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ABSTRACT

At the beginning of the successful meeting process, the meeting leader decides on a leadership style after considering his or her own nature, the needs and desires of group members, and the characteristics of the organization and situation. In planning the meeting, the leader's first guides are the goals and purposes he or she wishes to accomplish. Next, the meeting planner draws up the meeting's agenda. The meeting takes form as the participants are invited, the seating arrangements made, the meeting room arranged, and background information and agendas distributed to participants. When the meeting opens the interpersonal and discussion skills of the chairperson come to the fore. The leader skillfully guides the group through the chaos of problem-solving and decision-making. At the same time, the leader is alert for the surfacing of negative emotions and maintains the human relations in the group. When decisions are reached, the leader makes sure that responsibilities are clearly designated and deadlines set. After the meeting, the leader distributes the minutes, follows up on the decisions made, and evaluates the meeting's effectiveness. This document describes each of these processes and identifies the sources from which suggestions have been drawn. (Author/PGD)

SCHOOL MANAGEMENT DIGEST

Series 1, No. 19

MAKING MEETINGS MORE EFFECTIVE

ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management

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CONTENTS

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The Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) is a national information system operated by the National Institute of Education. ERIC serves the educational community by disseminating educational research results and other resource information that can be used in developing more effective educational programs.

The ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, one of several clearinghouses in the system, was established at the University of Oregon in 1966. The Clearinghouse and its companion units process research reports and journal articles for announcement in ERIC's index and abstract bulletins.

Research reports are announced in *Resources in Education (RIE)*, available in many libraries and by subscription for $42.70 a year from the United States Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402. Most of the documents listed in *RIE* can be purchased through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service, operated by Computer Microfilm International Corporation.

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Besides processing documents and journal articles, the Clearinghouse has another major function—information analysis and synthesis. The Clearinghouse prepares bibliographies, literature reviews, state-of-the-knowledge papers, and other interpretive research studies on topics in its educational area.

FOREWORD

Both the Association of California School Administrators and the ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management are pleased to cooperate in producing the *School Management Digest*, a series of reports designed to offer educational leaders essential information on a wide range of critical concerns in education.

At a time when decisions in education must be made on the basis of increasingly complex information, the *Digest* provides school administrators with concise, readable analyses of the most important trends in schools today, as well as points up the practical implications of major research findings.

By special cooperative arrangement, the series draws on the extensive research facilities and expertise of the ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management. The titles in the series were planned and developed cooperatively by both organizations. Utilizing the resources of the ERIC network, the Clearinghouse is responsible for researching the topics and preparing the copy for publication by ACSA.

The author of this report, John Lindelow, was commissioned by the Clearinghouse as a research analyst and writer.

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INTRODUCTION

"Our meetings are so dull! And we never seem to get anything done."

"What few decisions we make are rarely carried through. Decisions are often forgotten, or no one remembers who was responsible for doing what."

"Most people just sit with blank faces and never get involved. The same few people seem to decide everything."

"The principal says he wants us to be involved in decision-making, but in the end he always has it his way."

How many times have you heard similar feelings expressed after supposedly productive meetings? So many meetings seem to be a waste of time for their participants. Besides being unproductive for the school, they give individual members little personal satisfaction.

So why are meetings usually so unproductive? Meetings, of course, are only a part of the total workings of the school organization. What goes on in a meeting is, in a way, simply a reflection of the attitudes, relationships, and organization of the larger school system. "Every meeting is a microcosm," says Dunsing, "a condensed version of the values and style of the organization. . . . In working toward a change for the better . . . meetings defy separate treatment because they are all contaminated by the organization's basic values and styles."

And just as the norms of the organization affect how meetings are run, what goes on in meetings generates a "ripple effect" on the rest of the organization. "A meeting of fifteen people," say Doyle and Straus, "can affect how 300 people work—or don't work—for the rest of the day or week or even permanently." Obviously, a poor meeting can have a debilitating effect on an entire organization. On the other hand, well-run meetings can rejuvenate an organization, leading to improved teamwork, communications, and morale on many levels.

Thus the problem of unproductive meetings is part of the larger problem of ineffective organization. Government and nonprofit organizations seem most prone to "sluggish" organizational functioning, one reason being the lack of direct personal reward for increasing efficiency. It is no accident that the great majority of literature on improving meetings comes from the profit- and survival-oriented business world.

Contributing to the problem of ineffective meetings is a simple lack of organizational and human-relations skills on the part of meeting participants. Many of these skills, though, are as old as meetings themselves, such as dealing with the long-winded participant, creating an agenda and sticking to it, and assuring that responsibilities are assigned and deadlines set.

Some other meeting techniques have been developed more recently. Social scientists in the field of group dynamics have been studying for decades the interactions of group members and how to improve the communications process. A more recent arrival is the behavioral science called organization development (*see* Schmuck, Runkel, Arends, and Arends), which examines the whole of the communications structures of organizations. Both of these fields have shed new light on ways to make meetings more effective.

The problem of ineffective meetings has grown more acute in recent years. The modern school is having many new demands put on it, and principals, especially, are feeling the pressure. Instead of becoming instructional leaders, principals are required to administer many new federal, state, and local programs that impinge on the schools.

In addition, there are new demands on principals to work with advisory groups. A report by the Association of California School Administrators notes that of twelve new programs approved in the past five years, "Advisory Councils are specified in eight of the twelve laws or regulations while Parent Involvement is covered in ten of the twelve."

That many principals are *not* coping well with the new demands is evidenced by the high turnover rate among principals. A 1978 *Newsweek* article, "Burnt-Out Principals," notes that in a recent survey of 1,600 principals "fully one-quarter said they intended to quit, some to leave education entirely. Worse yet, the very best principals are quitting at an even higher rate. At the beginning of the survey, researchers singled out 60 exceptional principals. A year later, one-third of this special group had resigned."

We are fast approaching, it seems, what Alvin Toffler in *Future Shock* calls the "super-industrial age" in which organizational skills are perhaps the greatest assets one can have. In order to deal with the constant barrage of change in today's world, administrators, managers, and principals must become proficient at discerning the pattern of future events, setting goals for the future, and working efficiently toward those goals. Effective meeting techniques can go a long way toward helping leaders stay afloat in the increasingly turbulent waters of today's society.

This digest will present many suggestions aimed at helping educators improve their performance in meetings, both as group leaders and as participants. Before getting involved in the more practical aspects of meeting management, however, two important preliminaries will be examined: the leadership style you choose to use, and the importance of having clear-cut goals for your meetings.

