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Why even date? Why really? Many important issues are fairly satisfactorily conducted by one person who does not consult with anyone. Much more is resolved by a letter, memo, phone call, or a simple conversation between two people. Sometimes five minutes spent with six people individually are more effective and productive than meeting them all together. Of course, so many meetings spend a lot of everyone's time and seem to be held for historical rather than practical reasons; many long-established committees are nothing more than memorials to dead problems. It would probably not save the end of managerial time if each committee had to discuss its own dissolution once a year and put up a case if it believed that it should continue for another twelve months. If that requirement did nothing else, it would at least refocus the minds of the committee members on their objectives and objectives. But by saying that, and giving that the consideration of this issue to the committee can be a device for diluting powers, spreading responsibility and delaying decisions, I cannot deny that the meetings fulfill a deep human need. Man is a social species. In every organization and in every human culture we know about, people come together in small groups through regular and frequent intervals, as well as at larger tribal gatherings from time to time. If there are no meetings in the places where they work, people's attachment to the organizations in which they work will be small and they will meet at regular formal or informal meetings in associations, societies, teams, clubs or pubs when the work is finished. This need for meetings is certainly more positive than just a legacy from our primitive hunting past. From time to time, some technomaniac or others comes with a vision of an executive who never leaves his home, who controls all his work from all the electronic, multichannel, microwave, fiber optic video display to the sleep console in his living room. But any manager who ever had to do the work of the organization welcomes this vision with a smile that soon stretches into a yawn. There is a world of science fiction, and the world of human reality; and those who live in the world of human reality know that it is held together in face-to-face meetings. The meeting still performs functions that will never be taken on phones, teleprinters, Xerox copied, tape recorders, television monitors, or any other technological tools of the information revolution. The functions of the meeting at this stage can help us understand the meaning of meetings if we look at the six main functions that meetings will always be better than any of the later communication devices. 1. The easiest and most basic way a meeting determines a team, group, or unit. Those present belong to it, those who are absent do not. All able to look around and perceive the whole group and feel the collective identity of which he or she is a part. We all know who we will be, whether we are on universal International's board of directors, in flexitube's overseas sales department, Inc., a member of the school management committee, the East Hampton football team, or in Section 2 of Platoon 4, Company B. 2. A meeting is a place where a group reviews, updates, and adds to what it knows as a group. Each group creates its own pool of general knowledge, experience, judgment and folklore. But the pool consists only of what people have experienced or discussed as a group, i.e. those things that everyone knows that everyone else knows, too. This pool not only helps all members do their job more intelligently, but also greatly improves the speed and efficiency of all communications between them. The Group knows that all the special nuances and broader implications in the brief statement will be immediately clear to its members. A huge amount of material can be left unspoken, which should be made explicit to an outsider. But this pool needs constant updating and replenishment, and sometimes in the elimination of impurities. Thus, the simple business of sharing information and ideas that members have purchased separately or in small groups since the last meeting is an important contribution to the strength of the group. By asking and commenting on new contributions, the group performs an important digestive process that removes what is valuable and discards the rest. Some etiologists call this ability to share knowledge and experience between a group of social mind, thinking of it as a single mind scattered among a number of skulls. They recognize that this social mind has a special creative power. A group of people meeting together can often produce better ideas, plans, and solutions than one person can, or a number of people, each working alone. Meeting, of course, can also lead to worse exits or none at all if it is a bad meeting. However, when the combined experience, knowledge, judgment, authority and imagination of half a dozen people are brought to bear on issues, so many plans and decisions are improved and sometimes transformed. The initial idea that one person may have come up with is separately tested, amplified, refined, and formed an argument and discussion (which often acts on humans as a kind of chemical stimulant to enhance performance) until it satisfies far more requirements and overcomes far more objections than it might in its original form. 3. The meeting helps each individual understand both the collective objective of the group and how their own and any other work can contribute to the group's success. 4. The meeting creates a commitment to solutions in all present does and the goals she pursues. Once something has been decided, even if you initially opposed it, your membership in the group entails an obligation to make a decision. The alternative is to leave the group, but in practice it is very rarely a dilemma of significance. The real opposition to decisions within organizations usually consists of one part disagreeing with the decision of the nine-part grievance on not consulted before the decision. For most people on most issues, it is enough to know that their opinions have been heard and addressed. They may regret that they were not followed, but they agree with the result. And just as a decision by any team is binding on all members, so decisions of meeting people higher in the organization carry more credibility than any decision by one leader. It is much more difficult to challenge the decision of the board of directors than the chief executive officer acting independently. Decision-making at the meeting is of particular importance to long-term policies and procedures. 