

Ivanovic, Slobodan; Galicic, Vlado; Susnjar, Nikola

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LEADING EFFECTIVE MEETINGS IN A HOSPITALITY ORGANIZATION

Slobodan Ivanovic
Vlado Galicic
Nikola Susnjar
University of Rijeka, Croatia¹

Abstract:

Today's business environment demands of the individual manager to lead effective meetings. This is a skill which has to be studied and to be used and constantly optimized in order to keep the team focused on the goals that were set. Meetings keep track of a teams and the organizations goals that are being met or not being met. The specific focus of a certain meeting depends on what on what is to be achieved, whether that be setting goals or keeping evidence of what is being done, and to do this one needs the proper information to lead it correctly and efficiently.

Key words: meetings, conflicts, leaders, meeting techniques, team resistance.

MANAGING MEETING PROBLEMS AND CONFLICT

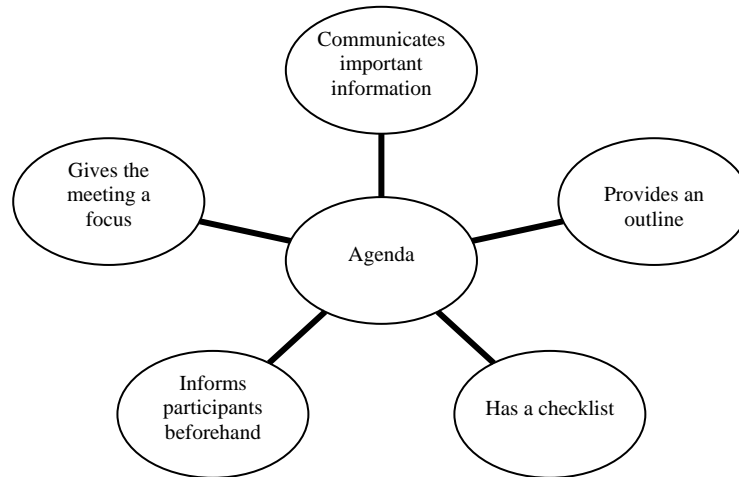
You will be able to stop or at least minimize most of the usual meeting problems by careful planning and by developing and enforcing ground rules; however, some issues may arise despite the best planning and meeting processes. All meeting leaders and facilitators must be prepared to handle problems in ways that will not interfere with the meeting objectives or those of the broader organization.

The primary responsibilities of a meeting leader are to plan the meeting, provide the content, anticipate problems, and ensure process facilitation. Fulfilling the last responsibility may call for the use of a skilled facilitator. A facilitator's primary is to ensure process problems do not interfere with the success of the meeting. Facilitators help to keep the meeting focused on the objectives and ensure redirection if it gets off track. Skilled facilitators should be prepared to (a) handle some of the most common

¹ **Slobodan Ivanovic**, Ph.D., Associate Professor, **Vlado Galicic**, Ph.D., Associate Professor, **Nikola Susnjar**, M.A., Assistant, Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality Management in Opatija, University of Rijeka, Croatia.

meeting problems, (b) manage meeting conflict, and (c) deal with issues arising from cultural differences.

In planning meeting we must know the agenda for the meeting. The meeting agenda is the first step towards making a meeting flow perfectly. The agenda should have the following:



Source: Author's

HANDLING SPECIFIC MEETING PROBLEMS

Common meeting problems and approaches to managing them:

Problem	Management approach
1. Confused objectives and expectations	Create an agenda that includes objectives as well as end products. Send agenda out ahead of time and review it at the beginning of the meeting.
2. Unclear roles and responsibilities	Communicate roles and responsibilities with agenda or establish at the beginning of the meeting.
3. Confusion between process and content	Separate the leader and the facilitator role. Call time-outs for process checks as soon as confusion is expressed.
4. Drifting off topic	Stop and review meeting objectives. If digression continues, suggest <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion continue after meeting • Topic be placed on agenda for next meeting • Topic be tabled, stored for future
5. Data confusion or overload	Control handouts to ensure all have the same version. Create simplified data packs specific to meeting exclude any data not directly related to the objectives of the meeting.
6. Repetition and wheel spinning	Regulate the discussion by reminding participants of the objectives being discussed.
7. Time violations	Start the meeting on time. Allowing delays at the beginning of meetings cuts efficiency and sends the message that the leader is flexible on time. Have a person to keep track of time. If time limits are violated time and again, re-evaluate agenda