CHOOSING A LEADERSHIP PATTERN

Ideas about leadership have been changing greatly in recent years. Earlier in this century, it was assumed that leaders should be autocratic, authoritative, and in full control of their organizations. Gradually, though, the idea surfaced that leadership could be a shared and democratic function. Social scientists began focusing on group members and their needs and found participative decision-making to be a workable alternative to traditional directive leadership.

Today's principals and administrators often find themselves torn between the two extremes of leadership behavior. The result is sometimes an uncertain compromise, with subordinates not quite knowing where the leader stands or what behavior would be considered "appropriate" in a given situation. Thus, before getting involved in the nuts and bolts of meeting management, it is helpful for the meeting leader or planner to give some thought to the kind of "leadership pattern" that is most comfortable for him or her.

In a classic article entitled "How to Choose a Leadership Pattern," Tannenbaum and Schmidt recognize the gamut of possible leadership styles, ranging from autocratic to democratic, and the importance for a leader to choose a leadership pattern compatible with his or her own personal needs, the needs of subordinates ("non-managers"), and the other "forces in the situation." They stress that no one style is necessarily right or wrong and that leadership behavior should be geared to the particular situation.

At one extreme of the "continuum of leadership behavior" is the complete autocrat who makes all the decisions and simply announces these decisions to subordinates. A step away from the autocrat is the manager who "sells" decisions to group members. Here again, the manager identifies the problem and arrives at a decision, but "rather than simply announcing it, he takes the additional step of persuading his subordinates to accept it." Further along the continuum is the manager who presents his or her ideas and decision and then invites questions and comments from subordinates, so they might better understand what he or she is trying to accomplish. Next there is the leader who "presents a tentative decision subject to change," after input from subordinates.

Subordinates finally get a chance to suggest their own solutions at the next step on the continuum where "the manager presents the problem, gets suggestions, and then makes his decision." Near the democratic end of the spectrum is the manager who defines the problem and the limits within which the decisions must be made and then requests that the group make the decision. Finally, there is the leader who is primarily a team member and who imposes only those limits on the group that are specified by the organization or the immediate superior of the team leader

In choosing a leadership style from this range of possibilities, a manager should consider three variables: his or her own personality, the characteristics of his or her subordinates, and the other factors in the situation, such as the norms of the organization. "Some managers," state Tannenbaum and Schmidt, "have a greater need than others for predictability and stability in their environment." Such managers would probably function better as more directive leaders. Other managers might have a greater "tolerance for ambiguity" that allows them to release some control over the decision-making process and thus over the predictability of the situation.

Subordinates, too, differ in their needs. Some enjoy clear-cut directives, while others have high needs for sharing in the decision-making process. Other factors influencing leadership style are the type of organization, the nature of the problem, and the pressures of time.

Even when the same group meets more than once, the leader may vary his or her style, depending on the type of meeting and its objectives. An autocratic style is appropriate when the meeting is mainly a briefing session, when the matters at hand are easy or routine, or when a crisis arises and decisions have to be made in a hurry. A democratic style is called for when decisions by consensus are necessary or desirable; when an informal atmosphere is needed, as in a brainstorming session, a gripe or rap session, or a creative problem-solving meeting; or when the acceptability of a decision is more important than its quality, as in a meeting held to resolve a conflict.

The effective meeting chairman, as summed up by Maude, is one who, at the beginning of the meeting,

> sizes up the situation, decides what kind of leadership is required, then slips into the appropriate gear. So in one meeting he is an unassertive idea-eunuch: in the next, a tough, fast-talking overlord. Today he is a suction-pump drawing out people's ideas. Tomorrow he is a conveyor-belt, feeding the group with information, carrying them steadily and efficiently towards a decision. The day after he becomes a spark-plug, showering the meeting with ideas. By discreet use of the loud and soft pedals he becomes a man for all meetings.

But simply varying style is not enough. It is incumbent on the meeting leader, say Chellew and Trott, to tell "the staff or committee at the outset of the life of the group why his or her style of decision-making will be different in different situations. The designated leader who does not do this will create confusion, apathy, and lack of trust." Thus, leaders should clearly indicate the degree of decision-making power they have in a particular situation and then stick to that agreement.

When group members know clearly the structure of the decision-making process and the bounds of their power, they can begin to work within this structure toward group goals, without continual doubt or haggling over power. A known decision-making style, whether it be autocratic or democratic, lends a certain psychological solidity to meetings that can prevent many frustrations within a group. In a like way, meetings become more meaningful when they are called for specific purposes and have clearly defined goals, as discussed in the next chapter.

13

GOALS AND VALUES OF MEETINGS

Before calling any meeting, the meeting planner should consider these few simple questions: What do I want to accomplish with this meeting? What goals and objectives do I wish to reach? Is a meeting the best route to my goal, or might some other form of communication be more efficient? Are there other values in meetings in addition to the obvious practical ends they achieve? These questions will be considered in turn.

Meetings with Purpose

"No wind favors him who has no destined port," goes the old saying. Yet how many meetings have you attended that have drifted pointlessly with no obvious goals or purposes to guide them? Every meeting needs one or more definite purposes that are known to all group members. Snell emphasizes this point by defining a meeting as "a group talking together *with a clearly defined purpose in mind.*"

Most meetings take place for one or more of the following reasons:

- To receive or give information
- To make a decision
- To define, analyze, or solve a problem
- To reconcile conflicts
- To express feelings (for example, a gripe-session or rap-session)

Information. Some meetings are designed primarily for the exchange of information among participants. The meeting leader may want to simply brief members, or to instruct them, as in a training session. Conversely, the leader may want to receive reports from participants. In this type of meeting, a more autocratic leadership style is usually the most efficient.

One advantage of an information meeting over a memo or written report is that reaction and feedback can be immediate. Every member can hear in the short time of a meeting both the information presented and the reaction of all other members to it. Another advantage of an oral presentation, notes Auger, is that it is often more effective and memorable than a written report. Furthermore, the nature of a group presentation often impels meeting participants to be more thoughtful in their preparation.

Decision-making. As discussed in the last chapter, decision-making style ranges from the autocratic to the truly democratic. An autocrat may simply wish to get some input from participants before making a decision. In meetings with a more democratic style of decision-making, everyone who has a critical stake in a decision is given a chance to be heard and to influence the final decision. The great advantage of group decision-making is that members are much more supportive of decisions that they have helped make, particularly when the decision is reached by consensus. A study by Lowell showed, for example, that members of groups making decisions by consensus are more satisfied with the group solution than are members of groups that operate according to majority vote or dominance by a leader.

