

The Conduct of meetings

4995

Introduction

1. Why meetings at all - A single individual can get a lot

more done on his own than in consultation;

A letter, a memo or a phone call not enough?

True - great many meetings are a waste of time.

Someone has written:

"Many long-established committees are little more than memorials to dead problems. It would probably save no end of members time if every committee had to discuss its own dissolution once a year, and put up a case if it felt it should continue for another 12 months. If this requirement did nothing else it would at least refocus the minds of the committee members on their purposes and objectives."

And yet

Man is a social animal. People come together at regular and frequent intervals and in larger gatherings from time to time.

If there are no meetings, say of members belonging to an organisation, their attachment to the organisation to which they belong will be small. Or _____

Organisations are held together by face-to-face meetings. A meeting will perform functions that will never be taken over by telephones, teleprinters, duplicating machines or telephsion

2. Six Functions of Meetings:

six functions that meetings will always perform better than even the most sophisticated device:

one - In the simplest and most basic way a meeting defines the team or the group. Everyone is able to look around and perceive the whole group and sense the collective identity of which he or she forms a part.

two - A meeting is the place where the group revises, updates and adds to what it knows as a group. Every group creates its own pool of shared knowledge, experience or judgement. A group of people meeting together can often produce better ideas, plans and decisions

than can a single individual, or a number of individuals working alone. The meeting can of course also produce worse outputs or none at all, if it is a bad meeting.

Three - A meeting helps every individual understand both the collective aim of the group and the way in which his own and everyone else's work can contribute to the group's success.

Four - A meeting creates (or should create) in all present a commitment to the decisions it makes and the objectives it pursues. Generally a decision of the group is binding on all present - even those who had opposed.

Five - In the world of management for instance a meeting is very often the only occasion where the team or group actually exists sees the head of the department as the leader rather than as someone to whom one reports.

Six - A meeting is a status arena. There is a feeling of being "someone" by being the member of a group.

3. Types of Meetings

Three broad categories

Public meetings - speaker or speakers and others mainly listen

Council meetings - seminars, symposia or larger groups of an organisation eg. general body. A ~~few~~ speaker or a few speakers. Others listen but can come in with questions and comments

Committee meetings - Around 10 to 20 present. All of whom more or less speak on an equal footing under the guidance and control of a Chairman.

The third one is really the functional meeting that carries on the business of the organisation. We are mainly concerned with this. But ~~with~~ there are common points to cover all three.

4. Preparing for Meetings

Fixing the date and time - Consult Chairman
or President and those whose presence at the
meeting essential (does not apply to organisations
which have fixed days and time for such meetings.)

Convenient time - important for voluntary
organisations - give people time to get to
venue after office hours.

Adequate notice - give allowance for postal
delays ; people have other engagements too;
telephone follow up useful.

Accessible Venue - important. Proximity to
Railway Station or Bus stop. Not everyone has a
car or scooter.

5. Agenda or Business

Two ways - Advance notice to warn members of
scheduled date and time. Followed by Agenda.

Period of notice - make sure bye-laws don't
prescribe any specific period.

Order of Agenda - Generally Confirmation

of Minutes of last meeting. Matters arising therefrom. Go on to list major items of agenda. Last item "Any other business...." Agenda order not sacrosanct. Can be changed at meeting after taking sense of house.

But when drawing up agenda remember:

- a. Early part of meeting tends to be more lively and creative than the end of it. Items needing mental energy, bright ideas and clear heads, better put up high on the list.

An item of great interest and concern for everyone could be ~~held back for xxxxxxxx~~ put in the middle - to cope with attention lag which usually sets in after the first 15 or 20 minutes. Keep trivial items last e.g. resolution re. Bank Account. If controversial issues involved good to bring in first ~~first~~ issues that unifies and not divides. Ideal - apportion time itemwise.

Or at least ending time of meeting.

Resolutions: Circulate draft with notice if possible.

Or at least keeping Working draft available.

Background papers: - excellent practice. Must be
be brief and not verbose. Also in simple language .

Alternatively - aide memoires

Papers can be marked : "For information" or
"For Decision" as the case may be.

Physical arrangements:

Recommended - tables and chairs - the hollow
square.

Don't neglect essentials - e.g. drinking water,
pins and clips, pencils, scribbling pads

Ensure acoustics - minimise outside noise levels
if room not air conditioned. If it is don't
make it uncomfortably cold. Not everyone wears
a jacket.

Papers - relevant documents and files, extra
copies of the agenda; the signature book, the
previous minutes(a few extra copies as well)
extra copies of draft resolutions and the rules

The meeting begins

Starting on time ... public meeting formula
listing late arrivals!
 Checking quorum

Taking the Chair - normally the President
 sometimes (when an organisation has no
 President) the members present propose and
 second someone to the Chair.

The Hon. Secretary normally conducts the
 proceedings.

Begins with Minutes - brings to notice objections
 except when Condolence resolution.
 received, if any.

Moves on to other business.

Resolutions

ideal if circulated in advance. Otherwise
 distribute copies of draft.

Amendments to resolutions - not those which
 negative main resolution

President's right to rule resolution out of
 order.

Voting

Standing or raising hands

Recorded - secret

Chairman's right - re: secret balloting -
circumstances.

Role of Chairman

Four types

Strong man: - see the chair as license to
dominate to harangue, to bully.

Indifferent - who goes along without giving any
kind of leadership. He nods with approval at
everyone who makes a point.

The lazy chairman - very indecisive. Every time
someone disagrees he takes it as an excuse to
post-pone decisions.

Weak Chairman

Who lets the meeting degenerate into a fish
market.

The ideal Chairman

Restricts his or her natural tendency to talk
too much. Generally confines to a sentence
or two.

Should consider himself as servant of the
group not as master.

His role thus: assisting the group towards
the best conclusions or discussion decision
in the most efficient manner as possible.

Move the discussion forward by being fair to everyone and not appearing to take sides in a discussion.

This will make it possible for everyone to accept his rulings even if they disagree.

By appointing time for items to make certain all items done justice.

At the end of each item chairman should briefly summarise what has been agreed on.

Dealing with people:

- A) Control the garrulous
- b) Draw out the silent
 - i) Silence of diffidence
 - ii) Silence of hostility
- c) Protect the weak
- d) Encourage clash of ideas
- e) discourage cross talk
- f) come to senior people last.

Secretary

Issue notices

prepares agenda - aide memoires

keeps documents and materials relevant to agenda available

draft minutes

~~The Secretary~~

Records discussions

Carries on in-between meetings

Carried out administrative chores

Implements decisions of meetings

generally functions under instructions of
President

Minutes drafting

Minutes v/d proceedings
explain difference.
