

SOLUTIONS TO THE CHALLENGES IN LEADING MEETINGS: WHICH MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCE DEVELOPMENTAL METHOD GIVES US MORE CREATIVE SUGGESTIONS?

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Abstract The paper deals with common dilemmas in leading meetings in organizational settings. Meetings are a regular part of our organizational lives, however too often their management is neglected and they stay without strategical focus. In many organizations they are left to coincidence or individual meeting organizers' good will. Professional field of meeting leadership emphasizes that we can accomplish strategic directions and more efficient work by appropriately preparing for the meeting, suitable organizational structure of the meeting framework and suitable leadership and controlling mechanisms. The study was carried out on two samples about solving challenges in leading the meetings based on two developmental methods which are presented in the paper. The paper states that for successful and efficient leadership of the meeting one needs to elaborate specific roles at the meeting, take care of organization and climate at the meeting.

Keywords:

meeting
leadership,
multiple
intelligence,
planning a
meeting,
being late for
the meeting,
conflicts at the
meeting.

1 Introduction

If we manage meetings badly what can we expect as a result of a management project in an organization? Many meetings are not effective because managers do not pay attention to them and do not get all the multiple intelligences from the participants due to not paying attention to multiple intelligence developmental tools (Gardner, 1983; 1993; 1995; 1999; 2007; 2010), do not prepare for meetings sufficiently, do not choose the right participants for the meeting, do not take care of the right environment for the meeting, etc.

2 Theoretical overview

There are four types of meetings, each serving different needs and requiring different leadership. A good manager knows when to hold meetings, what leadership style is appropriate, how and when to use participative leadership and how to facilitate consensus.

English (1987) defines four types of meetings: 1) staff meetings (include reporting of facts by staff members to the manager and information giving by the managers to the staff members; 2) problem solving or decision-making meetings (the group uses facts and ideas to solve problems and make decisions); 3) a combination meeting (contains some elements of problem solving and some reporting or information giving); and 4) creative meetings (team develops new ideas, relating to a theme or issue, open to a large number of participants, should exert little control).

Meeting organizers should invite the following key stakeholders (English, 1987): 1) people who will probably have to implement some of the action items that may result from the meeting; 2) people whose approval will be required to carry out the potential action items; 3) people who have official responsibility for any issues that will be discussed; and 4) people who could contribute significantly.

Meeting managers need to be prepared for managing problematic participants (English, 1987): 1) silent members (the leader should draw them out by asking questions in their area of expertise that relate them to the discussion; if left alone they may express opinions outside the meeting, actually sabotaging decisions made in the meeting); 2) aggressive members (dominate the discussion, make judgemental

remarks about others' contributions, interrupt others; the leader should interrupt to ask him/her to relate statements directly to objective or invite others to contribute); 3) private discussions (members who are engaging in a private discussion should be asked a pointed question; they could be asked to share their opinion on the problem being discussed by the group); 4) conflict between members (conflict should not be suppressed immediately since it can bring out good ideas; conflict must be controlled emotionally and should not extend too long; conflict may be entirely negative when it results from one member who is feeling rejected or criticized, attacking another member or some aspect of the meeting in an irrelevant fashion; in this case the leaders should calmly state the facts and move on, not being drawn into a conflict).

Alternatives to holding meetings are one-to-one meetings, phone communication or memos. Criteria (English, 1987) to decide whether to hold a meeting or not is presented in table 1.

Table 1: Criteria for holding a meeting.

| Yes | No |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">- If the issue is complex, face to face communication assumes that meetings are understood- Manager needs advice in solving a problem- Group stimulates better ideas than the manager could generate alone- The staff wants a meeting- There are concerns to share with the staff as a whole | <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Emails/memos have the advantage of being permanent records, save time, money- A meeting is not appropriate for dealing with personnel issues- When the manager's mind is already made up about an issue- When the subject is trivial- When there has been inadequate preparation- When anger and hostility in the team is such that people need time to calm down before they can begin to work collaboratively |

2.1 Leading meetings

Meeting is a microcosmos of managerial arena. Running meetings demands managerial skills (decision making, problem solving, negotiating, etc.). The ability to skillfully lead meetings can contribute to manager's effectiveness. Various leadership and communication skills are required to effectively open, conduct and close a meeting. The leader needs to know how to handle participants who become a problem. Leading meetings is an important management tool for solving problems, making decisions, finding new ideas, building team spirit, and developing staff effectiveness and self-confidence.

