

Minutes of FM Meetings in Swiss Hospitals – Worth a Look at

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: Effective communication is a prerequisite for a well-functioning Facility Management (FM) in any organisation. As part of formal communication structures, meetings are a powerful tool at the disposal of Facility Managers. Minute-taking is predominantly done in formal meetings and performs four essential functions: constitutional, historical, executive and progressive. This research looks at the structure and content of minutes taken in FM meetings in Swiss general hospitals. The aim is to provide a guideline for managers to analyse and, if applicable, improve meeting minutes and hence meetings they are responsible for.

Methodology: The research is based on a case study design. Data collection methods include document research. A total of 402 sets of minutes of FM department and division meetings amounting to 1420 pages have been analysed applying qualitative coding procedures.

Key findings: Even though the formal structure of the meetings is similar, the spectrum of their content varies. Predominantly the content provides passive information with little evidence that the meeting is used as a platform to piece together the knowledge and experience of several people advancing FM.

Intended impact of the study: Within FM and especially within the context of FM in hospitals meetings have not been looked at using the suggested methodology. It provides a unique insight on what minutes as historical evidence reveal of the meetings' purpose and provides food for thoughts for executives being responsible of meeting structure and content. The findings of this applied research and the method leading to them provide a guideline for FM executives, to analyse and, if applicable, to improve minute-taking practices and, critically, to improve their meetings. For instance, results indicating a predominant exchange of information among meeting participants whose areas of responsibilities due to the nature of FM have not so much common can lead to dissatisfaction of participants, as a large amount of meeting time is not directly addressed to their needs. Considering this, the findings enable to manage expectations, as knowing and if applicable proactively declaring that the purpose of the meeting is information exchange makes that procedure more tolerable for participants. Because in times of a tightening financial environment within the healthcare context, available resources such as meeting time must be used to their full extent.

Paper type: Research Paper

Keywords: Facility Management, organisational communication, meetings, healthcare

1 INTRODUCTION

The underlying research of this paper combines the specific setting of Facility Management (FM) in hospitals with elements of organisational communication. Hence, this introduction outlines the necessary background to orientate this research, starting with organisational communication.

The questions guiding this paper's research are:

How do minutes of FM meetings in general hospitals look?

What insights do they provide about the meetings content?

The methods used are based on a qualitative research approach using qualitative coding procedures to analyse meeting minutes, as explained in the upcoming methodology section of this paper. Firstly, a look at the corresponding literature is taken, followed by the methodology, a combined results and discussion chapter and the conclusion.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Conrad and Poole (2011) define organisational communication, also known as corporate communication, as “a process through which people, acting together, create, sustain and manage meanings through the use of verbal and nonverbal signs and symbols within a particular context”. Communication within an organisation has several functions: control, motivation, emotional expression and information (Robbins, 2000). Rogers and Rogers (1976) argue that the behaviour of individuals in organisations is best understood from a communication point of view. These authors further characterise effective communication as a prerequisite for implementing organisational strategies as well as for managing daily activities through people. These sources are many years old but provide valid content until today. The commanding (Conrad and Poole, 2011) or also called directing (Miles, 2012) part of management tasks involves activities including leading, motivating and communicating with staff as individuals, groups or the organisation as a whole (Miles, 2012). Papa et al. (2008) state that communication is not just a tool for managerial control, but that all of the human processes defining an organisation arise from communication, pointing out that “the linkages and connections among subsystems depend on communication and information flow” (p. 109). This is supported by Mosley and Pietri (2015) stating that to be effective, organisations must utilize two critical linkages to sustain positive intra-organisational relationships: open and clear communications. This linkage argument is taken further by Modaff et al. (2016) who identify three distinct communication functions essential for organisational systems: 1. *constitutive function* by creating connections and acting as a binder allowing the coordination of activities and integrating of the elements into a whole; 2. *adaptive function* through referring to a constant information exchange between the organisational system and the environment to adapt appropriately to environmental change; 3. *maintenance function* as it provides information throughout organisational systems to ensure a dynamic state.