Problem-solving. Several heads are usually better than one, particularly for defining, analyzing, and solving problems. In a problem-solving session, the group brings together "the bits and pieces of experience and insight which may lead to common understanding," says Auger. "One person may describe an effect, while another suggests a plausible reason for it. Out of a pattern of this type of analysis, an acceptable cause-and-effect relationship may be discovered."

Another advantage of problem-solving sessions is that such meetings tend to correct for the flaws and idiosyncracies in the thinking of individuals. An effective group can be much more flexible and wide-ranging in its thought, but at the same time sift out impractical or far-flung ideas.

The style of leadership can vary widely in problem-solving meetings, depending on the nature of the problem, time limitations, and other variables. For example, a brainstorming session might be called to foster ideas for increasing community awareness of certain school programs. In such a session, a very informal, democratic atmosphere would be needed to stimulate a variety of ideas. If, on the other hand, the analysis of a problem calls for an orderly presentation of data and some hard thinking, a more leader-controlled meeting would be more efficient.

Reconciling conflicts. A meeting is often the only good place to explore sharp differences of opinion and to negotiate some kind of compromise. This type of meeting requires tight control so that tempers do not flare. When the conflict does not directly affect the group leader, he or she can work primarily as a facilitator, bringing out and clarifying the points of difference, making sure that each side's case is fully heard, and hammering out compromises. When the group leader is one of the principal contenders, it is necessary (and sometimes required by law) to appoint a neutral third party to manage the conflict.

Expressing feelings. It is sometimes wise to hold gripe-sessions or rap-sessions with staff members to sound out their feelings about the organization and its administration. Such meetings should be as permissive and unstructured as possible, for they are important steam valves for an organization. The leader, according to Maude, should remain in the background and allow members to contribute spontaneously, for he or she recognizes "that any decision taken is less important than (a) providing a therapeutic opportunity for staff to express their feelings (b) ensuring that any decisions taken are acceptable to the participants."

The meeting planner should make sure that each agenda item has one or more of the above purposes and should clearly indicate the purpose on the agenda. For example, the agenda item "School lunch program" tells the meeting participant little about its purpose. More complete description might be "Information on new school lunch program," or "Decision regarding continuance of lunch program," or "Defining possible nutritional problems in school lunch program." (More will be said about agendas in the next chapter.)

Some meetings have none of the above purposes, yet they may be very important to the health of an organization. These are meetings, says Bormann and his colleagues, that are used primarily as rituals. Ritualistic meetings, such as, for example, the presenting of the yearly budget, might seem to be only the rubber-stamping of decisions already made. Yet they have the value of "adding to the cohesiveness of the organization," and sometimes such meetings assure "that hurt feelings do not impede efficiency." For example, a person in a position of authority might be invited to attend a meeting in which he or she has little active interest. "But the very fact that he was invited to attend," say these authors, "communicates to him that the people calling the meeting recognize his importance within the organization." If the proponents of policy or proposals fail to have a ritualistic meeting in which all people of authority a: informed about developments, they may "suddenly find any roadblocks in their way."

Is a Meeting Necessary?

The first step in reducing the huge amount of time wasted in meetings is to ask the simple question of whether the goals of a meeting might be reached in some other, more efficient way. Too many meetings are called simply because it's that time of the week o month. Often, memos or telephone calls (individual or conference) can accomplish the communication desired without the time and expense of a meeting.

A general rule of thumb is that meetings should not be called when an individual decision-maker can get better results. Meetings are often of value even for deciding simple matters, however. As Jay has observed,

> Real opposition to decisions within organizations usually consists of one part disagreement with the decision to nine parts resentment at not being consulted before the decision. For most people on most issues, it is enough to know that their views were heard and considered. They may regret that they were not followed, but they accept the outcome.

Individuals are more efficient when the matters to be decided are routine and, surprisingly, when the decision depends on the use of subtle, hard-to-explain reasoning that cannot be done spontaneously. "Research indicates that subtle reasoning problems are generally performed more accurately by individuals than by meetings," reports Maude. "The great danger of presenting difficult reasoning problems to meetings to solve is that the competent members (those who know how to solve the problem) may be out-voted or even convinced by the rest."

However true this may be with some decision-makers, one should remember that meetings often serve as a valuable check on the errors in reasoning of some members. In the broad area between very simple and very complex reasoning tasks, research shows, again according to Maude, that group decisions are more likely to be on target than individual decisions. And in this era of increasing accountability, more and more decisions must be made in which the reasoning process is open to public scrutiny.

Hidden Values of Meetings

Most meetings have value beyond the achievement of obvious organizational goals. Meetings satisfy, or can satisfy, the personal and emotional needs of individual members, such as needs for participation, belonging, achievement, and power. Participants interact, develop roles, and share their experiences, problems, and successes.

Meetings also have value in building the cohesiveness of an organization. "In the simplest and most basic way," says Jay, "a meeting defines the team, the group, or the unit. Those present belong to it; those absent do not. Everyone is able to look around and perceive the whole group and sense the collective identity of which he or she forms a part."

Schmuck and others sum up the values of meetings as follows:

> While all channels of communication in a school can be useful, meetings are singularly important in providing a setting in which school members can communicate and coordinate information about problems and decisions and at the same time satisfy emotional needs for activity, achievement, affiliation, and power. Meetings provide an opportunity for participation not found in memos, newsletters, loudspeaker announcements, and the like. They enable an immediate check of reactions to what another person has just said and to one's own immediate utterances as well. If managed effectively, meetings can be the principal channel for bringing staff members into collaboration to reach common understandings and for that reason can be highly productive and satisfying events in the life of the organization.

BASICS OF MEETING PLANNING

"Conducting a meeting without a plan," states Parker, "is much like trying to build a house without blueprints. It can be done, of course, but the end result is likely to be less than desirable and the process can be expensive and nerve-wracking."

A good part of the planning is already done once the purpose of the meeting is decided. This immediately gives a preliminary idea of who will be attending and what might transpire.

But engineering a successful meeting usually requires some careful strategic planning. The meeting planner should try to imagine what is likely to happen in the meeting from beginning to end, and especially what barriers to accomplishment might spring up. The planner might ask himself or herself questions such as the following: Who will be the meeting participants, and what stakes do they have in the matters to be discussed? What are their personalities and their stances on meeting issues? What conflicts are likely to develop among participants? Who will be asked to change or adjust, and how might they react?

What skills will be required to deal with problems facing the meeting, and are these skills available within the organization? If not, what experts can be invited? What are the critical issues on which a decision might hinge? What is the range of possible compromises that might be reached? What can and cannot be traded off?

