

1 MEETINGS

The role of meetings

- 1.1 Meetings play an important part in the life of any organisation, whether they are:
 - (a) formal meetings required by government legislation or the Articles of a company, and governed by strict rules and conventions laid down in the organisation's formal constitution; or
 - (b) discussions held informally for information exchange, problem-solving and decision-making.
- 1.2 A well-organised, well-aimed and well-led meeting can be extremely effective in many different contexts:
 - (a) Executive decision-making; for example, by a group of directors, managers, or government officials.
 - (b) The relaying of decisions and instructions (downward 'briefings').
 - (c) The provision of advice and information for management planning and decision-making (upward 'briefings' or reporting).
 - (d) Participative problem-solving, by consultation with people in different departments or fields, such as through a task force, working party, committee or quality circle.
 - (e) Brainstorming: free exchanges with a view to generating new approaches and ideas.
- 1.3 The wider corporate purposes of meetings may include the following:
 - (a) *Ritual*. A manager's 'ceremonial' role is acted out in meetings. Often, meetings form the ritual ending of months of negotiation: the final 'handshake'.
 - (b) *Communication and personal contact*. A meeting helps people to get to know one another. Establishing good personal relationships is important in organisational life.
 - (c) *'Letting off steam'*. There is sometimes a good purpose in having an argumentative session in which grievances get aired. Disagreement might be seen as a useful way of generating new ideas.

- (d) **Motivation and satisfaction.** The fact, or at least the illusion, of participation in decisions may improve individual motivation.
- (e) **Representation.** Meetings enable the various different interests in a decision to be represented as 'equals'.
- (f) **Relay.** Meetings can be used to delay decisions, which may be of benefit to the organisation or to managers.
- (g) **Nailing colours to the mast'.** Meetings can also be used to put individuals on the spot in public (and in the written minutes of the meeting). They can enforce commitment, or at least indicate where battle lines are drawn.
- (h) **Inspiration.** Some meetings can be inspirational, if they are used to persuade, cajole or encourage a sense of values.
- (i) **Unification.** Finally, bringing people together underlines the fact that they belong to the same organisation, and in theory should be working to the same purpose.

The structure of meetings

- 1.4 To achieve their purpose, those who attend a meeting must generally conform or respond to a measure of *organisation* and *procedure*:
- (a) There is usually a **chairperson**, or at least an organiser, who guides the proceedings of the meeting and aims to maintain order. A meeting can hardly function efficiently if it is (or is allowed to become) a sort of Tower of Babel in which everybody talks at once and nobody listens.
 - (b) There is often a **sequence of business**, or at least of speeches, to express points of view or reach decisions on the common purpose of the meeting. It is not essential to formalise this point with an agenda, but meetings usually do have one.
 - (c) The purpose of the meeting is achieved by reaching some **decision or expression of opinion** at the end of the discussion. In some circumstances this may lead to taking a vote to determine what is the majority view.

- 1.5 Principal among the documents are the:

- (a) **notice:** the announcement of and 'invitation' to the meeting;
- (b) **agenda:** the list of items of business to be discussed at the meeting;
- (c) **minutes:** the written record of a meeting, approved by those present.

- 1.6 Let's now have a look at the organisation, procedure and documentation of a formal meeting, starting with the calling and arranging of the meeting.

2 ARRANGING A MEETING

Who should take part?

- 2.1 The participants for a meeting may be predetermined: for example, if it is a meeting of members of a department, club, society, or committee, or parties to a negotiation or conflict.
- 2.2 The meeting may specifically require or 'co-opt' the presence of:
- (a) a technical specialist, to provide necessary information and support, either to the meeting itself or in communicating or using the meeting's outcomes outside (e.g. the PR specialist who will release its result to the press);
 - (b) a person with the authority to ratify and enforce decisions taken by the meeting;
 - (c) a senior manager or figurehead, to encourage participants with the message that the organisation is supporting the business or authority of the meeting;
 - (d) a popular or charismatic figure, to fulfil a persuasive, encouraging or entertaining role (at a motivational meeting, say, or a sales demonstration).

