**UNIT 6: MANAGING MEETINGS**

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**Introduction**

A meeting is a gathering of two or more people that has been convened for the purpose of achieving common goal(s) or objective(s). Meetings are forums for discussion and machinery for getting things done. They can range from the very formal with complex rules of procedure, to the very informal, just guided by conversations. Yet all meetings have one thing in common: to channel the group expertise of a number of people to achieve a set of goals or objectives. Meetings may occur face to face or virtually, as mediated by communications technology, such as telephone conference call or a videoconference etc.

Many meetings take place in business and an effective meeting is an efficient tool in the communication process. Meetings enable face-to-face contact of a number of people at the same time. They provide a useful opportunity for sharing information, making suggestions and proposals, taking decisions and obtaining instant feedback.

Meetings are used for a variety of purposes such as:

* To coordinate or arrange activities
* To report on some activity or experience
* To take decisions about actions
* To inform and/or instruct
* To generate ideas

**Types of meetings**

Meetings can be formal or informal.

Formal Meetings

The rules of conduct of formal meetings are outlined in documents such as a company’s Articles of Association, Constitution or Standing Orders. With such meetings a quorum must be formed and a formal record of the meeting must be kept. Such meetings include:

* Annual General Meeting (AGM)

These are held once a year to assess the trading of the organization over the year. All shareholders are invited to attend the AGM but they must be given 21 days notice.

* Statutory Meetings

These are called so that shareholders can communicate and consider special reports. Companies are required by law to hold these statutory meetings.

* Board Meetings

These are held as often as individual organizations require. They are attended by all Directors and chaired by the Chairman of the Board.

Informal Meetings

Informal meetings are not restricted by the same rules and regulations as formal meetings. Such meetings may take the form of brainstorming or discussion sessions and include the following:

* Management Meetings

These are attended by a group of Managers who may need to discuss specific matters, report on progress or receive progress reports. Management meetings can take many forms depending on the structure of the organization. They involve managerial decision making at various levels; for example, some meetings will involve the senior management team, while others will involve middle management or will cover both groups.

* Departmental Meetings

These are periodic or one-off meetings attended by all departmental staff to discuss and address departmental issues (e.g. reviewing performance, setting objectives, reporting on the outcome of actions taken and discussing any other matters in connection with departmental operations)

**Meeting procedures and conventions**

Meeting procedure is the term used to describe the rules and guidelines by which we conduct

our meetings. Without these rules it is possible for the meetings to become talk fests, going

around in circles with no clear direction or aim, while it is also likely that the more outspoken people will dominate and hijack the debate and the decisions of the meeting. Observation of proper meeting procedure will help to overcome these problems. The need for strict application of many of the finer points can be relaxed at smaller or more casual meetings, but at larger meetings, or where some contentious issues are to be discussed, adhering to proper meeting procedure is advisable.

Conventions of a meeting refer to the code of behavior under which meetings are usually carried out. They are a set of rules which govern the way that each meeting progresses. Although not every meeting has exactly the same conventions, companies will often make sure that all of their meetings follow their own private set of conventions. The conventions of a meeting are like a set of rules which people have to follow in order to play the game correctly. These rules are designed to ensure structure, fairness and accountability.

The conventions of a meeting help to ensure that a meeting follows an approved, formal structure. Having a formal structure at meetings can help to ensure that the things which need to be addressed in a meeting will be covered before the end of the session. They also aim to ensure that all of the participants are given a fair chance to enter into the debate.

There are different types of conventions of a meeting. These fall under two categories as follows:

Legal Conventions – Legal conventions are those conventions of a meeting which are required by law at a formal meeting of an organisation or business group. Depending on your locality, these can include the preparation of an agenda before the meeting, the presence of a chairperson at the meeting and an official set of minutes to be produced after the meeting.

Informal Conventions – These conventions have been decided on by the group and are personal to the group which is running the meeting. They may include things like each member of the meeting having to introduce themselves formally to the group at the beginning of each session. These conventions are open to debate if the group thinks that they need to be changed.

The conventions of a meeting are usually agreed upon in the very first group meeting. If members want to challenge these conventions, they must bring the matter up through the correct channels and discuss proposed changes with the rest of the group in a meeting environment. If you are new to a group, the conventions may be outlined for you.

Conventions of a meeting apply at all stages of the process, and can include the planning of a proper agenda, the ways in which the meeting is conducted and the ways in which participants are expected to follow up any action points.

The conventions of a meeting have a positive impact on participants. They help to ensure that participants in a meeting treat each other with fairness and respect. They also help to encourage participants to attend when they can, and send their apologies for their absence when they cannot. They encourage participants to think about the meeting before hand, so that they may get their items added to the agenda in time.

