



“Why Face-to-Face Business Meetings Matter”

A White Paper by

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Dr Richard D Arvey is currently the head of the Department of Management and Organization at the National University of Singapore and has been active as an Industrial/Organizational Psychologist for over 30 years. After receiving his PhD from the University of Minnesota in 1970 and working briefly with Personnel Decisions, Inc., a consulting firm in Minneapolis, he joined the Department of Industrial Management at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Subsequently, he taught at the University of Houston for five years. In 1983, he joined the Industrial Relations Center at the University of Minnesota. He was awarded the Human Resource and Industrial Relations Land Grant Chair in 1998. In 2006 he moved to Singapore where he teaches and conducts research. He was awarded the Career Achievement Award from the Human Resources Division of the Academy of Management in 2006.

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He teaches classes in Staffing, Training and Development, Organizational Behavior, and Research Methodology to MA and PhD students as well as regularly delivers courses and modules to MBA and Executive Development participants. He has taught the Organizational Behavior course to health care professionals in a class delivered at the University of California at Irvine as well as at the University of Vienna.

Over the years, Arvey has served as the academic advisor to over 50 graduate students working toward their Master's or PhD degrees and published more than 100 articles, chapters, or technical reports including his book *Fairness in Selecting Employees* published in 1979, and revised in 1988. He was recognized as one of the top 10 most published authors in *Journal of Applied Psychology* and *Personnel Psychology* during the 1980's and 1990's.

He serves or has served on the Editorial Board of several national professional journals, is a Fellow of the Division of Industrial/Organizational Psychology, American Psychological Association, and held a variety of professional offices and positions. He has consulted with NASA management at the Johnson Space Center helping to devise a valid system for selecting astronauts for long duration space flight missions. He has also consulted with the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota helping with several group dynamics and organizational structure issues. In addition, he has served as an expert witness in a variety of court cases over the last 10 years.

Why Face-to-Face Business Meetings Matter

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***“Historically, face-to-face meetings have played an important role in the social, and especially the political life, of Western and non-Western societies”
(Schwartzman, 1989)***

1. Introduction

The above quote illustrates the important role that meetings¹ have in the broader context of society and in the context of organizational life. None-the-less, it is often said that business meetings are “a waste of time”. The list of ailments associated with business meetings is quite long. Such a list would produce comments like the following:

- Our meetings are never on time—they start late and end late
- Our meetings are “dull and boring”
- There are too many disruptions in our meetings
- Decisions never get made in our meetings
- Only certain people talk during our meetings
- We go off target in our meetings
- People lose interest during the course of our meetings
- From a simple cost perspective, business meetings are excessively costly given the benefits derived

As such, businesses are switching from face-to-face business meetings to other forms of business communications—such as teleconferencing, email, and other informal means of communicating². It is the purpose of this “white paper” to discuss the value of face-to-face business meetings. I intend to focus on the following themes:

1. Recent trends regarding business meetings and other forms of business communications.
2. Circumstances favoring face-to-face business meetings.
3. Why face-to-face business meetings are important from psychological perspectives.
4. Summarize the beneficial business outcomes of holding face-to-face meetings
5. How to make business meetings more effective.
6. Cultural differences in the ways in which business meetings may be viewed and conducted. My specific focus will be on China, Singapore, Australia, Japan, and Malaysia.

¹ A business meeting is understood here to be a type of gathering or encounter where focused interaction occurs when people agree to sustain for a time a focus of attention in a conversation or task sustained by a close face-to-face group of contributor.

² Based on a report by Hilton on business communications (2009), 89% of a sample of 233 business people agreed that advancing technology is resulting in fewer meetings and more phone or video conferencing. See Prophisee. (April, 2009). Hilton Report: Business Communication.