Another perspective on organisational communication is provided by Byers (1997), who points out that in today's society, effective leadership is seen as a key ingredient in determining organisational success. The author further states that regardless of which leadership theory one subscribes to, communication always plays a central role in the leadership process. Hence, it can be concluded that it is a leadership task to facilitate purposeful communication for the benefit of an organisation's success, as oftentimes, when communication is poor, people lack motivation and will react negatively. Hansen (2004) states that what frustrates managers the most is poor communication. Communication fundamentals include that communication flows vertically or laterally (Robbins and Judge, 2010); vertical communication pertains to

downward and upward communication, referring to the different hierarchical levels an organisation has. Lateral communication takes place among peer groups at the same hierarchical level (Robbins and Judge, 2010). Communication channels used can be formal or informal and can be classified in three ways: oral, written and non-verbal communication (Robbins and Judge, 2010). Formal communication is enabled by the setup of formal organisational and authority structure (Jian, 2013) and characterised as a type of verbal presentation or document intended to share information that meets planned and established professional rules, standards and processes and avoids using slang terminology (formal communication, 2018). Informal communication refers to emergent, unofficial, and unsanctioned communication among organisational members through informal social contacts (Jian, 2013). To process information, the managers have five communication channels at their disposal: mail (documented), telephone (purely verbal), unscheduled meeting (informal face-to-face), scheduled meeting (formal face-to-face), and tour (observational) (Mintzberg, 1971), for today, email (documented) and meetings via electronic channels need to be added.

This research focuses on scheduled meetings (formal, face-to-face), which consume a substantial part of managers' resources (Mintzberg, 2015, Mintzberg, 1971, Romano and Nunamaker, 2001, Allen et al., 2016). Rogelberg et al. (2006) state that a typical manager spends about six hours per week in scheduled meetings. Meinecke and Lehmann-Willenbrock (2015) state that this channel provides a window into social dynamics in the workplace. Drucker (1967) puts forward a striking definition of a meeting's purpose: "We meet because people holding different jobs have to cooperate to get a specific task done". Hence, scheduled meetings can be a platform for productive collaboration across disciplines (Romano and Nunamaker, 2001). But, despite this reasonable definition, numerous studies, as highlighted in an extensive literature review by Romano and Nunamaker (2001), reveal that this communication channel is often considered to be costly, unproductive and dissatisfying, and employees evaluate almost half of their meetings as ineffective (Schell, 2010, Lehmann-Willenbrock et al., 2016). Meeting minutes are often a result of formal meetings. They provide historical reference of an organisation's business, reducing the possibility of disagreement of what was discussed and decided, when and by whom (Waibel et al., 2001, Stanton, 2004). Buchanan (2000) summarises the value of minutes poignantly: "A good set of minutes can give the group a sense of progress; incoherent jottings [...] leave everyone bewildered." (p.94-95).

The term Facility Management (FM) (also known as Facilities Management) is defined in an industry-neutral way as "integration of processes within an organisation to maintain and develop the agreed services which support and improve the effectiveness of its primary activities" (CEN, 2006). As primary activities differ depending on an organisation's purpose, the term FM is used in a broad range of contexts and contains many different supporting services. Regarding the organisation "hospital", Gerber et al. (2014) offers a clear and comprehensive definition and differentiation of the non-medical support services in hospitals. This information facilitates a common understanding of the type and scope of the services (Gerber and Klauser, 2015), as displayed in figure 1.

Non-medical Support Services = Facility Services		
<p>Immovables Property Administration Space (Accommodation) Operating and Preventative Maintenance of Land, Site and Lot</p> <p>Outdoors Operating and Preventative Maintenance of Additional Space on Site Maintenance & Operation of additional Areas on Site Parking Lot Operation & Maintenance</p> <p>Infrastructure</p>	<p>Movables Medical Movables (according to ordinance of medical products, e.g. patient beds) Operation & Maintenance of medical Movables</p> <p>Non-medical Movables (i.e. movables, planting & room decoration, artworks, transport fleet) Operation & Maintenance of non-medical Movables</p> <p>Recyclables & Utilities Disposal and Recycling Supply & Disposal of Utilities</p> <p>ICT Services</p>	<p>Hygiene Cleaning Reprocessing of Core Process Devices</p> <p>Procurement</p> <p>Safety & Security Health & Safety Security</p> <p>Tactical Resource Management</p>
		<p>Hotel Services Reception & Contact Center Catering & Vending Services Owner-operated Kiosks & Shops Event Management Supply of Workwear & Textiles Childcare Library Non-medical Patient Care Management of Staff Accommodations</p> <p>Logistics Relocation People Transport Goods Transport & Distribution Warehousing & incoming Goods Inspection Mail / Courier Services Documents Management Signage Services</p>