5. In the management world, a meeting is very often the only time that a group or group actually exists and works as a group, and the only time a leader, leader or leader is actually perceived as a team leader rather than as an official to whom individuals are informed. In some jobs, the manager directs his team through his personal presence - not only the leader of a pit gang or construction team, but also a chef in the kitchen of the hotel and the master in the restaurant or the head of the department store. But in large administrative headquarters, a daily or weekly meeting is often the only time that a manager has ever been perceived as team management rather than work. The meeting is a status arena. Do not pretend that people are not connected or should not worry about their status compared to other members of the group. It's just another part of human nature that we have to live with. It is not a minor fact that the word order means (a) hierarchy or peck order; (b) instruction or command; and (c) stability and how things should be, how to put their affairs in order, or law and order. All three definitions are aspects of the same idea that are indivisible. Because a meeting is so often the only time that members have a chance to know their relative position, an arena function is inevitable. When a group is new, has a new leader, or is made up of people such as department heads who are in competition for promotion and who do not work in the same team outside the meeting, arena behavior is likely to figure more, even to the point of dominating proceedings. However, this is unlikely to mean having a long-established group that Regularly. Despite the fact that the meeting can do all basic functions, there is no guarantee that it will do so in any given situation. It is possible that any one meeting may be a waste of time, an irritant or an obstacle to achieving the organization's goals. What's the meeting? While my goal in this article is to show the critical points in which most meetings go wrong and point out the ways they are correct. I must first make some important differences in the size and type of meetings that we are dealing with. than listening to the main speaker or speakers; (2) Council-40 or 50 people who are mostly there to listen to the main speaker or speakers, but who may come up with questions or comments, and who may be asked to contribute something to their account; and (3) the committee - up to 10 (or no more than 12) people, all of whom more or less speak on an equal basis under the direction and control of the chairman. We are concerned in this article only with a committee meeting, although it can be described as a committee, subcommittee, training group, project team, working group, board, or any of dozens of other titles. This is by far the most common encounter in the world, and perhaps can be traced back to the primitive hunting gang through which our species evolved. Undoubtedly, it constitutes the bulk of the 11 million meetings that have been estimated to take place every day in the United States. In addition to differences in size, there are certain considerations as to the type of meeting that profoundly affect its nature. For example: Frequency - a daily meeting differs from a weekly meeting and a weekly one from a monthly one. Irregular, special, quarterly and annual meetings are once again different from others. In general, the frequency of meetings determines, or perhaps even determines, the degree of group unity. Composition - Do members work together on the same project, such as care and support staff in the same hospital ward? Do they work on different but parallel tasks, such as a meeting of company plant managers or regional sales managers? Or is it a diverse group - strangers to each other, perhaps united only by the meeting itself and the common interest in the realization of its goals? Motivation - Do members have a common purpose in their work as a football team? Or do they to some extent have competitive working relationships, such as subsidiaries managers meeting with the CEO, or heads of research, production and marketing discussing the allocation of funding for the coming year? Or the desire for success through the rally itself to unite them as a neighborhood action group or a new product Committee? Solution Solution ultimately, does the meeting group reach its own decisions? By general consensus, a sense of meeting? By a majority vote? Or do the decisions remain solely at the expense of the President himself, after he has listened to the facts, opinions and discussions? The Expert Gohner Meeting recognizes that while there appear to be five very different methods of meeting analysis, in practice there is a tendency for certain types of meetings to be sorted out in one of the three categories. Consider: A daily meeting where people work together on the same project for a common purpose and make decisions informally by common consent. A weekly or monthly meeting where committee members work on different but parallel projects and where there is some competitive element and a high probability that the chairman will make the final decision himself. An irregular, random or special project meeting consisting of people whose normal work does not bring them contacts and whose work has little or no relation to others. They are united only by the project that exists at the meeting to promote and motivate the desire for the project to succeed. Although actual voting is rare, each member actually has a veto. Of these three types of meetings, this is the first type of working person that is probably