2. Recent Trends Regarding Business Meetings

It is clear that electronically aided communications media are more and more frequently used by individuals and organizations in their communications within and between groups. A study conducted for Hilton Hotels of 233 business people in Sydney, Tokyo, Singapore, and Shanghai examined the pattern and experiences of these individuals in their organizations regarding the forms of communications used most regularly. Results indicated that, not surprisingly, emails and office meetings are the most prevalent forms of communications, with 84% of those surveyed indicating that they attended offsite meetings at hotels “at least occasionally”. Most of these participants (84%) agree that cost considerations have resulted in fewer meetings and more phone and videoconferencing. As airfare and accommodation costs escalate, particularly for organization that have global and/or regional outreach, the tendency to view computer mediated communication devices more favorably is obvious.

Another survey conducted by Meetings Professionals International based on 2,740 respondents indicated that 11% of meeting professionals expect an increase in the use of technology to access meetings and content remotely, in order to lower overall costs³.

However cost effective computer mediated communication devices are, there are potential disadvantages. The opportunities for distractions are great using these modalities—participants carry on working, check email, engage in SMSing, have irrelevant side conversations, and the like⁴.

³ <http://www.mpiweb.org/cms/mpweb/MPIcontent.aspx?id=22760&printview=1>

⁴ Hilton report on business meetings, p. 32.

3. Circumstances Favoring Face-to-Face Business Meetings

The type of outcomes or objectives expected will make a considerable difference in the choice of the communication modality... Group processes and outcomes that require coordination, consensus, timing, persuasion of others, etc. are less effectively accomplished using computer mediated communication modalities. Indeed, according to Straus and McGrath⁵, the type of communication medium is likely to affect outcomes “when there is a need for the expression of emotions, when tasks require coordination and timing among members’ activities, when one is attempting to persuade others, or with task require consensus on issues that are affected by attitudes or values of the group members.” (Straus and McGrath, p. 163). Under these circumstances, face-to-face communications are likely to be more effective compared to computer mediated devices⁶.

Other aspects will also determine if and when face-to-face meetings are more useful compared to computer mediated communications. Under conditions of low time pressure or urgency, when decisions are relatively less important, when consensus is not necessary a requirement, and when the communication is mainly about providing information, computer mediated modalities represents a more appropriate communication choice. However, when there is a need for a more “rich” communication channels (i.e., complex social interaction is required, when tasks and decisions are complex, and when there is a need to respond quickly), face-to-face communications are perhaps a more effective media channel. And, of course, an appropriate mixture of both face-to-face meetings and computer mediated communications might well best serve the interests of organizations⁷.

⁵ Strauss, S.G., & McGrath, J. E. (1994). Does the medium matter? The interaction of task type and technology on group performance and member reactions. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 79, 87-97.

⁶ This is consistent with the premise of “media richness theory” which indicates that media rich channels—meaning those vehicles that provide communication along multiple channels simultaneously (such as face-to-face communications) are better equipped to handle more complex, equivocal, or uncertainty in the tasks at hand. See Strauss, S. G. (1996). Getting a clue: The effects of communication media and information distribution on participation and performance in computer-mediated and face-to-face groups. *Small Group Research*, 27, 115-142.

⁷ For example, see Maznevski, M. L. & Chudoba, K. M. (2000). Bridging space over time: Global virtual team dynamics and effectiveness. *Organizational Science*, 1, 473-492. In this article, the researchers report on the repeated rhythms of the use of intense face-to-face meetings interspersed with computer mediated communication devices when doing an in-dept study of three global virtual teams.

4. Why Are Face-to-Face Business Meetings Important?

From a *psychological perspective* there are a number of positive features about face-to-face meetings that cannot always be achieved as well via other forms of communication.

Face-to-face meetings allow members to engage in and observe verbal and non-verbal behavioral styles not captured in most computer mediated communication devices. There are nuances associated with hand gestures, voice quality and volume, facial expressions, and so forth that are simply not captured in email discussion, chat rooms, and the like. Even videoconferencing does not capture all of the dynamics of group members (e.g. the expression of others while one member is talking, etc.).