Figure 1: FM in hospitals – service allocation, source: based on Gerber and Klauser (2015)

The work from Gerber (2014) defines what can be put under the umbrella of FM in hospitals, but does not elucidate upon how FM is organisationally structured within individual hospital organisations. There are no mandatory standards of how to implement the FM part in the hospital’s organisation. Furthermore, the term FM is not consistently used in most hospitals organisational structure (Honegger et al., 2016). Raab (2001) mentions the fact that structures and organisation forms are the way they are for historical reasons and that they do not always match the current requirements. However, FM accounts for up to 25-40% of a hospital’s total costs (Abel and Lennerts, 2006, Jensen, 2008). Hence, out of the CHF 30 billion of healthcare cost caused by Swiss hospitals (BFS, 2018), about 60-75% is consumed by a hospital’s core activities, medical and care leaving the substantial amount of up to approximately CHF 11 billion in the responsibility of hospitals FM. That alone justifies why a closer look at how FM processes are structured and thus FM services are delivered in hospitals, in addition to what part organisational communication plays in the setting of FM in hospitals.

3. METHODOLOGY

The inquiry strategy is based on a multiple case study. The unit of analysis / the case = communication activities within a hospital’s FM department; the sampling rationale for the cases is rooted in the general care hospital population in German speaking Switzerland, where there are single and multiple site hospitals. The case sample consists of case 1= One (1) single-sited hospital and case 2 = One (1) with three (3) sites. Data collection includes non-publicly accessible minutes of diverse meetings, taking place within the two cases. The sampling of the minutes was purposive. Access to the minutes focusing on department, division and sub-division meetings was obtained via the heads of FM, acting as the gatekeeper for the two cases. The minutes were taken by persons other than the researcher, which classifies them as “secondary data” (Saunders et al., 2016). To acquire rich data on these, a whole year - at the point of data collection this was 2016 - was looked at. To overcome the heterogeneity of the FM department’s organisational structures and to guarantee their confidentiality, the individual organisational structure of the two cases is subsumed into four major FM disciplines: catering, housekeeping, infrastructure / engineering, procurement & logistics. Figure 2 shows how many minute documents within these disciplines are analysed.