Other important facets of meeting planning, to be considered in the following pages, include writing up the agenda and allotting time for each item, deciding who will attend, arranging the seating, and selecting the meeting room.

The Agenda and Time Considerations

The heart of the organizational structure of a meeting is the agenda. "Without an agenda, the most skilled meeting leader might not be able to bring off a meeting successfully," says Auger.

> With an agenda, however, he is able to devote his talents to managing the interplay of personalities in the meeting room. He can do this more effectively because he knows what he wants to achieve. With this general strategy mapped out in the agenda, he can concentrate on the more fluid tactics of the meeting room.

Before a meeting, it is wise to consult with meeting participants to determine what topics need to be on the agenda. Sometimes a premeeting discussion can eliminate the need to put a topic on the agenda, saving everyone's time. And often it can stimulate participants to properly prepare for the meeting. Halverson suggests that this participant input can be achieved by "circulating a skeletal or blank agenda and asking for agenda items."

Once the agenda is drawn up, it should be distributed to meeting participants. The optimum time to distribute the agenda for most meetings is one to three days before the meeting. If the agenda is circulated too far in advance, some participants may forget it or lose it. But at least twenty-four hours should be allowed so participants can give some careful thought to meeting topics.

If the meeting is called on short notice, advance distribution of the agenda may be impossible. On the other hand, very early distribution of an agenda may be necessary for an elaborate meeting or one requiring a lot of advance preparation.

Along with the agenda, any necessary background information should be distributed to participants before the meeting. "High-quality information leads to high-quality decisions," says Maude, and prevents a discussion from becoming "a mere pooling of ignorance." Supplying background information can allow participants to consider matters carefully in advance and formulate useful questions. "But the whole idea is sabotaged once the papers get too long"; says Jay, "They should be brief or provide a short summary."

One useful approach is to ask the person who will be making a presentation to provide you with the necessary background information. You or a staff member can then write up a short summary of important points and distribute the summary to participants with the agenda.

The agenda should include both the starting and ending times of the meeting. Having a definite ending time is important, for participants have other responsibilities and appointments to attend to, and it is only common courtesy that they know when the meeting will be over. "If meetings have a tendency to go on too long," suggests Jay, "the chairman should arrange to start them one hour before lunch or one hour before the end of work." Other authors warn, however, that meetings at these times may be less productive because of low blood sugars and general weariness.

In addition to definite starting and ending times, meetings should have an internal structuring of time. Each agenda item should be allotted a certain amount of time, depending on its importance. For a productive meeting, these time constraints must be held to, or at least closely approximated. Of course, the amount of time each topic will need is an extremely unpredictable quantity. With experience, however, the meeting planner will be able to better estimate the time needed for particular kinds of topics. Until then, it may be wise to follow the system that Maude wryly suggests for working through a particular agenda:

1. Estimate the time required to deal with each item.
2. Calculate the total time required.
3. Double this figure.

While working on a particular agenda item, the trick is to get all the necessary information out in the open, but to cut off any superfluous additions. This is truly an art, but a chairman skilled in discussion techniques (discussed in the next chapter) can approach this efficiency ideal.

Another aspect of meeting design that can be altered to achieve desired ends is the order of agenda items. Naturally, urgent items need to come before those that can wait. But if some items might divide members, and others might unite them, the meeting planner can vary their order to produce, hopefully, a smoother meeting. In any case, it is always a good idea to end each meeting with a unifying item. Jay makes these suggestions concerning the order of agenda items:

> The early part of a meeting tends to be more lively and creative than the end of it, so if an item needs mental energy, bright ideas, and clear heads, it may be better to put it high up on the list. Equally, if there is one item of

great interest and concern to everyone, it may be a good idea to hold it back for a while and get some other useful work done first. Then the star item can be introduced to carry the meeting over the attention lag that sets in after the first 15 to 20 minutes of the meeting.

If there is a large number of topics to discuss, it may be best to hold two or more separate meetings. Similar topics can be clustered in each meeting allowing a smaller number of participants.

It is very rare for meetings to remain productive after two hours. As Snell points out, "Clear thinking falters as the clock goes round, and in turn, emotions take over. Weariness breeds dissension and contrariness." The ideal length seems to be from an hour to an hour and a half. If the meetings must be held for longer periods, be sure to provide coffee and fresh air breaks.

In addition to the meeting date, starting and ending

TABLE 1: Sample Agenda

District C Managers' Conference
December 17, 1979, 9:00-10:45 A.M.
Central Meeting Room
AGENDA

Topic	*Person Responsible*	*Objective*	*Time*
1. Approval of Agenda	Al Herbert	Decision	5 minutes
2. Discussion of possible state funding decrease for 1981-82.	Al Herbert	Discussion	10 minutes
3. Shall district lunch program be contracted out next year?	Ed Freemont	Decision	20 minutes
4. Discussion of new district information packet.	Al Herbert	Information	5 minutes
5. Discussion of proposed 1981-84 contract.	All	Discussion	30 minutes
6. New requirements for parental advisory groups.	John Nelson	Information	10 minutes
7. Cutting energy consumption to meet federal guidelines.	Ed Freemont	Problem-solution	20 minutes

times, and the place where the meeting is to be held, the agenda should contain a brief description of each topic, the objective desired for each topic (for example, decision, discussion, information), the name of the person responsible for each topic (who should introduce the item at the meeting), and the time allotment for that item. A sample agenda is presented in table 1. (A variation of this agenda is to simply head each agenda item with "For discussion," "For information," or "For decision.")

Although a firm structure is desirable for effective meetings, the planner should not "overstructure" the meeting. As Auger puts it, "One must not create the impression among the participants that the meeting has been so finally and rigidly preplanned that they are merely assembling to hear a proclamation." Participants should be left with the impression "that there is a legitimate need for the meeting and that their views, information and problem-solving talents can be con idered." So within the srructure of the agenda, a good bit of flexibility is advised.

Who Shall Attend?

Once you decide what you want to accomplish in a meeting, the question of whom to invite will be half answered. For starters, you will need those who are most affected by the issues to be discussed, those who have to give or receive information at the meeting, and those whose presence is necessary or desirable for decision-making purposes.

Maude stresses that meeting participants be chosen from the organizational level most appropriate to deal with the problem. Long-term policy issues, for example, should be decided by experienced, upper-level administrators who "have the experience and the over-view to grasp the financial implications of a particular decision and to overcome the inherent uncertainty of this kind of long-term decision-making."