A further advantage of face-to-face meetings is that they occur in “real time” as opposed to non-synchronized time. Computer mediated communications often are delayed because of a variety of reasons, not always received, and sometimes disrupted because of technical problems.

Another feature is simply the fact that face-to-face business meetings provide human contact among members. Human contact is a primitive need among human beings. We are social creatures and isolation is harmful. A recent article in the New Yorker magazine⁸ discussed the impact of social isolation and concluded that “simply to exist as a normal human being requires interaction with other people” (p. 36). There is much psychological research affirming this proposition—that individuals need personal contact with others to satisfy deep primitive psychological needs. Face-to-face business meetings help meet these needs. Emailing and even teleconferences are not as likely to meet these needs, notwithstanding the enormous popularity of Facebook which basically provides electronic connections between social “friends”. However, the popularity of this website suggests that people might be even hungrier for social friends than can be satisfied in their present day-to-day work and personal lives.

Similarly, business meetings allow participants opportunities to develop important exchange relationships among themselves. These exchanges can be in the form of business negotiations, personal favors, promises, understandings, etc. that cannot often be achieved via other forms of communication because of their personal and informal nature. One psychological theory that emphasizes this notion is “social exchange theory” where human relations are viewed as an exchange of rewards among individuals or achieving equity between “what you put in” compared to “what you get out” of relationships.

⁸ Gawande, A. Hellhole. The New Yorker, March 30, 2009, pages 36-45. In this article, Gawande discusses the severe psychological damages to individuals exposed to isolating environments for long periods.

Face-to-face business meetings afford participants opportunities to develop transparency and trust among each other in ways that are not always possible compared to other forms of communications. Trust is an integral part of business relationships and building trust is clearly a function of having repeated personal interactions with one another⁹. This is not to say that trust cannot be built using computer based technologies, but the research evidence suggests that it takes longer to build¹⁰.

Face-to-face business meetings allow for member to evaluate and judge the integrity, competencies, and skills (e.g. verbal skills) of other participants and leaders in ways that are not easily evaluated in computer mediated mechanisms.

Face-to-face business meetings allow participants to develop strong social relationships among themselves. Nardi and Whittaker describe the importance of face-to-face shared activities in facilitating social bonding and showing commitment: touching, engaging in mutually meaningful experiences in a common physical space, and “showing up” in person¹¹.

Individuals are more apt to develop social “identities” or how they define themselves in terms of group membership with face-to-face contacts. Attending face-to-face meetings help individuals develop more clear understandings of how they themselves “belong” to the organization in which they work, how they fit in, and their relative status among other group members. Most of us would share the experience of pride when being included in face-to-face meetings with high level executives in organizations. Schwartzman (1989) makes the following point in her book about meetings¹²: “Meetings are an important sense-making form for organizations and communities because they may define, represent, and also reproduce social entities and relationships.” (p. 39).

Face-to-face meetings are also strong vehicles for participants to learn the relative norms of the organization as well as its idiosyncratic culture. Individuals learn about the various ways things “operate” in organizations by observing how others behave and display emotions. Information such as the value and meaning of time (i.e. showing up on time), who has power in the organization, what is reinforced and punished, etc. are all things people learn in face-to-face meeting which otherwise might not be observable in electronically based communication devices.

Face-to-face business meetings allow “side-line” conversations among participants that are often very valuable in accomplishing the various tasks and duties. Often discussions during breaks help in terms of members dealing with decisions, information sharing and exchange, indicating agreement or disagreement with issues, and so forth.

⁹ See McAllister, D. J. (1995). Affect- and cognition-based trust as foundations for interpersonal cooperation in organizations. *Academy of Management Journal*, 38, 24-59.

¹⁰ Wilson, J. M., Straus, & McEvily, B. (2006). All in due time: The development of trust in computer-mediated and face-to-face teams. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 99, 16-33.