the most common. It is also, oddly enough, one most likely to be successful. Operational imperatives usually ensure that it is brief, and the experience of participants side by side ensures that communication will be good. The other two types are different. At these meetings, all sorts of human cross-currents can sweep the discussion off course, and errors of psychology and technique on the part of the chairman can defeat its goals. In addition, these meetings are likely to bring together older people and bring solutions that profoundly affect the effectiveness, prosperity and even survival of the entire organization. Therefore, it is at these higher-level meetings that the lessons of this article are first and foremost directed. Before the Meeting, the most important question you have to ask is, What should this meeting achieve? When it was over, how should I judge whether it was a success or a failure? But if you don't have a very clear requirement from the meeting, there is a serious danger that it will be a waste of everyone's time. By setting a goal, you've already covered the six main functions that all meetings perform, but if you're trying to use a meeting to achieve certain goals, there are only certain types of goals that it can actually achieve. Each item on the agenda can be placed in one of the following four categories or divided sections that fall into one or more of them. 1. Information and digestive Obviously, it is a waste of time for a meeting to give out purely factual information that would be better disseminated in the document. But if the information needs to be heard from a particular person, or if it needs some clarification and comments to sort it out, or if it has profound implications for the members of the meeting, then it is quite right to put an item on the agenda that does not require a conclusion, decision or action from the meeting, just that the meeting should receive and discuss the report. The function of the information-digestive includes progress reports to keep the group up to date with the current state of the projects for which it is responsible or which affect its discussion, and review completed projects in order to come to a collective judgment and see what can be learned from them next time. 2. Constructive Origin This feature What do we do? covers all items that require something new to be developed, such as a new policy, a new strategy, a new sales goal, a new product, a new marketing plan, a new procedure, and so on. This kind of discussion asks people to contribute their knowledge, experience, judgment and ideas. It is clear that the plan is likely to be inadequate unless all relevant parties are present and in their case. Executive Duties It's a function Of How do we do it?, which arises after it has been decided what members will do; at this stage, the executive branch's responsibilities across the various components of the task should be shared across the table. If their knowledge and ideas are important to participants in the second function, their contribution is to implement the plan. The fact that they and their subordinates suffer from this makes their contribution particularly significant. Of course, these executive responsibilities can be distributed without a meeting, through individual briefings, but some considerations often make the meeting desirable. First, it allows team members to find the best way to achieve their goals. Second, it allows each member to understand and influence how their own work fits into the work of others and the collective task. Thirdly, if the meeting discusses the implementation of a higher-level decision, the consent of the group may be paramount. If so, the fact that the group has the ability to formulate a detailed action plan itself may be a decisive factor in securing its consent, since in this case the final decision, so to speak, belongs to the group. Each person is committed to what the group decides and is collectively responsible for the final form of the project, as well as individually Ideally, such an agenda begins with a policy and ends with an action plan. 4. Legislative framework: For all reasons: What to do and how to do it, there is a framework - departmental or departmental organization - and a system of rules, procedures and procedures in which all activities are carried out. Changing that structure and introducing a new organization or new procedures could be deeply troubling to committee members and a threat to their status and long-term security. However, leaving it unchanged may prevent the organization from adapting to a changing world. At whatever level this change is concerned, it must have the support of all the prospective leaders whose groups are affected. Key leaders of this legislative function must collectively make or confirm this decision; if there is any important dissent, it is very dangerous to close the discussion and make a decision by decree. Group leaders cannot rely on quick solutions if they seek to change the structure of the organization and the procedures that people have grown up with. Thus, they should be prepared to leave these items unresolved for further discussion and consultation. As Francis Bacon put it, and it was never better: Advisers to whom time was not called, time does not ratify.

