

Management essays - key communication skill



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Key Communication Skill

The ability to negotiate is a key communication skill and frequently takes place in the context of meeting. How can meetings be managed to ensure useful outcomes are achieved, particularly when the participants may have very different objectives? Use examples from real meetings where possible.

Abstract

Business meetings frequently take place with the view to allow executives to explore and achieve desired organizational objectives. They are to communicate of plans, updates, progress and outcomes of business strategies. At times these meetings are also between parties outside the organization. Whichever the case, negotiation skills are critical in helping managers to persuade other participants to change their views and accept the ones that are presented at the meeting. The ability to negotiate therefore is key to communication at meetings and required by chairpersons/leaders/participants to conduct successful business meetings.

Introduction

Meetings can be frustrating and at times not necessary if the objectives of the encounter are not clearly identified. Business persons get frustrated at the frequency and quality of the meetings they attend (or conduct) declaring them a waste of time and resources. The value of such meetings is compromised when parties attending the meeting come out unsatisfied and frustrated by the decision reached. With the rate of meeting timings increasing everyday in organizations engaging executives 75 percent to 100

percent of their time, the success rate is diminishing day by day due to rapid decisions made and implemented (Timm 1997).

Meetings participants are likely to feel disappointed and unsatisfied with the results of meetings especially when they spend less time in preparing and planning for meetings they attend. It is therefore not surprising to find that there are numerous documents and books published on meetings and how participants can engage in fruitful endeavours without compromising their own position. As a formal communication framework, meetings can make or break a business therefore consideration for its success is critical.

Negotiation as a key to communication skills must be integrated along with other meetings strategies with the view to ensure outcomes are achieved to the desires of the participants without frustrating either party.

Purpose Statement

In the following report the researcher shall outline how negotiation as a key to meetings communication skill can be used to achieve business objectives despite participant differences in objectivity. The report shall first outline the purpose of meetings followed by how business meetings should be conducted and what elements are critical for its success. This is concluded with recommendations for successful business meetings.

Report

Purpose of communication

Building a corporate culture is pegged in the setting up of an effective communication system. Organizations shape and influence the behaviour of individuals through powerful communication strategies and culture so that

they can help in achieving organizational objectives. When used appropriately, communication can offer insightful analysis of the organization's vision and mission, goals and objectives and more importantly how these may be implemented. To perpetuate conducive business environment, executives and management often engage in communication dialogues for numerous purposes and on a variety of occasions. According to Deborah J. Barrett (Oliver 2004) organizations engage in communication to mediate change management. Executives and top management uses its communication framework to communicate the need for change to cope up with the dynamic business environment. They engage in meetings with employees to communicate identification of roles in carrying out tasks required for the change management.

Employees and employer meetings therefore is a top-down approach to communication with the purpose to form powerful coalition, creating vision, empowering workers to act on vision, carry out plans and consolidating efforts for change management (Barrett in Oliver 2004). However, often management in the flow of forming their objectives fail to recognize the objectives of individuals working within their organizations, resulting in ineffective and useless weekly meetings that achieve less and waste more time and resources.

In another scenario communication through meetings among managers to discuss and generate ideas and feedback on work progress is also normal. Purely administrative communication of this nature is carried out with the purpose to analyze and update on organizational progress. Managers of various departments communicate their intent, delegate by expressing their

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proposals and establish chain of command of internalized processes for plan implementation purposes. They communicate with other managers and executives to update progress and express their desire for shared resources or to provide feedback to evaluate existing or forthcoming problems within and outside the organization. In such instances the climate of communication may not appeal to the participants as each attempt to put forth their ideas and expect acceptance from the others. For this reason resistance and barriers to communication are expected. The participants tend to bargain or negotiate their way with others with the hope to elicit collaborative actions (Ramundo 1994).

Another and perhaps the most important aspect of formal communication in meetings is the objective to elicit business outcomes from individuals outside the organizations like sellers, suppliers, unions, shareholders or directors where the basic premise of the meeting is to negotiate and come to certain winning outcomes. Meeting participants therefore come to the room geared to negotiate and to reject opponents' proposals. The purpose of these corporate meetings therefore is to overcome the barriers to communication and come out as the winning party.