¹¹ Nardi, B. A. & Whittaker, S. (2002). The place of face-to-face communications in distributed work. In P. Hinds & S. Kiesler (Eds.). *Distributed Work*. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, p. 84.

¹² Schwartzman, H. B. (1989). *The Meeting: Gatherings in Organizations and Communities*. New York: Plenum Press.

Another advantage of face-to-face meetings is that they provide a forum for members to obtain and give social support. Such support might include providing tangible assistance, information, and emotional support that might be either less forthcoming or less convincing in computer media communications. Organizational life can be lonely and face-to-face meetings can help to alleviate feeling of isolation and stress¹³.

Another aspect of face-to-face meetings is that they allow the direct expression of humor in a way that is not always conveyed in computer mediated communications. Members may feel freer to laugh, pun, and otherwise inject humor into conversations where as telecom and other forms are typically more sterile and “only business”. Humor is being recognized as being an important component of human life as well as contributing positively to experiences in organizations¹⁴.

In summary, there are number of compelling psychological reasons for conducting face-to-face business meetings.

¹³ King, L.A. *The Science of Psychology: An Appreciative View*. (2008). New York: McGraw-Hill, p. 479.

¹⁴ Meisiek, S. & Yao, Y. (2005). Nonsense makes sense: Humor in social sharing of emotion in the workplace. In C. Hartel, W. Zerbe, N. Ashkanasy (Eds.). *Emotions in Organizational Behavior*, p. 143-165; Vinton, K. (1989). Humor in the workplace: It is more than telling jokes. *Small Group Behavior*, 20, 151-166; Abramis, D. J. (Aug, 1992). Humor in healthy organizations—Corporate Culture. *HR Magazine*.

5. Business Advantages of Face-to-Face Business Meetings

From simply a *business perspective*, research has also demonstrated the superiority of business meetings compared to electronic communication devices in the context of decision-making. A study conducted by Baltes, Dickson, Sherman, Bauer, & LaGanke and published in a prestigious journal of organizational behavior¹⁵, abstracted and summarized statistically the results of 22 published and 5 unpublished studies comparing face-to-face communication groups versus computer mediated groups (those using email, teleconferencing, videoconferencing) in terms of their decision making effectiveness, time to make decisions, and member satisfaction. Their results showed that “..the overall impact of computer-mediated communication indicates that its use is associated with more negative work outcomes than occur in face-to-face groups” (Baltes, et al., p. 167)¹⁶. They also investigated whether it made a difference as to whether there was anonymity among group members (in the computer mediated groups), whether there was limited versus unlimited discussion time, and whether the groups studies were relatively large (4 or more group members) or small (3 group members). The findings were that these factors made a difference but non-the-less were not so much as to indicate superiority for computer mediated communication groups. They concluded with this statement: “Computer-mediated communication may be an efficient and rapid means of disseminating information, but the research too date suggests that it is not the most effective means of making group decisions....managers must make the decision as whether the cost savings in travel expenses and time outweigh the potential decrements in quality of decisions reached” Baltes, et al., p. 175). Amplifying on these results, data from the survey participants in the Hilton study indicated that 94% believe that meetings held offsite at hotels are productive with 32% believing they are very productive.

According to a bulletin recently published in MIX¹⁷ summarizing new research on global meeting trends conducted by GLOBAL Meeting Professionals, while meeting and event budgets are expected to fall this year, face-to-face meetings “are still considered to have the highest ROI of all marketing tools”.

How are these outcomes achieved? The Hilton Report on Business Communications, referred to above, showed strong agreement among survey participants that face-to-face business meetings help to:

- Bond teams together
- Result in people feeling more inspired
- Brings out the best in people
- Results in breakthrough thinking
- Build stronger business relationships

¹⁵ Baltes, B.B, Dickson, M. W., Sherman, M. P., Bauer, C. C., & LaGanke, J.S., (2002), Computer-mediated communication and group decision making: A meta-analysis. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 87, 156-179.

