

are important, and ones the group is prepared to discuss. This requires estimating the length of time needed for each item and allotting sufficient time. The agenda should focus on the most pressing concerns of the group and organization. The agenda items typically present themselves in relation to the work that is to be accomplished. What decisions need to be made and implemented? What information is needed by the group in order to conduct their work? What new programs or responsibilities have been assigned to the group? How has the vision for the group shifted? What information does the group feel that they need to discuss? What do you need help with in regard to the goals of the group? What authority does the group have?

MEETING FACILITATION

The chairperson should establish mutual trust, foster mutual respect and build a positive atmosphere, ensure that the group maintains direction and moves expediently toward goals, and provide opportunities for all members to participate and contribute. The chairperson should make it clear where the meeting should try to get to by the end. During the meeting the chairperson or facilitator fulfills *task* functions, which carry forward the purpose of the meeting, and *maintenance* functions, which help group members to participate and develop effective work relationships. The person in charge of the meeting stimulates discussion, maintains focus, and helps the group come to closure. The leader should keep his or her interventions and comments very brief.

The effectiveness of the team will be determined by the quality of information brought out and the judgments and decisions made based on this information. Success can best occur when the facilitator keeps meetings on track and eliminates unnecessary disruptions. Meetings should not last much longer than two hours. Give members an opportunity for listening, sharing, thinking, formulating ideas, analyzing information, and tying facts together. Close discussion when it becomes clear that more information is required, other people should be at the meeting, members need more time than is available, or, best of all, a decision has been reached.

HOW TO CONDUCT AN EFFECTIVE MEETING

The facilitator must have the ability to manage the meeting effectively. Some of these responsibilities are listed below. Check off those that you practice as a team leader.

1. ☐ Start meeting on time
2. ☐ Start with and stick to the agenda
3. ☐ Relieve tensions and distractions
4. ☐ Keep discussion relevant to the objectives of the meeting
5. ☐ Draw out ideas and feelings related to purposes
6. ☐ Reduce or eliminate wandering from the agenda and "hidden agenda" ploys
7. ☐ Routinize problem scanning and solution generation
8. ☐ Assure accurate understanding of each other's point of view
9. ☐ Summarize progress toward objectives frequently
10. ☐ Follow the energy. (If a person has strong feeling, knowledge, or background about the issue under discussion, allow him or her to help energize the committee.)

Conducting Effective Meetings

Most interns will be involved in chairing a meeting. Meetings help to define the group, determine needs, encourage reflection, develop collegiality, exchange information, and facilitate growth and effective decision making. Meetings help to build a solid base for a commitment to decisions made and the work that will need to be completed to implement those decisions. Committee members typically spread knowledge quickly and efficiently throughout the organization so plans can be implemented. This occurs through informal discussion with non-team members, training and information-sharing sessions, visits to observe relevant innovative practices, and written forms of followup.

The leaders of effective committee meetings begin by ensuring that all important groups related to the work are represented and the committee members are well prepared to take on the responsibility of committee membership. Committee members must have time for preparing, participating, reflecting, learning, thinking about the work, and deciding on needed actions. Members must understand their authority before being involved in discussion and decision making. Concerns like frequency, composition, motivation, decision process, authority, and acceptable areas of work responsibility should be addressed prior to committee formation. There should be a clear purpose for all meetings.

THE AGENDA

An agenda should always be set and distributed prior to the meeting. The agenda is very important and can speed and clarify the meeting. Papers that need to be discussed should be provided prior to the meeting. The agenda will help ensure that those attending the meeting will be well prepared when they come to the meeting.

The agenda should not include more items than the group can consider in the time allotted. The meeting should not cover items that are more easily and effectively communicated in a memo or e-mail. Items requiring urgent attention should be discussed before those that can be decided over a longer period of time. Sufficient information should be provided to consider all agenda items, especially the most important ones. It is a good idea to include the starting and finishing time on the agenda.

