

Holding Meetings - Meetings Interactive System (eMeeting)

The Tender Board in collaboration with the eGovernment Authority

The Tender Board is an independent body, established by a Royal Decree on the 9th January 2003. The Tender Board has a clear agenda regarding setting up a strict regulatory mechanism that would ensure fairness, transparency and an equal opportunity for all. The aims of the Tender Board are clearly specified in the Legislative Decree No.36 issued on 9th October 2002, with respect to regulating government tenders and purchases. The Tender Board aims to protect public funds and preventing the influence of self-interest on the board's decisions. Moreover, the Tender Board aims to achieve maximum level of economic efficiency with regard to purchasing goods at competitive and fair prices; encouraging integrity, competitiveness, fair treatment and an equal opportunity to all contractors and suppliers, as well as achieving total transparency in all aspects of the government purchasing procedures.

Source: Tender Board website

In pursuit of achieving transparency, integrity, justice and competitiveness, the Board of Directors of the Tender Board holds a meeting once a week. In the meeting, they discuss matters related to tenders and bidding such as requests for tenders and new bids, requests for extensions, and grievance requests in order to ensure that they conform to the laws and regulations of the Board. The meetings are held in the presence of:

- Chairman of the Board
- General secretary of the Board
- Assistant Secretary-General
- Legal Adviser
- Members of the Board of Directors (8 members)
- 'Meeting Minutes' Clerk

Thus, the total participants are thirteen people.

The eGovernment plays an important role in developing the government's performance. In addition, the meetings that are held periodically are used to make decisions concerning government projects as well as other projects that affect the government's work procedures. These decisions are made by executive and non-executive directors, the senior management, and the work teams. Therefore, the Interactive Meeting System (eMeeting) has been developed by the eGovernment Authority, in order to create more efficient and effective meeting environments through the use of electronic systems and Information Technology (IT).

The Interactive meetings system (eMeeting) is a sophisticated electronic system for holding meetings using information and communications technologies (ICT). This electronic system is the first of its kind in the Kingdom of Bahrain to electronically hold and manage meetings. The system provides an advanced solution for holding meetings without the need for the physical presence of participants in the meeting. The participants can have access to all the required meeting items electronically via the developed system, where they can review the agendas and all the related reports, give comments and exchange letters and emails via smart mobile devices.

This document discusses a case study on the application of the interactive meeting system (eMeeting). The document shows and compares the traditional way of holding a meeting before applying the system. It explains the benefits of using the system in relation to the direct and indirect cost of the meetings.

Meeting style before applying the system

In preparation for the weekly meeting, the procuring entities send all related documents to the Board's Technical Evaluation Section, which in turn hands it over to the correspondents to make the required copies (two files for each participant).

Each file contains approximately six hundred fifty papers with different sizes, for example, but not limited to:

- Letters and applications relevant to the tenders (new applications, extensions, grievances, etc.)
- Engineering drawings
- Specifications evidences
- Maps
- Along with the other documents which include description of goods or services required by the tender.

Files are prepared on Tuesday of each week after the official working hours, which made it necessary to make special arrangements with the members of the Board of Directors to send their correspondents in order to receive the files. As for the internal members, the files are distributed among them the following day. It should be noted that the process of preparing and delivering the files used to take a number of additional hours charged by correspondents in the end of each month.

The members review the files before Thursday so that the necessary actions and decisions can be made during the meeting. It used to be a burden on the members due to the time constraints compared to the size of the documents required to be reviewed. The burden increases when files are processed and completed on Wednesday as other important documents are sent by one of the authorities on the same day and should be reviewed. It should be noted that the files required to be reviewed are not completed at once and there are cases in which the authorities send the documents in several stages until before the day of the meeting. In these cases, the updated documents will be printed, faxed or distributed on Thursday before the meeting begins. This might lead to a delay in taking the required decisions with regard to these projects until the members of the Board review the documents.

After the meeting, a copy of each archive document is retained. The clerk records the meeting minutes that capture the essential decisions made during the meeting regarding the matters that have been discussed. The meeting minutes will be reviewed by the members in the beginning of the next meeting.

It is clear from the above there are many challenges associated with the traditional way of preparing for the meetings as well as the way they are held, which include the following:

- Cost of printing; where 16900 sheets are printed per month.
- In some cases the documents were not complete before the meeting, and therefore are not distributed among the members to be reviewed before the meeting.
- Difficulty of taking the precautionary measures necessary for the confidentiality of information
- Difficulty in obtaining documents and documentations that have been discussed in previous meetings when needed.

- Lack of making prior discussions before the meeting.

Method of Conducting Meetings – Effect of the System

Following the implementation of the system, the process of printing documents was replaced with smart tablet devices. When authorities send the required documents, concerned members in the Tender Board scan and upload these documents into the system which then sends notifications to notify users. Similarly, when updating any of these documents, each authority uploads the up-to-date documents and notifies users. Hence, it is not required for correspondents to visit the Tender Board in order to receive files. Such step contributes in reducing the printing costs and logistical arrangements of the correspondents.

Users may access the documents and prepare for the meeting from anywhere - through the use of wireless networks (Wi-Fi) or other networks such as Third Generation (3G) and Fourth Generation (4G) mobile networks. In addition, users may record their notes in order to discuss them during the meeting as well as add public or private comments; public comments are available and sent across to all members. Furthermore, each member can send immediate and individual correspondences to other members.

When meetings are completed; ‘Meeting Minutes’ clerk processes the minutes, uploads them in the system and incorporates them into the agenda of the next meeting. The minutes’ document includes all of the decisions that have been executed.

Consequently, the system assisted in numerous aspects such as the following:

- Reducing costs of printing, fuel, overtime hours and paper shredders.
- Possessing the possibility of meeting members at any time and place - regardless of time difference and geographical locations.
- Immediately posting the latest updates.

- Managing documents related to the meetings - allowing easy retrieval of the past and current meetings as well as agendas.
- Ensuring data protection with the utilization of passwords, fingerprints and storing files in an encrypted form.

The benefits of using the interactive meetings system (eMeeting)

The following is an analysis of the benefits estimated in Bahraini dinar per year where the saving amount on the direct and indirect costs level was calculated before and after using the interactive meeting system (eMeeting). This analysis is represented in the following table where the savings percentage stood at 90%.

| Value-added Element | Cost of traditional procedure | Cost of e-procedure | Amount of Financial Saving | Amount of Saving |
|--|--------------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Direct cost (Paper- Printing- equipments maintenance) | 24,448 | 2,351 | 22,097 | 90% |
| Indirect cost (productivity of human resources - fuel subsidy - cost of archiving papers) | 13 | 0 | 13 | 100% |