Every leader of meetings uses a leadership style. This leadership style can considerably impact the outcome of the meeting and the climate in the department in general, since it influences the attitudes and motivation of staff members. Many times managers set to incorporate big changes when they see that results of the department are not as they should be but a good thing would be to inspect first how meetings are run in the organization and if there is a free flow of information at the meetings and if the purpose of the meetings is met. The several ways of conceptualizing leadership can be spread along a continuum that varies from a highly autocratic leadership style to a noncontrolling leadership style (English, 1987).

Effective meeting leadership requires far more skills than merely acting as a referee of opinions or an announcer of administrative information. Careful preplanning is needed, as well as sensitivity and diplomacy, follow-up skills, and knowledge of appropriate leadership styles. The ability to effectively lead various meetings will improve staff morale and performance and can build one's reputation as a good manager among peers and higher management (English, 1987).

2.2 Leading virtual meetings

In today's turbulent business environment meetings, supported with online tools are common. Often it is hard to navigate people at different venues around the globe, therefore careful preparation is necessary. Most meetings and tactical work could benefit from compressed time where intensity is higher. One of the ways to shorten meetings are coaching sessions of 30-minute sessions where everyone saves time and money (Bergman, 2016). Coach-client 30 minute sessions are in the format of

(Bergman, 2016): 1) everyone is on time, every minute counts in a short conversation and they know it; 2) the session gets started more quickly as the relationship is built on doing good work, not small talk; 3) people are much more likely to come prepared; and 4) the time pressure enhances focus and attention: people tackle the single biggest opportunity and move on it). The quality of outcomes is related to the organisation and briefings undertaken prior to the videoconferencing events (Standing et al., 2018). In virtual meetings you will need to get to the most critical agenda points quickly and be fully present, without multitasking and distractions.

3 Methodology

Research is based on the qualitative method of gaining in-depth perspectives on the researched topic of business students through reflection analysis (Grah, Dimovski, & Peterlin, 2018; Peterlin, Dimovski, Tvaronavičiene, Grah, & Kaklauskas, 2018; Roblek, Meško, Dimovski, & Peterlin, 2019).

The current study is based on 2 samples of participants. First sample was composed of international participants of blended learning Entrepreneurship course, co-funded by EU Erasmus+ programme of the European Union BLUES project. The study took place on June 5th, 2019 at University of Ljubljana Faculty of Social Sciences. The second sample was composed of Master students at the Strategic leadership and responsibility course at the University of Ljubljana School of Economics and Business in the study year 2018/19 (June 13th, 2019).

Thematic analysis was carried out. Data was anonymized and aggregated. The participants in the study sample 1 were each given one challenge to write at least 5 suggestions and then they switched places with the rest of the participants, so each of them added to the solutions of previous participant. The students in the study sample 2 were divided into four groups and each group of students was given one challenge for leading a meeting and instruction to come up with at least 5 suggestions for solving the given challenge. The group for challenge 3 did only present in class their solution and did not hand in the summary of the solution, the solutions presented were not more than 15.

4 Results

The data on leading meetings is divided into 4 main challenges (Running meetings, 2014) in leading meetings: 1) Team member is always late for our meetings; 2) Co-workers are leaving the meeting before finishing it; 3) The group is consistently repeating what was already said; and 4) One co-worker is dominating our meeting.

Table 2: Comparison of sum of ideas of two samples.

| | Number of solutions to challenge 1 | Number of solutions to challenge 2 | Number of solutions to challenge 3 | Number of solutions to challenge 4 |
|-----------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Sample 1 | 10 | 14 | 15 | 11 |
| Sample 2 | 5 | 5 | / | 6 |

As we can see from Table 2, the way we structure the solution seeking has great impact on how creative students are in recalling their experiences and ideas for solving a challenge. In sample one there were less students, only 4, however at the beginning of the task each student was responsible for suggesting solutions for one challenge and other participants therefore worked on his/her suggested solutions. One reason could be that they felt responsible for the challenge given and wanted to help the group of other participants in providing solutions others could work on and add. In study sample 2 the emphasis was on discussion in the groups of three members and sharing of experience, therefore students provided the number of 5 solutions to the challenge as it was suggested on the paper handed out to them at the beginning of the task.

4.1 Challenge 1 - Team member is always late for our meetings

Participants in study sample 1 provided the following suggestions for solving the stated challenge in leading a meeting (Table 3).

