Chapter 7

Organizational Management—How to Run a Meeting and Make Decisions

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The student will

- examine purposes to hold a necessary meeting,
- observe a meeting and determine if it was effectively planned,
- create a fishbone diagram to illustrate a decision-making process,
- describe four methods of decision making and select the method most appropriate for multiple situations, and
- demonstrate the use of four tools that gather and organize data for decision making.

HOW TO RUN A MEETING

Meetings consume the majority of hours in the modern workday. An employee in a "knowledge worker" type position in any job sector can expect to have several meetings during the workweek and at least one a day. Higher level positions require even more meetings on the daily calendar. And as you will see in Chapter 10, technology has

enabled meetings to happen without everyone being in the same location. If you are engaged in organizations and activities outside of work, meetings are part of those environments as well. Family meetings, faith group meetings, community meetings, and club meetings can easily consume one's week. If you have children or a spouse, add their group meetings on top of your own, and you can see how quickly your meeting time adds up. It seems today's lives are surrounded by groups attending to a never-ending stack of meeting agendas.

REFLECTION: YOUR MEETING EXPERIENCES

Meetings take place to accomplish information sharing, problem solving, and decision making so that key stakeholders can participate efficiently and effectively. Recall the meetings you have attended in your many experiences at work and in other types of organizations. Did you feel your time was well used? Was your voice heard? Respond yes or no to the questions below to assess your experience at the most recent meeting you attended:

- I received adequate notice of the meeting time and location?
  ___ yes ___ no
- I had the opportunity to submit items for the agenda?
  ___ yes ___ no
- The meeting had a purpose and an agenda?
  ___ yes ___ no
- The meeting started on time?
  ___ yes ___ no
- Location, time, and date were conducive for maximum participation?
  ___ yes ___ no
- All stakeholders appropriate to the meeting purpose were invited?
  ___ yes ___ no
- Meeting space was comfortable with appropriate seating, technology, adequate lighting, and a minimum of distractions?
  ___ yes ___ no
- Ground rules were established or previously agreed upon?
  ___ yes ___ no
- Meeting facilitator was skilled in running an effective meeting?
  ___ yes ___ no
- Agenda items were addressed with few distractions?
  ___ yes ___ no

- Appropriate decisions, actions, and votes were recorded and shared with participants in a timely fashion?
  ___ yes ___ no
- Meeting ended on time?
  ___ yes ___ no
- I felt my time was well used?
  ___ yes ___ no
- I had opportunity for my voice to be heard?
  ___ yes ___ no

Based on your answers, give the meeting planners a grade: A if efficient and effective; B if moderately efficient and effective; C if you felt your time was wasted; D if all agenda items were not accomplished; F if nothing was accomplished.

DIAGNOSIS: MEETING PLANNER AND PARTICIPANTS

Meetings can become unpleasant, ineffective, dreaded time wasters due to the following pitfalls:

- Unclear views of meeting outcomes
- Personal agendas
- Misunderstandings between participants
- Inability to make decisions

Be wary of hastily planned meetings. When meeting organizers do not attend to the needs of participants, fail to communicate clearly, behave as if the meeting were their own personal gathering, and do not facilitate the actual operation of the meeting, the participants become unhappy, communication turns into gripe sessions, and the organization may suffer from lack of trust, indecision, and little or no forward motion on goals.

In addition to the meeting planner's lack of skills, be aware of participants who also lack the skills to work in a group. Learn to recognize the person in the meeting who has an ax to grind by behaviors such as being a poor listener, using insider jargon, and asking repetitive questions about the same issues. If you are a newly elected or appointed leader of the group, be aware of participants who have past loyalties to the previous leaders. They lack trust, exercise power and domination, and make personal accusations. They work to turn everyone's attention to the problem they have. They question everything and usually threaten to "take their toys home" if they do not get their way (Pew Foundation, 2001).