Officers of the meeting

- 2.3 Informal meetings will generally have a leader or *chair*, who will guide the discussion along the lines set by the agenda, keep order and encourage contributions where necessary.
- 2.4 In addition to a chairperson, there may be administrative support from an elected *secretary* of the meeting, whose duties may include the following:
- (a) Duties before the meeting:
 - (i) fixing the date and time of the meeting;
 - (ii) choosing and preparing the location of the meeting;
 - (iii) preparing and issuing various documents.
 - (b) Duties at the meeting: assisting the chairman, making notes.

- (c) Duties after the meeting: preparing minutes, acting on and communicating decisions.

Convening the meeting: notice

- 2.5 Notice of a meeting will be prepared and circulated in advance (according to any regulations laid down). In the case of a mass meeting of employees or members, a notice board may be used as the channel of communication, but it is usually more dependable to send the notice to each individual concerned, in the form of:
- (a) a card or note, rather like an invitation, perhaps pre-printed (with details filled in) for convenience;
 - (b) a personal letter (for a small committee); or
 - (c) a memorandum (for internal organisational meetings).
- 2.6 The *agenda* for the meeting (if already drawn up) is often included with the notice, to give participants a guide to the business to be discussed and the preparations they will need to make. The minutes of the last meeting may also be attached so that any objections or queries relating to them may be prepared in advance of the present meeting (where the previous minutes have to be approved as being a fair record of the discussion and decisions they describe).

PETRIC & CO. (Chartered Accountants)
Taj Arcade
Jail Road
Lahore

NOTICE OF COMMITTEE MEETING

To all members of the Lahore Chamber of Commerce Exhibition Committee

The next meeting of the Committee will be held at Chamber Hall on Monday, 2 July 20-- at 9.00 p.m.

I hope it will be convenient for you to attend. Items for inclusion on the agenda should reach me by Thursday 16 June.

Signed:

Miss Zahida (Secretary)

Exercise 1

Show how the above notice would look in memorandum format.

Solution

MEMORANDUM

To: Lahore Chamber of Commerce Exhibition Committee Ref: MR/ff
From: Miss Zahida, Secretary Date: 25 July
20--
Subject: Notice of committee meeting

The next meeting of the Committee will be held at Imperial House on Thursday 2 July 200- at 9.00 pm.

I enclose a copy of the minutes of the last meeting and an agenda. I would be grateful if you would bring with you to the meeting any relevant documentation.

Miss Zahida

Agenda

- 2.7 A meeting should (and can effectively) only discuss one subject at a time. If its business includes more than one item, the items will have to be taken in sequence. Hence it is standard practice to draw up a list (called '*an agenda*' - Latin for 'things to be done') of the various items of business of a meeting.

2.8 For a formal meeting (such as that of a committee), the agenda will usually contain the following elements:

 - (a) Membership.
 - (b) Apologies for absence.
 - (c) Minutes of the last meeting.
 - (d) Matters arising.
 - (e) Correspondence.
 - (f) Fresh business.
 - (g) Any other business (AOB).
 - (h) Date of the next meeting.

Karachi Defence Cricket Club

Annual General Meeting

Friday 26 December 2008 at 6 pm
at the Pearl Continental Hotel, Lahore

Agenda

- 1 Apologies for absence
- 2 Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 9 October 19X8.
- 3 Matters arising from the minutes.
- 4 Report of the committee on the 19X8 season.
- 5 Annual Accounts and Treasurer's Report.
- 6 Election of officers.
- 7 Possible increase of membership subscriptions.
- 8 Any other business.
- 9 Date of next meeting.

2.9 The *chairman's agenda* is slightly different from that circulated to everyone else:

- (a) Each item on the agenda is followed by brief notes: information updates, background detail, explanations, reminders of when an item was previously discussed, any problems that might arise between members and need sensitive handling.
- (b) A wide right hand margin is left for the chairman to make his own notes as the meeting progresses.

This means that the chair is fully prepared to provide all necessary information to the meeting, and can also conduct the proceedings with tact and authority.

