Managing Group Meetings

You will spend a lot of your career in meetings. The more efficient and effective those meetings, the more efficient and effective you will be. Facilitators that work with groups try to help them with these tasks, and the following tips can help you work more effectively.

Spend Some Time on Ground Rules

Many people think ground rules are a waste of precious teamwork time. If the group never has any problems this can be true, but if difficulties emerge then the group is debating both the content and the process. Suddenly a conversation about a subject matter dives into, "You are dominating the conversation too much" or "I thought we were going to make decisions by consensus" or "Does consensus mean majority or does everyone have to agree?" When you get into a difficult situation, the group can reference your ground rules. See the Managing Group Meetings Worksheet for ideas.

Tips for Running a Meeting

Here are some facilitator tips for running an effective meeting

- Begin and end the meeting on time
- Use an agenda created in advance or at the start of the meeting
  - 〉 Prioritize the agenda (for example, by deadlines)
  - 〉 Allocate time to each item
- Review actions from your previous meeting
  - 〉 What has been completed/not completed
  - 〉 What decisions did you make before
- Designate someone to keep notes
  - 〉 Record major points and ideas
  - 〉 Make note of tangents or other issues that you can come back to (this is sometimes called the "parking lot" for topics that you want to capture but don't want to get sidetracked into discussing)
- Summarize the meeting
  - 〉 What are the key points and decisions?
  - 〉 What are the tasks and assignments?
    - ▪ Define the task
    - ▪ Assign it to someone
    - ▪ Set a completion date

Use Meetings as a Learning Process

No one ever runs a perfect meeting, so treat every meeting as a learning process:

- Take turns leading or facilitating the meeting
- Take 2 minutes at the end of the meeting to evaluate the facilitator or leader
  - 〉 What things did they do well
  - 〉 What could they improve upon

Sample List of Ground Rules

Review these ground rules: amend them; clarify them; add to them. Share a final copy with everyone so you can refer to them periodically. The group can also check in with the ground rules to make sure you are still following them. [Source: Kaner, Sam. 2014. Facilitators Guide to Participatory Decision Making. Jossey Bass.]

- Listen actively and with an ear to understanding others' views.
- Make room all of our identities in a safe space.
- Consider power and privilege.
- Make space to learn from others.
- Listen respectfully, without interrupting.
- Allow everyone the chance to speak–don't monopolize the discussion.
- Critique ideas, not people.
- Commit to learning.
- Commit to sharing information, not to persuade.
- Avoid blame, speculation, and inflammatory language.
- Ask for clarification if you are confused.
- Avoid put-downs (even humorous ones).
- Avoid assumptions about any member of the class or generalizations about social groups.
- Do not ask individuals to speak for their (perceived) social group.
- Do not offer opinions without supporting evidence; beware of the danger of a single story.
- Take responsibility for the quality of the discussion.
- Don't be afraid to participate, but be open to challenges if you say something that hurts someone

Decide How You Will Decide

Groups often have the most difficulty when they need to reach decisions. If you don't decide in advance how you will make decisions things can get very messy. Below are some decision options to consider.

Decision Option	Pros	Cons
Majority vote	⟩ Fast and efficient ⟩ Good option for low stakes decisions	⟩ May mean that almost half of your group is not supportive (e.g., 3-2) ⟩ May ignore minority viewpoints ⟩ May lead to premature decisions
Super Majority Vote (e.g., 75%) Or Consensus Minus One	⟩ Fast and efficient ⟩ Good option for low stakes decisions ⟩ Works well with large groups ⟩ Higher threshold for agreement ⟩ "Minus one" prevents one person from holding up a decision	⟩ Sizeable number of people may still disagree (e.g., 2 out of 10) ⟩ May ignore minority viewpoints ⟩ May lead to premature decisions
Complete Consensus	⟩ Forces all perspectives to be heard and incorporated ⟩ Requires everyone to find a common solution	⟩ More time consuming ⟩ May not lead to an agreement ⟩ Means "I can live with it" not "I think that is the best outcome "