The preparation of the four different functions that have just been discussed can, of course, be carried out by one meeting, as the group goes through the agenda. Therefore, it can be a useful exercise for the chairman to go through the agenda, write next to each item, the functions that he is designed to perform. This exercise helps clarify what is expected from the discussion and helps to focus on what people to bring and what questions to ask them. Between 4 and 7 is usually ideal, 10 is tolerable, and 12 is the outer limit. Thus, the chairman should do his best to keep the numbers down, in line with the need to invite everyone with an important contribution to make. The leader may have to leave aside people who expect to come or who always come. For this work, he may need to tact; but since people tend to keep the fiction that they are overworked already and don't like serving on committees, it's usually not hard to ensure their consent is to stay away. If the manager does not see an opportunity to get the meeting to a manageable size, he can try the following devices: a) analyze the agenda to see whether everyone should be present at each point (he may be able to structure the agenda so that some people can leave at half time and others Arrive); (b) Ask yourself whether he really doesn't need two separate, smaller meetings, not one big one, and (c) determine whether you can ask for one or two groups of groups some of the themes are in advance, so only one of them has to come up with their suggestions. Remember, too, that a few words with a member the day before a meeting can add value to the meeting itself, either by ensuring that an important point is raised that arises better from the conference room than from a chair, or by preventing time from discussing an issue that does not need to be discussed at all. The Documents Agenda is by far the most important piece of paper. Properly drafted, it has the power of speeding and refining a meeting that very few people understand or use. The main fault is to make it unnecessarily concise and vague. For example, the phrase development budget doesn't tell anyone very much, while a longer explanation to discuss the proposal to cut the development budget for 1976-1977 now that the introduction of our new product has been postponed helps all members of the committee to form some opinions or even just to review the facts and figures in advance. Thus, the leader should not be afraid of a long agenda, provided that the duration is the result of his analysis and the definition of each item more closely, rather than adding more items than the meeting can reasonably consider on time. He should try very briefly to include some indications of the reason for discussing each topic. If one item is of particular interest to a group, it is often a good idea to highlight it for special mention in the accompanying note. The leader should also keep in mind the useful device of heading each item for information, for discussion, or to make a decision in order to let those at the meeting know where they are trying to get to. Finally, the President should not extend the subpoena too far in advance, since less organized members would forget it or lose it. Two or three days of eligibility if the supporting documents are voluminous. Other paper considerations: The order of the agenda items is important. Some aspects are obvious - issues that need urgent action must be prepared for those that can wait until the next time. In addition, the leader does not discuss the budget of the re-equipment program before discussing whether to turn off the refurbishment until next year. But some aspects are not so obvious. Consider: The early part of the meeting tends to be more lively and creative than the end of it, so if the item needs mental energy, bright ideas, and clear heads, then perhaps it's best to put it high on the list. Similarly, if there is one item of great interest and concern to everyone, it may be a good idea to hold it on for a while and get some other useful work done first. The star element can then be introduced to meetings due to a backlog of attention, which is set after the first 15-20 minutes of the meeting. Some items unite the meeting into a common front, while others divide the party from A leader may want to start with unity before entering into a division, or he may prefer the opposite. The point is to be aware of this choice and to make it consciously, because it is able to change the whole atmosphere of the meeting. It is almost always a good idea to find a unifying point with which to end the meeting. The common mistake is to dwell too long on trivial but urgent points, excluding issues that are fundamental, the importance of which is long-term rather than immediate. This can be corrected by putting on the agenda a time when the discussion of an important long-term issue will begin and by sticking to it. Very few business meetings achieve anything valuable after two hours, and an hour and a half is enough time to set aside for most purposes. Often a good idea is to put the end time of the meeting on the agenda, as well as the start time of the meeting. If meetings tend to last too long, the Chair should arrange their com start an hour before lunch or an hour before the end of the work. Typically, items that need to be concise can be entered ten minutes from the fixed end point. The practice of distributing reference or sentences along with protocols is, in principle, good. This not only saves time, but also helps to formulate useful questions and considerations in advance. But the whole idea is sabotaged as soon as newspapers take too long; they should be concise or provide a brief summary. If they are circulated, obviously the chairman should read them, or at least should not be caught without reading them. (One chairman, better known for his cunning than his good faith, is said to have spent 30 seconds before each meeting going through all the documents he didn't read with a thick red pen, marking lines and question marks on the margins at random, and making sure they were accidentally made visible for the meeting while the issue was being discussed.) If the meeting were to produce documents for discussion, they should obviously be concise and simple, since they should be read by all. It is the ultimate folly to bring a group of people together to read six pages of closely printed sheets to themselves. The exceptions are certain types of financial and statistical documents, whose function is to support and illustrate verbal points as reference documents, rather than to swallow them as a whole: they are often better represented at the meeting. All items should be thought through and thought out in advance if they were to be usefully discussed. Putting Any other business on the agenda is an invitation to waste time. This does not preclude the Chairman from announcing an additional agenda item at the meeting if really urgent and unforeseen