¹⁶ In another more recent study using Taiwanese subjects showed that face-to-face groups were significantly better at problem analyses, establishment of decision making criteria, and were more efficient than groups using computer mediate communication channels. Li, S-C. (2007), Computer-mediated communication and group decision making: A functional perspective. *Small Group Research*, 38, 593-614.

¹⁷ MIX: Asia’s Creative Meetings Magazine. (April/May, 2009). Future Watch: Focus on meeting’s value. P. 10.

6. Creating More Value For Business Meetings

The overall value of business meetings is really a simple function of costs and outcomes. Anything that lowers the costs (i.e. travel costs for participants, time, hotel rental, food, etc.) of face-to-face meetings will increase their ultimate utility.

Anything that increases the efficiency of business meetings increases their utility. A quick look on either the internet or Amazon.com will reveal a plethora of articles and books that give advice in terms of how to improve the efficiency of business meetings¹⁸. There are even websites dedicated to making meetings effective¹⁹. I have abstracted the various guidelines in making business meetings effective from these various sources and present them below:

I. Prior to the meeting

- a. Decide whether a meeting is necessary
- b. Decide who and how many attendees—too many people may be problematic under circumstances where decision-making is important.
- c. Define the purpose and/or objectives of the meeting
- d. Prepare an agenda—including topics for discussion, presenters for various topics, time allotment for each topic. Make sure there are not too many topics to cover within the designated time period.
- e. Choose an appropriate meeting time.
- f. Circulate information to those who will be in attendance—include objectives, agenda, time and place, background material if any
- g. Indicate that participants must be on time and have read the materials prepared
- h. Assign roles to participants (e.g. note-taker, facilitator, etc.)
- i. Decide on who sits where
- j. Make sure that coffee, tea, snacks are ordered
- k. Insure that the location will be in physically pleasing and hospitable location with good acoustics, air conditioning, convenient, etc.
- l. Make sure that adequate resources are available (e.g. laptops that work, flip charts, pens, etc.)
- m. Prepare readable name tags if necessary

¹⁸ See for example: Parker, G. & Hoffman, R. (2006). Meeting Excellence: 33 Tools to lead meetings that get results. Jossey-Bass. This book also contains references from books, articles, and websites providing information on running effective meetings. Also, see Henkel, S. (2007). Successful Meetings: How to plan, prepare, and execute top-notch business meetings. Orlando, Florida: Atlantic Publishing Group.

¹⁹ For example: www.effectivemeetings.com/meetingbasics/training.asp;
www.meetingwizard.org/meetings/effective-meetings.cfm

II. Holding the meeting

- a. Welcome members to the meeting.
- b. Introduce members to each other, if they were not known previously.
- c. Identify who is in charge of the meeting and any special roles taken by individuals
- d. State the purpose and/or objectives of the meeting
- e. Review the time frame allowed for the meeting
- f. Do an attendance check or head count.
- g. Determine the decision-making process if necessary.
- h. Make sure that discussions are not monopolized by only a few people.
- i. Summarize the major decisions made (if any) or action plans resulting from the meeting.
- j. Insure the level of confidentiality needed.
- k. Terminate the meeting if it is over.

III. After the meeting

- a. Prepare minutes and distribute as soon as possible after the minutes.
- b. Follow-up on action items.
- c. Debrief in terms of what made the meeting effective or ineffective and ask for feedback from participants.

7. Holding Meetings In Diverse Cultures

Meeting held in different cultures may involve different behaviors and understandings among those who lead business meetings. Take for example the meaning of time among different cultures. For some cultures, meeting times are not honored—people come 30 minutes late or sometimes not at all. For business leaders who are interested in conducting effective meetings, getting participants to arrive on time remains one of the biggest challenges. For other cultures, this is not typically a problem.