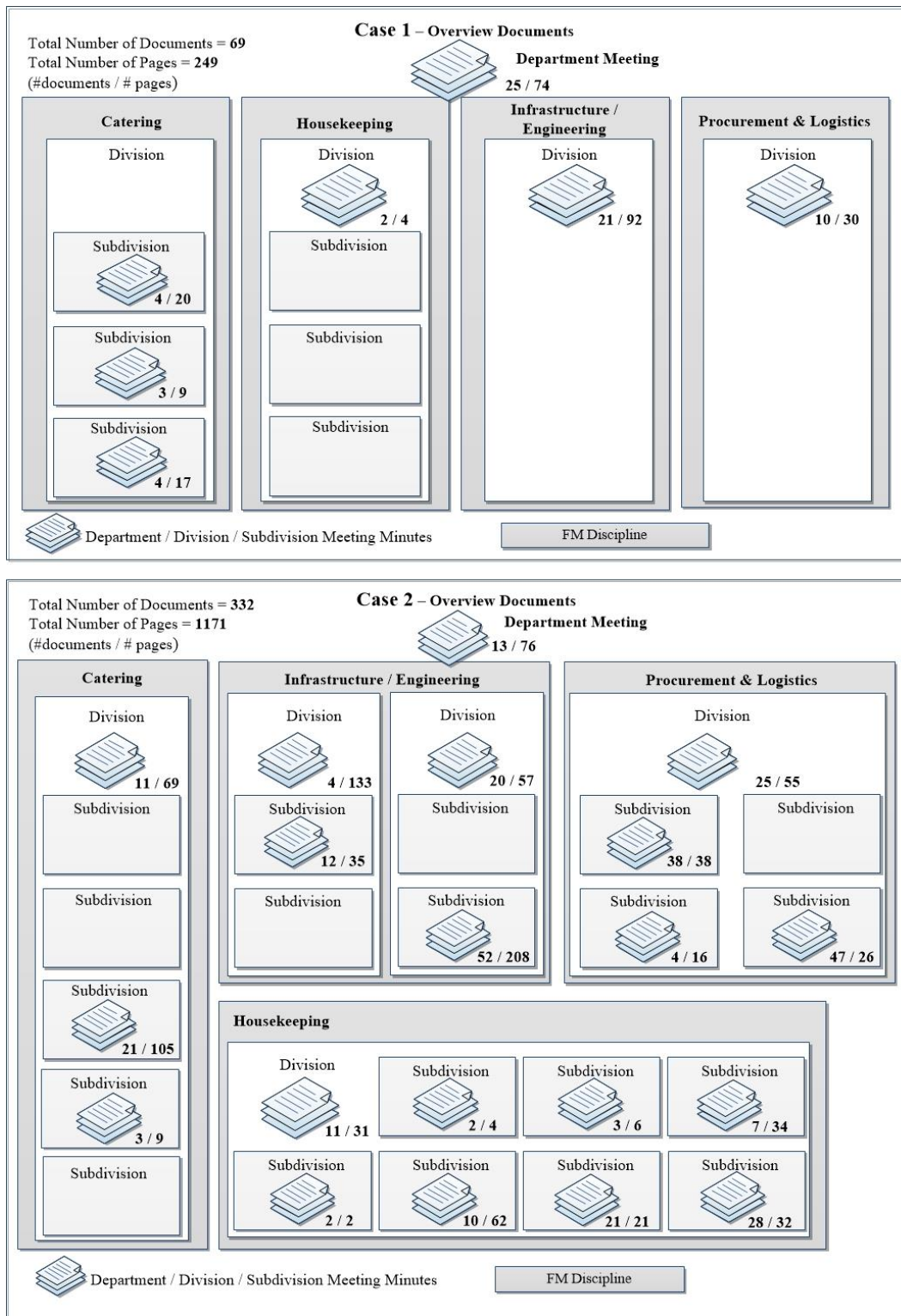


Figure 2: Overview analysed documents in case 1 and case 2

Over the two cases, a total of 402 documents with a total of 1420 pages are analysed. Some sub-divisions did not provide minutes. This is due to their communication procedures, where such documents are not produced. Data analysis is based on rigorous qualitative coding procedures, primarily guided by Saldana (2016) and Flick (2009). Coding was led by a predefined list of categories (= *a priori* codes). Their predefinition was led by the theoretical

background with respect to organisational communication, meetings and use of minutes, and by the structure of the cases' FM organisation. These categories were complemented by subcategories based on codes which emerged during the coding process. The coding list developed is visualised in table 1, categories with an * were used in all FM disciplines.

Table 1 Categories used to code documents

Category Name	Description
Adaptive (<i>a priori</i>)	Adaptive Function: referring to a constant information exchange between the organisational system and the environment to suitably adapt to environmental change (Modaff et al., 2016). For this analysis, this is specified as content from the hospital and its external environment impacting the FM that meeting participants can not necessarily retrieve themselves, content they need to know to carry out their tasks and maintain their processes.
Hospital Environment	Information from the hospital presented by the department / division / subdivision manager
Department / Division Environment	Information passed on from department level, which is found in division and subdivision minutes, presented by the division head and subdivision head.
Constitutive (<i>a priori</i>)	Constitutive Function: creating connections and acting as a binder allowing the coordination of activities and integrating the elements as a whole (Modaff et al., 2016). For this analysis, this is specified as the coordination of activities taking place within the meeting and is thereby an active part in contrast to the passive meeting action of merely passing on information.
Maintenance (<i>a priori</i>)	Maintenance Function: as it provides information throughout organisational systems to ensure a dynamic steady state (Modaff et al., 2016). For this analysis, this incorporates information exchange within FM - nice to know but not explicitly necessary for participants (information receiver) to maintain their processes.
<i>lateral</i>	Information presented by division / sub-division heads to the meeting participants present, which are mostly at same hierarchical level. Therefore, it is classified as lateral information.
Catering	FM discipline including: kitchen, restaurant, event management
Housekeeping	FM discipline including: cleaning, supply of work-wear and textiles, staff accommodation, reception services
Infrastructure / Engineering	FM discipline including: site maintenance, operation and maintenance of non/medical and medical devices, security
Division Information*	Contains information about current projects, responsibilities and tasks that are being carried out within the respective division and are dealt with in division meetings.
Staff issues*	Refers to information regarding staff decisions, allocations, personal issues
Subdivision * Information	Contains information about current projects, responsibilities and tasks that are being carried out within the respective subdivision and are dealt with in division meetings.