will be offered to him by a member, provided that it is simple and clear enough. This also does not preclude his departure time for the general general discussion after the meeting. The President, having updated the agenda items in advance, could usefully insert his own brief notes on items that he did not believe would be excluded from the discussion. Brief Marginal Doodle How Much Notice? or Standby Arrangements? Or that's all that's needed. The chairman's job is to say you've just been appointed chairman of the committee. You tell everyone it's boring or a chore. You also tell them that you have been appointed for my sins. But the thing is, you're telling them. Almost everyone is in some way happy and proud that they have been made chairman. And that's three-quarters of the trouble. A master or a servant? Their appointment as chairman of the committee takes people differently. Some have taken the opportunity to impose their will on a group that they consider themselves licensed to dominate. Their presidency is harangue, interspersed with demands for a group agreement. Others are more like Scouts, for whom the collective activity of the group is fairly satisfied, without the need for achievement. Their presidency is more like endless rousing and refueling of a campfire that cooks nothing. And there are unprotected or lazy presidents who look to the meeting for confidence and support in their inefficiency and inaction so that they can share responsibility for their indecision among the whole group. They use each expression of dissent or doubt as an excuse to avoid making decisions or actions. But even the vast majority who don't go to these extremes still feel a certain pleasant tumescence of ego when they take their place at the top of the table for the first time. Feeling is not a sin: sin is to indulge it or to assume that pleasure is shared by other members of the congregation. It is the indulging of the President that is the biggest obstacle to the success of the meeting. His first duty, therefore, is to be aware of the temptation and dangers of succumbing to it. The clearest of the danger signals hears him speak a lot during the discussion. One of the best chairmen I've ever served under makes this rule to limit her intervention in one sentence, or no more than two. She forbids herself to ever make a point to the meeting she chairs. This is a harsh rule, but you will find it hard to find a regular to attend her meetings (or anyone else) who thought it was bad. There is, in fact, only one legitimate source of pleasure in the presidency, and it is the pleasure of the achievements of the meeting, and to be legitimate it should be shared with all present. Meetings are necessary for basic and primitive human causes, but they are useful if they saw everyone present to get somewhere, and somewhere they know they couldn't get to individually. If the chairman wants to make sure that the meeting achieves valuable goals, he will be more effective in seeing himself as a servant of the group rather than as its host. Its role then becomes a role to assist the group in making the best possible conclusion or decision-making in the most effective way: to interpret and clarify; To move the discussion forward; and to bring it to a resolution that everyone understands and accepts as the will of the assembly, even if individuals do not necessarily agree with it. His true source of authority among members is the strength of his perceived commitment to their common purpose and his skill and effectiveness in helping and guiding them to achieve it. Control and discipline are not an act of imposing his will on a group, but by imposing the will of a group on anyone who is at risk of distraction or delaying progress in the discussion and thus from the realization of the goal. Once members realize that a leader has been snough off his commitment to his common goal, he does not need much personal strength to control the meeting. Indeed, a sense of urgency and a clear desire to reach the best possible conclusion as soon as possible are a far more effective disciplinary tool than a great pist. An effective chairman can then hold a discussion to the point of pointing out that there is no time to pursue a specific idea now, that there is no time for long speeches, that the group should go through that paragraph and the next, rather than resorting to pulling the rank. There are many polite ways the chair can point to a slight impatience, even when someone speaks, leaning forward, fixing his eyes on the speaker straining muscles, raising eyebrows, or nodding briefly to show the point taken. And by answering or commenting, the chairman can indicate by the speed, brevity and finality of his intonation that we should move on. Conversely, he could reward the contribution he was seeking by opposing expressions and intonations, showing that he had ample time for such ideas, and encouraging the speaker to develop that view. After several meetings, all present readily understand this non-verbal language of the presidency. It is the main tool of the chairman of the training group in the general type of meeting behavior that he is looking for. He is still a servant of the group, but as a hired mountain guide, he is someone who knows the destination, the route, the weather signs, and the time that will take the journey. So if he assumes that members walk a little faster, they take his advice. This role of servant rather than master is often hidden in large organizations that the chairman is often a line manager of members: this, however, does not change the reality of the role of the chairman. The fact is, it's easier to see, say, the neighborhood action group. The question in this case is simple: Thanks to the presidency of which person do we collectively have the best chance of getting a playground built? However, one particular problem was the definition of the role of chairman, and he had an extremely interesting answer. The question was, how could the President combine his role with that of a member who was in favour of one of the parties to the dispute? The answer to some interesting