In the same manner, middle-level managerial decisions and day-to-day operating decisions should be made at the appropriate level. Maude warns against "inviting people to meetings simply because of their high status in the organisation." One secret of making meetings more efficient, he states, is to "push decision-making as far down the organisation as it will go, i.e. to the lowest level competent to handle the problem."

Depending on the goals of your meeting, you can invite either a group with diverse personalities, or a more like-minded group. Maude quotes research that has "found that meetings made up of people of unlike personality often produce better solutions than like-minded groups. The reason may be the wide range of ideas that is likely; or simply that different-minded people tend to disagree and this prevents over-hasty decisions being made." So for creative problem-solving sessions, it may pay to invite a range of people from different levels and backgrounds, perhaps even some "outsiders."

So now you have thought of everyone who might either do the meeting some good or gain something from it. The next step for the meeting planner, and a very important step, is to pare down the attendee list so it includes only those members whose presence is absolutely necessary. There is universal agreement among meeting-improvement experts that a major reason for poor meetings is that too many people have been invited.

"Large, unwieldy meetings seem to be especially common in the public sector," says Maude, "perhaps because of legal and representational considerations." The philosophy of "participative management" is one of the reasons for ineffective meetings, according to Dunsing. "In line with a tradition of 'touching base with everyone', some groups that are supposed to be working groups grow to assemblies of 20, 30, or even 40 people. But though they're billed as 'working' meetings. their size alone makes them barely able to function at all."

Dunsing states that the working meeting should rarely consist of more than 8 to 10 people. Jay states that "between 4 and 7 is generally ideal, 10 is tolerable, and 12 is the outside limit." Maude prefers 5 to 9, and Snell sets a limit at 15. If you must hold a meeting with a large number of participants, it may be desirable to create committees or subgroups to work on particular topics.

Small groups of four or less are more prone to biased decisions, and they lack the "breadth of experience and thinking to deal adequately with complex problems," says Maude. On the other hand, when groups grow to over ten, "an increasing number of people are scared into silence" and "intimate face-to-face contact between all members becomes impossible, so the meeting tends to split into cliques."

The optimum number for a particular working group is best found by experimentation. The ideal size is one that is large enough to provide the needed expertise for solving a problem, yet is small enough to prevent communications and control problems.

Seating Arrangements

Yet another factor that the astute meeting planner can vary in designing a successful meeting is the arrangement of attendees in the meeting room. Again, the type of seating arrangements will depend on the objective of the meeting and the kind of leadership style the meeting leader chooses. In addition, it will depend on whether the meeting planner wishes to promote or prevent conflict among individuals or factions in a meeting.

A "democratic" seating arrangement is one that emphasizes the equality of members, for example, a round or square table. A variation is to use low coffee tables, or no tables at all, as might be done in an informal rap-session.

The leader becomes more central when he or she sits at the middle of a U-shaped arrangement. This "leader-centered" symbolism becomes stronger still when the leader sits at the head of a long, narrow table. With the traditional rectangular table, says Maude, "you talk either to the chairman or to the people opposite and you respond to comments by the people opposite more than to comments made by people alongside you." Particularly if the table is narrow, participants are forced into uncomfortable direct visual contact with the people sitting opposite, and they have to crane their necks to see the leader. The result is that "this kind of meeting often turns into a kind of verbal tennis match, with contributions flying to and fro across the table rather than around it."

Another way to minimize social contact is to place the leader at the front of the room with all other chairs facing the front. "The easiest way to maintain a group as strangers," says Spaulding, "is to seat them theater-style so that except for those on either side, they never become acquainted with anything other than the backs of their colleagues' heads." However, this may well be a good set-up if your primary objective is to give information to participants.

In general, the meeting planner will want to increase interaction and eye contact among meeting participants. When participants can see each other's faces and read the body language of other members, their understanding of each other will be maximized. For greatest eye contact, use a U-shaped or circular table.

If there are two conflicting groups, and you wish to minimize tension, be sure to break up the groups. In particular, do not put opposing camps on opposite sides of a rectangular table. Likewise, keep individuals who are antagonistic a good distance apart. As Snell observes, "Distance will definitely make the hearts of two opposites grow fonder!"

The Meeting Room

"Surroundings tend to affect the way we think and act," states Auger, "and a poorly arranged and uncomfortable room is not likely to produce positive meeting results." Common sense, you say, yet how many meetings have you attended where something disturbed your concentration, such as an uncomfortable chair, a burnt-out projector bulb, a hot, overcrowded room, or a dance class meeting on the floor directly above? Attention to the physical setting of a meeting can't guarantee a good meeting, but it can prevent a bad one.

The location of your meeting depends on its purpose. If it is an instructional meeting, a classroom may be the best place. If it is a "ritualistic" meeting, it should probably be held in the best conference room available. And if it is a problem-solving or decision-making meeting, a simple meeting room is best. But "do not hold a decision-making meeting in the office of a high status member," caution Bormann and others—the surrounding symbolism is bound to inhibit free communication.

The size of the meeting room should match the size of the group. Maude reports that "the size of the room preferred by most participants is one that gives the impression of being comfortably full—not crowded—when everyone is present and sitting around the table."

Chairs should be comfortable, but not so comfortable that participants are prone to doze off. There should be ample electrical sockets for projectors, recorders, and so forth, and the meeting planner should make sure that the correct audio-visual equipment will be available and serviceable. Paper and pencils should be in ample supply, and a coffee pot should be nearby.

Good acoustics, lighting, and ventilation are other common-sense necessities for a good meeting. A room with poor acoustics is apt to lull participants to sleep, or frustrate them. Poor lighting and ventilation can also make group members irritable.

If there is antagonism between the smoking and non-smoking factions of the meeting, try to put the smokers together in the best ventilated area of the room. An increasingly popular remedy is to restrict smoking during the meeting altogether.

Meeting distractions come in the form of incoming telephone calls, late-comers, and outside noises. All calls to meeting participants should be held unless there is an emergency. If there are two or more entrances to the meeting room, only one should be used to minimize interruption by late-comers. And the meeting should be held in a room that is not usually subject to outside noises.

Of course, it is impossible to meet in an "ideal" room every time, but with judicious attention to environmental factors that can be altered, the meeting planner can most often ensure that the meeting environment will be comfortable and conducive to good communication.

THE ART OF LEADING THE MEETING

Good meeting planning is essential for having consistently good meetings. Yet even with the best planning, meetings can go awry. The other half of the meeting leader's art consists of successfully managing the "human energy" *during* the meeting.

An influencing factor, as always, is the style of leadership that the leader chooses. Do you want to run your meetings in traditional fashion, like a captain running his ship, giving orders and taking full command? Or do you prefer to view yourself as a subtle facilitator who is *at the service* of the group?