2.10 A combined notice and agenda might look like this:

PETRIC & CO. (Chartered Accountants)
Taj Arcade Jail Road Lahore
LAHORE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE EXHIBITION COMMITTEE

The next meeting of the Committee will be held at Chamber Hall on Monday 2 July 20— at 9.00 p.m.

AGENDA

- 1 Membership
- 2 Apologies for absence
- 3 Minutes of the last meeting
- 4 Matters arising
- 5 Proposal to increase participation by new businesses in the exhibition:
THAT a new prize be given for the best stand at the exhibition by a business formed in the last 12 months
Proposer: H Haroon
Seconder: B Nadeem
- 6 Finances as at 30 June 20— (Treasurer to report)
- 7 Progress in organising this year's exhibition (report from the Secretary attached)
- 8 Any other business
- 9 Date of next meeting

2.11 The Chairman's agenda for this meeting might appear as follows:

LAHORE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE EXHIBITION COMMITTEE

CHAIRMAN'S AGENDA

For the meeting to be held at Imperial House on Thursday 23 June 19— at 8.00 p.m.

- 1 *Membership*
Mr M.J. Arif of 10 F.C.C Avenue, MT12 to replace Mrs Q. Aslam as the Cantt. area delegate.
- 2 *Apologies for absence*
D.C. Tahir and Mrs. A. Shahbaz are both indisposed
Mr Anis Khan will be in New York until Friday
- 3 *Minutes of the last meeting*
- 4 *Matters arising*
Item 5: Mr Rasool Ahmad of ICI has agreed to present the prizes at this year's show. Copy of his letter attached.
- 5 *Proposal to increase participation by new businesses in the exhibition*
THAT a new prize be given for the best stand at the exhibition by a business formed in the last 12 months.
Prop: HH 2nd: BDH

This is the second year that HH has tried to raise this matter but I understand that Sir John is willing to fund the new prize and that HH has amassed some statistics supporting his case. HH has canvassed quite widely and has a lot of support on the committee.

- 6 *Finances as at 21 June 19-*
I believe HH is rather concerned about the society's finances and may object at length.
- 7 *Progress in organising this year's show*
The only contentious area in the secretary's report is likely to be the section on catering, as GMR has very strong views on the proposal to provide alcohol (as discussed several times before).
- 8 *Any other business*
- 9 *Date of next meeting*
11 July 19— at Chambers Hall (subject to consent)

Preparing the location

2.12 Many of the same considerations apply here as for interviews, discussed in the previous chapter. Briefly, however, attention should be given to the following:

- (a) Accessibility.
- (b) Size.
- (c) Facilities.
- (d) Seating arrangements.
- (e) Materials and other details.

3 CONDUCT OF THE MEETING

3.1 Most meetings, of course, are informal ones and are conducted according to informal rules. The guiding principles are civility or congeniality and efficiency: long rambling meetings are very boring and unconstructive. Much of what follows applies only to formal meetings though the principles, in a watered-down form, may well help to ensure smooth running meetings in less formal contexts.

Constitution

3.2 A meeting which has been properly *convened* may only proceed to business if it has been properly *constituted*, that is if it is 'made up' in a certain way.

- (a) A meeting must have a *chairman*. A 'chairman' may of course be of either sex, and is sometimes called 'a chairperson' (and addressed merely as 'Chair').
- (b) A minimum number of persons (called a *quorum*) must be present, usually throughout the meeting. By definition, a meeting usually requires at least *two individuals* to be present. The regulations of a body usually fix the quorum at a minimum of two (or some higher number). If there is no quorum, or the quorum is 'lost' during the meeting (say, by someone leaving), the meeting must be temporarily suspended, or adjourned.

Motions and resolutions

- 3.3 The proposal put to a meeting is called a *motion*. It should have a proposer, and usually also a 'seconder' (although this is not essential). If it is 'carried' (or approved) the motion becomes a *resolution* (or decision).

The original motion is sometimes amended (or altered) in the course of debate and may then be carried in altered form as a 'substantive motion'. An *amendment* is a proposal to alter a motion which has been put before the meeting, but has not yet been put to the vote: the amendment must itself be agreed by the meeting. An amendment which simply adds words to the original motion is called an *addendum*.