Purchasing & Logistics	FM discipline including: goods procurement, transport and distribution, warehousing, document management
Investments (emerged code)	Contains information directly related to investment decisions
Projects (emerged code)	Contains information directly related to purchasing projects
Miscellaneous	FM disciplines not considered (due to a similar adaption of the two cases) but which deliver content in the analysed documents.
Staff Issues	Refers to information on staff decisions, allocations, personal issues
Top down	Information from department / division / sub-division head (meeting chairs) classified as overarching information of interest to all participants.

Every item of information within the documents was coded accordingly. This led to categories of data, then to themes and concepts and thus to assertions and conclusions. In order to demonstrate the robustness of these categories, table 2 displays examples of data supporting their development based on minutes from catering. The distinction of different items of information was made due to their presentation in the minutes (e.g. as bullet points) and with the researcher's background knowledge. The language is German, *italics* represent the English translation.

Table 2: Demonstration of data supporting the categories – *example catering division*

Category Name	Data supporting category = minute excerpts
Adaptive	
Hospital Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Die vorliegenden Unternehmensziele 2016 wurden von der GL verabschiedet. <i>The hospital board approved the present corporate goals 2016.</i>
Department / Division Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grippeimpfung Es haben sich in dieser Saison doppelt so viele Mitarbeitende gegen Grippe impfen lassen, als im Vorjahr. <i>Flu jab: This year, twice as many employees have been vaccinated against the influenza virus than in the previous year.</i> Wer neuer Verwaltungsratspräsident wird, steht noch nicht fest. <i>The new Chairman of the Board of Directors has not yet been decided on.</i>
Constitutive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Am 9.5.2016 findet die ERFA Tagung KAPO/Spital statt. Gibt es Themen aus dem Bereich? <i>On 9.5.2016, meeting xyz takes place; are there any topics for it from the department?</i> Die Auswertung der neuen Pikettzeiten muss erarbeitet werden, bis wann erhält xyz einen Vorschlag? <i>The evaluation of the on-call times must be worked out; by when will xyz receive a proposal?</i>
Maintenance	
<i>lateral</i>	
Division Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Voraussichtliche Eröffnung neues Restaurant Juni 2018. <i>Expected opening of new restaurant June 2018</i>

Staff issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Das Probezeitgespräch mit xyz wurde geführt und war beidseitig sehr positiv. <i>The probationary interview with xyz was conducted with a positive result on both sides.</i>
Subdivision Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Im Restaurant wurden erstmals über 600 Essen, alleine vom warmen Buffet verkauft. <i>For the first time, the restaurant has sold over 600 meals from the warm buffet alone.</i> • Das Glace Sortiment 2016 wurde für alle 3 Standorte definiert. <i>The 2016 ice cream assortment has been defined for all 3 sites.</i>
Top down	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ziele 2016 für den Bereich werden in einer separaten Sitzung vom 14.1.2016 besprochen. <i>The 2016 department goals will be discussed in a separate meeting on 14.1.2016</i>

4. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

With reference to the common schematic representation of the structure of meeting minutes, it can be said that the documents analysed do contain the required formal elements: heading, participants, approval of previous minutes and mentioning of the next meeting. However, regarding the nature of their content, many more maintenance elements, represented as items of information, than constitutive elements, represented as hints of discussion with conclusions reached within the meetings were detected. This can be seen in figure 3, displaying level 1 minutes (department meetings) itemised by minute content and also in figure 4, displaying the same itemisation in level 2 minutes (division meetings). The displayed case 1 and case 2 refer to the two samples as introduced in figure 2. These results contradict literature stating that scheduled meetings should be a platform for productive collaboration across disciplines (Romano and Nunamaker, 2001), especially as maintenance elements contain information exchange within FM that is “nice to know” but not explicitly necessary for all meeting participants to maintain their processes. Figure 3 also displays the minutes itemised by FM disciplines. Division meetings have not been itemised per FM discipline as they focus on just one discipline, meaning their respective division such as catering or cleaning. The results differ across the cases, but infrastructure / engineering content consumes many items, which reflects the complex nature of this discipline.

