maths
Date:	10/05/2023
Attendance:	

Agenda	Initials	Action
1) Summer Exams		
2) Department Head for 2023/2024		
3) Maths Awards (prize giving)		
4) CBA - SLAR		
5) Open Evening 2023/2024		
6) List of CPD completed		
7) Text Books		
8) Scheme of Work 2023/2024		
9)		
10)		

Appendix 2. Survey

Subject Department Meeting

Subject department meeting pre-amendments

* Required

1. What subject department meeting are you attending? *

○ Mathematics

○ Other

2. How long did the meeting last? *

    ◯ 0–20 minutes

    ◯ 20–40 minutes

    ◯ 40–60 minutes

    ◯ 60+ minutes

3. Was there an agenda provided before the meeting? *

    ◯ Yes

    ◯ No

4. If 'Yes', how was the agenda distributed?

    [   ]

5. Were you given the opportunity to add to the agenda? *

    ◯ Yes

    ◯ No

6. Was there a teacher/coordinator appointed to lead the subject department meeting? *

○ Yes

○ No

7. If 'Yes', how was the lead selected?

[   ]

8. Was the subject department meeting effective? (i.e. all agenda items covered) *

[   ]

9. Were you given the opportunity to contribute to the meeting? *

○ Yes

○ No

10. The meeting outcomes were clearly communicated, and next steps were defined. *

○ Strongly agree

○ Strongly disagree

○ Disagree

○ Neutral

○ Agree

11. Was there any use of technology (i.e. laptops, interactive whiteboard, software programs) in the meeting? *

○ Yes

○ No

12. Please list any technology that was used both pre-meeting and post-meeting. *

13. On a scale of 1-10 how satisfied were you with the meeting and what was accomplished? *

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

14. What changes would make to the organization and/or structure of the subject department meeting? *

Appendix 3. Agenda – during the meeting

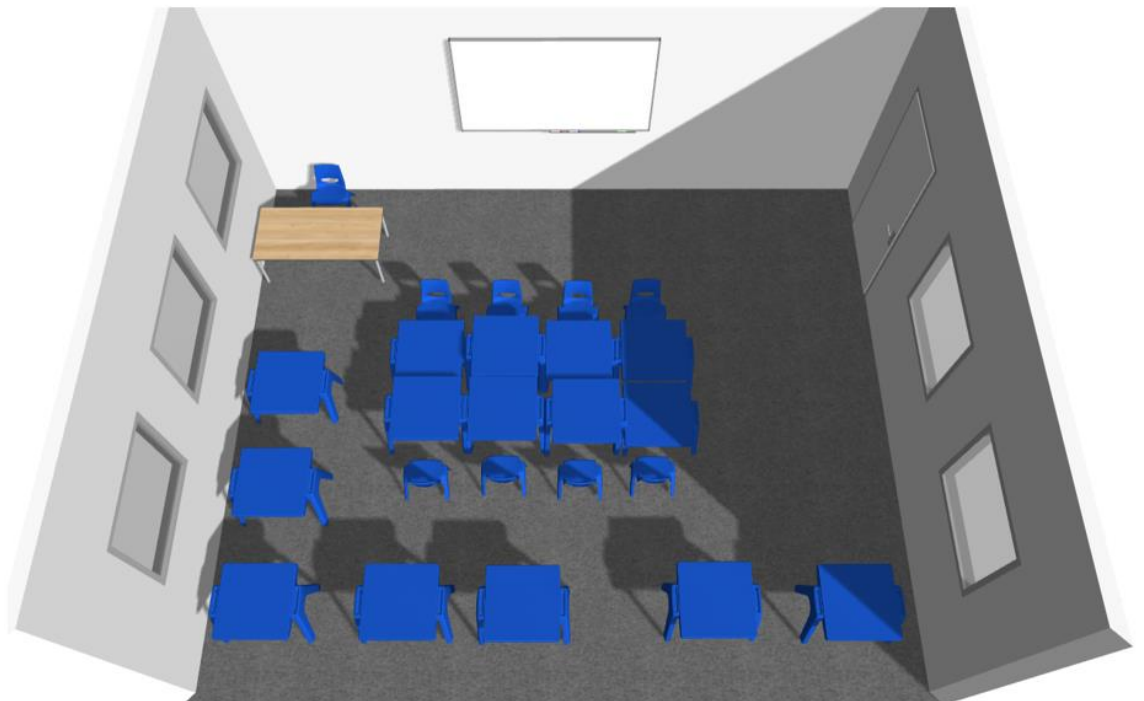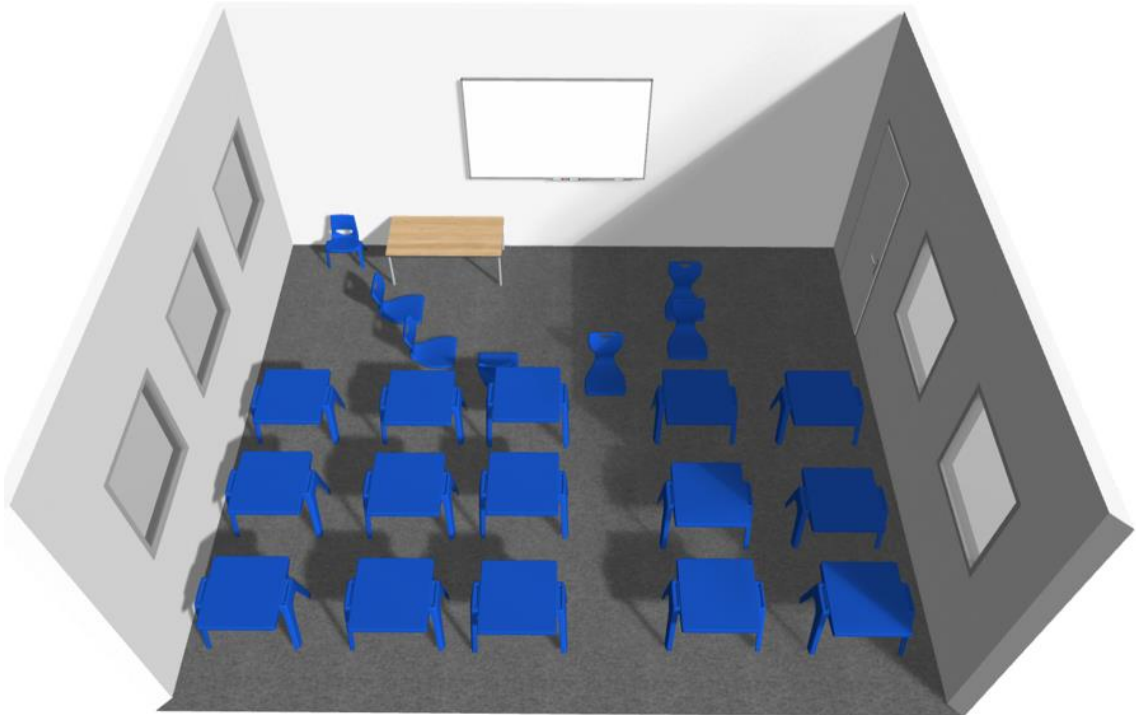## Appendix 4. Standard classroom layout