Negotiations in business meetings

Meetings in today's business world compromise of participants negotiating defensively (Foster 2004). Whether one is a buyer, a supplier, a union leader or a client successful meeting participants are those who negotiate before the contract is signed. Spending some time to communicate the details of the contract like clauses, agreed upon provisions, price or salary can help the negotiator in achieving the desired outcomes. Once a meeting is

convened, the participants assume the roles of the negotiators engaging dialogues that elicit their objectives and purpose for participating. It is best that participants define the objectives and account for the desired outcomes. Successful negotiators usually plan their strategies before hand so that they can concentrate on non-aggressive yet succinct dialogues to persuade the opponent in accepting their terms.

For instance a union leader and a company management will likely have their strategies written down before they enter the meeting room. They are likely to engage in dialogues that reflect clauses that they plan to negotiate upon. Such planning is critical as it helps the negotiators to direct the meeting and also to save time by concentrating on the objectives only rather than engage in meaningless communication.

In such situations James Manktelow of Mind Tools (2005) is of the opinion that negotiation skills are essential in meetings and conflict situations where the participants need to appropriate their dialogues to seek wining negotiation. The participants who lose out tend to become confrontational or harbour a grudge against the wining party. Consequently the modern adage for negotiation is to create a win-win situation whereby both parties gain from the negotiation. this approach is not only critical for resolving disputes and have a lasting effect on the business relationship but it also open up channels of communication in the long term.

Nevertheless, this is not to say that negotiation dialogues always result in win-win situations. In cases of policies making, or buying of a house or selling a product negotiation often result in one party losing and the other wining.

For this purpose it is recommended that the situation is dealt with in an amicable manner through excessive planning for counter arguments without having to be aggressive to the other person. The key to such business meetings is to negotiate the terms of trade rather than focussing on defeating the opponent (Manktelow 2005). Consideration for trade's terms, alternatives, expected outcomes, consequences, and possible resolutions are critical to the negotiation situation.

Communication in meetings

Meetings as discussed in the previous sections are formal communications in organizations and businesses carried out by participants with certain objectives expressed and negotiated in the course of the meeting.

Successful meetings are those that engage negotiation strategies to focus and achieve desired objectives. These strategies need to be carried out in a very conducive manner so as not to offend opponent yet reach the end results amicably. For this purpose, Joan Mulholland (1991) recommends certain kind of speech acts chosen to represent a range of meanings and significance designed to represent and develop negotiation content.

These acts should be considered often and may be integrated in negotiation dialogues to express certain context and performance of certain actions.

Mulholland posit that communication during a negotiation meeting entail the use of body language as well as speech specification. Careful use of language notations and sentence structure can greatly influence the results of the encounter. For example one of the most important parts of meetings is the participant's acceptance or rejection of proposed ideas. Depending on

the individual perception offer or proposal can be accepted, rejected or reach a compromise.

Depending on how the proposal is presented the response from the participants can damage cooperation behaviour and result in conflict situation if it is rejected. To mediate and elicit a positive response even if the participant is hesitant about accepting the proposed idea should demonstrate a cooperative attitude by acknowledging the ideas without acceptance by saying " That's an idea worth consideration..."; given general acceptance like " we would be keen to do something along those lines on day...." or set up a response from other participants or voice hesitation before acceptance (Mulholland 1991).

On the other hand in cases of real acceptance of ideas participants should not hasten to communicate acceptance immediately but should ask for additional information and reports to reach to informed decisions. The important aspect of the meeting is to show to the participants that the outcome should be mutual. Furthermore, acceptance in situations of business meetings should be entirely separate from the person who has communicated and negotiated the deal.

