
Welcome to

"Meetings ... not more Bloody Meetings"

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Workshop overview




- Do these words sound familiar?
 - "Am I late...? "Do I have to be here?"
 - "Why did we need that meeting?"
 - "Why can't meetings be more structured?"
- Do you have a Sherman tank, a bulldog, a clam or hippopotamus (or whatever name you call them...) hiding in your meetings?
- Leave this short, practical workshop with an understanding of how to manage the process more effectively

Welcome and Introductions



Hello!

- 
- You are in a meeting...
 - Quick introductions to the people beside you...your name and where you work

How many agree with this statement?



- Meetings...

- The most energizing, creative and fun activity in the workplace

Are you lonely ???

Don't like working on your own ?
Hate making decisions ?

Then call a MEETING !!

You can
SEE people
DRAW flowcharts
FEEL important
FORM subcommittees
IMPRESS your colleagues
MAKE meaningless recommendations
ALL on COMPANY TIME !!!!



MEETINGS

THE PRACTICAL ALTERNATIVE TO WORK.

Some thoughts...

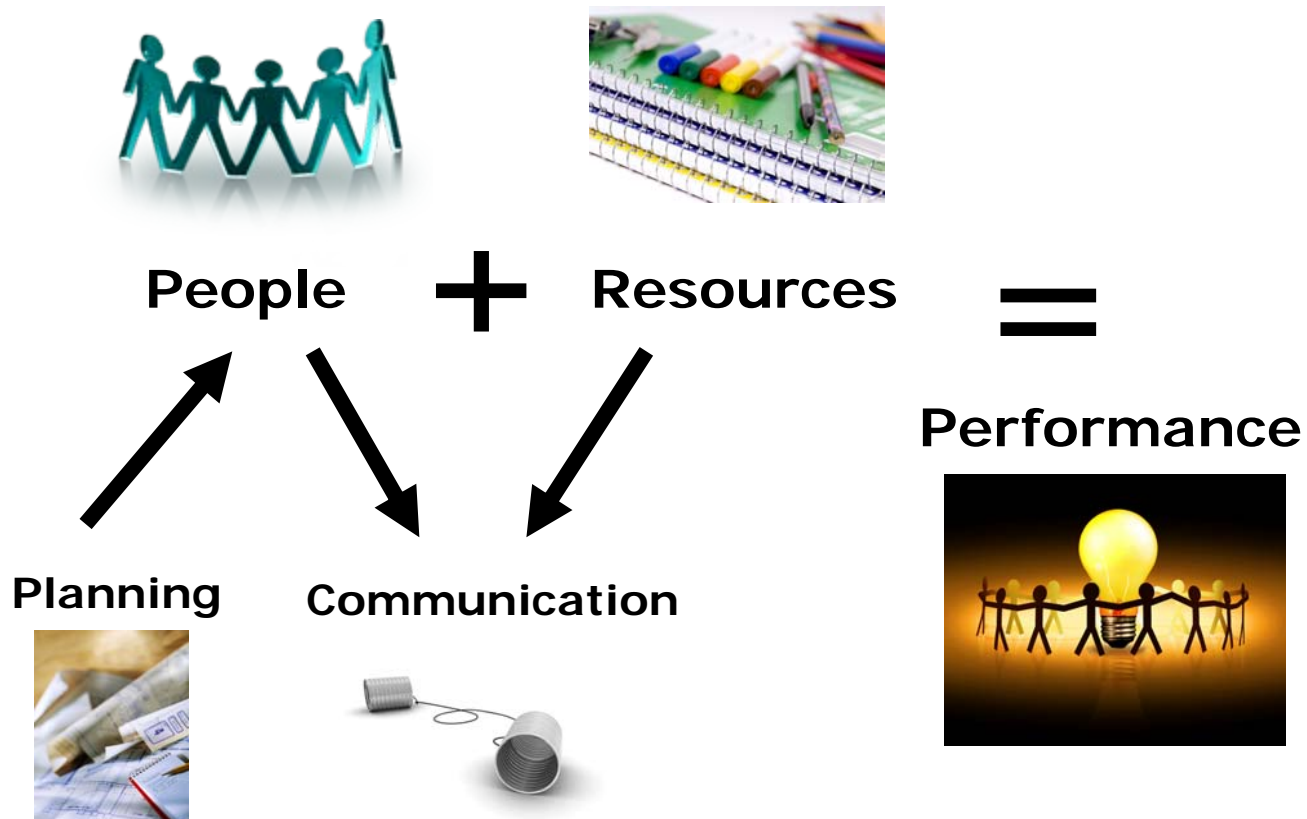
- Research indicates that ... most professionals attend a total of 61.8 meetings per month
- ...and that over 50% of this meeting time is wasted
- Assuming each of these meetings is one hour long, professionals lose 31 hours per month in unproductive meetings, or approximately four working days
- Calculate how much money your meetings cost. Not the opportunity costs, just the actual costs –
 - number of people x average salaries/pension costs per hour x number of hours in the meeting