The purpose of the meeting helps to determine the agenda. It is useful to designate each agenda item as "for information," "for discussion," or "for decision" so that people at the meeting know what they are expected to accomplish during the meeting. To develop a good agenda, the chair must keep his or her finger on the pulse of the organization, including in the agenda only items that

11. ____ Reach decisions by consensus
12. ____ Provide frequent, sincere reinforcement and unambiguous constructive feedback
13. ____ Don't allow the group to avoid decision making or to jump too quickly to a decision without adequate information
14. ____ Assign an alternating "process observer" to look at specific aspects of the meeting and report to the group at the end of each meeting (no discussion of process observer report allowed)
15. ____ Use audiovisuals and technology to complement oral communication
16. ____ Maintain control and ensure all attendees participate
17. ____ Recognize when agreement has been reached and terminate discussion on that issue
18. ____ Close on a note of achievement
19. ____ End meeting on time and summarize conclusions
20. ____ Follow up on action to be taken by you and others
21. ____ Periodically evaluate meetings

Following the meeting, concise minutes should be distributed, including the date, time, and place of the next meeting. In the minutes, identify persons who have made action commitments during the meeting. Follow up on all decisions and action commitments, ensuring that progress is reported and decisions are executed. Remove members who no longer provide relevance to the issues being discussed, and eliminate committees that have accomplished their intended purpose and are no longer needed.

Brainstorming Ideas

Brainstorming can provide a quick and easy way to gather ideas that exist among the members of a committee. Brainstorming provides a positive, nonthreatening way to generate a lot of creative ideas related to an important issue, question, problem, direction, and so forth. It usually develops a broad range of alternative solutions or ideas to be considered by the committee in relation to an actual area of responsibility. The committee is asked to allow a free flow of ideas related to an important need with the purpose of using the ideas to develop a vision, understanding, or possible solution related to work achievement.

An example of typical steps in brainstorming (I/D/E/A/, 1991) are:

1. Committee chair explains purpose of brainstorming and its use.
2. Individual presents problem or question.
 - a. Committee listens to a participant describe a problem, opportunity, or challenge related to an agenda item.
 - b. The description of the opportunity should include the essential elements of the situation—those elements which would need to be considered in a solution.
 - c. Close the discussion by writing and publishing the question. A more focused request will likely bring forth helpful ideas.
 - d. After the question has been presented, members ask clarifying questions to ensure that everyone understands the situation and the problems. Avoid making any suggestions during this clarification period.
3. Revisit and perhaps rewrite the question, if the problem presenter or group has changed what he or she wants to know.
4. Facilitator announces that the committee will have time to generate as many potential ideas for the stated question as possible (they may be asked to post them in plain sight of all group members).

5. Facilitator reviews rules of brainstorming:
 - a. No criticism allowed, no explanation needed
 - b. Be free wheeling, anything goes
 - c. Seek combinations and improvements
 - d. Seek quantity over quality
 - e. Rotate around each individual in the group in order
 - f. On each rotation, the participants offer one (1) idea or says "pass"
 - g. All ideas are accepted without judgment or comment
 - h. Piggyback off other ideas
 - i. Relax and have fun
6. Facilitator asks groups to select one or two recorders, depending on the activity.
 - a. Recorders should make contributions.
 - b. Individuals are responsible to see their own contributions get recorded in plain view of the participants.

The group brainstorms many creative responses to the question. Either put a time limit on brainstorming or allow the problem presenter(s) to stop the brainstorming when they have enough suggestions by thanking the group.
7. Ask the problem presenter or the committee if any further explanation of any of the suggestions is needed. Go through each suggestion to make sure it is clear.
8. The recorded suggestions are used by the committee to finalize discussion and make a decision.
9. Those responsible report back to the group on the level of success achieved related to the brainstormed decision.

Building Consensus

Consensus, first of all, means a general agreement, "the judgment arrived at by most of those concerned," and "group solidarity in sentiment and belief." Research suggests that consensus is an effective way of arriving at group decisions and is an integral part of school improvement (Golary, 1992). There have been many benefits associated with consensus decision making (Golary & Golary, 1995; McEwan, 1997; Peterson-del Mar, 1994).

The original Latin stem *sentire* means *feel* and its prefix *con-* means *together*. Consensus, then is an affirmation of community. Consensus cannot be forced, any more than fellowship can be. It is important, then, that a committee becomes a team or a fellowship or a community before they attempt to arrive at consensus.

How does a group arrive at consensus? The group is presented with a problem and asked to arrive at a solution to which each group member can agree; right from the start the group members assume that they will have differences of opinion. Disagreement is taken for granted but not emphasized.

