Let's Make Those Project Meetings More Effective

~ By Ron Rosenhead

I was trying to get hold of the project manager. Or rather he was trying to get hold of me. However, I had tried three times already so I sent him an email knowing it would sink to the bottom of the pile.

I got to thinking that it wasn’t just this project manager who always seemed to be in meetings. Several people, I have been trying to get hold of always seem to be in back to back meetings.

Project Agency has been collecting statistics for several years. Some 1,120 people have completed our questionnaire, and one of the questions is quite revealing:

"Project meetings are collaborative events which look at achievements, not past failures."

Here are the results:

- Strongly Agree: 1.3% (15 people)
- Agree: 25.6% (289 people)
- Disagree: 57.3% (648 people)
- Strongly Disagree: 12.6% (143 people)
- Don’t Know: 3.2% (36 people)

Not very good stats are they? Interesting that 36 people do not know how effective their meetings are!

So, what can be done? Well, here are some golden rules for project management meetings (and meetings in general).

**Rule 1:** Ensure you have the right people there. May seem obvious, but how many meetings go ahead with the wrong people there and the right people ‘on the way’ or a key stakeholder not invited?

**Rule 2:** Have an agenda for each meeting and against each item put a time (the length of time the item will take). Ensure you stick to the stated time.

**Rule 3:** Have a clear objective. Is it to receive a highlight report, or to prepare a highlight report. Is it to review project progress based on milestones, or develop part of your plan, or all of these? If you go off agenda/objective here is a quick tip. Give everyone a coloured card (any colour as long as they are the same). If a person wanders off the agenda or is rambling on, you put up your card. It works, try it.
Rule 4: Summarise before moving on to the next point. This ensures everyone is clear about what has been agreed or said.

Rule 5: Have a stand-up meeting. Yes, stand up meetings, that is, NO chairs - speeds up the meeting and really does focus attention.

Rule 6: Papers, we are supposedly in the era of a paperless office. Ensure the meeting is not bogged down with papers. Use highlight reports to cut down the paper and speed up the meeting.

Rule 7: Rules, what rules have you agreed? I know of one person who said that if the start time for a meeting was 3 pm, then no one was allowed in after this time! What are your rules for meetings and does everyone know about them. Useful to use your cards here (rule 3).

Rule 8: Train, yes you can train people to be better in meetings. Chairing a meeting, contributing via appropriate questions, listening, preparing an agenda, these are all areas a person can be trained and developed to do better. Call us or email events@projectagency.com for more information.

And finally (Rule 9) - review how successful your meetings have been. If you set out an hour and a half for a meeting and it has only lasted an hour, then you should be saying well done (provided the meeting met its objective). If it lasted two hours, then you should review why to stop it happening again.

Help make sure your meetings go well and contribute to making the scores above better, much better.

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