The concept of leadership, as noted earlier, has been changing rapidly in recent decades. Earlier meeting manuals stress the importance of a strong leader who is the master and controller of the group. More recent publications, influenced by the rising philosophy of humanism, portray the meeting leader as a manager and facilitator whose primary function is to foster a democratic and cooperative group process among participants. In keeping with the spirit of the times, the suggestions in this chapter are designed more for the "leader as facilitator" and less for the "leader as captain."

The What and How of Meeting Management

A trained meeting observer or a perceptive meeting participant will be aware of two distinct sets of activities that take place in every working discussion. The first set, called the "task" or "content" activities of the group, has to do with *what* the group is doing. The second set, called "maintenance" or "process" activities, has to do with *how* the group is doing it. The effective group leader should be aware of and facilitate both activities.

Task activities, says Dunsing, are "rational, systematic, cognitive efforts of the kind we typically expend in talking about and working on a problem." The goals of task activities are the stated goals of the meeting: to make a decision, to solve a problem, to plan a budget, to exchange information. Examples of task activities are setting goals, listing priorities, using background and history, examining consequences, linking with other issues, setting assignments, and agreeing on time limits.

Maintenance activities (also called human relations activities), continues Dunsing, concern "the way people think, act, and feel while they're immersed in the task." The goals of maintenance activities are the personal, usually unstated goals of each member: to feel acceptance and affiliation, to achieve, to have power. Things to watch for in assessing process activities include the eruption of conflict and how it is handled, body language, the relevance of inputs from each participant, the expression of emotion by participants (such as anger, irritation, resentment, apathy, boredom, warmth and appreciation, or satisfaction), and the mixture of seriousness and playfulness in the group.

Maude has observed that "meetings oscillate between intellectual and emotional activity as the pressures of decision-making arouse emotions in people."

When emotions start surfacing, it is time for the group leader and other sensitive meeting participants to start "maintaining" the human relations in the group. When the "meeting machine" is back in smooth working order, the meeting leader should guide the group back into task activities.

Task Functions

The primary tool the group leader has to help a group toward its goals is the agenda. The agenda defines the topics and objectives of the meeting and structures the time within the meeting. It is the backbone of the meeting, the roadmap to its goals.

The first topic on the agenda should be the approval of the agenda itself. This activity allows participants to review the "meeting menu" and suggest changes if they feel they are necessary. For example, some members might think that the time allotment for a topic should be greater in light of recent events, or that a certain topic should be talked about first thing. Even if no changes are made, the agenda review and approval are valuable for setting the stage for the meeting and allow members to get into the right "mental set."

The meeting leader should constantly monitor the meeting in relation to its plan, the agenda. When the conversation gets off track, the leader should correct the direction of the meeting. Questions are a useful way to do this; for example, the leader may ask: "Just a moment, please. How does this relate to the point Janet made earlier?" A more direct approach is sometimes needed: "This is interesting, but we're getting off the subject. Let's get back to the main topic."

The leader should watch for signs that the topic has been discussed enough—such as the repetition of ideas or loss of interest—and move the group on to the next topic. But the leader should also be flexible and not hurry the meeting along too fast in the interest of sticking to the agenda. Says Maude, "Meetings need time to deal with complex problems: under pressure, they settle for quick but unsound decisions."

A good way to round off the discussion of a topic is to summarize the main points brought up. An added benefit is that the leader can gracefully move into the next topic after summing up. Another simple approach is to ask participants if they think enough time has been devoted to the topic, and whether they would like to move on.

Just as the leader helps the group round off its discussion of one topic, he or she helps the group begin discussion of the next. The leader may simply indicate the group member responsible for the next topic, as indicated on the agenda. Or the leader may give background information on the topic and then "immediately encourage the contribution of opinions and information by group members," says Bradford. "If the leader fails to promote initiation by all members, the group can quickly become passive and uninvolved."

At times it may become obvious that a different approach is needed to solve a problem. The leader can stop discussion, suggest the new strategy, and ask what the group thinks about the change. Such "restructurings" of the group process can both save time and prevent unnecessary conflict.

In most meetings, there are some members who are more aggressive than others in their presentation of ideas. More timid members may have good ideas, but their ideas may only get half-stated or half-heard. It is up to the meeting leader to draw out the idea, particularly if it is a good one, and elaborate it for the group. This prevents the loss of good ideas and prevents the timid group members from withdrawing from active participation to the detriment of the whole group.

When the desired end-product of a discussion is a decision, the leader should step in when he or she senses there may be a consensus and ask if the group is in substantial agreement. If no consensus is in sight and the discussion seems to be going nowhere, the leader can call for a vote. If consensus is required or desired, however, the leader may have to be imaginative and think of a new method for resolving the remaining conflicts.

When a decision is made, the meeting leader should make clear just what the decision is and how it will be implemented. Responsibilities should be assigned and deadlines for action set. This solid information should be entered at once into the minutes of the meeting.

Even if there was substantial disagreement during a meeting, the leader should attempt to end on a positive note. A good means of doing this is to save for last an agenda item that everyone can agree on.

Finally, the meeting leader should briefly sum up the entire meeting and restate its decisions and the assignments of responsibility. Just before the meeting adjourns, it may be a good time to arrange the next meeting time with group members.

Maintenance Functions

Properly maintaining the human relationships in a group is somewhat like properly maintaining the machines in a factory, says Bradford. "The effective group . . . learns that consistent maintenance not only resolves problems; it makes working together a rewarding experience." But "without attention to moods, feelings, and interpersonal relationships, a group chokes its lifeline of energy and motivation to complete the task."

Other authors address the task/maintenance issue in terms of a balance between effort and reward. According to Burgoon and his coauthors, the amount of personal reward members receive influences both "the willingness of group members to participate and their satisfaction with group outcomes."

> Individuals bring to the group their personal anticipations of the amount of effort they will expend compared to the amount of reward they will receive. If the amount of effort required becomes disproportionate to the amount of reward received, willingness to be involved in the group decreases. . . . The group must, therefore, select its responsibilities and design its activities so that the members are collectively and individually satisfied with the relationship.

The goal of the leader's maintenance activities, then, is to create a group in which members feel involved, nonthreatened, and satisfied in their personal needs. Such a group can reach its maximum productivity as negative interpersonal conflicts fade out and the natural tendencies of humans to cooperate and solve mutual problems emerge.