Table 3: Solving challenge 1 by first sample.

| Theme | Quote |
|--------------------------------|---|
| Punishment | <i>give extra assignments that you know this person does not like or has hard time doing them (»punishment«)</i> |
| Sanctioning | <i>must bring breakfast for all other team members the next working day</i> |
| Sanctioning | <i>let him/ her bring chocolate next time</i> |
| Punishment | <i>lock the door</i> |
| Direction by the leader | <i>tell him/ her</i> |
| Policy making | <i>set ground rules with specific »punishments«</i> |
| Discipline | <i>kick him out</i> |
| Punishment | <i>do a fake meeting and that no one arrives so he/ she feels how everyone does / or everyone arriving late</i> |
| Discipline | <i>set meeting earlier or at a convenient time</i> |
| Leadership methods | <i>when a co-worker comes to work on time, praise him/ her, use positive motivation, encouragement, make him/ her special, even use small award</i> |

Participants in study sample 2 provided the following suggestions for solving the stated challenge in leading a meeting (Table 4).

Table 4: Solving challenge 1 by second sample.

| Theme | Quote |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Administration | <i>use presence list</i> |
| Understanding | <i>friendly talk about being late</i> |
| Training | <i>send him/ her to a workshop where he/ she can experience how it feels for others to wait for him/ her</i> |
| Socializing | <i>invite him/ her for a dinner and explain the problem</i> |
| Being on the same page | <i>the leader of the meeting starts next meeting with a lecture on coming on time for our meetings. Those who are late miss the topic of our meeting and conversation</i> |

source: Own conceptualization.

4.2 Challenge 2 - Co-workers are leaving the meeting before finishing it

Participants in the study sample 1 provided the following suggestions for solving the stated challenge in leading a meeting (Table 5).

Table 5: Solving challenge 2 by first sample.

| Theme | Quote |
|--------------------------|--|
| Punishment | <i>they get the »hard« assignments</i> |
| Sanction | <i>next time they have to bring some snacks</i> |
| Educating | <i>they have to give some extra help to their colleagues</i> |
| Discipline | <i>set their part of obligations to the end of the meeting</i> |
| Role | <i>put them in charge to write notes</i> |
| Rewarding | <i>give a prize or reward to those who stay</i> |
| Empathy | <i>do an empathic work when they feel what everyone feels</i> |
| Leadership | <i>ask ourselves if this person should be really on the meeting</i> |
| Openness | <i>»speak with them: why?</i> |
| Fun | <i>make meetings fun!</i> |
| Concrete meetings | <i>make a break or make them more concrete: SHORT, PRECISE</i> |
| Understanding | <i>identify the REASONS for early leaving: reschedule meeting in the middle of the workday (eg. 11 a.m.) when employees will not have opportunity to come late, neither they will not have excuse to leave meeting before finishing it</i> |
| Planning | <i>plan the meeting, give employees timeframes in advance</i> |
| Preparation | <i>check their schedules in advance</i> |

source: Own conceptualization.

Participants in study sample 2 provided the following suggestions for solving the stated challenge in leading a meeting (Table 6).

Table 6: Solving challenge 2 by second sample.

| Theme | Quote |
|---------------------------|---|
| Preparation | <i>»rules of the meeting« - the right people, set time frame and beginning of the meeting</i> |
| Organization | <i>tell the participants in advance how long the meeting will take</i> |
| Operationalization | <i>schedule the meeting on time and get confirmations of attendance from the participants</i> |
| Preparation | <i>active preparation for the meeting</i> |
| Operationalization | <i>advance scheduling of the meeting and reporting of absence or leaving before finishing the meeting</i> |

source: Own conceptualization.

4.3 Challenge 3 - The group is consistently repeating what was already said

Participants in the study sample 1 provided the following suggestions for solving the stated challenge in leading a meeting (Table 7).

Table 7: Solving challenge 3 by first sample.

| Theme | Quote |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Creative thinking techniques | <i>use de Bono method of hats</i> |
| Design thinking | <i>use design thinking method</i> |
| Decision-making | <i>finish the meeting and decide</i> |
| Mission | <i>remember the purpose and objectives</i> |
| Time-off | <i>give a break to refresh</i> |
| Moderate | <i>establish a moderator</i> |
| Leadership | <i>take the lead and decide or say what is happening, summarize</i> |
| Topic management | <i>change the topic and re-take it again later</i> |
| Wrapping up | <i>break meeting with a conclusion</i> |
| Question | <i>are they really seeing all the perspectives? Ask questions.</i> |
| Leadership | <i>decide on a person who is going to lead a meeting. Create a structure of a meeting: short overview of the flow of a meeting, introduction of a purpose, challenges and solutions, task distribution that are attached with the time frame, time for discussions – brainstorming, effective orientation.</i> |
| Preparation | <i>prepare for the meeting: write down achievements, tasks, solutions</i> |
| Preparation | <i>structure of the meeting in terms of what is the aim of the meeting, time frame</i> |
| Purpose | <i>it is about the ideas – take a short look or stop the meeting and propose to continue it next day.</i> |
| Leadership | <i>sometimes we need to change the leader of the team for a new perspective</i> |

source: Own conceptualization.

