Business English in meetings

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It is common for accounting personnel to hold or attend meetings and therefore it is important for you to understand key phrases and expressions related to meetings. This issue is about the use of English for different communicative purposes in meetings.

1. Opening
There are both formal and informal ways to open a meeting.
- Ladies and gentlemen, I declare the meeting open.
- Perhaps we'd better get started/get down to business.
- Shall we get started?
- Shall we begin?
- I think we should start the meeting.
- Let's begin/get going, shall we?

2. Minutes of the last meeting
We need to first accept the minutes of the last meeting.
- Can we take the minutes as read?
- Would someone move that the minutes of the last meeting be accepted?

3. Agenda
The Chairperson has to conduct the meeting according to the agenda.
- Has everybody received a copy of the agenda?
- There are three items of discussion on the agenda. One,…
- We have three main topics on the agenda. First, …
- There are three main issues we need to discuss today.
- The first item on the agenda today is…

4. Subject
The Chairperson also has to introduce the purpose of the meeting.
- The purpose of today's meeting is…
- Our meeting this morning is to…
- The main objective of our meeting is…
- I've called this meeting first to…second to…

5. Giving the floor

The Chairperson invites participants to give their opinions.

- What are your views Brian?
- Mabel, would you like to say something about this?
- Sarah, could you introduce our financial situation?
- Martin, how do you think about it?
- What do you think about?
- What are your feelings on this?
- What's your opinion about that?

6. Taking the floor

Participants take the floor and express what they think.

- I think that…
- My opinion is that…
- Could I make a point about…
- Excuse me Chairman, may I say something here?

The structure *It is* or *They are*, followed by an adjective expressing value or judgment. For example,

- It's never too late to change the system.
- It's not easy to carry out the project.
- They're appealing only to those younger customers.
- I'm sure that staff morale will be enhanced if we do so.
- I'm convinced that the marketing project will bring us profits.

Expressing very strong opinions

When expressing a very strong opinion, the following can be used:

- I strongly/definitely believe there are other ways besides cutting the budget.
- I believe that refining the remuneration package is the foremost thing to do.
- In my reckoning, …
- I reckon that…
- According to the latest figures, there will be a big increase in the number of the elderly by 2022, and they are far richer than the existing ones.
- Surely, Facebook is another means we could use to reach more potential customers, especially the younger ones.
- I doubt very much if cutting human resources is the best way out.
- Clearly, there is a need to save money, but budget cuts may not be feasible.

Expressing fair probability

When you are about 60% sure of what you say, use the following:

- Perhaps we can first carry out a pilot study to examine the feasibility of the idea.
- I guess/suppose staff members may resist the idea.
- It's fairly possible to solve the problem face-to-face with the Staff Union members.
- There's probably a good opportunity to work together with the Staff Union in introducing the policy.

Showing agreement

To show agreement during a meeting, you can say the following:
- Exactly.
- You've got it.
- That's the way I see it too.
- You're right.
- Yes.
- Precisely.
- I go along with that.
- Good idea.
- I couldn't agree more.

Remember to explain why you agree and not just indicate agreement.

Showing conditional agreement

To show conditional agreement, use *if*.
- I would agree if this only means a fundamental reform of the medical system.
- Sure I'll agree with you if the change is not drastic and significant.

Showing disagreement

Try to disagree diplomatically and politely.
- I wonder if that works.
- I am not sure if that's the case.
- I am not sure about that.
- Well, I'm not sure whether we can do that.
- Yes, but don't you think that the policy is too radical?
- That may be true, but it still cannot solve the problem perfectly.
- That may be so, but junior staff may still be dissatisfied.
- That's not really/strictly true. Statistics show that word of mouth is much more important.

You can also use questions to introduce alternative viewpoints and allow others to clarify and explain further their points.
- Don't you think the lay-off will bring the problem of low staff morale?
- Don't you think we need to do more research before finalizing the policy?

7. Finishing a point

The Chairperson should ensure that all participants are given opportunities to express their ideas before discussing a new issue.
- Has anyone anything further to add?
- Has anyone anything further they wish to add before we move on to the next item?
- Could we move on now to item 5?
- OK then, let's move on.
- Well, let's move on to the financial aspect.

8. Directing
The Chairperson should be able to monitor the discussion, especially when digression occurs.
- Please stick to the subject/topic.
- That isn't quite relevant to the discussion. What we are trying to discuss is…
- Excuse me, but the subject is….Could we deal with … in another meeting?
- Could we go back to the main issue, please?
- Sorry, but we're getting side-tracked here.

9. Keeping order
The Chairperson should keep order in a meeting.
- We can't all speak at once. Peter, how about you speak first?
- One at a time, please.
- Martin, I'm afraid I have to call you to order.
- Just a minute, Jason. Let Winnie finish first.

10. Postponing a point
The Chairperson can decide on postponing discussing particular agenda items if it seems hard to reach a consensus.
- Perhaps we could leave this for the time being. We may need to do more research before coming back to it later.
- If no one has any objections, I suggest we leave this matter until our next meeting.
- I'd like to continue with this issue in the next meeting if you agree.

11. Moving to a vote
When there is a need to vote:
- Can I ask for a show of hands?
- Let's put it to the vote.

12. Voting
- Those for the motion, please?
- Those against?
- Any abstentions?
- The motion is carried unanimously.
- The motion has been rejected by 7 votes to 6.

13. Consensus
- It seems that we have a consensus.
- Are we all agreed on that?

14. Summarizing the main points
The Chairperson has to summarize the main points of discussion before closing the meeting.
- To conclude, there are two main problems we need to solve.
- We've examined the pros and cons of cutting the budget. Now we need to think about the best way to go.
- Let's go over what has been discussed.

15. Any Other Business
The Chairperson has to ask if there is anything else for discussion.
- Is there any other business?
- Is there anything else to discuss?

16. Closing
- I declare the meeting closed. Thank you ladies and gentlemen.
- That's all for today, thank you.

Quiz:
Try to find out for what purpose the following expressions are used in a meeting.

1. I strongly believe that salary cut is not the only way to solve the problem.

_____

2. Don't you think that salary cut is not the right way to go?

_____

3. I declare the meeting open.

_____

4. That's also what I think.

_____

5. I suggest doing more research before exploring this issue further.

_____

Answer:

1. I strongly believe that salary cut is not the only way to solve the problem.
<u>Expressing very strong opinion</u>

2. Don't you think that salary cut is not the right way to go?
<u>Showing disagreement</u>

3. I declare the meeting open.
<u>Opening the meeting</u>

4. That's also what I think.
<u>Showing agreement</u>

5. I suggest doing more research before exploring this issue further.
<u>Postponing a point</u>