	topics and limits on time as well as building in in-between time.
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Careful planning and purposeful facilitation will solve most of these process problems; however, problems may arise during meetings that are more liable to the personality of the leader and the participants in the meeting rather than the corporate culture or the issues being discussed.

There are two common problems in general that can cause problems with creativity which are negative thinking and resistance to the insights and ideas of others or changes of any kind. While a negative thinker can cause the meeting to run into chaos through analysis, negativity-criticizing ideas without any good reasons to back them up- is terrible for a brainstorming session, this type of action can undermine the creative thinking process and demoralize the participants. The leader of the meeting must address this negativity immediately and deal with it.

The best way to stop negativity is to establish a ground rule banning it. If no ground rules exist then the leader must ensure that they play a vital role in confronting the individual or individuals being negative. The person(s) may not even be aware that they are being negative.

However, if the person persists, the leader must call the person to the side and discuss what he/she is doing and correct their attitude, giving advice on how counterproductive the negative remarks are, and see if there may be something that is troubling the individual and is the cause for the negativity.

Resistance to the ideas of other people is similar to negativism, but not that obvious. Instead of giving a negative remark(s), the individual will usually give opposing ideas that conflict the ideas being presented. To some extent, the leader of the group should try to encourage opposing ideas and encourage someone during the meeting to be giving contrary ideas and insights to the presented ones to give a dose of inspiration on how something can be improved on.

However, once the leader sees that the individual is getting out of hand then leader should be stepping in and stopping them.

Techniques to manage resistance:

Technique	Answer to technique
Confirm	“What you are saying is...”
Understand	“I’m not quite sure i understand the idea you presented. Is there another way you would express it?”
Align	“How can we see the problem how you see it?”
Analyze	“Could you elaborate more on the issue...”

MANAGING MEETING CONFLICT

When the common meeting problems turn into direct conflict, perhaps because of personality or factions within the group, leaders may need to be more aggressive in

their tactics. They must be prepared to manage the conflicts and the people involved before they interrupt meeting progress and in some cases even intrude into the overall working environment.

Many approaches have been developed for managing conflict. One popular technique often used by negotiators calls on the individuals involved in the conflict to apply different levels of assertiveness and cooperation. They can approach the problem by competing, compromising, collaborating, avoiding, or accommodating.

Some common reasons for conflict include:

Conflict	Reason
Miscommunication	Selective listening, passive attitudes during briefings, misinformation etc.
Clashing perspectives	Personal experiences affect outcomes, Views/interpretations etc.
Varied values	Some issues may spark argument, sensitive themes etc.
Opinions	Personalities, experiences, values, outside influence etc.

Any of the five modes may be used to allow the meeting to progress. However, collaborating is usually the best choice to manage meeting conflict because it calls on both sides to work together toward a common goal. Both sides can assert their points of view while still cooperating at a high level. Neither side feels as if it is losing anything; thus, both sides feel as though they have won, which results in a much more positive atmosphere for the meeting.

Although compromising allows the meeting to continue as well, it is usually not a choice to use frequently or for longer term conflict. On the surface, a compromise seems to be a win for both sides to assert their opinions is only moderate and the level of cooperation is moderate as well. Therefore, neither side is likely to feel satisfied by the resolution; they will just accept it. If, however, a compromise is the only way to reach a resolution and will appease most of the group, it is better than the remaining three modes.