Checklist: motions

A motion:

- Is a proposal put to the meeting for action, decision or consideration
- Becomes a resolution when carried, and is recorded in the minutes as the final decision on the point which it covers

It must:

- Begin with the word 'that'. (The proposer moves...'that [x should be done]')
- Be positive rather than negative. [There is no point in resolving *not* to do something, since it shouldn't be done in any case *unless* a decision is taken to do it!]
- Contain sufficient detail to be unambiguous and easy to act upon
- Conform to any relevant regulations and/or statutes
- Be within the scope of the business indicated in the notice of the meeting

Adjournment

- 3.4 An *adjournment* is an interruption of the proceedings of a meeting before they have been completed. It may be:
- (a) an adjournment of a particular *debate*, to be resumed later in the same meeting; or
 - (b) an adjournment of the *meeting* itself, with a view to its resumption at some later date (or possibly later on the same day - for example when a meeting adjourns for lunch).

It is not possible to cancel or *postpone* a formal meeting, once a notice to convene it has been issued. If there are reasons for not holding it at the appointed time, the correct procedure is to *hold the meeting but propose a motion for an adjournment before any business is done*. (The secretary may issue an advance notice to members that the adjournment will be proposed, so that they do not waste time by coming to the meeting).

The debate

- 3.5 If there is more than one item of business on an agenda, and each is to be considered and voted on separately, the chair's task is to guide the meeting through a sequence of short debates.

(Some formal items on the agenda may of course be accepted or approved without discussion, for example a vote of thanks, or apologies from absent members.)

- 3.6 The purpose of a debate is to ascertain '*the sense of the meeting*'. Hence the chair, with an eye for the timetable and the number of remaining items on the agenda, may have to cut short the debate, once he considers that every point of view has had enough of an airing. If he wishes to do so, he may call on the proposer to reply to the debate, or he may sum up himself.

- (d) A division.
- (e) A voice vote, or 'vote by acclamation'.

Whatever the method of voting, the chair declares the result, which is entered in the minutes. Once an item of business is concluded, it cannot be raised again, nor the debate re-opened, in the same meeting.

Results of a vote

- 'Unanimously carried'
- 'Nem Con' (*nemine contradicente*)
- 'Abstention'
- 'Casting vote'

- All members voted in favour
- No one voted against (but some abstained)
- Not voting for or against a motion
- A deciding or 'tie-breaker' vote

4 FOLLOW-UP

Minutes

- 4.1 The minutes or written record of a meeting are extremely important if it is to be an effective means of communication in an organisation. Minutes, as a written record of the proceedings at a meeting, have two main functions.
 - (a) *They are a source of reference.* It is important to remember details of (oral) decisions: they cannot be (conveniently or inconveniently) forgotten or distorted afterwards.
 - (b) They are a check on ill-considered contributions
- 4.2 Notes should be made *during* the meeting by the Secretary (or another appointed person) and written up into minute format as soon as possible afterwards. The Chair should be consulted or asked to check over the draft minutes. The production of minutes tests the secretary's skill in:
 - (a) forming an accurate, complete but concise record of business;
 - (b) writing correctly in reported speech;
 - (c) filtering out personality clashes and 'heat of the moment' expressions that are later regretted, and do not enhance the reputation of the meeting;

- (d) giving a correct account of participants' views, especially since the minutes will be jealously inspected for error or misrepresentation by the people concerned.

Types of minutes

4.3 Minutes may take three forms:

- (a) *Resolution minutes.* Here only the resolutions (or decisions) are recorded, without describing the debate preceding the vote.

'IT WAS RESOLVED that the Eid Milan party should be held at the Avari Hotel, Lahore on 20 December 19X4.'

- (b) *Narrative minutes.* Here a concise summary of the discussion leading up to the resolution is added.

