Management and Improvement of Meetings’ Quality in Business Organizations

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ABSTRACT

Meetings are one of the important reasons of time wastage among the managers. Although the meetings are costly and time consuming, without them most of the organizations cannot survive. Managers need some methods to improve the quality of their meetings and efficiently use them to progress the organization. In this paper a 5-part pattern has been proposed that helps managers to improve the quality of their meetings and to apply effective management during the meetings. These are as follows:

1. Description of the meeting objective.
2. Choosing the participants
3. Preparing the meeting.
4. Directing the process of team decision making
5. Registering and evaluating the results of the meeting.

Keywords: Time management, Meetings management, Quality improvement of meetings, Team decision

1. INTRODUCTION

Meetings are considered as one of the most important methods and major essentials of managing today’s organizations which are at the same time among the major factors of wasting time. The results of some research have shown that more than 1/3 of the middle managers and more than 2 hours of senior managers are spent in the meetings. Most of urban and service organizations like associations, enterprises and clubs are exactly managed by such meetings. Meetings are a central part of the work environment that can affect many different aspects of one’s job, such as job satisfaction (Rogelberg, et al., 2010); they also serve many purposes, including decision-making, product development, information sharing, etc. (Tracy & Dimock, 2003). Most of the organizations cannot survive without the meetings. They need to establish the meetings to discuss, make decisions, solve existent problems, organize team working, and summarize the knowledge and professions of the team. But most of the times, the meetings bring about dissatisfaction, tensions, crisis and conflicts. They are costly both in case of time and money. If you invite 7 or 8 middle managers to a meeting their salary and benefits would be 20 dollar for every one minute. So the managers would better make effort to estimate the cost of their meetings and determine their effects in fulfilling the organization’s objectives. According to Tracy et al. (2003), meetings are the primary communicative practice that organizations use to accomplish important goals, make changes, display power, and come up with new ideas.

Today, in different sciences, such as management and economics, more attentions are rendered importance of time and its applicability, in a manner that “Stephan Kinder” in connection with time process insufficiency in economic subjects says; time is counted as a unique source (Woodring, 1995) and time wasting cause irretrievable damages to individual and organization. Thus among other activities of directors their implementation of time can define the management to be effective or ineffective (Oshaglemi, 1998). Today, concentration on time management necessity re taken into consideration in all educational level in an extent that in directors education colleges, management and time planning are in alongside with other important subjects (Hammersley, 2002).

Because time is the only source which must be implemented as the sooner gained opportunity which is more necessary for all directors.
Effective use means the amount of time accessible. And in this case, sufficient planning and organization are required. Otherwise, more time will be lost (Miller, 1985) and time turns into the largest enemy of management because it is the mere needing source and that you cannot attain the amount you desire (Ratliff, 2003) therefore, time using ability is what that distinguished good directors from weak directors. That manager who cannot organize himself how could organize the others. In fact, time management skill is a multidimensional skill therefore there exist a higher relation between this skill with function and success of directors (Macan, et al. 1990).

Manager use different methods for management of time but the common base in all of these methods is controlling the major time losers such as dispersion and implementation of information in programming form (Kirk, 2001). In fact Managers must encourage spent of time for thinking and ultimately entrust solution of minor problems to official lower rungs (Chaves and Hall, 2001), in fact time management are better time using methods we can attain it and are of such abilities and skills that shall lead to optimum control of time by individuals. Time management is more than administration activities during the length of time, time management comprise planning skills, organization performance and control. Time management means effective implementation of sources and a way for achieving effective goals (Rogers, 1987). Time management is a process that include four entirely several phases but connected to each other as follows:

a. Commitment
b. Analysis
c. Planning
d. Follow up and reanalysis

a. **Commitment**

This phase of time management is entirely individual and personal. People should be aware of time importance and time loss subsequent. Directors should concentrate on their time management important outcomes and also on their organization and make decision with full mental readiness. Agitated time management looks like a bad habit and directors must commit to do something to it. Directors must define their goal or goals by application of time management, write them down and place it where to be in his exposure. The first covenant in time management is commitment and hindrance to convert habits and previous methods. Implementation of psychology and consultation are recognized useful in such hindrance and can be counted useful guide to manager or other individual.

b. **Analysis**

Analysis of existing situation and desirable situation is the second phase of time management. Manager should collect data about how he spends his time, what problems he has, in what condition he is, and analyze them. The outcomes of such analysis shall provide sufficient information for commencing the third phase, it means, for planning. Analysis comprises three phase in time management:

1/2: Analysis on how use time
2/2: Analysis of time issues in group work and Analysis of Simple and Multiple Relations among the Skills of University Directors and Time Management and Some Personal and Organizational Characteristics

3/2- Self-Assessment

c. **Planning**

Lots of inexperienced directors, under daily work pressure, notify that has not enough time for planning. But impressive and efficient management requires planning and the manager can save time in lieu of performing erroneous works can diminish crisis and prevent performance of unnecessary and insignificant jobs. Planning is the third phase of impressive time management and comprises three steps:

1/3- Definition of goals and priorities.
2/3- Analysis of time issues in group works and 3/3-Development of time management techniques.

d. **Follow up and Reanalysis**

This phase is the fourth phase of time management process. It is a continual process that cannot be completed by reading an instruction book or participates in a seminar. Time management must be counted a perpetual portion of daily life. Time management process must be recognized as a circle because there is not any termination points thereto, thus all time wasting cases must be analyzed frequently, should oversight its progress and find new ways for blocking time wasting. The goals must be reevaluated. Directors (directors) must know that management weaknesses hardly to be rectified as other bad habits and may easily return to previous form time wasting methods, unless apply the last process of time management process, it mean, reanalyze and follow up permanently. Therefore time management process is a permanent analysis, planning, reanalysis and re-planning.

The results of different research show that more than 40 factors have role in wasting time of managers which can be summarized in 6 factors within the following table:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Index</th>
<th>Controlling</th>
<th>Decision making</th>
<th>Communications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>Not specifying the objectives</td>
<td>Telephone Harassment</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Being able to say NO</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Lack of daily planning</td>
<td>Accidental visitors</td>
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<td>Insufficient information</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Not specifying the privileges</td>
<td>Lack of personal discipline</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Meetings</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Not finishing the jobs</td>
<td>More than enough fondness</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Hidden relationships</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Crisis management</td>
<td>Ineffective mistakes and executions</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Failure to hear and weakness in making relations</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Lack of methods to prevent self deception</td>
<td>Controlling the meetings</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Being sociable and having friendly relations</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Unclear perspectives and ambiguity in responsibilities</td>
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<td>Relationships in meetings</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Lack of programming for the meetings</td>
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<td>Sudden decisions</td>
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<td>Organizing</td>
<td>No personal organization,</td>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Failure in decision making and negligence</td>
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<td></td>
<td>More than needed efforts</td>
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<td>Need to all the realities</td>
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<td>Authority and unclear responsibility</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>Consultative decision making</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Number of employer</td>
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<td>Changing and repetitive cancelling of the decisions</td>
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<td>Reports and Bureaucracies</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>Process of decision making during the meetings</td>
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<td>Travels</td>
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<td>Sudden decisions</td>
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<td>Not organizing the meetings</td>
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<td>Failure in decision making and negligence</td>
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<td>Directing</td>
<td>Doing most of the tasks</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Involvement in regular details</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Inefficient empowerment</td>
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<td>Lack of motivation</td>
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<td>Not planned encounter</td>
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<td>No proper computability with changes</td>
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<td>Incompetent employees</td>
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<td>Directing the meetings</td>
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As it is shown in the above table, the common factor in 6 mentioned classes is the meeting and because of the importance of this essay, improving the quality of the meetings is concentrated.

2. THE FRAMEWORK OF EFFECTIVE MEETINGS

How can we make the meetings more efficient? It is better to start with the following definition of the meeting:

Meeting collects some employees, who have the same interests, enough knowledge and experiences to achieve some objectives through mutual interlocution. Nixon and Littlepage (1992) found that several procedural characteristics of meetings are related to meeting effectiveness including open communication; focus on tasks, and agenda integrity.

This definition gives us directives to better management of the meetings. With such a definition we can describe forming elements or the framework which help us in better management of meetings, as follows:

a. Description of objective: what does meeting formation mean? What are its meant objectives? What kind of meeting it is?

b. Choosing the participants: who have to participate in the meeting? What are their tendencies and professions? How is their personal problems and point of views? What effects can they have on the team`s decision?

c. Preparing the meeting: when and where is should be held? How long does it take? Does it need a special procurement? What general solutions must be considered during the meeting? What topics must be considered in the agenda? How we should behave with each participant? Do the participants need to have preparedness? Is there an introduction ceremony?

d. Directing the team`s decision: how can we motive the personnel to offer relevant knowledge and professions? How we can provide a creative environment? How can we overcome personal problems?

e. Registering and evaluating the results: which decisions have been made? What actions will be performed? Who will execute them? When?

How can we follow up the problems in order to insure their complete fulfillment? What was the total cost of the meeting? Was the meeting`s benefit more than the costs?

