

Having More Productive Meetings

Does this sound like you?

I was speaking to some managers at a Polson's Training Brokers breakfast recently about communication in the workplace and, for example, how meetings could be made more productive.

Someone said to me after the breakfast that the meetings she goes to have only two problems: they take too long and they don't work!

What can we do to make meetings more enjoyable and more productive?

So what's football got to do with it??

Senior Coach of the Adelaide Football Club, Neil Craig, is often heard talking about two things related to the performance of his team: their ability to make good decisions based on sound information, and their ability to execute those decisions.

It's the same with meetings. They are usually seen as a waste of time because people don't feel as though their point of view has been heard (not enough information, leading to poor decisions) and as a result they aren't committed to the result (leading to poor execution of the decisions)

4 different types of participation

Not everyone participates in meetings the same way. You may recognise these 4 types among your colleagues:

The Mover - advocates their position strongly. Seeks direction and commitment but may be seen as impatient and dictatorial.

The Opposer - puts an opposing point of view. Seeks correction and integrity but may be seen as critical and contrary.

The Follower - agrees with one of the above. Seeks completion and compassion, but may be seen as placating and wishy-washy.

The Bystander - keeps to themselves but watches closely. Seeks perspective and moderation, but may be seen as disengaged or judgmental.

The problem arises when the positive side of one or more of these styles is ignored, or someone's viewpoint is dismissed as being "negative" in some way.

How to fix it

If we want to improve the quality of the input from everyone, and increase their commitment to implementing the result, the meeting chairperson needs to ensure that all 4 types are listened to.

To ensure this happens:

- **keep an eye on who is participating**, and make space for the "quiet ones" to be heard
- **ensure that people aren't "shouted down"** without being given time to explain
- **ask "Why do you think that?"** to ensure that others hear what the person is thinking
- **purposefully go around the table in turn** and ask each person "What do you think on this issue?"

Above all, for better results: ensure that each person is given time and space to contribute, and that their contribution is respected.