'The Chairman referred the meeting to Mr Patel's proposal on the matter of staff shortage in the Finance Department. Mr Patel reported that since the departure of D Rouf (data processor) in March, the situation had worsened considerably, with resulting costs to the company in morale and overtime payments. Mrs Gulraz expressed some doubt as to the seriousness of the situation, but Ms Haroon was able to cite several occasions on which delays had been caused. Details of salary levels were discussed. In summarising, the Chairman reminded the committee that in engaging the staff recommended by Mr Patel only one new post would be created, since the Finance Department was understaffed by one member. By a majority of 6-2 IT WAS RESOLVED that two data processors (scale 1 and 2) be engaged from 1 September.'

- (c) *Action minutes.* In the organisations where the meeting or chair has clear authority to direct member's actions, the format of 'action minutes' may be used to indicate explicitly what is expected as a result of resolutions, and who is responsible. A right hand column may be used to note the name of the person who has undertaken or been asked to perform the necessary action.

The format of minutes

4.4 The formats of minutes vary. Hints for producing them include the following:

- (a) Start with details of the time and place of the meeting.

List those present (officers first, then members in alphabetical order).

- (b) Work though the sequence of items on the agenda. Some minutes use the same numbers and headings as appear on the agenda, while others number items continuously from the first minute of the first meeting. Whichever system is used, spacing, indentation, headings and numbers should be used to help the reader to refer easily to each item.
- (c) Get the names and designations of speakers right, and make sure that each reported statement is clearly attributed to the appropriate individual.
- (d) Use a wide right-hand margin labelled 'Action', if you are writing action minutes, and note the name or initials of individuals to whom follow-up action has been delegated.
- (e) Finish with 'Signed: (name and designation of chairman) (date)'.

You might also include a 'distribution list' at the foot of the minutes (ie people to whom the minutes are to be sent).

4.5 Examples

Resolution minutes might appear as follows:

MINUTES OF THE COMMITTEE MEETING OF THE LAHORE DEFENCE CLUB

Held at the Green Room of the Holiday Inn.
on Saturday 2 July 20-- at 9.00 p.m.

Present: A. Ahmed (in the Chair); B. Sonia (Hon Secretary); C. Sadiq (Hon. Treasurer); D. Zahoor; E. Sani; F. R. Waseem; G. Javeed

364. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from H. Barkat and I. Rasool

365 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the last meeting were read and signed as a true and fair record.

366 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

There were no matters arising.

367 POSTERS FOR BENEFIT CONCERT 10 AUGUST

It was resolved that J Siagills Ltd. be approached by Mr Shamim to design and print posters to be circulated on the 20 July.

368 CHOIR RE-AUDITIONS

It was resolved to re-audition members of the Choir who had not attended May rehearsals. Auditions to be held in the Music School on 10 July.

369 APPOINTMENT OF MUSICAL DIRECTOR

It was resolved to appoint an overall Musical Director for the society: Ms S to be responsible for advertising and candidate selection.

370 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting of the committee was scheduled for 25 July 19--.

Exercise 2

Everyone turns up at the meeting, except Ms Zaman who sends apologies for absence due to illness.

The minutes of the last meeting are taken as read and signed. You (as acting Secretary) inform the meeting about the new database, arising from the resolution in the last minutes (Item 5) to implement such a change. The meeting progresses, while you take notes. The various items are discussed, with the following results.

- (a) Mrs Wajid's report is accepted.
- (b) Mrs Dawood proposal is defeated: carphones will not be installed, for reasons of cost, safety and potential for abuse.
- (c) The sales conference will be held on 14 March and will involve the cricket, if tickets are available.
- (d) Thanks and flowers are to be sent to Ms Zaman by you.

- (a) The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday 17 March.

Under 'any other business' you draw the meeting's attention to the library of magazines and journals on Marketing, which you heartily recommend. The meeting ends at 7.30 pm.

Write out full resolution minutes for the meeting.

Action minutes of our meeting convened in paragraphs 2.10, 2.11 might be as follows:

LAHORE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE EXHIBITION COMMITTEE MINUTES

Minutes of the meeting held at Chamber Hall, Lahore, on the 2 July 20** at 9.00 p.m.

Present: B. Amjad (Chairman), M. Tanya (Secretary), B. Nadia, B. D. Naveed, H. H. Maqbool, T. Sabir, G. M. Rehan, M. J. Riaz.