Participants in the study sample 2 provided the following suggestions for solving the stated challenge in leading a meeting (Table 8).

Table 8: Solving challenge 3 by second sample.

| Theme | Quote |
|----------------------------|---|
| Systematic approach | <i>participants emphasized systematic approach to stating what was already said</i> |

source: Own conceptualization.

4.4 Challenge 4 - One co-worker is dominating our meeting

Participants in the study sample 1 provided the following suggestions for solving the stated challenge in leading a meeting (Table 9).

Table 9: Solving challenge 4 by first sample.

| Theme | Quote |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Discipline | <i>do not let him/ her speak next time</i> |
| Role switch | <i>make a person the moderator</i> |
| Responsibility sharing | <i>give prior the meeting tasks to do to everyone</i> |
| Mediating | <i>use a MEDIATOR or a person that will guide the meeting, the time that is meant for brainstorming and sharing opinions should be divided, therefore everyone would on a constant basis get 5 minutes opportunity to speak, like an elevator pitch, when it is requested from an individual to speak-up when it's his/ her time</i> |
| Raising importance | <i>give him/ her assignment so she/ he feels important, it is crucial</i> |
| Wrapping-up | <i>at the end EMPHASIZE the positive outcome of cooperative opinion and exchange</i> |
| Leadership tactics | <i>stimulate others to talk</i> |
| Educating role | <i>explain to a person to give others a chance</i> |
| Task maching | <i>give a person a special task (like he has to ask others to give the ideas or he has to evaluate his ideas)</i> |
| Time sharing | <i>everyone has to speak about the topic for 5 minutes without interruptions</i> |
| Rules | <i>limiting the time someone can talk</i> |

source: Own conceptualization.

Participants in the study sample 2 provided the following suggestions for solving the stated challenge in leading a meeting (Table 10).

Table 10: Solving challenge 4 by second sample.

| Theme | Quote |
|----------------------------|--|
| Organization | <i>organizing and structuring the meeting</i> |
| Operationalization | <i>writing the minutes of the meeting, agenda of the meeting and following the agenda</i> |
| Organization | <i>delegation, set the structure of the meeting clearly</i> |
| Taking time | <i>reflect on what is being said at the meeting and give the possibility of personal consultations</i> |
| Conflict management | <i>conflict person is in charge for writing the minutes of the meeting</i> |
| Role of the leader | <i>create the right environment</i> |

source: Own conceptualization.

5 Interpretation and conclusion

The study shows that students were much more creative in study 1 where each student first wrote his/her own suggestions for solving a challenge and then the rest of the participants added suggestions to the existing ones. In study sample 2 the discussion among participants was alive and participants liked the fact that they could hear how other people and other companies are leading companies so they had less time for actual writing of the proposed solutions to the given challenges. They reported more positive impact on them by having the chance to listen to other participants stating good practice examples of leading meetings in their companies – that is an example of storytelling.

The participants emphasized punishment solutions in solving challenge 1. The participants identified an important role of the organizer of the meeting in solving challenge 2 and his/her planning skills in checking the time for the meeting and availability and suitability of the meeting members. In solving challenge 3 participants mentioned several established methods and the need for a mediator or leader of the meeting. Participants emphasized the role of regulating the meeting in solving challenge 4 and expressed the need for systematic organization of the meeting in order to provide for all the »voices« at the meeting to be spoken up and heard to.

The paper states that for successful and efficient leadership of the meeting one needs to elaborate specific roles at the meeting, take care of organization of the meeting before, during and after the meeting and also make sure the organizational climate at the meeting is productive by using the leadership tools the leader has at his/her disposal.

Acknowledgements

Part of the study was supported by EU Erasmus+ programme of the BLUES European Entrepreneurship experience - Blended-learning international entrepreneurship skills programme project. The authors acknowledge that the paper was partly financially supported by the Slovenian Research Agency, Program P5-0364 – The Impact of Corporate Governance, Organizational Learning, and Knowledge Management on Modern Organization.

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