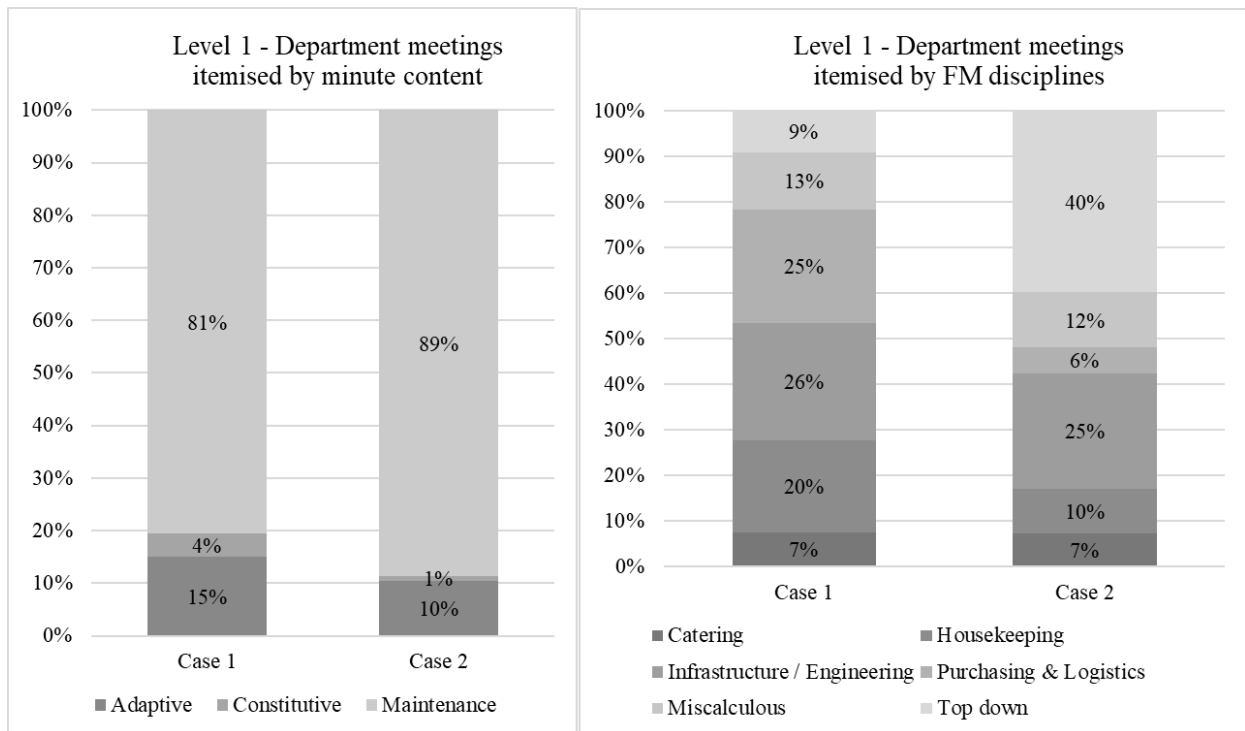


Figure 3: Minutes of department meetings itemised by content and FM disciplines

The literature section stated that employees evaluate almost half of their meetings as ineffective (Schell, 2010, Lehmann-Willenbrock et al., 2016). Employees sitting in such FM meetings expecting a sense of cooperation will certainly evaluate the meeting negatively, whereas clarification on meeting purpose and managing expectations improves meeting perception and hence the use of meetings as such.

