Meeting Management

Sheila Ager, ALP
A committee is a group that keeps minutes and wastes hours.

Attributed to Milton Berle. And approximately 572 other people.
People at work spend a lot of the day in meetings.

Meetings are important because they give everyone a chance to talk about work.

Which is easier than doing it.
University Governance

• Collegial governance = multiple committees and multiple meetings
• Faculty councils, Dean’s advisory groups, undergraduate committees, graduate committees, department meetings, DTPC’s, DACA’s, FTPC’s, special task forces, etc.
• The meta-importance of meetings –
  • Conduct of business
  • But also a social occasion
  • Engagement and ownership
The enjoyable meeting
Effective, focused, prepared, collegial, clear outcomes
The unenjoyable meeting
Ineffective, poorly managed, unprepared, contentious, ambiguous results
Meetings and Time

• Academic Chairs: up to 50% of time spent in scheduled meetings? (Gmelch and Miskin, *Chairing an Academic Department*, 2004)

• Should we have fewer meetings? Shorter meetings?
  • Potential downside

• Better management of time in meetings?

• More effective communication outside meetings?

• Can we cancel a regularly scheduled meeting if there is no business?
Business Processes*

• Consider the various levels of decision processes in light of your Department culture:
  • ‘Just do it.’ ‘Inform me.’ ‘Consult me.’ ‘Involve me.’
• Don’t use Department meetings to debate every issue from the ground up
  • Use subcommittees to prepare recommendations for Department meetings
• Expectations and ground rules for regular meetings

Meetings and Consensus

• This will be affected by the size of the unit
• Always good to try to build it – but don’t be paralyzed by persistent nay-sayers
• Even in very critical topics, do not let discussion drag on forever – you may have to call a vote
• But in the end, don’t allow efficiency to trample members’ rights to be heard (it is always a balancing act)
Meetings and Contentious Matters

• Ahead of time:
  • Consult widely
  • Build consensus around the problem (recognizing it, acknowledging it, defining it)
  • Create potential solution scenarios

• At the meeting:
  • Set the tone (patience and respect)
  • Focus on the issue, not the people
Meetings and Efficiency

• Distribute everything well ahead of time – agenda and any documents for discussion/decision (*indicate which is which*)
• Consider a consent agenda?
• Consider a stated time limit for each item on the agenda
• Start on time and don’t (in general) recap for late arrivals
• Do not let the meeting be held up by the individual who regularly arrives unprepared and without having read the material
The Challenges of Chairing

Ned Stark chairs the Small Council, Game of Thrones
Meeting Preparation

• Prepare ahead of time
• Send out agenda in plenty of time
• Send out minutes and reports ahead of time so as not to waste time on them in meeting (unless they are on the agenda)
• Identify and communicate necessary outcomes ahead of time (not the actual decision, but the action item)
Running a Meeting

• Start on time
• Stick to the agenda (don’t let the meeting be hijacked) – but don’t be *such* a stickler that all free conversation is stifled
• Don’t allow discussion on matters already decided
• Items can be tabled if discussion is heading to deadlock – but not repeatedly
• No one speaks twice till everyone has had the opportunity to speak once
• Summarize and review accountabilities and ‘action items’ at the end
Managing Enjoyable Meetings: The Role of the Chair
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• Planning the agenda – and being prepared!
• Managing time in the meeting (keeping things on track)
• Setting the tone (collegial, professional, respectful)
• Facilitating the expression of differing viewpoints
• Balancing members’ rights to be heard (and inviting quiet ones to speak up)
• Maintaining a certain level of neutrality – Chairs can provide information and advice (and vote if necessary), but they should generally not speak first
Running an Inclusive Meeting
These important people are discussing work-place diversity.
Running an Inclusive Meeting

• Be aware of religious calendars in scheduling
• Physical accessibility (room + furnishings)
• Visibility and audibility (materials and presentations)
• Be sensitive to different communication styles
• Don’t allow members to talk over each other and encourage quiet members to speak up
• Share comprehensive information ahead of time (i.e., not just a heading on the agenda)
Gender Inclusivity

• ‘Manterrupting’, ‘mansplaining’, and ‘bropropriation’*

• Dealing with it? The same general rules as running a good meeting:
  • Ground rules such as ‘no talking over each other’
  • Encourage *all* participants – men and women – to engage in supporting those rules (e.g., ‘Excuse me, I just want to hear Katrina finish what she was saying.’)
  • Take the worst offenders aside and point out their behaviour – they may be unaware of it.

*Renée Cullinan, Harvard Business Review
Managing Enjoyable Meetings – Other Members of the Group

Tyrion Lannister and various members of the Small Council, who are evidently refusing to take their places,

*Game of Thrones*
Managing Enjoyable Meetings – Other Members of the Group

• Do your homework and arrive on time
• Stay on track
• Don’t repeat yourself for the sake of hearing your own voice
At a meeting, everyone has a chance to have their say.

Most of the people at this meeting have nothing to say, but they say something anyway.

That way the meeting has not been a waste of everyone’s time.
Managing Enjoyable Meetings – Other Members of the Group

• Do your homework and arrive on time
• Stay on track
• Don’t repeat yourself for the sake of hearing your own voice
• Be respectful of others’ rights to be heard, even when you disagree – allow others to finish what they are saying
• If you agree with a colleague, say so
• Respect the process and support the Chair actively in getting other members to stick to the ground rules
• Don’t text, read e-mail, work on a document, etc. (RUT)
After the Meeting

• Consider a follow-up message with decisions made and action items articulated
• Ensure that minutes reflect decisions and action items
• Review action items well in advance of next meeting and (if necessary) remind persons responsible
Robert’s Rules – do you need them?

Henry Martyn Robert, 1837-1923
If you decide you do, you have to be consistent.
Some Resources


Questions or Comments?