The principles

- **Meetings Are Work - And Great Meetings Take Lots of Work**
- Great meetings don't just happen - they're designed
- First you have to create agreement that meetings are work - events in which real work takes place - not an empty ritual to be suffered through before getting "back to the office"
- We get the meetings we deserve...as a chair and as a participant ... it is our responsibility to make them great

The meeting equation

- Where does it go wrong? Have a 5 min meeting to agree where it goes wrong at each part of the equation



You might have had some of these...

- Meetings that don't start or end on time
- Unorganized meetings with no direction – makes it feel like a waste of time
- Autocratic meetings where 1 or 2 people dominate the conversation and not everyone's voice is heard
- People who don't participate

The Purpose

- Passing information on
- To gain views on issues
- Collective decision-making

Stage One: Plan

- Important questions:
 - “What is this meeting intended to achieve?”, “What would the consequence be if we didn’t hold it?”
 - Unless there is a clear need for the meeting, it might be a waste of everyone’s time...
- Be clear why you need the meeting and list the subjects as follows:
 - For Information
 - For Discussion
 - For Decision

Stage 2: Inform

- Make sure everyone knows exactly what is being discussed, why and what you want from the discussion
- Anticipate what people and information may be needed and make sure they're there
- Having the right number of people and the correct people are essential – and they should be properly informed and prepared before they come so that everyone can use their time as effectively as possible
- The value and success of a meeting can be threatened if too many people are present (between 4 - 7 is generally ideal, 10 is tolerable, and 12 is getting to be outside the limit)

Stage 3: Prepare

- Prepare the logical sequence of items on the agenda
- Look for connections between different items and arrange them in the necessary order
- Prepare the time allocation for each item on the basis of its importance, not its urgency
- All items should be thought about in advance
- Listing 'AOCB' on the agenda as a catch-all is an invitation to waste everyone's time! Use only if something urgent or unforeseen crops up (that was not in time for the agenda and could not be held over to another meeting)

Stage 4: Structure and control

- Take each item in stages:
 - the evidence stage; then
 - the interpretation stage; then
 - the action stage
- And stop people jumping ahead or going back over old ground
- At the end of each agenda item, the chair should give a brief summary of what has been agreed (and ask people to confirm they will do it)

Stage 5: Summarise

- Summarise all decisions and record them straight away, with the name of the person responsible for any action
- Minutes or action notes?
- Often there is no need for formal minutes and action notes are more relevant. They are much easier to complete (and to make useful) than minutes

Minutes or Action Notes?

AGENDA ITEM	ACTION	PERSON RESPONSIBLE	DATE
1			
2			
3			

The Chairperson

- Be on time – start on time, end on time
- Start by briefly reviewing the purpose and objectives as well as any ground rules
- Be business-like
- Be firm but fair
- Watch and listen

The Three Laws of Chairing Meetings

Unite the Group
Focus the Group
Mobilise the Group



Be ready for disruption – the signs

- Arrive late / leave early
- Engage in private conversations
- Keep talking – even when they have nothing to say
- Never volunteer for jobs
- Criticise others freely
- Keep looking at watch, interrupt, try to skip forward
- Create diversions such as dropping things, passing round sandwiches, making tea
- Re-open discussions not on the agenda
- Fall asleep

Dealing with difficult people at meetings

- The definition of coping is "to contend on equal terms" and when dealing with difficult people this is the key
- Difficult people have learned that being difficult puts other people at a disadvantage
- It's that disadvantage they count on to get the results *they* want