One maintenance function already mentioned is that of drawing out and encouraging the more timid members of a group. Not only does this increase the "idea pool" of the group, it prevents the withdrawal of timid members from active participation in the group. The danger of withdrawn members is double: first, they are "dead weight" on the group's shoulders, contributing little to the group's productivity; second, out of feelings of resentment, they may sabotage group decisions by "forgetting" to do things or by working actively against implementation of the decisions in which they "really had no say."

Group members who feel that they and their ideas are valuable to the group will work for the group instead of against it, because they will have gotten something positive from the group: acceptance, identity, and a feeling of belonging. Thus, the group leader should encourage participation from all members and make sure that the "smaller voices" are not overwhelmed.

When conflict breaks out in a meeting, as it inevitably will, the role of the leader becomes that of harmonizer. "Harmonizing," says Bradford, "is negotiation between opposing sides in which one member serves as a third-party peacemaker, trying to retrieve the best ideas of both sides." However, Bradford warns, "When overdone, harmonizing dulls the flash of creativity that confrontation can produce."

So a certain degree of conflict is part of a healthy group process. But when conflict is extreme, and egos are involved, the progress of the group toward its goals often comes to a complete standstill.

One useful technique for decreasing personal conflicts in meetings is to distinguish clearly between ideas and individuals. Ideas, *not* individuals, should be evaluated by the group, stresses Bradford. "An individual may feel that a critical evaluation of his contribution is a rejection of himself. Such individuals, unable to separate their ideas from themselves, may withdraw. Others may fight, creating polarization and conflict in the group."

Of course, it is no easy trick getting participants to keep their minds on ideas instead of individuals. Certainly, reminders from the leader at critical times can help. A useful exercise for helping members learn the distinction is this: Have members write down their ideas for the solution of a problem. Collect the ideas and emphasize that they are now "group property." Then have the group evaluate the ideas one by one.

The leader should not, if at all possible, take sides in an argument. If questioned about his or her opinion, the leader can relay the question back to the group: "That is a tough problem. Does anyone have any ideas?" If the leader does answer questions about substantive measures, warn Bormann and his associates, "he is quite likely to be drawn into the conflict. Once a part of the fight, he loses control of the meeting. It is difficult to lead and take an active part. The man who does both may monopolize the meeting."

Indeed, monopolizing the meeting is usually what a traditional-style leader does when conflict is brewing. Yet how can you both lead a meeting in which you have a critical stake and facilitate the meeting, as if you didn't? One approach is to have several or all members trained in facilitating meetings. Then when conflict erupts, the person most neutral on the issue can "referee." Another approach, to be discussed later in this chapter, is to have a neutral person from outside the group facilitate the entire meeting (see the Interaction Method).

You as a Participant

A meeting's success should not, of course, be solely dependent on the leader's capabilities. Participants, too, have responsibilities for making meetings work.

The first rule for meeting participation is to come prepared. Read the agenda and think about the topics to be discussed. Make sure you understand the issues. Read the background information provided with the agenda, if any. Formulate your own views and questions, and imagine what other points of view might be presented.

When you have a presentation to make at a meeting, prepare yourself fully: make an outline, prepare any visual aids you need, and rehearse your presentation. When your proposals may be controversial, discuss them with key people before the meeting.

When in the meeting, use good manners: try not to shuffle papers or engage in side conversations. Listen carefully to what others say and try to see the issue from their viewpoints. Speak up when you have knowledge or an opinion to share, but don't overparticipate--try to get an active group process going. Ask clarifying questions when there appears to be confusion.

Help the leader by sticking to agenda topics and time limits, drawing out the ideas of others, facilitating the resolution of conflicts, and criticizing ideas instead of people. And . . . please arrive on time.

Utilizing Minutes

Memory is as fleeting as time itself. How much do you remember, for example, about your day just one week ago? We begin forgetting events immediately after they occur, and even when we do think we recall something, we are often incorrect in our recollections.

Auger brings this point home by summarizing the results of a memory-retention study, conducted on the attendees of a psychological society meeting. Two weeks after the meeting, the average attendee could recall "only 8.4 per cent of all points actually covered in the meeting." Worse yet, "forty-two per cent of what they thought they remembered was incorrectly recalled."

Thus, a very important principle for making meetings more effective is to *document the results* of the meeting.

Promptly getting the decisions made and actions required onto paper will help ensure that they are both remembered and implemented properly.

The amount of detail you put in your minutes depends on the situation. Sometimes a detailed transcript or tape recording may be desirable or required. More frequently, a group will wish to have a simple record of the main points made in a meeting, including, perhaps, the reasoning used to come to conclusions. "Even when a proposal is rejected, it may be useful to keep a record of the argument," says Maude, "so that if ever the issue is raised again the committee will be able to refer back to the report and see what its thinking and its reasons for rejection were last time."

Even if your minutes consist of a few simple statements outlining the major decisions of the meeting, they should contain a certain minimal amount of information: What is going to be done, and how will it be done? Who is going to do what? When should these actions be completed? It is important that these details be written down to avoid the common after-meeting syndromes of forgetfulness, procrastination, and confusion about what is required or who is responsible.

Minutes that are limited to key decisions can often be taken by a group member, or the group leader. When a decision is reached, the minute taker should record the decision and all its details and immediately read it back to the group for confirmation.

When more detailed minutes are desired, a formal minute taker from outside the group is usually needed; a group member taking detailed minutes cannot actively participate in discussions, because he or she is busy writing. In addition, an external notetaker is less likely to be biased in recording the proceedings. On the other hand, the notetaker may have difficulty understanding what is going on in the meeting and may consequently make recording errors.

A disadvantage of taking minutes on the traditional notepad, says Dunsing, is that "the course of events is hidden from view on the note paper. Others at the table cannot refer to past key points." A method growing in popularity is to have the proceedings of a meeting recorded on large pieces of paper taped to the wall, or on large pads on an easel.

With this form of minutes, participants can see the past flow of ideas in the meeting and won't feel the necessity of repeating their ideas as much because others in the group have forgotten them. Another advantage, says Halverson, is that "it serves to depersonalize the ideas—they become 'the group's'."

When the meeting is over, copies of the minutes should be made and distributed to group members within forty-eight hours of the meeting, and preferably sooner. Auger even suggests that, given a nearby secretary and copying machine, the minutes can be handed to group members as they leave the room.

If more detailed minutes are taken, it may be desirable to write up a summary of the meeting's major decisions. The summary should be distributed to participants and the original detailed minutes kept on file.

The Interaction Method

One way to solve the leader/facilitator conflict mentioned earlier is to have a person from outside the group do the facilitating. The leader is then free to concentrate on the "what" of the meeting (the task functions), while the facilitator takes care of the "how" (the maintenance functions). This is the approach proposed by Michael Doyle and David Straus in *How to Make Meetings Work*.