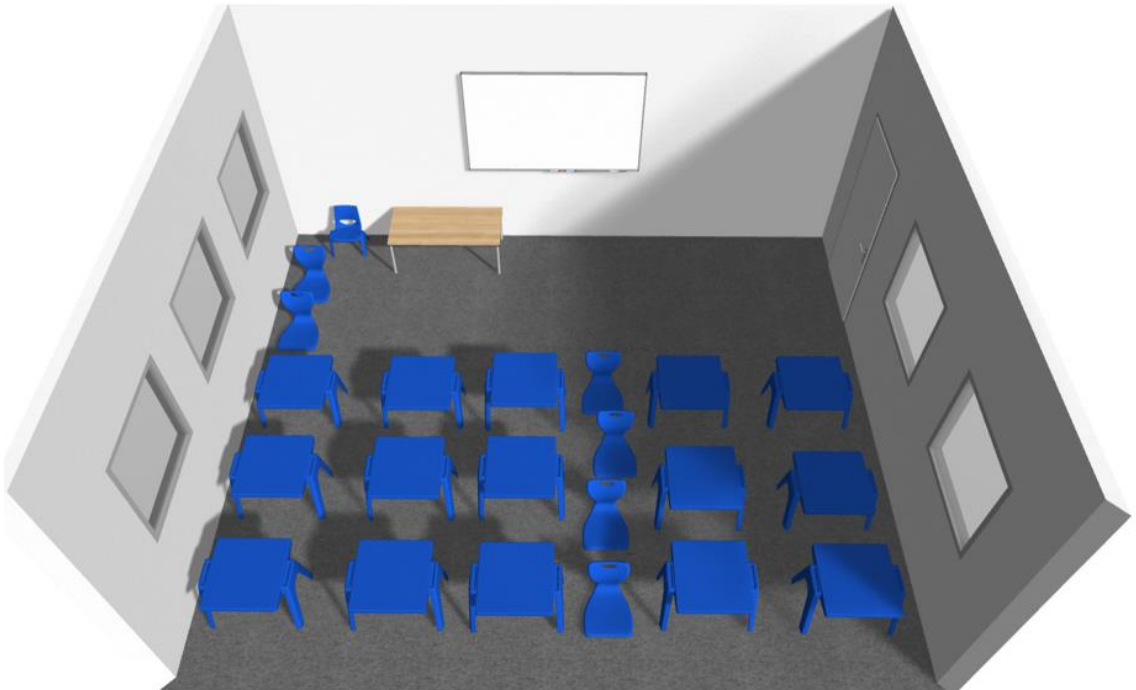Appendix 5. Standard meeting room layout – example 1
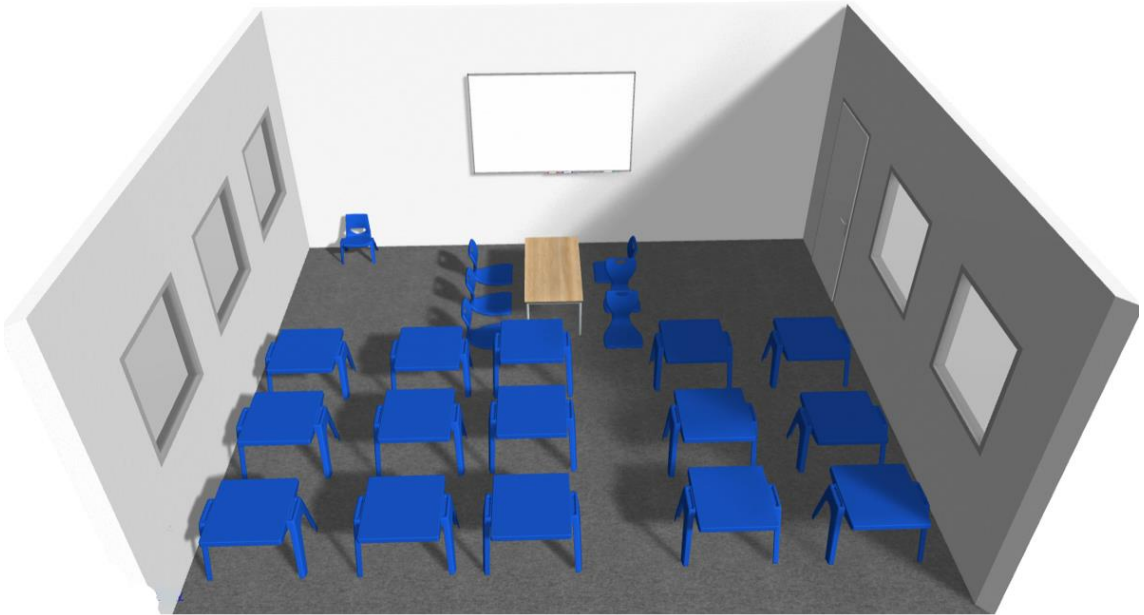
Appendix 6. Standard meeting room layout – example 2