1 Membership

Action

The Chairman welcomed Mr M. Rehan, the new Cantt. area delegate.

2 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from D.G. Tahir Mrs A. Shahbaz and Mr P. Ghazal

3 Minutes of last meeting

The minutes of the last meeting, circulated to members, were taken as read and signed as a true record.

4 Matters arising

Further to Item 5 the Secretary reported that Mr Rasool Ahmad of ICI had agreed to present the prizes at this year's exhibition.

The Chairman requested the Secretary to confirm acceptance of the offer by letter.

M. Tanya,
Secretary

5 Proposal to increase participation by young people in the show

The Chairman referred the meeting to Mr Haroon's proposal to introduce a new prize for the best stand at the exhibition by a business formed in the last twelve months. Mr Haroon reported that Lipton Pakistan had agreed to donate Rs. 50,000 to the society for the purpose of purchasing a silver cup to be presented to the winner and engraved with the winners' names. Mr Haroon then presented a brief verbal report on the significant number of new business start ups in the area: many could be attracted to join the Chamber of Commerce and participate in the exhibition by the draw of a special prize and the attendant publicity.

The motion was seconded by Mr Rafiq. General discussion ensued. The motion was carried unanimously, and *it was resolved* to call the new prize 'Lipton Pakistan Cup'. The Secretary was asked to write to M.D on behalf of the Society to convey the Committee's thanks for his generosity and to ask if he approved of the choice of name for the new prize.

M. Tanya

6 Finances as at 21 June 19--

The Chairman referred the meeting to the Treasurer's report of balances available as at 21 June 19--. It was resolved to accept the report by general consent. However, Mr H Haroon requested that his name should be inserted in the minutes of the meeting as not accepting the report since he felt that it gave a misleading picture of the affairs of the Company.

7 Progress in organising this year's exhibition

The committee discussed the Secretary's report on progress and in general considered that good progress had been made so far. However, Mr Faheem reiterated his previous objections to the serving of alcohol, on the grounds that the previous exhibition had degenerated into a bean feast whereas its purpose was to promote local businesses. After some

discussion, it was decided that alcohol would not be served. Mr Faheem was asked to investigate further the possibility of persuading a local delicatessen to provide catering free of charge.

G M
Rehan

8 Any other business

The need to provide an adequate number of litter bins was stressed by Mrs Naheed, who reminded the Committee of the problems caused last year by insufficient provision of bins. She agreed to look into this point with the Council.

B Nadia

9 Date of next meeting

The next committee meeting was scheduled for 11 July 19-- at Chamber Hall.

The meeting closed at 11.00 p.m.

Signed:

B. Amjad, Chairman

Date:

5 FACE TO FACE DISCUSSION

5.1 Face to face discussion is particularly effective in:

- (a) allowing non-verbal cues, both audible and visual, to be used to enhance understanding and persuasion;
- (b) allowing immediate exchange and feedback;
- (c) allowing communication between or with a number of people; and
- (d) humanising the context of communication by opening the parties to each other's direct scrutiny and to personality factors.

5.2 These qualities make it particularly suitable for the following applications:

- (a) Generating and developing new ideas, since each party may be encouraged and prompted by the others.
- (b) Feedback, constructive criticism and exchanges of views, where necessary to resolve problems or conflicts.
- (c) Decision-making, since each party may contribute a necessary viewpoint or piece of information.

- (d) Spreading information quickly through a group of people.
 - (e) Using personal charisma and logic (especially with the opportunity to invite and answer questions) to persuade.
 - (f) Encouraging co-operation, information-sharing and sensitivity to others.
 - (g) Dealing with difficult or personal issues (such as discipline, grievance, counselling, bad news etc) honestly and sensitively.
 - (h) Encouraging honest, open and spontaneous communication - since it is much more difficult to give a dishonest or prepared answer or opinion face to face than in writing or on the phone.
 - (i) Showing the 'human face' of the organisation, and encouraging identification with it.
- 5.3 In order to avoid being non- or counter-productive, face to face discussion requires:
- (a) clear terms of reference (defining its purpose, scope and the authority of its outcomes);
 - (b) strong guidance from a leader;
 - (c) opportunity for planning and preparation (information-gathering, problem analysis, attitude clarification etc); and
 - (d) suitable conditions.