The communicator should communicate the fact that the organization or institutions with which he is associated and himself are two different entities and any personal remarks should not constitute as business dialogues. The content or objectives of the meeting should also be separated from participants who attend it. These considerations are important for participants to be objective in their decisions whether it is a rejection or

acceptance or something in between (Mulholland 1991). Hence, a human resources manager conducting a performance appraisal (a type of meeting) should communicate its objectivity and his/her role as the mediator and the organization's requirement. He/she should also communicate the separation of the employee's records and performance outcome from himself the evaluator. Any negative outcome from the performance appraisal meeting should not be associated with the ill-will of the appraiser. This can be expressed through verbal communication between the participants.

Effective meetings

The above dynamics are critical for influencing the progress of meetings in the desired direction of organizational objectives. However, implementing these dynamics does not necessarily guarantee efficacy of meetings. Instead there are certain procedures that need to be followed and managed for meetings to achieve its objectivity. Adair and Thomas (2003) prescribe preparation and the following formality:

- ‡ planning
- ‡ Informality
- ‡ Participation
- ‡ Purpose
- ‡ Leadership

They also outline the importance of purpose in meetings:

- ‡ To pool available information
- ‡ To make decisions
- ‡ To let off steam/tension

‡ To change attitudes

‡ To instruct/teach

Gathering information, reports, agendas and laying out technical data or equipment in advance are helpful. Meetings should be purposeful so that the information relegated is meaningful for the participants to absorb, analyze and make decisions. Whether it is a meeting of signing contracts, an employee-employer appraisal meeting or a purchase of an asset, advance planning is critical in enabling the participants to focus on the objectives.

Since meetings are of groups of people from different background, different meetings tend to develop personalities of its own. Leaders or the chair persons must make efforts to understand the personality of the participants' conformity, values, attitudes, prejudice or power so that they can effectively communicate in a certain manner to influence participant's thinking (Adair and Thomas 2003).

Furthermore, Kellie Fowler (2005) is of the opinion that running effective meetings is inherent in the skills of the leader who is managing the meeting.

The leader should:

- " Generate an agenda to all involved in the meeting
- Start the discussion and encourage active participation
- Work to keep the meeting at a comfortable pace - not moving too fast or too slow
- Summarize the discussion and the recommendations at the end of each logical section
- Circulate minutes to all participants" (Fowler 2005)

But perhaps the most important aspect is the fine tuning of negotiation skills so that outcomes can be achieved. The first step is to choose the right participants to contribute to the decision making and problem solving initiatives. The key is to try to keep the number of participants to 12 and ensure that they are knowledgeable in the issue under consideration. The leader's role in enumerating on the agenda, guiding the participants and direct them towards it, and summing up of the debate is critical as he/she is the one who rounds up the various views to resolve the issues discussed. Confusions, misunderstanding and mix-up of any sort should be clarified before decisions are made.

The basic premise for such meetings often stem from the debates or negotiating points presented by the participants. The leader or the chairperson acting as the mediator must keep the above communication principles and dynamics in mind to guide the participants in taking part in the decision and not feel neglected or lose out" in the negotiation.

Conclusion

The above report on meetings enumerate on the process and management of effective meetings. It also outlines the importance of negotiation skills in contributing to successful business meetings under certain circumstances. The purpose of meetings as discussed is to focus on planned agenda and achieve desired outcomes. Many business meetings deviate from this focus and tend to result in inefficacy and waste of time. For this reason it is recommended that meeting participants develop planned agendas, focus on objectives and agenda, and direct the flow of communication dialogues in the same direction.

More importantly, for business meetings to reach its desired conclusions, participants should engage in amicable negotiation strategies in which both parties attain a win-win situation. This adage has proven beneficial and fruitful for meetings participants as it relegated non-aggressive business conduct and communication yet at the same time achieves the desired corporate objectives.

Successful meetings therefore are those that engage in extensive preparation, allow time for participants to understand agendas and purpose of the meeting and equip themselves with information for debates and discussion. Meetings that elicit positive response engage participants in positive and non-aggressive dialogues by allowing them to communicate their ideas and reservations. The leader or the participant has the choice to reject or accept or compromise but these should be communicated in an amiable manner without offending the opposing parties and at the same time do not compromise one's own position. Overall successful meetings are those that influence the objectives which the participants had before they entered the meeting room and persuade them to see one's own point of view and adopt it.

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