Appendix 7. Exemplar meeting room layout – example 1

Appendix 8. Exemplar meeting room layout – example 2

Appendix 9. Exemplar meeting room layout – example 3

Appendix 10. Microsoft Office platform – benefits

	Microsoft Teams	Microsoft Word	Microsoft PowerPoint	Microsoft OneDrive	Microsoft Forms	Microsoft OneNote
Collaboration	√	√	√	√		√
Communication	√					
Accessibility	√	√	√	√	√	√
Integration with Office 365	√	√	√	√	√	√
Scheduling	√					
Recording / Transcription	√					
Security / Privacy	√	√	√	√	√	√
Documentation		√	√			
Familiarity		√				
Formatting Control		√	√			
Templates		√	√		√	√
Visual Presentation			√			
Structured Content			√			√
Customisation			√		√	
Multimedia Integration			√			√
Presenter Notes			√			
Handouts			√			
Animations / Transitions			√			
File Storage				√		
Version Control / History				√		√
File Synchronisation				√		
Easy Survey Creation					√	
Response Tracking					√	
Data Analysis					√	
Anonymous Responses					√	
Ease of Distribution					√	
Digital Note-taking						√
Offline Access						√

Appendix 11. Microsoft Office platform – negatives

	Microsoft Teams	Microsoft Word	Microsoft PowerPoint	Microsoft OneDrive	Microsoft Forms	Microsoft OneNote
Security / Privacy	√			√	√	√
Technical Issues	√		√	√		
Learning Curve	√			√	√	√
Overwhelming Notifications / Volume	√					
Limited Offline Access	√				√	
Meeting Etiquette	√					
Distraction	√		√			
Limited Real-Time Collaboration		√	√			
Version Compatibility		√	√	√		
Lack of Real-Time Communication		√			√	
Storage / Accessibility		√		√		√
Linear Structure			√			
Overuse of Visuals			√			
Time Consuming			√			
Limited Interactivity / Formatting			√		√	
Organisation Challenges						√