The Sherman Tank



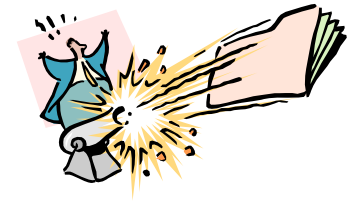
- The Sherman Tank needs to be right and prove a point
- They are likely to show disinterest in what is being discussed if they're not in support of it
- They will read something else, fidget in their chair and will make it very clear to everyone this topic is a waste of time
- They may even interrupt the discussion with a statement like "What's next on the agenda?"
- Don't let the balance of power swing to the Sherman Tank. If you give in, whatever was being discussed will be tabled forever and the group's respect will vanish
- Suggest that the group feels this item is important (otherwise it wouldn't be on the agenda)
- Remind them they can participate in the discussion and present their side of the issue. (Careful ... once involved in the discussion, they may become highly argumentative)
- Remember to control your temper- if you remain calm, it's likely the rest of the group will too
- Try to find merit in one of their points, express your agreement and move on to others
- If the Tank makes an incorrect statement, toss it out to the group and let them turn it down

Snipers



- Snipers use innuendoes, under-their-breath remarks and teasing to undermine others
- They are not as obvious as the Tank, but their behaviour can be just as destructive
- Snipers, like Tanks, feel very strongly about how others should think and act
- Force Snipers out into the open. Ask questions like, "That sounded like a dig. Was it?" or "What did you mean when you turned your thumbs down while I was making my presentation?"
- It is important to give them an alternative to a direct conflict - ask questions rather than make statements
- Snipers may also be side conversationalists, and their conversation may or may not be related to the topic at hand
- Call on Snipers by name, restate the last opinion or remark expressed by a group member, and ask their opinion on it
- If you are in the habit of moving around the room, saunter over and stand casually behind the talkers (don't make this too obvious)

The Exploder



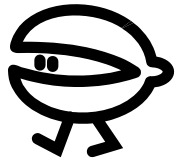
- The Exploder is like an adult throwing a temper tantrum
- Often this behaviour erupts during what began as a friendly and reasonable conversation. Usually, Exploders feel threatened or have had their plans and ideas thwarted
- Wait for the outburst to end. It is common for Exploders to suddenly realize where they are and what they are doing and then to quiet very quickly
- If there doesn't seem to be an imminent pause in the explosion, try to bring it to a close
- Try saying "Right! Right!" "Wait a minute!" or "Yes! Yes!" with enough loudness that they can hear
- Suddenly standing up may also catch their attention long enough to break the tantrum
- Once they have settled down, make sure they know you take them seriously by saying things like "I see this is very important to you and I would like to talk about it, but not like this"
- Another useful technique is 'mirroring'. You get the Exploder's attention by speaking loudly; then, gradually lower your voice. You will find the Exploder will follow your example
- Suggest a time to discuss the situation **after** the meeting

The Complainer



- Complainers find fault with everything
- It can be difficult to recognize a true Complainer. They are skilled at stating problems in such an accusatory way that it's hard to separate genuine problems from complaints
- People around them become defensive because they know the Complainer will be the first to blame them if something goes wrong
- Complainers often rely on others to fix the problems and this perpetuates their own beliefs that they are without blame or fault
- A Complainer may end up monopolizing the agenda because they have something negative to say about every item
- As chair, indicate there are time restrictions the group is facing in order to complete the allotted agenda
- Ask other members to answer the complaints. If the Complainer is complaining about a policy of the organisation, point out the policy can't be changed at the meeting but you would be happy to discuss it with them privately later

The Clam



- The Clam reacts to situation they deem disagreeable by clamming up. Just when you want a response, they may grunt, give a no or a yes or more likely say nothing
- Difficult to discern a Clam from a quiet person. However, quiet people are not likely to avoid direct questions, whereas Clams are
- The biggest problem is you don't know what the silence or lack of response means; therefore, the best way to cope is to get them to talk
- Ask open-ended questions like "How do you feel about this?" or "What are your ideas?" are good starters. Add to those questions a friendly, silent stare to encourage answers
- If and when your Clam opens, be attentive to what they have to say
- A Clam may sit staring at the floor or wall and not say a thing. (If this happens at one meeting, ignore it; but if it continues, take action.) Talk to the person privately and then refer to one of their ideas in the meeting to help bolster confidence and draw them out
- Suggest the Clam works on a project and ask them to report back at another meeting
- Or make a written note of the Clam's point in a meeting and then refer to it later in the meeting, to once again help them to open up



Super-Agreeables

- Super-Agreeables want to be liked and accepted by everyone, so to achieve this they are outgoing, sociable and very personable
- The danger is they will agree with you about one thing and then agree with the next person whose ideas are contrary to yours
- The Super-Agreeable will volunteer to do every job and get none of them done. Don't let them make unrealistic commitments
- Suggest other group members should be sharing the load
- Remember, Super-Agreeables crave your acceptance, so don't embarrass them in front of the group, but just work at keeping them in check