If a meeting is to be effective, it must have a clear sense of direction. As already stated, a meeting without structure is likely to veer off track and end up as a ‘talking shop’ – so, having a structure can help ensure that the things which need to be addressed in the meeting will be covered. The structure will vary depending on the nature of the meeting and the level of formality or informality. For example, a team meeting which is convened to brainstorm some ideas on a particular issue before deciding on a course of action may appear relatively unstructured. However, the team leader will still follow an unwritten structure, for example, as follows:

* Explain the purpose of the session
* Facilitate the session
  + Ask for ideas from the group
  + Record the ideas on a flipchart
* Discuss the findings
* Seek consensus on the best course of action

A regular team briefing may have a written structure in the form of a list of points for discussion. A departmental meeting may involve issuing a more formal agenda with a list of items for discussion. The agenda is what will determine the **structure** or **order of deliberations** of the meeting.

**The roles of key players**

One of the causes of communication failure in meetings is poor performance of `key players´. It is therefore important that each person involved in meetings knows what his/her role is. The following table provides a useful reminder of some of the essential roles of the key players in meetings:

**Table 5.1: Roles of Key Players**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Before meeting** | **During meeting** | **After meeting** |
| **Chairperson**   1. Establish and understand the items of business to be transacted. 2. Agree a draft agenda. 3. Ensure members are notified of time, place, purpose of meeting and issue agenda if possible. 4. Ensure the room is properly arranged – seating arrangements, papers, water, ashtrays, etc. | 1. Start on time 2. Introduce topics clearly 3. Obtain valid contributions. 4. Control the discussion and maintain order. 5. Encourage all to contribute 6. Get decisions. | 1. Verify draft copy of minutes prepared by Secretary or minute writer. 2. Monitor progress. |
| **Secretary or minutes recorder**   1. Obtain the matters from previous minutes or new sources. 2. Draft agenda to a logical order of priorities and agree with Chairperson. 3. Notify members by circulating notice of meeting, agenda, and any other necessary documents. 4. Get the meeting room properly arranged. | 1. Attend before time. 2. Have all necessary papers/documents available. 3. Take note of the proceedings. 4. Do not allow unclear discussion to pass. 5. Assist the Chairperson. | 1. Draft minutes. 2. Agree with Chairperson. 3. Distribute to members within two days of meeting. 4. Issue instructions arising from minutes and monitor if necessary. |
| **Member**   1. Notify Secretary/Chairperson of items for agenda. 2. Read all papers that have been circulated. 3. Prepare if appropriate own supporting papers. 4. Clear any points of correction with Secretary. | 1. Attend on time. 2. Make disciplined contributions. 3. Respect contributions of others. 4. Take note of decisions made and action(s) to be taken. | 1. Read and verify minutes. 2. Carry out any action required and if necessary report back. 3. Respect confidentiality. 4. Always bear in mind the principle of collective responsibility. |

**Documentation for meetings**

Documents for meetings serve various purposes:

1. To guide the members as to what their mandate or scope of operation is; outlines what members can discuss and decide upon (Terms of Reference)
2. To provide rules/regulations guiding the conduct of members and meetings (standing orders, articles of association, constitution)
3. To ensure that all participants know a meeting is to take place, formal advance notifications of their being called are issued (notices);
4. To ensure meetings achieve their purposes, schedules or lists of items to be discussed are issued to all participants (agendas); and
5. To ensure that all participants are reminded of the business that was conducted, the decisions that were made and the issues that were resolved at the meetings, formal written records are published (minutes).

**Notice and agenda**

The notice and agenda are usually combined in one document. The portion at the top is known as the notice. This gives details of the venue, day, date and time of the meeting. You may write a notice using any one of several formats i.e.:

1. A form postcard – such postcards are pre-printed and used to call routine, perhaps monthly meetings. Spaces are left for the Secretary to enter the committee member’s name and the day, date, time and venue of the meetings.
2. Centered notification – some notices are produced on sheets of A5 landscape headed paper. The essential information is in a centered paragraph.
3. Letter format – sometimes formal meetings are called by means of a personally written letter from the Secretary to each committee member. It is written on the organisation’s headed paper.
4. Memorandum – in the case of meetings called by a company or public service department, the most frequently used format is the memorandum.

The agenda is the middle part of the document. This is a list of topics to be discussed at the meeting.

