

## *Meetings, Bloody Meetings*

### *Making meetings more productive*

Work meetings are one of the key management tools in a company. That's why we must make sure that the time we spend there is productive time, useful for the team to come together, foster good decision-making processes and make us feel we're working in the right direction. Otherwise, our meetings will become a waste of time, de-motivating the participants and making them lose confidence both in how the company works and the leader's capabilities.

Fortunately, there are techniques which can help us make the best out of our meetings. They are included in the five steps we will review next:

#### Step one: Plan the meeting

When setting up the meeting, we have to be very clear about its goals. That is, we have to ask ourselves about the objectives, make sure they are really necessary and make a list of the topics to be covered. This way, we will prevent improvised, disorganised discussions. It will also help us avoid involving non relevant people, who will feel they are wasting their time if they attend a meeting in which they are not needed.

#### Step two: Explain the purpose of the meeting

One of the reasons that lead to inefficient meetings is the lack of information from the leaders. Before we start, it is important for the team to know the agenda and be familiar with the topics that will be dealt with, why they are going to be discussed and what goals the meeting is meant to achieve.

Each of the members will thus know what their role is and what information they need to have ready for the meeting.

#### Step three: Prepare an agenda

An agenda is not a list of topics jotted down on a piece of paper. Each of the topics to be discussed in the meeting must be analysed previously, bearing in mind the logical order and the priority of the items.

The first thing to do is to make sure the order in which we will cover the items is logical. If it is, we will avoid going backwards and forwards on the agenda. On the other hand, it is essential to be clear on what matters are important and which ones are urgent. When we allocate the time slots for each item, the less relevant issues shouldn't eat into the time of more important ones.

#### Step four: structure and control the discussion

The items on the agenda can't be dealt with without preparation: they must follow a pre-fixed structure, and the leader has to guarantee the team sticks to the procedure. First, we must state the proposition to see if there's a problem, then discuss the possible alternatives, follow with the conclusion and, finally, make a decision. This way we will prevent participants from giving unjustified opinions. With that structure in mind, it will be easier for the leader to control spontaneous discussions that steer away from the relevant items.



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#### Step five: Summarise and keep record

The best way to lead a meeting in a structured manner is by summarising the item conclusions as we finish commenting on each item. This will allow us to keep the stages separate and make the discussion much more specific, stopping people from jumping to the next stage or going back over old ground. These conclusions will later be compiled in the minutes, an essential document for the people involved to know exactly what has been agreed upon. By consulting the minutes, each of them will know what their task is and what the starting point will be when the next meeting is held.