

## Managing better meetings

Have you ever thought that you could get so much more done if it weren't for the number of meetings that you attend?

A meeting is a group of people that keep the minutes but lose the hours!

A committee is seen by some as a group of the unwilling, picked from the unfit to do the unnecessary.

Poor management of meetings can lead to loss of energy and motivation.

Common complaints on meetings are:

There are too many meetings

Meetings last too long

Meetings fail to provide decisions or outcomes

The wrong people are attending

They are badly run

They are held for the sake of having a meeting

There is inadequate preparation

Too much paperwork

They start late

They lack direction

They are used to rubber stamp decisions already made

There are inadequate opportunities to participate

Hidden objectives are brought to meetings

### MEETINGS SHOULD HAVE A CLEAR PURPOSE

- To cover something new
- To build morale
- To tackle difficult decisions
- To brief a team on a situation
- To solve a problem
- To consult
- To exchange information
- To express grievances or let off steam

Meetings can INFORM (factual information given) PERSUADE (considering changes to policy) PROBLEM SOLVE (an issue is tackled) DECIDE (take decisions).

It is the role of the chairperson to

- Tell the meeting what needs to be done (INFORM) – dominant role
- Sell them ideas (PERSUADE) – dominant role
- Consult them over a problem (PROBLEM SOLVE – listening role
- Involve them in making a decision (DECIDE) – listening role

Of course some meetings contain many items and each item could command a different role.

### **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

Before any meeting it is vital that its purpose is considered. Is the meeting the best way to carry out this purpose? Other forms of communication are available (memos, phone calls and individual meetings). How should it be delivered – style, presentation, support papers, prior information? Who needs to attend?

The Agenda

Purpose:

- Sets clear objectives and priorities
- Tells people what pre-meeting information is needed
- Includes all relevant items
- Provides a logical structure
- May indicate timings

Influences on the order of items

- Put routine first
- Keep in mind convenience for those in attendance
- Cover difficult items when you are all fresh
- Urgent first and important later
- Remember concentration falls after about 40 – 60 minutes

### **THE AGENDA FORMAT**

- 1 Title of group, date and place of meeting
- 2 Apologies for absence
- 3 Minutes of the last meeting
- 4 Matters arising
- 5 Items on the agenda
- 6 AOB (Any other business)
- 7 Date and time of next meeting

Where should the meeting take place? Consider the environment, seating layout, equipment for presentations.

- (a) Chairperson sits facing the meeting group at desk (screen behind them)
- (b) Chair separate on one side of a table – remainder sit on other 3 sides
- (c) Chair faces group with no barrier
- (d) No structure – informal group chat

## CONDUCTING THE MEETING

Chair skills – setting the tone – get there first and introduce new members

Outline the purpose of the session and keep rules of debate (no interruptions, chair is in control and decision is final – aim to reach a consensus but if this fails a clear majority. Decisions are accepted by all.

Develop discussion. Maintain neutrality and ensure fair time for all sides. Draw out contributions via questioning.

Summarising to indicate progress (or lack of it); to re-direct or re-focus discussion; to tie up a point and lead into next; highlight significant points; clarify misunderstandings.

Keep meeting to time and conclude offering thanks for contributions.

### The Secretary

Planning and preparation – distribution of information and advising members.

Formal duties: to read minutes of previous meeting/correspondence/reports/apologies for absence/drafting motions/making documentation available.

Produces minutes that are produced quickly, accurate, unambiguous indicating actions that are required by whom.

### Members

Should ensure they are fully briefed beforehand/ attend regularly and punctually/ participate fully and openly/cooperating to achieve objectives.

Use listening and teamwork skills and avoid a 'hidden' agenda not talking too much or side-tracking.

Note what needs to be done and take agreed action.

### The Minutes

These should be accurate, concise and produced promptly.