The "Interaction Method," as Doyle and Straus call their approach, actually defines four separate roles "which collectively form a self-correcting system of checks and balances." The *facilitator* is "a neutral servant of the group and does not evaluate or contribute ideas." The facilitator suggests methods and procedures for the meeting, protects members of the group from personal attack, and assures that everyone has an opportunity to speak. In short, "the facilitator serves as a combination of tool guide, traffic officer, and meeting chauffeur."

The *recorder*, or minute taker, is also neutral and nonevaluating. The recorder writes down the group's ideas on large sheets of paper on the walls, using, whenever possible, the actual words of each speaker. The advantages of this approach, according to the authors, are that "the act of recording does not significantly slow down the progress of the meeting," and the written record (called the "group memory") serves as "an accepted record of what is happening as it is happening."

The *group maker* is one of the active participants in the meeting. The group members "keep the facilitator and recorder in their neutral roles" and "make sure that ideas are recorded accurately." Group members can also "make procedural suggestions" and "overrule the suggestions of the facilitator." Other than these functions, their main focus is on the agenda and the tasks to be accomplished.

The fourth and final role is that of the *manager/chairperson,* who becomes an active participant in the group, yet retains the powers and responsibilities of the traditional leadership position. The manager "makes all final decisions; has the power to set constraints and regain control if not satisfied by the progress of the meeting; sets the agenda; argues actively for his or her points of view"; and "urges group members to accept tasks and deadlines." (Although the Interaction Method is built around this fairly autocratic leadership style, there seems to be no reason why it could not be adjusted to a more democratic style, or even to a leaderless group.)

Doyle and Straus, who run a "consulting and training firm with expertise in problem-solving" (Interaction Associates Inc.), claim wide success with their method in education, business, and government meetings. Their book contains a complete description of the Interaction Method and a wealth of meeting improvement techniques.

TOOLS FOR EVALUATING AND IMPROVING MEETINGS

The literature on group dynamics and organizational development is replete with exercises, techniques, and "structured experiences" for evaluating and improving meetings. Some can be implemented quite easily and do not require special training. Many others take a fair amount of preparation and follow-up and work best with a meeting consultant.

As an example of the former, Ernest and Nancy Bormann provide three checklists for meeting improvement. The first is a planning checklist that asks critical questions of the meeting planner, such as "What is the purpose of the meeting?"; "Who will participate?"; and "Will the room be ready and open?" The second checklist is designed for evaluating a meeting by a participant or observer. Questions include, "Was the preparation for the meeting adequate?"; "Was a permissive social climate established?", and "Did the leader exercise the right amount of control?" The final checklist is designed for the leader to evaluate how well he or she led the meeting: "Did you 'loosen up' the group before plunging into discussion?"; "Did you pose a challenging question to start the discussion?"

Bradford provides six other brief meeting evaluation forms that are designed for recording participant reaction at meeting's end. The group can use the resulting data in several ways: a summary of the results can be announced at the next meeting; the leader can select themes from the forms and ask for discussion on those topics only; or the group can devote a whole meeting to the maintenance issues that surfaced via the evaluation forms.

Some of the evaluation forms Bradford provides are taken from University Associates' *The 1979 Annual Handbook for Group Facilitators* (see Jones and Pfeiffer), a much wider source of evaluation and group-process awareness exercises. Each *Annual* "is intended to make widely available to group facilitators an up-to-date repository of information, techniques, methods, and 'tools of the trade' (structured experiences and instruments)." University Associates encourages users to duplicate and adapt the materials for their own educational and training needs.

Halverson describes several simple techniques for improving meetings. In "Going Around the Room," each participant in turn is asked to state his or her position at that moment. This method is useful "when the group is hung up around the views of those who are dominating the conversation," says Halverson, as well as "when the group seems to have run out of solutions." It is also useful for quickly evaluating a meeting and for winding up a meeting.

In "Subgrouping," the group is temporarily divided into smaller groups of from two to six people to discuss either the same or different topics. Subgrouping is useful in larger groups because it keeps members involved, allows every participant to be heard, and permits more than one topic to be discussed at once. (A legislature with its committee system is the epitome of subgrouping.) Fordyce and Weil report the success of subgrouping in a meeting that included both professional and clerical workers: "To surface underlying issues for the agenda, the group was divided into homogeneous subgroups. Each subgroup reported its proposed agenda items. For the first time, the voices of the clerical staff were clearly heard."

Another series of exercises and evaluation instruments are presented in *The Second Handbook of Organization Development in Schools* (see Schmuck and others). Although designed for organization development consultants, many of the exercises are easily implemented without specialized knowledge.

Other publications containing some evaluation tools are *Taking Your Meetings Out of the Doldrums* by Schindler-Rainman, Lippitt, and Cole, *You and I Have Simply Got to Stop Meeting This Way* by Dunsing, and *The Small Meeting Planner* by This.

CONCLUSION

As Toffler's "super-industrial age" comes upon us and educators are burdened with an ever-increasing number of duties and responsibilities, effective meeting techniques become more and more important. No longer can education afford the price of unproductive and unsatisfying meetings. Each meeting must become more effective at grappling with the future, more effective as an arena of controlled change. At the same time, the meeting must serve to satisfy personal needs for affiliation, achievement, activity, and power, for the long-term benefit of both the organization and society.

Briefly, this digest has outlined the process of successful meeting management as follows:

At the beginning of the meeting process, the meeting leader decides on a compatible leadership style after considering his or her own nature, the needs and desires of group members, and the characteristics of the organization and situation. In planning the meeting, the leader's first guides are the goals and purposes he or she wishes to accomplish. Next, the meeting planner draws up the blueprint for the meeting's actions—the agenda. The framework of the meeting takes form as the participants are invited, the seating arrangements are decided on, the meeting room is arranged, and background information and agendas are distributed to participants.

Finally, the meeting opens and the interpersonal and discussion skills of the chairperson come to the fore. Using the agenda as a road map, the leader skillfully guides the group through the chaos of problem-solving and decision-making. At the same time, the leader is alert for the surfacing of negative emotions and maintains the human relations in the group as needed. When decisions are reached, the leader makes sure that responsibilities are clearly designated and that deadlines for action are set. After the meeting, the leader distributes the minutes, follows up on the decisions made, and evaluates the effectiveness of the meeting.

When meetings are run in this way, they can actually become both productive and satisfying! With some thought given to leadership style, purpose, planning, and the personal needs of participants, your meetings, too, can become more effective.

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44