research is researchers who have sat on hundreds of meetings to find out how they work. Their consensus is that most effective discussions are, in fact, two leaders: one they call a team, or a social leader; another task, or project, leader. Whether leadership is actually one or a double function, it is enough for our purposes to say that the best role of the chairman is the role of a social leader. If he wants a particular point to be vigorously defended, he ensures that it is someone else who leads from the discussion of the task, and he holds back until much later in the argument. He can actually change or change his point of view by hearing the discussion, but even if he does not, it is much easier for him to show support for someone else's point of view later in the discussion after hearing the arguments. He can then take stock of what he prefers. A task lawyer may regularly be a second vice-chairman, or another person may advocate for various agenda items. On some issues, the chairman may well be the lawyer himself, especially if they are not related to the conflict within the group. What is important is that the chairman must maintain his social leadership, even if it means sacrificing his leader. However, if the task lawyer appointed persists in championing the reason through two or three sessions, he risks building up quite a head of antagonism to him among other members. Despite this, this antagonism harms the group less by being focused on the task leader than at the social leader. The structure of the discussion may seem to be that there is no right or wrong way to structure the discussion of the committee meeting. The topic is raised, people say what they think, and finally a decision is made, or the discussion stops. There's some truth to that. In addition, it would be a mistake to try to link each discussion of each item to a single immutable format. However, there is a logical order for group discussion, and while there may be reasons not to follow it, there is no reason not to know about it. In practice, very few discussions are held back, and many of them consciously joining the next steps that follow exactly the same pattern as a visit to the doctor. What seems to be trouble? The reason the item on the agenda of the meeting is usually like the symptom we go to the doctor with: I keep getting this back pain similar to the sales have grown in Germany, but fell in France. In both cases it is clear that something is wrong and that something needs to be done to fix it. But before a visit to the doctor, or a meeting of the European Marketing Committee, that is about everything we really know. How long has this been going on? The doctor will begin with the medical history of all relevant reference facts, and so will the discussion of the committee. A solid basis for general and agreed facts is the best basis for any decision, and a set of relevant issues will help to establish it. For example, when did French sales start to fall? German sales rose exclusively? Was there a delivery problem in France, or less sales efforts, or weaker advertising? Have we lost market share or are our competitors' sales falling too? If the answers to all these and other questions are not established at the beginning, then a lot of discussion may be wasted later. Could you just lie on the couch? The doctor will then conduct a physical examination to find out how the patient is now. The Committee would also want to know how things were at the moment. Are measures being taken? Do long-term orders show the same trend? What are the latest figures? What is the current stock position? How much money is left in the advertising budget? You seem to have slipped the drive. When the facts are established, you can go to the diagnosis. The doctor may seem to do it quickly, but it is the result of experience and practice. It, in fact, quickly eliminates all impossible or far-fetched explanations until it leaves itself with a short list. The committee will also risk and eliminate various diagnoses while it is at home on the most likely, such as the company's recent vigorous and highly successful advertising campaign in Germany plus a new packaging market leader in France. Take this round to the addict. Again, the doctor is more likely to take the label that a committee meeting may be wise to avoid. The doctor comes out with one prescription, and the committee can also quickly agree on a single course of action. But if the course is not so clear, it is better to take this step in two stages: (a) to decide a number of options - do not reject any proposals first, but try to select and combine promising elements from all of them until a number of thoughtful, agreed and reasonable proposals are presented; and b) only when you have created these options do you start to choose among them. Then you discuss and decide whether to choose a course based on repackaging and point-of-sale promotion, or one based on advertising and price reduction, or one that trades its time and saves money for heavy new promotion products next year. If this paragraph is complex or particularly significant at all, it is important for the President not only to have the proposed course of discussion in his head, but also to announce it so that everyone knows. A good idea is to write the headlines on the easel pad with felt pen. This saves most of the time to spend and the confusion that results when people pick up items in the wrong place because they weren't involved in the secret chair, that the right place goes up later in the discussion. Holding a meeting just as the driver of the car has two tasks, follow his route and drive his vehicle, so that the work of the chairman can be divided into two relevant tasks concerning the subject matter and the fight with people. Working with the topic the essence of this task is to follow the structure of the discussion, as just described in the previous section. This, in turn, entails careful listening and ensuring that the meeting is aimed at achieving the goal. At the beginning of the discussion of any item, the Chairman should make it clear where the meeting should be reached