PRESCRIPTION: PREPARING FOR AN EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT MEETING

Tips for Meeting Planners

The first step to avoid confusion is to determine the purpose of the meeting. Is the group having a meeting mostly out of habit, such as weekly staff meetings? What needs to be accomplished at this meeting? Typical reasons for workplace meetings include the following:

- Brainstorm new ideas
- Strategic planning
- Professional development retreats/training
- Resource allocation
- Decision making
- Client case review
- Budget review/approval
- Policy making/review/update
- Performance review/promotion review
- Goal achievement follow-up
- Disseminate news that is critical for all to hear simultaneously
- Work team plan/feedback

For a successful meeting, first communicate the meeting purpose and be a gatekeeper in determining what will be placed on the agenda. Accept agenda items based upon the purpose of the meeting. After items for the agenda have been agreed upon, decide what would be the best method to work through it. What environment would be more conducive to reaching the goal: such as through an online forum, in a learning environment, in a relaxed setting, in a structured setting, or one-on-one? Be judicious in the request for the time of your colleagues. If an agenda can be organized so that some participants can leave early, come later, or attend online your consideration of others shines through. Once in the meeting, start on time, stay on the agenda, and end on time. This will result in participant respect for this and future meetings. Meeting attendance and attitude will rise when participants' time is respected.

Second, are the participants clear on the goals and desired outcomes? Are they aware that there is an expectation of a discussion and decision? Were materials provided to participants in a timely fashion so they can read, research, and review the items on the agenda and be prepared for a discussion and decision? Some group members are process thinkers and need more time and details, while others

are expedient thinkers who require a reason to review the information (remember Chapter 3). Do not let your lack of meeting planning skills or assumptions about participants' need for decision time prevent the meeting from a successful conclusion. How will the group make the decision? Is there agreement and understanding about this process? Are there group-created processes and ground rules to stay focused and provide the members with tools to return the discussion to the established purpose? Ground rules can be helpful if there are hidden agendas or if office politics surface. Below is a list of suggested ground rules for the group to agree upon:

- Stay on point. (It is everyone's responsibility to point out distractions.)
- Do not interrupt those who have the floor.
- Provide a reasonable balance of "air time." Have time limits for discussion.
- Share your opinion; don't make assumptions for other's thoughts. Speak for yourself.
- Don't take disagreements personally.
- Discussions are not fodder for tomorrow's gossip mill.
- Treat all with respect.

By setting clear goals and having a specific agenda that involved opportunities for others to have input to the agenda, you have conveyed a message of respect as well as focus on the business at hand (Pew Foundation, 2001).

Third, does the agenda contain old business? Was the research for necessary additional information regarding the old business completed since the last meeting? This action item should be at the top of the meeting planner's list so that decisions and action can prevail in the upcoming meeting. Like the information for new agenda items, this too must be shared in advance. Have all the stakeholders in attendance at the previous meeting indicated attendance at this meeting? Some members will be reluctant to make an important decision if key stakeholders are absent. Meeting reminders and stakeholder follow-up is recommended. As a rule, groups tend to make riskier decisions than individuals. Having key stakeholders present will allow for adequate discussion of facts and data. Think of the time spent in meetings as critical for strategy and communication time to address issues and plan accordingly (Pew Foundation, 2001).

Too many times group leaders assume they must facilitate their meetings. Certainly they can if they choose, but the duties of a meeting facilitator are to maintain neutrality, ensure the process is fair, and to record agreements. It may come as a surprise to many that the meeting facilitator's job is not to push an agenda item or the process. Showing favoritism, criticizing, debating, arguing, or talking too much is also not appropriate. Given those parameters, why not choose another team member

to facilitate the meeting. It might even be appropriate to rotate the facilitation duties. The list below includes additional tips for the assigned meeting facilitators:

- Prepare for the meeting; know expectations, attendees, and issues.
- Remind the participants of your neutral role.
- Review and use ground rules.
- Explain decision-making method to participants (leadership chooses decision-making process).
- Confirm participant agreement to goals, objectives, and agenda.
- Be inclusive.
- Keep the group focused and the process moving forward.
- Restate discussion summary and key points, and seek clarification if necessary.
- Record decisions or appoint a recorder.