Negativists



- Negativists, or Wet Blankets, feel very strongly that unless a project is in their hands, it will fail
- You are likely to hear them say things like "We tried that before and it didn't work then. Why should it work now?"
- A Negativist will spread feelings of disappointment and helplessness. The more you try to solve a problem or improve a situation, the more negative they become
- They believe that people in power don't care or are self-serving; as a result, they strongly believe their negative comments
- When coping with Negativists, don't try to persuade them out of their pessimism. Instead, point out the successes in solving similar situations in the past
- If a new idea or project is being considered, quickly point out the possible negative repercussions yourself and then include the Negativist in the discussion which **you** are leading
- Ask others to comment on the potential problems. Pick people in the group who you know are realistic and objective
- If something has gone wrong, ask how the mistake can be avoided in the future rather than harping on the failure

Know-it-alls

- Know-It-Alls believe they are superior to others and show it by being pompous and condescending
- There are two types of Know-It-Alls:
 - Bulldozers
 - Balloons

Bulldozers



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- Bulldozers are usually experts who don't know how to work/deal with other people
 - They feel strongly that the more they know, the better off they will be. They also feel that they control their own destiny - the ideas and knowledge of others are deemed irrelevant
 - Get them to consider alternatives without directly challenging their expertise which they interpret as a personal attack
 - Listen carefully and then paraphrase back to confirm your understanding
 - Ask questions to introduce possible alternatives, prefacing them with statements like "I realize this may not be what we will be doing a year from now, but could we consider this..."
 - When coping with a Bulldozer, there is a tendency to become one! Beware ...
 - If your Bulldozer attempts take over the meeting, acknowledge their competency, then ask others for their thoughts
 - Suggest the meeting is based on the democratic principle of an equal voice for all



The Balloon

- Balloons, like Bulldozers, want respect and admiration from others based on their expertise...but they aren't really experts at all
- They are often unaware they are talking about something they don't know much about
- They are usually quite curious and good collectors of information. This characteristic is a hindrance when the information they present is only half the story
- State the correct facts as explicitly as possible. Provide an escape route for the Balloon. At some point in the conversation, they will realize others are experts and will panic - allow them to save themselves from embarrassment
- Of all the difficult people, the Balloon represents the least of your worries
- A Balloon is easily pinpointed by most people in a meeting and dealt with as an annoyance which is endured
- If your Balloon is getting out-of-hand, take them aside after the meeting and present them with the actual facts

The Indecisive



- Indecisives, or StALLers, put off making decisions which might upset someone
- The serious problem here is that indecisiveness can work - most unmade decisions become irrelevant through time
- Try to make it easier for them to tell you why they find it so difficult to make a decision. What are their reservations or conflicts? Listen carefully for hesitancy or omissions which may provide clues to problem areas
- Once the problems have surfaced, help the Indecisives to solve them: once the decision has been made, give your support
- It may take many meetings to get an Indecisive to participate in the group
- It's likely an Indecisive will inwardly, and sometimes outwardly, agree with everything everyone has said. This can be very frustrating
- Solving this problem may require a face-to-face discussion away from the group
- Another alternative is to give the Indecisive a job which will force a decision

Talks too much

- There are lots of reasons why people talk too much
- The best way to handle it is to wait for talkers to take a breath, thank them for their contribution, then bring the group back to the topic at hand and continue on with the meeting
- Other options are
 - assign the talkative person to take notes
 - suggest everyone should be heard on the topic
 - set a good example yourself by not monopolizing discussion

In summary

- Always provide an agenda and distribute it before the meeting
- Set realistic goals and objectives for each meeting
- Don't include everyone. Attend the meeting only if it is relevant
- Reduce the number of meetings, meet only when necessary and make it easy for people to opt out of participating if their attendance is not critical
- Distribute appropriate information before the meeting via e-mail, instead of during the meeting
- Break into smaller groups for brainstorming
- Pay attention to timing and impose a time limit; meetings that are shorter and that start and end on time are less disruptive
- Record and distribute minutes/action notes for each meeting
- Provide meeting feedback and reflect on that feedback as a group

Meetings – a time management issue

“We shall never have more time. We have, and we have always had, all the time there is”

Therefore

- Let's only have meetings that matter ...
- In the spirit of the flippant workshop title, let's aim for all meetings to be the three 'Eff' words:
 - Effective
 - Efficient
 - Effortless



It's QUESTION TIME!!

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- Thank you for all your contributions



- Enjoy the rest of your day!