Face to face discussion in organisations

- 5.4 Face to face discussions may be informal: a chat over the coffee machine or in the lunch hour; chance meetings in the lift; showing someone informally round the office or factory.

They may also take place in more formal contexts:

- (a) Private discussions between superior and subordinate in a closed office, on personal or sensitive matters.
- (b) Information briefings: downward (instruction) or upward (reporting).
- (c) Planning or co-ordinating meetings: executive or consultative, departmental or interdepartmental etc.
- (d) Negotiations with suppliers (on terms of trade) or between management and employee representatives.

- (e) Interviews for staff selection, appraisal, grievance or conflict-resolution, counselling or advice, discipline, information-gathering, customer query or complaint handling and so on.
- (f) Training or induction talks or on-the-job demonstrations/explanations.
- (g) Meetings of task forces, project groups or committees: whether permanent ('standing committees') or formed for a particular purpose and then disbanded ('ad hoc' committees). Committees can have delegated authority to make decisions, or may be instruments of consultation and information, for co-ordination.
- (h) Brainstorming sessions, designed to generate lots of new ideas, by members of a small group bouncing ideas off each other and synthesising or 'hitchhiking' ideas.
 - (i) Conflict resolution meetings or interviews, to get problems 'out in the open'.
 - (j) Quality circles: groups of employees brought together to discuss problems of quality and quality control in their area of work, and (perhaps) to devise ways of improving them.
 - (k) Motivatory/celebratory meetings: announcing good news or results, giving awards etc.

Constructive discussion

5.5 A '*debate*' is a formal procedure, examining an issue from all angles. Its aim is not only to examine but to determine: each side contends for the support of the audience, to 'win' the debate eg a debate in the House of Commons or Lords, culminating in a vote.

A '*dispute*' is a conflict of opinion. In industrial contexts, the word has come to denote a rather grim test of wills between two parties: 'The workers are in dispute with the management', 'the long-running signal workers' dispute'.

'*Discussion*' carries none of the competitive sense of debate or dispute. It involves the co-operation of individuals or groups in getting to grips with an issue, problem or proposal.

'*Constructive discussion*' may be defined as a co-operative attempt to consider a question or problem thoroughly and systematically, and to evaluate all proposals and counterproposals advanced in response.

5.6 Unfortunately, however, discussions rarely fulfil their potential for participation and creativity, because of:

- (a) time wasted on irrelevant issues;
- (b) lack of co-operation between individuals;
- (c) poor leadership or guidance.

Leadership

5.7 The key to constructive discussion is leadership or guidance. This will vary according to circumstance and personality, but the range of communication skills required by the controlling member of a discussion might be as follows:

- (a) Using discretion as to the location and style of discussion: a formal meeting, informal chat, in private or in public.
- (b) Communicating the aims and terms of reference of the discussion.
- (c) Keeping the discussion relevant: steering it away from unhelpful side issues and disputes.
- (d) Moving the discussion on to more profitable ground once each issue has been exhausted.
- (e) Recognising feedback signals of boredom or indifference, frustration and rising tempers: changing tack smoothly in response.
- (f) Encouraging the participation of all members. This includes inviting quiet members to contribute, and controlling forceful and talkative ones. Personality clashes and emotional outbursts will also have to be controlled.
- (g) Keeping order; inviting participation so that people are not talking over each other; firmly but courteously checking attempts to set up splinter groups or dialogues.
- (h) Following all the arguments and conclusions reached, and summing them up for the participants, to draw the discussion to a satisfying close.

The discussion leader is engaged in exercising his persuasive and human relations skills in order to create an atmosphere in which others can do the same.

6 INTERVIEWS

6.1 You know from your own experience what an interview is, but if you had to define it, you might call it *a planned interaction characterised by objectives*.

This indicates why an interview is not the same as a discussion or conversation: