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MEETINGS MANAGEMENT: A DRIVER FOR DECISION MAKING SUCCESS OF THE BREWERY SECTOR IN RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study investigates the influence of Meetings management on decision making in the brewery sector in Rivers State of Nigeria. Taking a cross sectional survey, the study investigated all permanent employees in the seven (7) brewing firms in Port Harcourt. The reason for the target of permanent workers is dependent on the fact casualization is very prominent in the sector that only few hands are maintained while others are hired on contractual arrangement. A sample size of 110 employees was drawn from the total population of 152 staff in the sector studied. Closed ended questionnaire was constructed and used to gather primary which were analyzed and results presented in using tables, mean and standard deviation. The hypotheses were tested using the Spearman Rank Order Correlation statistical tool. Findings from the study revealed significant positive relationship between meeting management and decision making success in the brewery sector in Rivers State, therefore, all the attributes of meetings management adopted in the study were recommended for management of the brewery sector in Rivers State.

Keywords: Meetings management, Agenda, Scheduling, Decision strategy, problem solving, Decision making

I Introduction

Meetings are organised sessions where discussions about business solutions are presented for collaborative examination and brainstorming for the purpose of selecting better alternative choice of actions. The organisation of meetings has been a problem to many industry actors in recent years because of the statutory cost involvements. The time factor invested in certain meetings is a serious concern to contemporary managers today. Because meeting is the platform from which key decisions are taken for the benefit of actors in organisations, it become very critical to examine the management of meetings and how strategic meeting management can enhance valued decisions in a sector that provide drinks that has implications on the health of society. Such decisions must take cognizance of the health hazards of the product in terms of sugar levels and alcohol contents especially to curb unwarranted damage to consumers. Technology has made management of meetings very smooth in todays business world. The use of social network as the result of the embrace for internet means of information interchange is now very useful for information dissemination and the need to call congressional sit tight meetings are becoming antiquated and unnecessary. Earlier understanding of meetings had posited that it is a lawful assembly of persons or group for the purpose of resolving problems and taking decision, but today assembly of persons may not necessarily be uppermost in the constitution of a valid meeting. Any point of contact via the electronic media can allow for meetings so long as what is discussed has legal beneficial output on society. Effective meeting management involves adequate planning and strategy for all embracing involvement of the members of the given organisations. (Anastasia & Martin, 2014). Within an organization, meetings are conducted where information sharing takes place for the purpose of problem-solving, planning, decision making. Meeting serves as an important means for coordination between teams, and it constitutes a significant part of the life of every organization. Good meeting management skills also ensure valuable contribution by all team members, and it creates the pathway to finding the optimum solutions for industry problems. Managing meetings is a critical strategic function that members of organisations must embrace and appreciate if the desire of the firms is to make successful decisions that affects their work. Meetings management therefore plays pivotal role in improving communication, interpersonal relationships, teamwork as well as employees involvement. (Martin, 2017). Decisions come in all flavours and sizes. Good business decision means the end of deliberation and the beginning of action. In meetings management, deliberations are made, decisions are taken for positive action that are capable of driving industry growth and organizational sustainability. The brewery sector of Nigeria economy is volatile due to government policies directions that sometimes are attempted to reduce patronage of the products. State legislations are intermittently enacted to stop consumption of certain drinks. These policies and legislations are detrimental to the success of the sector. It is therefore more critical and imperative that decisions that bother on the brewing sector are strategically evaluated by all concerns through meetings. Decision making is the process of identifying and selecting a course of action in order to solve a specific problem. The business of managing organisations is more relieved

from burden of choice amongst alternatives when effective meetings management is the approach because it helps to create a smooth thoroughfare for easy decisions on best alternatives. (Neider & Schrieshein, 2011)). One of the most unproductive activities that organization members get absorbed in is the constant engagement of workforce in repeated meetings that spend times and man hours as well as cost to organisations and it members. It is so routine in some organisations and departments that meetings are called to conference halls every week and months for the purpose of meetings. These routinized meetings come with their meeting refreshments entertainment that add cost to the bottom line. Staff are committed to procedural logistics of meetings, and special attention is placed on the welfare of attendants for their participating comforts. It is possible that certain companies have to encounter the situation where the same old issue is raised up again and again after the decision had been made repeatedly in the past. This kind of failure has capacity to trigger non-productiveness and low efficiency in organizations. In order to successfully execute the action plans; responsible people need to have the mind set of result-oriented approach. Those who really want to get things done should take into consideration the following action driven factors: (i) *Responsiveness* – It's important to assign a responsible person to take charge of the decided tasks. Without clear ownership, the issue could be left undone. Sometimes, a change of person in-charge may be needed. When responsibility is attached to the business of planning, success is closer. (ii) *Determination* – This requires all concerned to demonstrate the real intention to get the work done. It is useless to have a meeting without seriously demanding for achievement by all members. Every member of the meeting should have that consciousness to achieve success in the cause of deliberation. (iii) *Speed* – Team members need to have the sense of urgency and practice the self-reminder of "do it now". A non-negotiable approach to delay and postponement of deadlines is emphatically contributory to successful meetings. (iv) *Follow-up* – Meetings should ordinarily have a culture of feedback. Therefore, monitoring is necessary to ensure the progress of the action plan implementation. In many cases, it may not be enough to know who will take care of the problem but how it is being carried out is important. In addition, the following secondary actions may be taken to enhance effective execution of meetings: *Set an alarm or reminder* – This can easily be done through the personal note or electronic tool available such as outlook reminder feature. Once it is set correctly, the system can remind the user in advance in minutes, hour, day, and week. *Result-oriented culture* – this culture can be promoted by showing example especially from the top management. Sometimes compromise has to be limited for the sake of performance enhancement.

Problems Resolution

Problem resolution is the process of working through details of a problem to reach a solution. It may include mathematical or systematic operations and can be a gauge of an individual's critical thinking skills. Problem solving is about finding the most optimal solution or reaching the best compromise that can resolve an issue facing the group or organization. In order to do this, identifying possible solutions is important. Problem solving meetings should be oriented around issues that affect the

organization and should only be resolved through brain storming. If a problem is the responsibility of, or can be fixed by one person, a group meeting is likely a waste of time. However, when a singular person's decision affects that of the entire team, it may be worth it. Taking time to identify potential future problems allows a team to have solutions immediately ready. Unfortunately, problem solving meetings are all too often done only after a problem occurs, adding a variety of challenges that would not exist in other meeting types. Problem solving can be a particularly stressful type of group strategizing. (Selart, & Johnson, 2011). When taking group decisions, a number of different strategies can be used to reach a compromise. The best way to approach a problem solving meeting is to properly define the problem and the restrictions of potential solutions. Before brainstorming solutions, evaluate them, and decide on the best choice. Identify the problem to be addressed. The first key step to solving any problem is to identify the issue at hand. Problem solving meetings are designed to address any type of situation specific to the group. Determining what the problem is may be easier if it has already become a pressing issue. However, problem solving meetings can also be designed to generate pre-emptive solutions to problematic situations that may arise in the future. Regardless, any problem solving meeting should begin with a discussion of the specific issues that need to be changed or resolved by the end of the meeting. Often, when a pervasive issue exists within a group, some members are more aware of it than others. Beginning a problem solving meeting by explicitly identifying the issue not only makes clear what the meeting goals are, but also puts all team members on the same page about the state of the group or project. Identifying this problem early on also gives the team the ability to modify the topics or members involved in reaching a solution. Once a problem has been identified, the group should propose all possible ways to approach and resolve the issue.

Agenda

An agenda is a list of meeting activities in the order in which they are to be taken up, beginning with the call to order and ending with adjournment. It usually includes one or more specific items of business to be acted upon. It may, but is not required to, include specific times for one or more activities. An agenda may also be called a docket, schedule, or calendar. It may also contain a list of an order of business. (Langley, Mintzberg, Pitcher, Posada & Jan, 1995). An agenda lists the items of business to be taken up during a meeting or session. It may also be called a calendar. A meeting agenda provides the pathway for healthy deliberation in a meeting. Because every meeting plans it items of discussion, Agenda exposes the mind of all participants to what is expected and thus encourage preparation and focussed discussions. Steps on any agenda can include any type of schedule or order the group wants to follow. The sequence of agenda items is important, as later issues may be dependent upon information derived from or completion of earlier steps in the agenda. Frequently in standard meetings, agenda items may be "time boxed" or fixed so as not to exceed a predetermined time interval. In workshops, time boxing may not be effective because completion of each agenda step may be critical to beginning the next step. Creating an agenda is crucial to the

success of any business meeting. An agenda will determine the form and structure of the meeting so you can plan what will be accomplished.

Scheduling

Scheduling is a plan of procedure, usually written, for a proposed objective, especially with reference to the sequence of and time allotted for each item or operation necessary to its completion. In scheduling, you develop the agenda with the key participants in the meeting. One of the reasons why meetings have fallen under criticism in recent times is the waste of production man-hour that ordinarily could be used if unnecessary meetings were avoided. Scheduling therefore becomes more crucial in the prioritization of deliberation schemes. In the agenda, you state the overall outcome you want from the meeting, design the agenda so that participants get involved early by having something for them to do right away and so they come on time, next to each major topic, including the type of action needed, the type of output expected (decision, vote, action assigned to someone), and time estimates for addressing each topic. Scheduled meetings have a set time, and participants are formally responsible, while unscheduled meetings have no set time, and participants are not formally responsible to other groups (Schwartzman 1989:63). Vincent, Bryarugaba, & kyogbiirwe, (2005) suggest that a scheduled meeting with a shared agenda of all decisions to be taken may induce decision makers to form opinions upfront at the meeting, and these opinions eventually serve as sources of conflict during group discussion. When issues are scheduled for discussion, it creates order on the part of all members as well. Because of the nature of the conflict generated, these meetings are bound to run for a long time and sometimes fail to deliver on expected outcomes. The contribution to the debate on group decision-making processes by examining the effect of meeting scheduling on information elaboration and conflict in real-world decision-making settings is the thrust of the study. Boris, Massimo, Daniele, & Morandi, (2016) argues that unscheduled decision making can result to more effective meetings.

Decision Strategy

Strategic decision making describes the process of creating a company's mission and objectives and deciding upon the courses of action that should be pursued to achieve goals. (Castillo & Dorao, 2013). Strategic decision making is an on-going process that involves creating strategies to achieve goals and altering strategies based on observed outcomes variation. It involves the process of creating an organization's mission, values, goals and objectives. Deciding upon a particular action plan, organisations also involve in altering strategies based on observed outcomes. Strategic decision making is capable of transforming smaller organisations into large groups and industries. When meetings are effective managed, strategic decisions are better taken so long as the meetings are organisation to address matters of strategic importance. Discussions are focused and not diversionary. Some entrepreneurs have the ability to make strategic decisions quickly, sometimes with limited information. While taking a calculated risk, you must set a threshold to qualify your decisions. When competition is the order of the day, decisions about staying in business and negating the forces of

competition are more strategic and given serious deliberation. It is very important that decision strategy should be explored to provide better pathway to for meetings to address issues that appear more strategic so as to remain focussed.

2. Materials and Methods

This study sampled a cross section of the population which investigated only the permanent staff of the brewing firms located in Rivers state. The target population comprised of all permanent employees in the seven (7) brewing companies that are covered in the study. The reason for the target of permanent workers is dependent on the fact casualization is very prominent in the sector that only few hands are maintained while others are hired on contractual arrangement. The study therefore sampled 110 employees from the total of 152 staff strength in the companies studied. Data was analyzed and results presented using tables, mean and standard deviation. The study hypotheses were tested using the Spearman Rank Order Correlation statistical tools. Data analysis of the association between the variables was carried out at a 95% confidence interval and a 0.05 level of significance. The Spearman's rank order correlation coefficient statistical tool was used in the presentation and analysis in the test of association or correlation between the dimensions of meetings management (agenda, scheduling, cost involvement and decision strategy) and the measures of decision marking in organizations (business continuity and adequate decision making). Furthermore, the partial correlation statistics was used to test the effect of the moderating variables (leadership and technology) on the relationship between meetings management and decision making success in brewery sector in Rivers State. The Scatter graph is one of the techniques used in deciding whether a bivariate relationship does exist between interval scaled variables. In our bid to determine the existence and trend of this relationship, we plotted a scatter graph as presented in Figure 1 below.

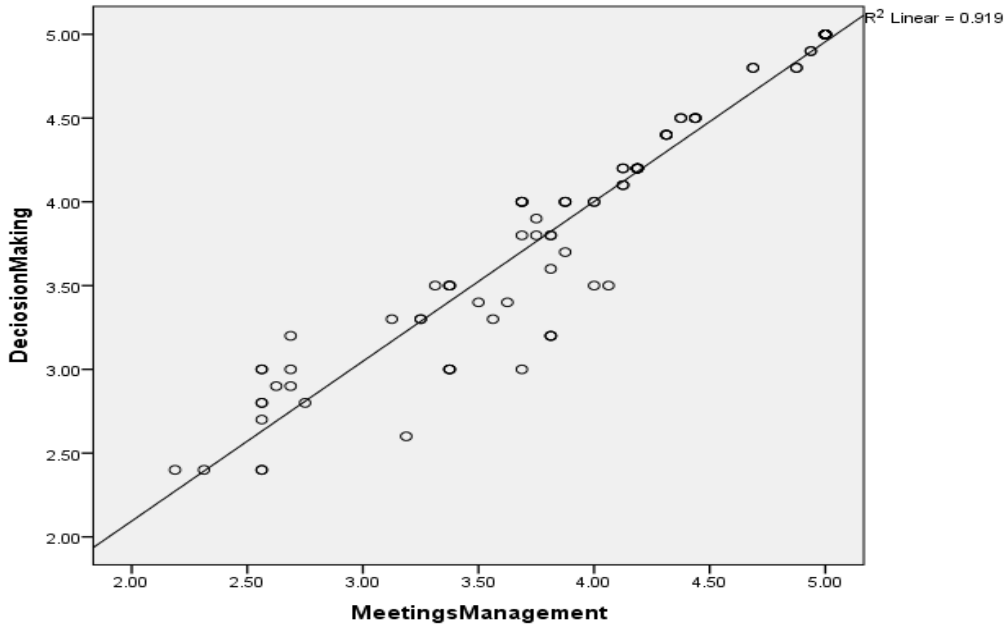

Figure 1: *Scatter plot showing relationship between meeting management and decision making*

Figure 1 above shows a positive relationship between meeting management (independent variable) and decision making(dependent variable). The scatter plot shows at R^2 linear value of (0.919) depicting a positive relationship between the two constructs. The implication is that understanding how best to manage meetings simultaneously brings about an increase in the level of decision making success.

Presentation of Results on the Tests of Hypotheses

The Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient is calculated using the SPSS 21.0 version to establish the relationship among the empirical referents of the predictor variable and the measures of the criterion variable. Correlation coefficients can range from -1.00 to +1.00. The value of -1.00 represents a perfect negative correlation while the value of +1.00 represents a perfect positive correlation. A value of 0.00 represents a lack of correlation. In testing hypotheses one to nine, the following rules were upheld in accepting or rejecting our alternate hypotheses: all the coefficient values that indicate levels of significance (* or **) as calculated using SPSS were accepted and therefore our alternate hypotheses rejected; when no significance is indicated in the coefficient r value, we reject our alternate hypotheses. Our confidence interval was set at the 0.05 (two tailed) level of significance to test the statistical significance of the data in this study.

Table 1: Correlation Matrix For Agenda And Decision Making

			Agenda	Problem Resolution	Growth
Spearman's rho	Agenda	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.878**	.679**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000
		N	98	98	98
	Problem Resolution	Correlation Coefficient	.878**	1.000	.872**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000
		N	98	98	98
	Growth	Correlation Coefficient	.679**	.872**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.
		N	98	98	98

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Research Data , 2018

From the result in the table 1 above, the correlation coefficient (rho) shows that there is a significant positive relationship between agenda and problem resolution. The *correlation coefficient* 0.878 confirms the magnitude and strength of this relationship and it is significant at p 0.000<0.01. The correlation coefficient represents a very high correlation between the variables. Therefore, based on empirical findings, the null hypothesis earlier stated is rejected and the alternate upheld. Thus, it is

restated that there is a significant relationship between agenda and problem resolution. From the result in the table, the correlation coefficient (rho) shows that there is a significant positive relationship between agenda and growth. The *correlation coefficient* 0.679 confirms the magnitude and strength of this relationship and it is significant at p 0.000<0.01. The correlation coefficient represents a very high correlation between the variables. Therefore, based on empirical findings the null hypothesis earlier stated is hereby rejected and the alternate upheld. Thus, there is a significant relationship between agenda and problem resolution.

Table 2: Correlation For Scheduling And Decision Making

			Scheduling	Problem Resolution	Growth
Spearman's rho	Scheduling	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.933**	.829**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000
		N	98	98	98
	Problem Resolution	Correlation Coefficient	.933**	1.000	.872**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000
		N	98	98	98
	Growth	Correlation Coefficient	.929**	.872**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.
		N	98	98	98

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Research Data, 2018 (SPSS output, version 21.0)

The *correlation coefficient* 0.933 confirms the magnitude and strength of this relationship and it is significant at p 0.000<0.01. The correlation coefficient represents a very high correlation also indicative of a very strong relationship between the variables. Therefore, based on empirical findings the null hypothesis earlier stated is hereby rejected and the alternate upheld. Thus, there is a significant relationship between scheduling and problem resolution. From the result in the table above, the correlation coefficient (rho) shows that there is a significant and positive relationship between scheduling and growth. The *correlation coefficient* 0.829 confirms the magnitude and strength of this relationship and it is significant at p 0.000<0.01. The correlation coefficient represents a high correlation and also indicates a strong relationship between the variables. Therefore, based on the findings, the null hypothesis earlier stated is therefore rejected and the alternate restated that there is a significant relationship between scheduling and growth.

Table 3: Correlation Matrix For Cost Involvement And Decision Making

			Cost Involvement	Problem Resolution	Growth
Spearman's rho	Cost Involvement	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.852**	.712**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000
		N	98	98	98
	Problem Resolution	Correlation Coefficient	.852**	1.000	.872**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000
		N	98	98	98
	Growth	Correlation Coefficient	.712**	.872**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.
		N	98	98	98

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Research Data , 2018

From the result in table 3 above, the correlation coefficient (rho) shows that there is a significant positive relationship between cost involvement and problem resolution. The high correlation coefficient of 0.852 confirms the magnitude and strength of this relationship and it is significant at p 0.000<0.01. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternate upheld. It is also evident that the correlation coefficient of 0.712 confirms the magnitude and strength of this relationship and its significant at p 0.000<0.01. The correlation coefficient represents a high correlation indicative also of a strong relationship between the variables. Therefore, based on the findings, the null hypothesis earlier stated is rejected and the alternate upheld.

Table 4: Correlation Matrix For Decision Strategy And Decision Making Success

			Decision Strategy	Problem Resolution	Growth
Spearman's rho	Decision Strategy	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.796**	.656**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000
		N	98	98	98
	Problem Resolution	Correlation Coefficient	.796**	1.000	.872**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000
		N	98	98	98
	Growth	Correlation Coefficient	.656**	.872**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.
		N	98	98	98

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Research Data , 2018 (SPSS output, version 21.0)

From the result in the table 4 above, the correlation coefficient (rho) shows that there is a significant and positive relationship between decision strategy and problem resolution. The high *correlation* coefficient of 0.712 confirms the magnitude and strength of this relationship and it is significant at p 0.000<0.01. Therefore, based on empirical findings the null hypothesis earlier stated is hereby rejected and the alternate upheld. Thus, there is a significant relationship between strategy and problem resolution. The result in the table also The *correlation* coefficient of 0.656 confirms the magnitude and strength of this relationship and it is significant at p 0.000<0.01. The correlation coefficient represents a high correlation indicative also of a strong relationship between the variables. Therefore, based on empirical findings the null hypothesis earlier stated is hereby rejected and the alternate upheld. Thus, there is a significant relationship between strategy and growth. For the multivariate analysis, the partial correlation technique was used in testing the moderating effects of organizational culture and leadership styles.

Table 5: Partial Correlation for the moderating influence of Leadership

Control Variables			Meetings Management	Decision Making	Leadership
-none-[a]	Meetings Management	Correlation	1.000	.959	.916
		Significance (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000
		Df	0	96	96
	Decision Making	Correlation	.959	1.000	.795
		Significance (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000
		Df	96	0	96
	Leadership	Correlation	.916	.795	1.000
		Significance (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.
		Df	96	96	0
Leadership	Meetings Management	Correlation	1.000	.946	
		Significance (2-tailed)	.	.000	
		Df	0	95	
	Decision Making	Correlation	.946	1.000	
		Significance (2-tailed)	.000	.	
		Df	95	0	

a. Cells contain zero-order (Pearson) correlations.

Source: Research Data , 2018 (SPSS output, version 21.0)

In table 5, the zero-order partial correlation between meetings management and decision making shows the correlation coefficient where leadership is not moderating the relationship; and this is,

indeed, both high (0.959) and statistically significant (p-value (=0.000) < 0.05). The partial correlation controlling for leadership, however is (0.946) and statistically significant (p-value (= 0.000) < 0.05). The observed positive "relationship" between meetings management and decision making is due to underlying relationships between each of those variables and leadership. Looking at the zero correlation, we find that both meetings management and decision making are highly positively correlated with leadership, the control variable. Removing the effect of this control variable reduces the correlation between the other two variables to be 0.946 and it is significant at $\alpha = 0.05$, therefore we reject the null hypothesis and conclude that: Leadership significantly moderates the influence of meetings management and decision making.

Table 6: Partial Correlation for the moderating role of Technology

Control Variables			Meetings Management	Decision Making	Technology
-none-[a]	Meetings Management	Correlation	1.000	.959	.900
		Significance (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000
		Df	0	96	96
	Decision Making	Correlation	.959	1.000	.769
		Significance (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000
		Df	96	0	96
	Technology	Correlation	.900	.769	1.000
		Significance (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.
		Df	96	96	0
Technology	Meetings Management	Correlation	1.000	.956	
		Significance (2-tailed)	.	.000	
		Df	0	95	
	Decision Making	Correlation	.956	1.000	
		Significance (2-tailed)	.000	.	
		Df	95	0	

a. Cells contain zero-order (Pearson) correlations.

Result from table 6 testing the zero-order partial correlation between meetings management and decision making shows the correlation coefficient where organizational culture is not moderating the relationship; and this is, indeed, both high (0.959) and statistically significant (p-value (=0.000) < 0.05). The partial correlation controlling for organizational structure, however is (0.956) and statistically significant (p-value (= 0.000) < 0.05.). The observed positive "relationship" between meetings management and decision making is due to underlying relationships between each of those variables and organizational culture. Looking at the zero correlation, we find that both meetings management and decision making are highly positively correlated with organizational culture, the

control variable. Removing the effect of this control variable reduces the correlation between the other two variables to be 0.956 and it is significant at $\alpha = 0.05$, therefore we reject the null hypothesis and conclude that: organizational culture significantly moderates the relationship between meetings management and decision making.

4. Recommendations

Findings from the results presented and conclusion above lead to the following recommendations:

1. The brewery organisations in Rivers State should ensure that Agenda for meetings are prepared and made available to members so that their discussions are better coordinated. This approach enhances better discussion and easy decision making at meetings.
2. Scheduling meetings is a critical management approach for successful meetings. Unscheduled meetings takes participants unawares and thus, inhibit better preparations for decision making. It is therefore very pertinent to schedule meetings so as to enhance effective decision making.
3. The cost involvement for organizational meetings must be kept at optimum level in order to keep low the percentage of operational costs. Some meetings are not necessary and thus, they constitute cost to organisations. Meetings should be hld only when they become realy important and decisions are seen to be critical for the success of the sector. Unnecessary meetings come with unnecessary costs.
4. The success of any meeting depends on the strategies adopted in arriving at decisions at meetings. It is very important that result oriented strategies involving prioritization and trade-offs etc should be factored in decision strategies during meetings.
5. The leadership of the organisations in the sector should be committed to ensuring that meetings are better managed so as to encourage better decision making given the nature of the sector and its threats.
6. The study recommends that organizations should employ the best state of the art technology in the management of meetings. Some meetings may not necessarily be held physically in a hall or room, conferencing and virtual meetings are time and cost efficient. Contributions are impersonal and fear of physical contacts during deliberations are avoided.

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