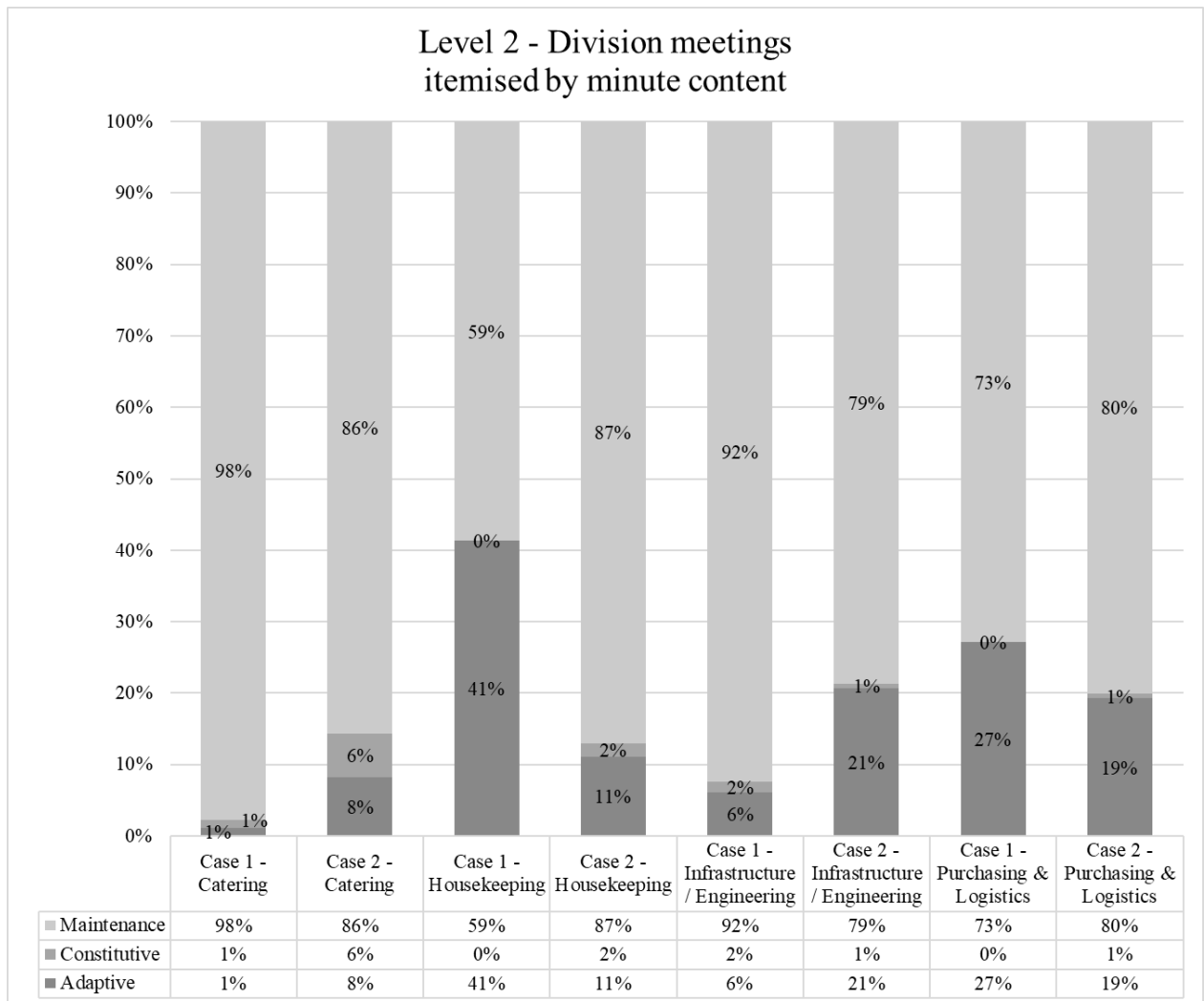


Figure 4: Minutes of division meetings itemised by content

These results are based on a total of 3474 codes extracted and hence itemised out of the minute documents.

5. CONCLUSION

This research set out to systematically analyse minutes produced in FM meetings taking place in Swiss general hospitals. Findings show that minutes predominantly display maintenance information and only few constitutive elements. Despite the constitutive function of meetings being the one element that uses the collaboration potential of meeting participants for the benefit of FM. The findings are based on a case study and are therefore assertions and not generalisations. Nevertheless, they and the method leading to them, provide a guideline for FM executives to analyse and if applicable improve minute taking practices and, critically, to improve their meetings. In times of a tightening financial environment within the healthcare context, available resources such as meeting time must be used to their full extent. Future research can include to determine structures of FM department meetings specifically addressing the participants diverse backgrounds across FM disciplines.

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