According to the Institute for the Development of Educational Activities (1991), each person's point of view is sought and the meaning of each item they value is listened to, with an emphasis on finding commonly held beliefs and values. There is a sense that once the person's interests, meaning, and point of view are truly understood, differences in positions will diminish or even disappear. If the group does not rush into solutions, but allows time to bring out relevant issues, to analyze and discuss relevant issues with respect for each other's views, then a consensus can usually be arrived at that people understand and can commit to. This is best achieved when the individuals start by presenting their interests and values regarding the decision and steer clear of positions and solutions until each person's interests are well understood (Fisher & Ury, 1981).

The remaining ideas are considered, and arguments pro and con are given. During this process some group members may change their minds, bringing the

group closer to consensus. Another possibility is that group members may suggest modifications of an idea that will satisfy those who did not approve of the idea in its original form.

The group works within itself to agree on the two or three best (most workable, under the circumstances) solutions.

It is not necessary or advisable to take a vote regarding consensus. Most often the group can sense when a consensus has been reached. When this has occurred, the committee chair can test to see if everyone appears in agreement that a consensus has formed and that the group can move on to the next agenda item.

Consensus is not always the appropriate process for decision making. There are some situations in which a group may be providing information to an individual who makes the decision because that individual is accountable for its consequences and/or because that individual has data which cannot be shared with the group.

Nonfunctional Group Behaviors

An important aspect of a meeting is ensuring that everyone has a voice in decisions made at the meeting. This means that no one dominates the meeting and that attendees listen attentively. There are a number of nonfunctional group behaviors that can occur during committee meetings. The following are a few nonfunctional behaviors and how they might be handled:

1. *Domination.* Explain that the committee has to move on, ask direct questions to others, do not call on the dominant person(s), have a private chat, assign a project, pick out a comment and redirect as a question to someone else, send dominant member on an errand, or add strong new person to the group.
2. *Argumentative.* Question the person to get his or her ideas, ask others questions, point out quibbling is impeding progress, do not allow any criticism or debate during a period of time (invoke brainstorming rules).
3. *Socializing.* Invite the person to share with everyone, stop talking and look at the individual, speak more loudly, or more rapidly. Talk to the individuals about this after the meeting.
4. *Silence.* Ask questions in an area the person can speak with conviction, call on those with relevant experience, clarify the objective, refer questions to the group, silence on your part, be prepared to offer facts and ideas for consideration, plan something active, and reward good contributions with positive comments.
5. *Hot-potato subjects.* Explain not pertinent to the meeting objectives, remain neutral, promise not to take action but report to management, insist on objective consideration. Ask group if they want to continue on controversial subject.
6. *Group think.* Encourage taking issue with statements, probe opinions, silently record ideas, use Delphi technique or nominal group process (Cunningham, 1982), keep all statements anonymous, periodically change membership, invite outside experts, don't allow people to support their own ideas.
7. *Confrontations.* Redirect the question to the group, present facts and reasons, generate reasonable alternatives, table issue and work out later, use humor, state opposing views, clarify objective. Ask members of the group for support.
8. *Misdirected topic.* Put the topic at the end of meeting or for next meeting, interrupt and bring back to agenda, reorient and elaborate on objectives.

Other common group dynamic problems are individuals' unwillingness to abandon their publicly expressed points of view; the persuasive power of articu-

late, loud, and emotional individuals; and the band-wagon effect of a majority opinion. Many of these behaviors can be reduced by using a process observer who reports on nonfunctional group behaviors. The process observer is asked by the group to watch for certain types of behaviors during the meeting and to report back to the group about these behaviors at the end of the meeting. No comments are allowed on the process observer's report; the group simply listens and reflects individually on the information presented.

The most significant factors that make meetings nonproductive are:

- Lack of control by leader
- Lack of preparation by leader
- Lack of preparation by participants
- Objectives, topics, and agenda not clearly communicated
- Poor attitude of participants
- The wrong participants
- Improper notice to participants
- Little interest or enthusiasm
- Committee recommendations are ignored
- Lack of follow through and/or no action taken
- Hidden agendas

Lots of important work is completed through committee action, so being able to run an effective meeting is quite important for an intern. Make sure you are an effective committee chairperson.