In addition to providing an ‘early warning system’ to help meeting participants to prepare themselves for the topics to be covered, the agenda acts both as a ‘running order’ schedule and timetable during a meeting. Below is an example of a notice and agenda of an ordinary meeting in memorandum format:

|  |
| --- |
| **NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION**  **MEMORANDUM**  TO : All Students – BPA I Class  FROM : Class Representative  REF : NIPA/BPA I  DATE : 6th January, 2016  **SUBJECT: NOTICE OF MEETING**  This serves to inform you that there will be a meeting in classroom 13 at NIPA Main Campus on Friday 8th January, 2016 at 10:30hours.  Please be punctual.  **AGENDA**   1. Chairperson’s opening remarks 2. Minutes of last meeting 3. Matters arising 4. Absconding from classes 5. Lecturer attendance 6. Any other business 7. Closing remarks |

In the example shown, note that the first three (1, 2, and 3) and the final two (6 and 7) items are known as ordinary business. These are items which are usually included on every meeting agenda

After the first three opening items (1, 2, and 3) of ordinary business, there will be a list of special or new business (items 4 and 5 in the example) – these are special matters to be discussed at this meeting only.

**Chairperson’s agenda**

There are basically two types of agenda, i.e. the chairperson’s agenda for use by the chairperson and the general agenda which is circulated to the rest of the members and which you have just looked at on the previous page.

The difference between the two is that the chairperson’s agenda will have supplementary notes to guide the chairperson during the meeting. It will also have wide margins so that the chairperson can take down notes during the meeting.

The following is an example of a chairperson’s agenda:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| TIME | AGENDA ITEMS | NOTES IN PREPARATION | NOTES FROM MEETING |
| 10:00 | 1. Apologies | Mrs. Moono will be away at a conference. |  |
| 10:05 | 2. Minutes | Copy attached |  |
| 10:15 | 3. Matters Arising | Ask if anyone wishes to make a point |  |
| 10:30 |  |  |  |

**Minutes of Meeting**

Minutes are a summarized true record of the deliberations of a meeting. They can also be said to be a brief official record of the proceedings of a meeting that need to be approved by the participating members of the meeting. An accurate written record is essential not only for those who attended the meeting but also for those who were unable to attend.

**Types of minutes**

Minutes may take three forms:

1. Resolution minutes. Here only the resolutions or decisions are recorded, without describing the discussion preceding the resolution/decision.

Example: Purchase of printer/copier – The Company Secretary submitted a report from the Manager, Administration containing full details of the trial of the HP printer/copier. It was resolved that the HP printer/copier be purchased at a cost of K 85,000.

1. Narrative minutes. These minutes include a concise summary of the discussion leading up to the resolution(s)/decision(s). They are usually written in full sentences rather than bullet points and are a useful reminder for participants after the meeting and also ensure that absent colleagues are able to know what decisions were made and the discussion leading to those decisions. They can also be used to trace the history of a project.
2. Action minutes. Sometimes when it is important for executive decisions to be implemented quickly and there is infrequent contact among participants between meetings, then the format of `action minutes` may be used to indicate what is expected as a result of the resolutions, and who is responsible. A right hand column may be used to note the name or designation of the person who has been asked to perform the necessary action. The advantage of such a format is that it is very clear who has been asked to do what. When the minutes are circulated, it is immediately clear to a participant whether he/she has been required to act in any way.

**Action sheet**

Sometimes, the Secretary or minute recorder may decide to circulate an `action sheet`. An action sheet is a list of tasks drawn from the resolutions and decisions made in a meeting. It indicates the list of tasks, action officers for each task and the completion dates. It is relatively easy to prepare and can be circulated even before the minutes are completed. It serves as a reminder to members who have been assigned tasks. The action sheet is not only a summary of the required actions but it is also a monitoring tool for the chairperson to follow up implementation of agreed tasks.

**Sample Action Sheet**

**ACTION SHEET FOR BPA I CLASS MEETING HELD ON 8TH JANUARY, 2016 IN CLASSROOM 13**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Agenda item** | **Action item** | **Action by** | **Outcome** | **Due date** |
| Insert agenda item number | Insert action item details | Insert name/designation of person responsible | Insert details | Date to have completed work |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |

Prepared by: .....................................

Name

Designation

Date

**Format of minutes**

Whatever type of minutes you choose to prepare, the format is generally as follows:

* Name of organisation being represented
* Heading: This includes:
* The name of the committee (or body) which met.
* The venue at which the meeting was held.
* The date and time when the meeting was held.

PRESENT: The list of names of members or persons present at the meeting, with their titles etc.

ABSENT: The list of names of members or persons absent from the meeting without excuses, with their respective titles, etc.

APOLOGIES: The list of names of members or persons absent from the meeting with excuses, with their respective titles, etc.

