

Mastering the Art of Effective Meeting Chairing: Key Practices for Success

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Introduction

Effective meeting chairing is an essential skill for ensuring that meetings are productive, purposeful, and contribute positively to an organization's goals. A proficient chairperson plays a pivotal role in orchestrating meetings, ensuring that all necessary business is addressed, diverse perspectives are heard, decisions are made efficiently, and meetings start and end on time. This article delves into the key practices that make for an effective chair.

1. Clarity of Expected Outcome

One of the fundamental qualities of an effective chairperson is the ability to set clear objectives for a meeting. Before the meeting commences, the chairperson should have a well-defined expected outcome in mind. This outcome serves as the guiding beacon throughout the meeting, providing a sense of direction and purpose. For example, an expected outcome could be as precise as "to get the 2022/2023 draft Accounts approved and submitted to the Auditor General."

2. Advance Circulation of Agenda and Papers

To ensure that a meeting runs smoothly, it is imperative that the meeting agenda and any relevant supporting documents are circulated well in advance. This practice empowers meeting participants to come prepared, thoroughly acquainted with the topics to be discussed. When all participants are well-prepared, meetings become more efficient, as discussions can proceed more smoothly.

3. Proactive Room Management

A chairperson's responsibilities extend beyond the meeting room's proceedings. Arriving at the meeting venue 15 minutes ahead of the scheduled start time allows the chairperson to ensure that the room layout, catering, lighting, and temperature are conducive to an effective meeting. By taking these steps, the chairperson helps set the stage for a productive discussion.

4. Time Management Expertise

Maintaining a strict adherence to the meeting's scheduled timings is a hallmark of a skilled chairperson. Meetings should begin on time, once a quorum is established, regardless of attendance. A well-structured agenda with allocated time slots for each item allows the chairperson to manage discussions effectively, ensuring that contributions remain focused and to the point.

5. Utilizing a Flipchart "Car Park"

During meetings, it is not uncommon for participants to introduce points that, while important, may not be directly

relevant to the current agenda item. To maintain focus and ensure discussions stay on track, effective chairpersons often utilize a flipchart “car park.” This tool enables them to quickly “park” such comments, promising to revisit them later. This practice keeps the meeting flowing smoothly.

6. Encouraging and Managing Contributions

Effective chairpersons recognize the importance of fostering meaningful contributions from all participants. Encouragement and active facilitation of discussion are crucial to the successful implementation of any decisions made. Chairpersons must strike a balance between drawing out quieter, reflective participants and managing and controlling louder, more vocal ones. Additionally, they should be adept at constructively resolving any conflicts that may arise during the meeting.

7. Summarizing Key Decisions and Actions

At various points throughout the meeting, a proficient chairperson should summarize the key points and decisions reached during the discussion. This summarization helps clarify and focus the meeting, ensuring that participants have a clear understanding of the decisions made. Additionally, action points should be captured and confirmed during the meeting, leaving no room for ambiguity.

8. Post-Meeting Review

To continuously improve meeting effectiveness, a chairperson may ask meeting participants to briefly review how the meeting was conducted and whether it achieved its objectives. This

feedback loop can provide valuable insights for enhancing future meetings. Questions such as “What worked well in this meeting?” and “What could we do differently next time?” encourage constructive feedback and promote learning.

9. Follow-up and Action Point Review

The chairperson’s role extends beyond the meeting itself. It is crucial to ensure that agreed-upon action points are executed within the agreed-upon timeframe and before the next meeting. The first agenda item of any regular meeting that the chairperson leads should involve a review of progress on action points from the previous meeting, commonly referred to as “MATTERS ARISING.” This practice fosters accountability, commitment, and proactive resolution of challenges in achieving the set action points.

Conclusion

Effective meeting chairing is a skill that can significantly enhance an organization’s productivity and decision-making processes. By adhering to the key practices outlined in this article, chairpersons can create an environment where meetings are purposeful, efficient, and conducive to meaningful contributions from all participants. Ultimately, the role of the chairperson is integral to ensuring that meetings serve their intended purpose and contribute positively to the organization’s success.