Each manager who wants to hold a meeting must keep these five factors in mind. It is clear that some meetings need more procurement whilst others do not. If the managers use these factors they will succeed to hold more effective meetings. Through following lines the mentioned pattern will be more described:

i) Defining the aim or objective

The meetings are performed to achieve the following objectives:

- Planning
- Decision making to realize a plan
- Evaluating
- Problem solving (finding the reasons and offering solutions)
- Informing and Educating
- Benefiting from the knowledge and expertise of the team
- Founding cooperation and responsibility
- Inclusion and sustainable development practices

To answer the question about the meaning of a meeting, the answer is almost: "it is clear, meeting is about the budget". Or "we intend to discuss the reasons of delay in delivering the products". Such opinions are about the subject not the objective. Ambiguous and unclear statements about the objectives often cause some troubles.

Think about the meeting that you have in the office or a gathering and write and practice a clear description of the objectives with specified subjects. Sometimes, after clarifying the objective, you may conclude that having a meeting is not necessary. A note may facilitate the job or it may be better to meet the personnel separately. But meeting is sometimes essential, and you have to discuss other participants with its objectives.

ii) Choosing the participants

Think about those who have to participate in the meeting. The problem is completely clear in some meetings. In the meetings of financial committee, the members of that committee may just participate. In the
meeting of member of the boards, its members, inspector and director manager will participate to answer. But for most of the meetings the relevant head will decide who have to participate. If you are the head of a meeting, try to invite few people in order to be able to talk and consult easily, however those whose ideas are important must participate. If you intend to make an important decision you must pay attention to all the effective speeches because those employees who express their opinions will be more useful in execution of that decision. Sugihara et al. (1989) view meeting scheduling as an optimization problem called “Timetable Rearrangement” problem. Given a timetable of meetings and an additional meeting to be scheduled, the problem is to rearrange the timetable so that the total number of persons obliged to change their schedules is minimized.

Some people tend to suppress others even if they are present and cooperate in decision making. Those who have higher positions or those who show off their position or education may make others to become silent or accept their opinions. Those who are more zealous are stronger in advancement of their opinions and strongly criticize others’ opinions. Therefore, the head of a meeting should consider two points about the participants:

1. The participant’s interest, knowledge and the expertise relevant to the meeting’s objectives,
2. Their effects on interrelationships of the team

In this regard, we need to answer the following questions:

- Who will participate in the meeting?
- What is the field of their cooperation?
- What effects might they have on the performance of the team?

iii) Preparing the meeting

The next step is the preparation for meeting, when? Where? Why? How?

Describing the objective and preparing a list of the participants will help you to make decision about holding the meeting. When different people of different organizations attend the meeting, it is better to hold it in a neutral region, like a hotel’s or library’s conference salon. If the subject is complex and delicate and takes several hours, it is better to be held in a calm location in suburbs; including the lunch and resting time it is possible to better discuss there. Try to choose a salon in line with the meeting’s objective.

Location and status of the participants may make conflicts as well. Have you ever participated in a meeting in which 12 or 13 people had to sit on fixed chairs or around the manager’s table, or in a discussion session in which many had to sit face to face beside the table? Try to choose a place in which people feel comfortable and it owns a proper ventilation system. Choose a place in which people do not force to sit in front of door, because when others enter they will lose their attention. Choose a place in which each participant knows himself as a member and easily sees and hears what is necessary.

A good agenda which describes all details is the most useful mean for forming an effective and acceptable meeting. Agenda will act as a guide map and inform participants of the contents and become their acting guidance, it will give them the chance to have a role in decision making. To clarify the objective of the team, it is better to classify the agenda with titles such as decision making, discussion or gaining information.

Agenda will also include date, location, starting and finishing time of the meeting. The meetings whose finishing time has not been determined will be in fact time-wasting. If we fail to determine time schedule of a meeting, it will continue non-stop so the participants will be tired, negligence and nervous. Most of the meetings will not result even after two hours, so consider a break time in your agenda. When the agenda is for several topics, carefully mention the order of topics. The participants are generally more active and conscious early in the meeting, therefore place the discussion about problems at the beginning of the session (Rogers, 1987).