Accurate recording of important decisions made in meetings is critical. As most police officers will tell you, three eyewitnesses to the same incident will not give the same description of the event. It is not that they are dishonest or have a visual disability; it is that we all see and focus on different things in the same situation. Therefore, what we see and remember is different from someone else. It is best to have a neutral third party, someone who is not also trying to facilitate or participate in the meeting, serve as a recorder or secretary for the meeting. Recording ideas and projecting the comments on a screen or recording on a whiteboard for all to see is useful beyond the historical record. Here are the benefits:

- Participants feel heard by the group.
- Participants can check remarks for accuracy during the meeting.
- Discourages repetition.
- Holds ideas for use later in agenda.
- Encourages sense of accomplishment.
- Easy to catch up latecomers or participants whose attention strays.
- Increases accountability.
- If someone was unable to attend, it provides an unbiased account of the meeting.

(Pew Foundation, 2001)

Research by social scientist Robert Putnam, author of *Bowling Alone*, a book on declining civic engagement published in 2000, continues to support the Pew Foundation's premise that organizations and communities of all sizes have difficulty gathering all the stakeholders around the table. Encouraging key stakeholders to remain committed to the work of the organization and its decision-making processes is a hallmark of good leadership. Stakeholders are impacted by the organization's actions; therefore, they have important information to add to the deliberations of

a group. Organizations cannot afford to exclude their representation and thus their perspectives. The more varied the ideas and experiences at the table, the stronger and more innovative the solution (Jonas, 2007).

Tips for Enabling Meeting Participants

Meeting planners can do many things to enable the participants to be effective:

- Securing meeting times and locations convenient to participants
- Allowing time for participants to learn about each other
- Providing adequate notice for meetings
- Sharing agendas and supporting materials for meetings in advance
- Sharing expectations about the type of work to be done in the meetings
- Starting and ending on time
- Showing genuine appreciation for the participants' work at the meeting

Essentially, all suggestions described in the first part of this chapter are actions that enable meeting participants to work at their best and create a desire to want to attend the meeting. Everyone wants to be part of an effective group that accomplishes what it sets out to do.

DECISION MAKING

Decision making is one of the most important actions groups can take. Before a group determines a course of action and the related action items are assigned, the participants first need to have clarification on the necessary related issues, must be able to provide input, and engage in discussion to forecast each possible solution. Only then can the group make effective decisions and take action. This process seems logical and simple on the surface. The complexity multiplies with each person, viewpoint, set of experiences, and leadership of the group.

REFLECTION: YOUR EXPERIENCE WITH GROUP DECISION MAKING

Every day, you make a series of decisions such as selecting an outfit, your route to work, or the items that make up your lunch. These are choices you usually make alone, using your own judgment and experience on style, traffic patterns, and nutrition. Imagine adding one more person to the decision-making process; the amount of dialogue and feedback required has increased exponentially.

Now let's consider a work team or whole organization. The decision-making process becomes even more complex due to the number of people now participating in the process.

Have you participated in a large (five or more) group decision-making process? Describe the decision the group was charged to make.

- Was it simple or complex?
- Was it a short or lengthy process?
- Did everyone in the group work together respectfully? Did you feel heard?
- Was data collected and then used to inform the team's discussion?
- What method was used in the decision-making process? Did group members vote? Did the senior member of the group make the decision?
- Did the group support the final decision? Did you support the final decision? Did others support the decision in the organization?
- Who decided how to make the final decision? If you were doing this again, would you use the same process?
- Were the different possible solutions reviewed in detail during the decision-making process before the group decided on one? Did you understand what made the selected solution superior to the other options?

Whether your previous experience using group decision making was positive or negative, the question set reveals a number of actions leaders and groups should take to achieve a quality decision-making process and outcome.

DIAGNOSIS: THE STEPS IN DECISION MAKING

There is a logical set of steps groups frequently fail to follow in the full decision-making process. First, they must determine how they will make the final decision. Second, they must describe the problem as clearly as possible. Third, they must explore possible solutions and related issues by gathering and organizing data. Last is using the process identified in step 1 to make the decision. Beginning with step 1, if a leader or organizational authority figure is in the group, he or she should determine the decision-making process. This is part of the leader's responsibility. However, when the line of authority is not clear (as frequently happens in nonprofit and community collaborations), group members jointly decide. This fuzzy line of authority is also common in educational and human services organizations, especially in dealing with family situations and service providers from many departments.

When deciding on the decision-making process (Patterson, Grenny, McMillan, & Switzler, 2002), there are four questions to consider:

1. Who cares? Choosing participants for the process should come from those who care and are affected.

2. Who knows? Experts on the situation are always important to include on the team.
3. Who must agree? This is a question about stakeholders, those individuals who might enable the service to take place, or bring helpful influence and approval at a later stage.
4. How many people should be involved? Do we have enough or too many people to make a good choice and give the decision momentum to carry it through the action stage?

In step 2, the group facilitator/leader must help the group achieve clarity about the problem itself. In haste to hurry a decision or to take control, leaders can cause critical errors at this step when the group is excluded from or eliminates problem clarification. It is easy to allow previous patterns of experiences to steer the leader to ignore small differences and make assumptions (Campbell, Whitehead, & Finkelstein, 2009). Everyone must be on the same path toward solving the same problem.

In step 3, the group must decide how to incorporate and sort through the many types and quantity of ideas and data in the decision-making process. There are some helpful tools used in the quality management profession that can be very useful for all kinds of organizations when sifting through the data. You will see several examples later in this chapter.

In step 4, the actual act of making the decision becomes a "fait accompli" for the group by having successfully worked through steps 1 through 3. Too many times groups become stuck in the process and never actually make the choice. Frustration ensues and participants and stakeholders withdraw. Clients soon look to other organizations to meet their needs.

PRESCRIPTION: THE TOOLS OF DECISION MAKING

According to Patterson et al. (2002, pp. 164–173), the four basic methods of decision making are command, consult, vote, and consensus. Each of these options, from command to consensus, brings increased degrees of involvement from the group with the level of commitment increasing in tandem. Moving from command to consensus also tips the scales toward a much more process-oriented and time-consuming procedure. The four methods are described with details about their rules for use as well as their weaknesses.

Command decisions usually come from external sources, such as government mandates, professional requirements, and safety standards. Organization leaders simply convene their groups to make the decisions work. In a few other command situations, leaders may choose to let someone else make the decision because it is

a low-stakes decision or one leaders in the organization do not care about. However, leaders should be cautious when using the command method. The current generation of employees expects to be involved in the decision-making process. Rules when using this method include the following:

1. Don't allow command decisions to become as frequent as the daily coffee break. Find ways to incorporate choices or flexibility.
2. Explain the "why" of the decision. This generation does not follow blindly. The more people who understand why the decisions are necessary, the more likely they are to buy in to its implementation, facilitate the implementation, or follow the decision.

Consulting is a good way to gather lots of data for a decision when the decision makers are not the experts on the subject. Maybe an organization is building a new facility, and the leader selects a committee to investigate and visit facilities built during the previous 3 years for organizations similar to yours. Large amounts of data will be collected, including the experiences of each of the new facility's users. Using this method, the organization's leader will need to specify whether or not the facility designers and data collectors will be invited to participate in the decision-making process. The leader must be very clear at the beginning of the process on the parameters for participation. There are suggested rules for when and how to use the consulting method:

1. Many people will be affected by the decision.
2. Large quantities of information must be gathered.
3. People care about the decision and the impact it will have.
4. There are many possible solutions, some of which could be expensive or controversial.
5. Communicate who will participate in the data collection and decision-making processes as well as why these people were chosen.
6. Do not pretend to consult with a team if the leader has already decided. Doing so will cause group members to distrust the leader for disrespecting the time, effort, and information contributed.

Voting is helpful when efficiency is needed and there are several good choices from which to select. However, voting creates winners and losers. Organization leaders will want to consider the reaction of the losers. Rules for selecting a voting method are as follows:

1. The choices are not weighty matters.
2. There are many good choices.

3. Participants care more about not spending too much time on the choice.
4. It is useful to *reduce* a long list of possible solutions so that a different decision-making process can be used to select from the shorter list.
5. Voting should never be the "cop-out" method when participants cannot achieve a choice through other decision-making processes.

Consensus is a dialogue among participants that allows all to share thoughts, ideas, and arrive at a common choice everyone supports. This process can unify a group and generate high quality solutions. Consensus is about choosing what is best for everyone. However, this process can be overused and implemented poorly. Participants of an overused consensus method could lose patience and the focus needed on complex issues. Leaders must maintain patience and help the group stay focused. The consensus decision-making process should be used under the following circumstances:

1. With high stakes and complex issues.
2. When choices are not equally liked.
3. Everyone cares and is affected by the issues.
4. Everyone in the group must have adequate time to devote to the consensus process.
5. Group members participate in healthy discussions by respecting everyone's ideas and opinions. Disagreements must not become personal.
6. Group members must not lobby for a solution nor give in to others' ideas.
7. Everyone must support the final solution; all participants own triumphs and failures.

Gathering the Data for Decision Making

Gathering and organizing data are important initial steps in the decision-making process. The methods used to analyze the data can profoundly affect the decision-making process in regard to clarity, group members' feelings of contribution, and buy-in. Brassard and Ritter, authors of the book *Memory Jogger 2* published in 2010, describe four techniques that can be added to the leader's repertoire of group tools used in decision making.

Tool #1

Brainstorming is a common group technique used for creating an unlimited number of ideas that can generate solutions to problems and spark new program

ideas. Brainwriting 6-3-5, as described below, is a different approach that might generate breakthrough ideas and new excitement from the team.

Why use Brainwriting 6-3-5?

- Provides a time and structure for teams to thoughtfully generate a large number of ideas as well as to find unusual connections and combinations among the listed ideas

What is Brainwriting 6-3-5?

- Provides a worksheet for team members to record ideas
- Combines the group's energy of exchanging ideas in a thoughtful written process
- Diffuses emotional issues that may reduce participation and creative flow among team members
- More likely to build synergy among the team than brainstorming

How should Brainwriting 6-3-5 be used in a group?

- Involve the whole group to clarify the topic and then write it as a problem statement.
- The target size group for this technique is four to six individuals. If you are in a larger group, divide the larger group into smaller groups of four to six to maintain the suggested range.
- Give each participant a Brainwriting 6-3-5 worksheet as shown in Figure 7.1. Each person records the problem statement at the top of the worksheet.
- The object is to take 5 minutes to write three ideas (one per box beginning in row 1) that could lead to a solution. Group members should not talk during the writing time. Use a six- to ten-word sentence to describe your idea. If you are unable to think of three ideas, leave the other box(es) blank.
- After 5 minutes has passed, send the worksheet to the person on the right in your group. Group members are then instructed to read the previous person's ideas. Once everyone has done this, 5 more minutes are on the clock for another round of three ideas. Use the previous person's thoughts to build on, write a variation of, or to stimulate a new idea.
- Circulate the worksheets until everyone has added three ideas to each sheet. For each round, the same rules apply. Group members are to read the previously listed ideas before they contribute their own. As more rounds are completed, it may take a bit longer to read all the ideas and write. Add a little time as needed.

- Review all the ideas as a whole team. Eliminate duplicates. Clarify others as needed.
- Sort the ideas using an Affinity Diagram or the Nominal Group Technique (described after the sample Brainwriting 6-3-5 form in Figure 7.1).

Figure 7.1 Brainwriting 6-3-5 Format

Problem Statement:			
	Idea #1	Idea #2	Idea #3
Round 1			
Round 2			
Round 3			
Round 4			
Round 5			
Round 6			

Source: Brassard, M., Ritter, D., and Oddo, F. *Memory Jogger 2: Tools for Continuous Improvement and Effective Planning*. (2010). Goal/QPC.

Tool #2

An Affinity Diagram organizes a large number of creative ideas. Why use an Affinity Diagram?

- Gives the team a technique to cluster the ideas into natural groupings that provide clarity about the problem and can lead to breakthrough solutions

What is an Affinity Diagram?

- Encourages creativity in all stages of the process
- Breaks down communication barriers in the team
- Encourages a nontraditional look at connections among ideas
- Allows breakthrough thinking to occur naturally
- Encourages ownership of ideas and results since the team is actively involved in both
- Overcomes team paralysis brought on by an overwhelming array of options and a lack of consensus

How should I use an Affinity Diagram?

- Record ideas on large sticky notes in an ink and letter size that are seen from a distance. Use phrases with a noun and verb. Most Affinity Diagrams have 10 to 40 ideas on sticky notes to group in clusters.
- Invite all group members to participate. On a wall, whiteboard, or flipchart and without talking, the group members move the sticky notes into clusters where the ideas seem to belong together. Sorting will slow or stop when each person feels comfortable with the groupings. Silence is important at this stage so groupings do not appear because of history or emotion. If one or two items travel frequently among clusters in the process, consider making a duplicate to temporarily put ideas into two clusters. (Be sure to label those as duplicates.) It is also okay for some notes to stand alone.
- Gain team consensus on a theme for each cluster, write it on a sticky note, and place the different themes above or centered in each cluster. Then working a bit more slowly, go back and rename each cluster with a concise statement that captures the grouping's central idea being sure each note in the cluster still connects. You may choose to edit the summary statement or move that idea note to another cluster or to stand alone. If the cluster of ideas is too large to summarize with a concise statement, you may also choose to create two smaller clusters from the large one. It is during this process of creating the concise summary statements that breakthrough ideas occur.

Figure 7.2 is a final Affinity Diagram arranged with the summary statements at the top of each column of sticky note ideas.

This is a small example of an Affinity Diagram from staff discussions for improvements to follow-up call procedures. If the group chose not to use an Affinity Diagram, you might instead use the Nominal Group Technique (NGT).

Tool #3

NGT provides groups a way to rank choices for a consensus discussion.
Why use the nominal group technique?

- Allows groups to include the individual importance of issues by ranking each idea

What is the NGT?

- Builds commitment to the group's choice through equal participation in the process
- Allows every group member to rank issues without pressure from others

Figure 7.2 Affinity Diagram of Client Follow-Up Services

Problem Statement: Issues Associated With Clients Receiving Follow-Up Calls		
Summary: Providers' Issues	Summary: Members' Issues	Summary: Outreach Issues
Staff too busy	Client's lack of awareness that call is provided	Unable to contact due to inaccurate intake information
Staff's lack of training in follow-up procedures	Client's lack of understanding of follow-up call benefits	Outdated files showing who is due for follow-up

- Puts quiet group members on an equal footing with more dominant members
- Makes a group consensus or lack of it visible and allows the major causes of disagreement to be discussed

How should I use the NGT?

- From previously generated (using brainstorming, brainwriting, etc.) lists of issues, problems, or solutions to be prioritized by the group, statements are written on a white board or flipchart.
- As a list is created, group clarifies meaning of each item, and duplicates are eliminated.
- Record final list so all can see using letters as identifiers (since numbers will be used in the ranking process).
- Each participant records the identifying letter associated to each idea of the list and gives each letter a number indicating its rank or preference.

Example:
Issue: Why does intake paperwork have errors?

A. Lack of staff training

B. Unclear directions for client

C. Clients do not allow enough time to complete paperwork before appointment

D. Clients do not bring data needed to complete paperwork

Participant ranking sheet

A. 3

B. 4

C. 1

D. 2

Then combine the rankings of all team members. Such a process can reveal the sentiment of the group or at least eliminate a suggestion or two. In this example in the Figure 7.3, idea B is not a highly valued suggestion by the group. Although there is a top-ranked item (Danielle rated it #1), its ranking is still close in value to the A and D ranked ideas. Although C looks to be the runaway contender for most highly ranked reason, it will be important to share the thinking for the rankings in the group. The discussion to achieve consensus will likely have a higher degree of success because of each participant's engagement in the ranking process.

Instead of or in addition to sorting ideas generated by a group, there may be a need to identify root causes of a problem so that the group works to solve the actual problem instead of a surface symptom.

Tool #4

The Cause and Effect Fishbone Diagram is a tool that enables a group to identify and explore the possible causes of a problem that can lead to undesirable or desirable results.

Figure 7.3 Nominal Group Technique

Ideas	Maria	John	Danielle	Stephen	Amy	Total
A	3	2	4	3	4	16
B	4	3	1	4	2	14
C	1	1	2	2	1	7
D	2	4	3	1	3	13

Why use the Cause and Effect Fishbone Diagram?

- Enables a group to discover root causes and not just treat symptoms.

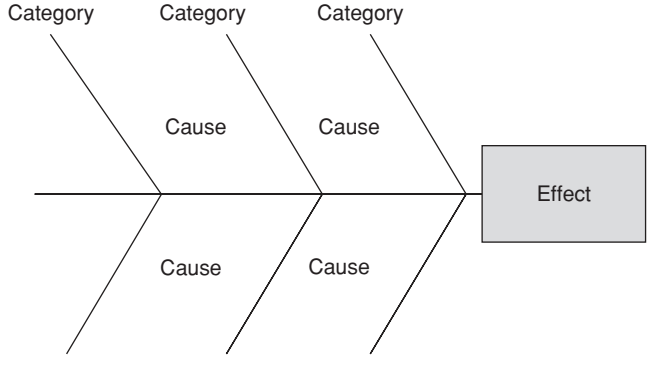
What is the Cause and Effect Fishbone Diagram?

- Enables the group to focus on the content of the problem, not the history or personal connections.
- Creates a snapshot of the collective knowledge around a problem and builds support for resulting solution.
- Focuses the group on causes not symptoms.

How should I use the Cause and Effect Fishbone Diagram?

- Write a problem statement as specifically as possible. Establish group's agreement with statement.
- Brainstorm a list of causes for the problem statement.
- Select cause categories. Common labels for these cause categories include management/leadership; measurements; materials; people; processes; machines/equipment; technology; sources; products, programs, and services; and environment/location. Some fishbone diagrams will have four ribs, others six or more. Use only the categories that make sense for your group's problem. Determination of the categories is a group decision.
- Draw the diagram that will sort and arrange the current work of the group. The diagram (Figure 7.4) resembles a basic fish shape: head, backbone, and ribs. The problem statement in the fish diagram appears as the "head" of the

Figure 7.4 The Cause and Effect Fishbone Diagram



fish and is referred to as the effect. The problem is seen as the result of the root cause.

- Draw a backbone horizontally from the head, or the problem statement, that connects the lines representing the ribs. (See Figure 7.4.) Each of the ribs of the fish is labeled as a category of causes. The smaller lines joining the ribs represent the range of possible causes in that category. Arrange the causes already brainstormed. It is possible you may have to add or eliminate a rib/cause or brainstorm additional ones to complete a forgotten category.
- Once the drawing is labeled and the data/ideas sorted in the fishbone framework, causes become easily identified for group discussion, decision making, and problem solving.

SUMMARY

Effectively running meetings and making decisions are much overlooked "soft" skills that leaders and managers take for granted. Given the amount of time spent in meetings as well as the impact of meeting environments on participants' effectiveness, sharpening meeting skill sets is important to the group's and organization's success.

Planning and facilitating a thoughtful, organized, and effective meeting solidifies the trust you have worked toward with your team members and shows you value their knowledge and experiences. It also sends a clear message regarding productivity and accountability expectations when you exhibit those same behaviors during meetings where the key planning and report outs take place. Bad attitudes quickly develop when the team members believe the leadership wastes their time in meetings when their input was neither requested nor valued. Become the host of meetings and decision making in which group members want to participate.

Avoid the do-nothing reputation of some groups who can't make a decision. Intentionally take each step in the process and choose the best method for the situation. Deciding how to decide establishes trust through transparency in the decision-making process. This is why the government in the Sunshine Act of 1976 became vital to the public regarding public institutions. Teams and citizens both want to know how and why decisions are made. Be a champion of keeping the communication channels open so everyone has access to the information. Leadership in the sunshine puts the office grapevine out of business.

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