Other attitudinal difference and preferences regarding business meetings exist across cultures. The Hilton Report on Business Communications cited previously provided the examination of such preferences from study participants from the cities of Shanghai, Tokyo, Singapore, and Sydney. Their findings revealed:

- Those in Shanghai were most likely to agree that offsite business meetings were a necessity and not a luxury (85%)
- Those in Shanghai more likely to agree that face-to-face meetings help build stronger relationships.
- Participants from Sydney and Singapore were more likely to want to increase the number of offsite meetings.
- People in Shanghai are more likely to attend offsite business meetings held in hotels (41%), where as people in Singapore are less likely (17%).

Research has also focused on basic cultural differences between countries; such research might be useful in helping to form judgments regarding how different cultures might react to and behave in face-to-face business meetings. One of the most well known scholars in this area is Geert Hofstede who surveyed more than 116,000 IBM employees in 40 countries about their work-related values²⁰. His results suggested that managers and employees vary on five value dimensions of national culture:

1. Power Distance: The degree to which people in a country accept that power in institutions and organizations is distributed unequally. A high-power distance rating means that large inequalities of power and wealth exist and are tolerated in the culture. A low-power distance rating indicates the culture discourages differences between power and wealth and is more equalitarian. In the context of business meetings, a high power orientation would indicate acceptance of formal leadership and hierarchical arrangements with full knowledge of “who is the boss”. In low power distance cultures, leaderless group discussions with little status differentiation among individuals in the group might be more acceptable.
2. Individualism versus Collectivism: Individualism reflects the degree to which individuals prefer to act as individuals rather than as members of groups and believe in individual rights above all else. Within the context of face-to-face business meeting, cultures high in individualism would emphasize active participation and “voice” in discussions. Business meetings held in cultures with high collectivism scores would place a premium on group satisfaction and consensus.

²⁰ See:http://www.geert-hofstede.com/hofstede_dimensions.php

3. Masculinity versus femininity: The degree to which the culture favors traditional masculine roles such as achievement, power, and control versus a culture that views men and women with equality. Within the context of business meeting, cultures that are high on Masculinity are less likely to accommodate the input and participation of females.
4. Uncertainty Avoidance: The degree to which people in a country prefer structured over unstructured situations. In cultures that score high on uncertainty avoidance, people have an increased level of anxiety about ambiguity. In cultures that score low on uncertainty avoidance, individuals are less dismayed by ambiguity and have a greater tolerance for a variety of options and opinions. In the context of business meetings, individuals in cultures high in uncertainty avoidance would be more likely to have higher needs for closure and clarity as products of business meetings, to be clear on who has particular responsibilities, and so forth.
5. Long Term versus Short-Term Orientation: This dimension focuses on the degree of a society's long-term devotion to traditional values. People in cultures with long-term orientations look to the future and value persistence, thrift, and tradition whereas those in a short-term orientation value the here-and-now, change is accepted more readily, and commitments do not represent impediments to change. One would expect business meetings in long term oriented cultures to not be so willing to make quick and/or dramatic decisions, and to rely on historical patterns of behavior and protocol. In short time oriented cultures, quick decisions would be favored and change welcomed.

Fortunately, the countries of primary interest for this particular “white paper” were among the countries for which data are available. I have presented their relative scores on these dimensions below:

Country	PDI	IDV	MAS	UAI	LTO
Australia	36	90	61	51	31
China	80	20	66	30	115
Malaysia	104	26	50	36	
Singapore	74	20	48	?	48
Japan	54	46	95	92	80

Where PDI = Power Distance Index
 IDV = Individualism
 MAS = Masculinity
 UAI = Uncertainty Avoidance
 LTO = Long Term Orientation

While Hofstede’s research was conducted some time ago (in the 1970’s) and is not without critics, the scores associated with the five countries above “ring true” with at least my experiences and observations of these cultures²¹. It is interesting to speculate about how these cultural differences among these five countries might impact the way in which business meetings are viewed and conducted.

Australia scores highest on the individualism dimension, suggesting that business meetings that emphasize individual responsibilities within groups might be more effective. Also, individuals are not likely to subjugate their own needs for groups needs.