The participants must be provided with the agenda several days before. It is accompanied with a background including researching reports, statistics, results, planning for the seats of participants and etc. The participants need useful information. Do not waste valuable time of the meeting with non-significant materials. You have to specify the process of meeting as well. The participants must know the person in charge of the meeting and know if the meeting will be held in debate manner or giving reports; or know if the meeting is held for decision making or offering the proposal. The decisions will be made by voting or consensus. Is the head of meeting authorized to make decision or reject the decisions?
Note that no one enjoys participating long and timing consuming meetings.

iv) Directing the process of decision making

Meeting is a mean to make team decision. The process of participation (an efficient team of people who act for achievement of a common objective) is an essential matter in the modern society. Although many affairs can be done individually due to organizational or legal reasons, most of them must be performed through cooperation. Most of research has shown that a group of people who negotiate effectively and creatively to solve the problems will make better decisions comparing other participants.

Following team decisions will result in achieving a common point of view, which originates from the proficiency of each member of the team and their interaction. Each decision must be based on this factor: "Agreement-based decision making". The major advantage of team decisions is that there is no loser. Those who lose in polling will often weasel out their obligations. This type of decision making has no loser because it will not be performed by polling and place against positive or negative individual decisions. The definition of decision making and some of its regulations which have been offered by Jey Hall and some other scientists will be shortly described.

A team will reach a consensus when each member can say "Yes, although it is not exactly what I desire I can accept it through final analysis". That does not mean the satisfaction of all team members but at least there is little satisfaction. So each member can disorganize the decision making, this shows that consensus decisions are more difficult and effective than other ways like polling. They force the team to consider all the concepts of the matter in this process. Consider disagreements as a method for: 1. collecting additional information 2. describing the subjects 3. forcing the team to find better options.

In case of conflicts, try to settle it immediately.

To obtain reasonable and uniform ideas of all the participants of a large group there are two problems (it is lees encountered among 4 or 5 members groups)

1. There is not enough and useful time. If a 10 members group have a meeting (regardless the time needed to personal affairs or telling a little joke, delay etc.) a useful time for each member is about 6 minutes.

2. Not all members use their 6 minutes. How many people use their 6 minutes in your opinion? Almost, less than half. Talkative people not only waste useful time but also break time. While taciturn people would just listen and their active cooperation will be wasted. To overcome such a problem, the head of meeting must have skills in obtaining the opinions of all members and limit talkative ones.

v) Reporting and evaluating the results

Notes are long term memory of a meeting. The notes must be concentrated on decisions that been made, the works have to be done, the deadline and important affairs. The meetings must be evaluated. The main reason of evaluations is to force the head to think about better and more complete meetings.

- The success of meetings will be evaluated based on 4 criteria:
- Percentage of efficiency in reaching the objectives
- Percentage of efficiency in using the time
- Rate of costs to benefits
- The importance of decisions made

What is generally named agenda has to benefits from such characteristics that can be used in future.

These characteristics will be defined as follows:

1. Date, starting and finishing time, participants, retarders, hesitators and absences
2. Avoiding common salutations and not mentioning long highfalutin titles like His Excellency Mr. X respected manager of Y company and deputy of Z institution remarked….
3. A short description of the subject for example, regarding the request of sale manager based on the problem of sale sector including …… this meeting has been held to investigate and decide upon the …… subject.
4. The result of meeting’s topics must be registered with titles such as decision making, consultancy, investigation and the approvals clearly identified.
5. If the approvals are financial or need participation of other parts of the organization they must be obliged in the minutes of meeting.

6. The person in charge to pursue the approvals must be specified. In front of each sub article the name of people in charge must be identified.

7. Most of the approvals need executive instructions which must be provided in regard to make approvals. In this list the person in charge to provide executive instruction and the required time must be specified, it must also determined if that instruction needs to be approved or not?

8. Record end time of the meeting and mention probable reasons wasting times and report in the next meeting.

9. It is obvious the first task of next meeting may be the report of last meetings approvals progress

3. CONCLUSION

The role of meetings is undeniable within the organizations. The study of different results consider 40 factors as the most effective ones in wasting managers’ time and the meetings are one of the important ones. So this paper has been prepared to improve meetings quality and by well managing them. Five part pattern which has been offered in this paper includes: 1. describing the meeting objective 2. Choosing the participants 3. Preparing the meeting 4. Directing the process of decision making 5. Registering and evaluating the results of meeting. To evaluate the meetings 4 criteria can be used: 1. Percentage of efficiency in achieving the objective 2. Percentage of efficiency in using properly the time. 3 Rate of costs to benefits 4. Importance of decisions which have been made. These 4 criteria offer a method to successful evaluation of the meetings. Using pattern and criteria of this paper, managers can calculate the cost of their meetings and estimate their effects on fulfilling the organizations’ objectives. They can also increase the personnel’s cooperation through improving the quality of the meetings. In addition it results in reinforcement of organization’s long term memory and avoid wasting time and energy.

REFERENCES