ITEMS DISCUSSED (set out in agenda order)

1. Chairperson`s opening remarks
2. Adoption of minutes of the previous meeting (if there was one)
3. Matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting
4. New items (listed by their specific headings)
5. Any other business
6. Closure

\*Space for names and signatures of Chairperson and Secretary. The signing is done after the next meeting when the minutes are confirmed as a true record of the proceedings.

Chairperson: ............................................... Date: ………………………

Secretary: .............................................. Date: ………………………

**Some guiding principles for the writing of minutes:**

1. The Secretary (or an agreed appointed person) takes detailed notes during the meeting.
2. Notes should be written up into minute form by the Secretary as soon as possible after the meeting is over.
3. The Chairperson (or another reliable person who has a good memory or who takes notes for his/her own benefit) should be consulted by the Secretary to see if their accounts of the meeting agree.
4. The sequencing of items in the minutes should reflect the sequencing of the items in the agenda.
5. Use alpha-numerical or decimal point numbering systems to break up the text of your minutes to facilitate easy reading.
6. Use reported speech.

**Terminology of Meetings**

The following list includes some of the principal terms used in meetings. This list is by no means exhaustive, so you can add to create your own more extensive checklist of important technical terms relating to meetings.

**Address the Chair:** speak to the Chairperson

**Ad hoc -** from Latin, meaning `for the purpose of’ as for example, when a sub-committee is set up

**Adjourn -**  to close a meeting (which is already in progress) temporarily until a later given date or time.

**Advisory** - providing advice or suggestion, not taking action

**Agenda** - is schedule of items drawn up for discussion at a meeting.

**AGM -** Annual General Meeting, All members are usually eligible to attend.

**Apologies -** excuses given in advance for inability to attend a meeting.

**Articles of Association** - rules required by Company Law which govern a company’s activities.

**Bye-Laws -** rules regulating an organisation`s activities.

**Chairman -** leader or person given authority to conduct a meeting.

**Chairman`s agenda** - based upon the committee agenda, but containing explanatory notes.

**Collective responsibility** - a convention by which all committee members agree to abide by a majority decision.

**Committee -** a group of people usually elected or appointed who meet to conduct agreed business and report to a senior body.

**Consensus -** agreement by general consent, no formal vote being taken.

**Constitution -** set of rules governing activities of voluntary bodies.

**Convene** - to call a meeting.

**Co-opt** - Invite a non elected member to serve on a committee.

**Executive** - having the power to act upon taken decisions.

**Extraordinary meeting** - a non-routine meeting called for a specific purpose.

**Ex officio** - given powers or rights by reason of office.

**Honorary post** - a duty performed without payment. E.g. Honorary Secretary.

K**angaroo Court -** Illegal Court (set without authority) by a group to try someone considered to have acted against their interest.

**Lie on table -** Left to pend and not acted upon

**Lobbying -** a practice of seeking members’ support before a meeting.

**Minutes** - the written record of a meeting; resolution minutes record only decisions reached, while narrative minutes provide a record of the decision-making process.

**Motion** - the name given to a ‘proposal’ when it is being discussed at a meeting.

**Mover** - one who speaks on behalf of a motion.

**Nem Con** - From Latin, literally, ‘no one speaking against but some may abstain.

**Not speaking to the agenda:** item being discussed is not on the agenda

**Other business** - either items left over from a previous meeting, or items discussed after the main business of a meeting.

**Point of** **information** - the drawing of attention in a meeting to a relevant item of fact.

**Point of order -** the drawing of attention to a breach of rules or procedures.

**Proposal** - the name given to a submitted item for discussion (usually written) before a meeting takes place.

**Proxy** - Literally, on behalf of another person. Person appointed to act on behalf of another.

**Proxy vote** - vote cast on behalf of another person.

**Quorum:** minimum number of people required to validate a meeting.

**Resolution** - the name given to a ‘motion’ which has been passed or carried, used after the decision has been reached.

**Rider-** Amendment to add, alter or Subtract.

**Secretary** - committee official responsible for the internal and external administration of a committee.

**Secret ballot** - a system of voting in secret.

**Sine die** - from Latin, literally, ‘without a day’, that is to say indefinitely, e.g. **adjourned sine die** means the no date or time was given for resumption of the meeting.

**Standing committee** - which has an indefinite term of office.

**Seconder** - one who supports the ‘proposer’ of a motion or proposal

**Treasurer** - committee official responsible for its financial records and transactions.

**Ultra Vires:** beyond the powers of (a meeting).

**Unanimous** - all being in favour.

**Vote, Casting** - when two sides are deadlocked a chairman may record a second or ‘casting vote’ or **tie breaker** to ensure a decision is made.