China is given high ratings in both power-distance and long-term orientation dimensions. Thus, hierarchical arrangements in meetings are accepted and comfortable. Also, tradition is valued and change may be slow among members of these business meetings.

Malaysia scored highest on power distance and relatively low on individualism suggesting that hierarchical arrangements in meeting are accepted and more emphasis is given to group acceptance and preserving tight social framework among the members of business meetings.

Singapore scored relatively high on power-distance and low on individualism. As such, hierarchical arrangements are easily accepted, group satisfaction is of high value, and there is an exceptionally high degree of willingness to take risks and decisions under uncertain circumstances. In addition, the Hofstede study showed Singapore as scoring low on the uncertainty avoidance. However, in the study

²¹ Another more contemporary study was conducted examining cross-cultural and cross-national differences in values. Data was collected by 170 researchers from 62 societal cultures and over 17,000 managers²¹. Nine different cultural dimensions were identified: Performance Orientation, Assertiveness, Future Orientation, Humane Orientation, Institutional Collectivism, In-group Collectivism, Gender Egalitarianism, Power Distance, and Uncertainty Avoidance. Cultural dimensions scores were obtained for 4 of the countries examined (Australia, China, Japan, Singapore); their profiles are mostly similar to those obtained via the Hofstede research, and thus I won’t discuss and interpret these results further. Javidan, M., Dorfman, P. W., Sully de Luque, House, R. J. (2006). In the eye of the beholder: Cross cultural lessons in leadership from Project GLOBE. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 20, 67-90.

reported by Javidan, et al. (see footnote 19), Singapore scored relatively high on uncertainty avoidance in contrast to the Hofstede study. The Javidan description of Singapore on this dimension was as follows: "Organizations in high uncertainty avoidance countries like Singapore and Switzerland tend to establish elaborate processes and procedures and prefer formal detailed strategies" (p. 70). This description seems more intuitively true than the opposite. With regard to business meetings, Singaporeans would want closure as well as procedures in place. The participants would also strive for group satisfaction.

Japan scores exceptionally high on the masculinity and uncertainty avoidance dimensions suggesting that authority and male roles are emphasized. Moreover, there will be a relatively greater need for clarification and the reduction of uncertainty among business meeting participants. I note also that this culture is changing rapidly and thus my comments here should be viewed as speculative.

I should also point out that there is a great need for further research to provide more specificity regarding how meeting participants (and leaders) might react across different cultures. My remarks are speculative at this point. However, based on these data and my own experiences, it seems likely that conducting face-to-face meetings across these diverse cultures will demand sensitivity and awareness among business leaders. Knowing more about the social protocol and cultural values and norms will be important in terms enhancing the quality of face-to-face business meetings. In addition, there will, of course, be wide variation in how meetings are conducted and participants behave even within particular cultures.

8. Summary

Given the existing data and research, it is clear that face-to-face meetings are used less frequently and there is substitution effects via the use of computer aided communication devices. However, the data indicate that meetings indeed “matter” and that the use of such face-to-face meetings has a variety of valuable psychological as well as business outcomes. It is my belief, given these data, that eliminating face-to-face meetings as an option in communicating with employees would be a mistake. That is not to say, however, that complementing or substituting computer-mediated communication vehicles with face-to-face meetings can’t enhance communications and help provide lower costs overall in the business context. Perhaps a more accurate question concerns not whether face-to-face business meetings are “better” than computer mediated communication, but instead “what is the right combination of face-to-face meetings and computer mediated channels?”

Another summary component of this paper is that there are ways to improve on face-to-face meetings which are well-documented. Proper pre-meeting components, organization of meetings, and follow-up will help improve the efficacy of face-to-face business meetings and thereby improve the cost-benefit ratio associated with them.

Finally, I have attempted to develop some potential differences in which face-to-face business meetings might be viewed and or conducted in five different cultures.