by the end. Did the members hope to make a clear decision or a firm recommendation? Is the preliminary discussion to give members something to go away and think about? Were they looking for different lines to be held outside the meeting? Should they approve the proposal or just mark it? The President can give them a choice: If we can agree on a course of action, that is normal. In this case, we will have to set up a working group for the report and recommendations before the meeting next month. The President must make sure that all members understood the issue and why they were discussing it. Often it will be obvious, otherwise they may have gone through it before. If not, he or someone he informed before the meeting should give a brief presentation with some indication of the reason why the item was on the agenda; History so far; The current position; What should be established, decided or proposed; and some indications of the lines of inquiry or courses of action that have been proposed or studied, as well as arguments on both sides on the subject. If the discussion can be long or complex at all, the chairman should propose at the meeting a structure for him with headlines (written if necessary), as I stated at the end of the section The Structure of Discussion. He should listen carefully in case people jump too far ahead (for example, start offering a course of action before meeting agreed to cause trouble), or on the old land, or start repeating the moments that were made He should very quickly lead the discussion of sterile or irrelevant areas (e.g. the rights and mistakes of past decisions that are too late to change, or distant prospects that are too distant to affect current actions). The President has a responsibility to prevent misunderstanding and confusion. If he did not follow the argument or he did not understand the reference, he should seek clarification from the speaker. If he thinks that two people use the same word with different meanings, he should intervene (for example, one member using promotion only for advertising at points of sale, and the other also includes advertising in the media). He may also have to explain by asking people for facts or experiences that may influence their point of view but are not known to others at the meeting. And it should be on finding points where an interim resume would be helpful. This device often takes only a few seconds, and acts as a life belt for some members who come out of their depth. Sometimes a draft document has to be discussed at a meeting. If there are flaws in this, members must agree on what the flaws are, and the chairman should delegate someone to develop a new project later. The group should never try to pass the table. Perhaps one of the most common shortcomings of the presidency is the inability to conclude the discussion early enough. Sometimes the Presidents did not realize that the meeting had actually reached an agreement, and therefore they allowed the discussion to continue for a few more minutes without getting anything at all. More often than not, they do not close the debate quickly enough before an agreement is reached. Discussion should be closed after it is clear that (a) more facts are needed before further progress can be made, (b) The discussion has shown that the meeting needs the views of people not present, c) members need more time to think about the topic and perhaps discuss it with colleagues, d) events are changing and are likely to change or explain the basis of the decision soon enough e) at this meeting will not be enough time for that meeting to be sufficient for that meeting to be sufficient. To properly move on to this issue, or (f) it becomes clear that two or three members can resolve the issue outside the meeting without taking away the time of the rest. The fact that the decision is difficult can be challenged, or will be undesirable for someone, however, is not a reason for postponement. At the end of the discussion of each item on the agenda, the President should provide a short and clear summary of what had been agreed upon. This can act as a dictation of actual minutes. It serves not only to put this item on the register, but also to help people realize that something worthwhile has been achieved. It also responds to Where's all we have? If a resume includes the actions of a member of the assembly, he should be asked to confirm his consent Dealing with people there is only one way to make sure the meeting starts on time and that is to start it on time. Laters who believe that the meeting began without them will soon learn a lesson. The alternative is that fast and punctual members will soon realize that the meeting never starts until ten minutes after the announced time, and they will also learn the lesson. Punctuality at future meetings can be wonderfully enhanced by the practice of listing late arrivals (and early departures) in the protocol. His imaginary and perfectly correct purpose is to draw the attention of lateness to the fact that he was absent when the decision was made. Its side effect, however, is to tell everyone on the circulation list that it is late and people don't want this kind of information about themselves to be published too often. There is a growing amount of work on the importance of seats and their influence on group behavior and relationships. Not all conclusions are generally agreed. What seems true is that the fact that members sit face-to-face at the negotiating table contributes to confrontation, conflict, and disagreement, though of course that does not make allies enemies. But it shows that the chairman should think about who he takes in front of himself. Sitting side by side makes disagreement and confrontation more difficult. This, in turn, suggests that the chairman can use the friendly values of the seats next to him. To the right of the chairman is the dead corner, especially if a number of people are queuing next to him (this does not apply if he is alone at the head of the table). As a rule, proximity to the President is a sign of honor and favor. This is most noticeable when he is at the head of a