HIGH

	COMPETING	COLLABORATING
LEVEL OF ASSERTIVENESS		
LEVEL OF COOPERATION		COMPROMISING
LOW	AVOIDING	ACCOMMODATING

HIGH

Competing, avoiding, and accommodating may be appropriate in certain situations, but they will usually only work as a short-term fix. In the competing mode one party wins, but the other loses. Thus, it frustrates the loser and even affects the others in the meeting as well since they may side with the loser or at least feel sympathy for his or her position. Avoiding is not an optimal approach longer term since the problem is just buried and both sides feel frustrated. Neither side asserts the problems openly, and neither cooperates to achieve a solution. Avoiding the problem may work for a short time since it will allow the meeting to continue; but in a longer meeting, or in an organizational context, avoiding problems will usually result in an explosion or sabotage somewhere down the line.

Finally, in most organizational contexts, accommodating is not a good approach as long-term solution since the level of assertiveness is so low that the conflicting parties may feel as if their opinions are not of value. This approach will allow a meeting to progress since the level of cooperation is high, which will mean the atmosphere of the meeting will not be negatively affected in the short term. Also, in some cultural contexts, cooperation and avoiding conflict may be preferred. Anyone who has to be accommodating too often, however, will become resentful and may eventually withdraw from the group.

Leaders will find that they need to use all of these modes at one time or another to keep the meeting moving toward their goal; however, all but collaboration- and, if managed right, compromise- are short-term, quick fixes. If used over the long term, they can lead to dissension within an organization or with teams or any group holding a series of meetings.

If none of these modes seem best for the situation, the leader may want to try one of the following methods of conflict management to calm the situation so that the meeting can continue:

1. Turn the question to the group.
2. Use the is/is not approach or a pro/con format.
3. Try listing points of agreement and disagreement.
4. Attempt to get at underlying assumptions.
5. Shift the discussion to the facts.

Quite often, the shifting to the facts works well since it takes the emotions out of the moment and forces the group to be more objective and to look only at the facts.

ENSURING MEETINGS LEAD TO ACTION

Unfortunately, inaction following a meeting is very common. A good meeting planner, however, can overcome this inertia by performing four steps:

1. *Assign specific tasks to specific people.* Giving the actions to a group is dangerous. The vagueness encourages moral equivocation, and inertia triumphs. When assigned a specific task, an individual is much more likely to deliver than a group will be. Accountability is increased when individuals are required to deliver.

2. *Review all actions and responsibilities at the end of the meeting.* Too often meetings just stop. Never let this happen. You should allow time for a review of actions and ensure the responsibilities are clear to all attending. Any next steps should be spelled out explicitly.
3. *Provide a meeting summary with assigned deliverable included.* If you have a note taker, that person should write up the minutes of the meeting, confirm with you on all action items and responsibilities, and send the minutes out to all attendees. The minutes do not need to include every word uttered at the meeting as they would in a traditional civic meeting, but they should contain the main topics discussed and list every next step task, the person responsible, and the timing if appropriate.
4. *Follow up on action items in a reasonable time.* The leader should contact the responsible people shortly after the meeting to make sure they are clear about what they need to do and to see if they need help. This contact will serve as a gentle reminder and will be enough in most situations to ensure delivery. However, if someone habitually has trouble with deadlines, then the leader should contact that person again as the deadline approaches.

CONCLUSION

Although these steps seem like micromanaging, if the meeting contained serious business objectives as it should have, then you are entitled to expect some action to come out of it. Otherwise, you risk sending a message that employees should not take meetings seriously, which will cause them to feel the meetings are busywork, the first deadly sin of meetings. Having you employees feel that meetings are a waste of time brings us back to the question asking, "Is a meeting necessary?" if you decided that you needed a meeting to accomplish your purpose, you must ensure that it moves tasks forward and makes actions happen. The follow-up to all meetings is not micromanagement; it is simply good management and good leadership.

Most of what happens in meetings involve factors that can be controlled. Keeping focused on the agenda of the meeting and informing participants on time will control the meeting ahead of time. The specific problematic that meetings have are true in nature and are relevant with the personalities that attend the meeting. Each of us will encounter situational conflicts that we will deal with when leading meetings. Whether we like it or not the conditions which meetings leave us with determine how the meeting will end and whether actions will follow.

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