long, narrow table. The greater the distance, the lower the rank, just as the lower status positions were below salt in medieval refectory. Control garrulous In most meetings someone takes a long time to say very little. As President, your sense of urgency should help to point him out the need for brevity. You can also assume that if it was going to take a long time it would be better for him to write an article. If it's urgent to stop him in full flight, there's a useful device of choice for a phrase (it really doesn't matter what phrase) as he pronounces it as an excuse to cut and offer it to someone else: Inevitable recession is very interesting. George, do you agree that a decline is inevitable? Draw silence in any properly run meeting as simple arithmetic will show most people will be silent most of the time. Silence may indicate general agreement, or no important contribution to make, or the need to wait and hear more before saying anything or too good lunch, and none of them need to bother you. But there are two kinds of silence that you should Silence of uncertainty. Someone may have a valuable contribution to make, but be nervous enough about his possible intake to keep it to themselves. It is important that when you draw such a contribution, you have to express interest and pleasure (though not necessarily an agreement) to encourage further contributions of this kind. 2. Silence of hostility. This is not animosity towards ideas, but about you as chairman, in the assembly and in the process in which decisions are made. This kind of complete detachment from the whole proceedings is usually a symptom of some sense of insult. If you probe it, you tend to find that there is something gaping to come out, and that it is better than an inch protection of weak junior members of the assembly can provoke disagreements of their seniors, which is quite reasonable. But if the disagreement escalates to the point where they are not allowed to contribute, the meeting weakens. So you may have to bring pain to pay tribute to their contribution for its usefulness, as a proactive measure. You can amplify this action by taking a written note about the point they are making (always a plus for a member of the meeting) and referring to it again later in the discussion (double plus). Encourage the clash of ideas, but at the same time, prevent the clash of personalities. A good meeting is not a series of dialogues between individual members and the chairman. Instead, it's a cross-stream of discussions and discussions, with the chairman sometimes guiding, meditating, sensing, stimulating and summing up, but mostly allowing others to trash ideas. However, the meeting should be an affirmation of ideas, not people. If two people start to heat up, expand the discussion by asking a question to a neutral member of the assembly, preferably a question that requires a purely factual answer. Watch out for the suggestion of crush reflex Student meetings have reduced everything that can be said in questions, answers, positive reactions, and negative reactions. The questions can only be sought, and the answers are only deliveries, three types of answers: information, opinion and suggestion. In almost every modern organization, these proposals contain the seeds of future success. While very few proposals will ever lead to anything, almost all of them should be given every chance. The trouble is that sentences are much easier to ridicule than facts or opinions. If people feel that making an offer will provoke a backlash of being laughed or crushed, they will soon stop. And if there's any status-jostling going on at a meeting, it's all too easy to use the case of someone making an offer as an opportunity to take it down a peg. It is too simple and a formula for ensuring fruitless meetings. The answer is for you to take special care and show heat when someone makes an offer, and discourage as sharply as you can squash the reflex. This can often be achieved by requiring a squasher to produce the best offer on the spot. Few suggestions can stand up to the crush in their pristine state: your reflex should be to choose the best part of one and get the other committee members to help build it into something that can work. Come to the most senior people in the past Obviously this may not be the rule, but once someone of high authority has uttered a topic, less senior members are likely to be discouraged. If you're working up a pecking order rather than down, you tend to get more widely shared opinions and ideas. But the juniors who start it should only ask for contributions as part of their personal experience and competence (Peter, you were at the Frankfur Exhibition- what reactions are you there to pick up?). Close on the achievement note Even if the final paragraph remains unresolved, you can refer to the previous paragraph, which was well resolved as you close the meeting and thank the group. If the meeting is not a regular meeting, fix the time and place of the next one before dissipating. A little time spent with appointment diaries at the end, especially if it is a meeting of five or more members, can save hours of secretarial phone conversations later. After the meeting your secretary may take minutes (or better yet, one of the members), but the protocols are your responsibility. They may be very brief, but they should include facts such as the time and date of the meeting, where it took place and who headed it. Names of all present and apologies for absence. All items on the agenda (and other items) were discussed and all decisions were taken. If the action has been agreed upon, check (and emphasize) the name of the person responsible for the appointment. The time during which the meeting ended (important because it can be significant later to know whether the discussion lasted 15 minutes or 6 hours). The date, time and place of the next committee meeting. A version of this article appeared in the March 1976 issue of Harvard Business Review. Reviews. hbr running effective meetings. hbr leading effective meetings. effective team meetings hbr

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