

shocking to hear how many other ways something can be done. The stimulation your thinking gets when it can play off or incorporate another point of view or even need to justify itself to dissenters is invaluable. The variety and quality of solutions a group can come up with is still another reason for meetings.

- *Group self-critique*

In a group, it's safe to join in on the complaining and nitpicking and even laugh about how something's getting fouled up, when everyone else is doing it. The leader can also authorize and direct self-criticism about a project at a meeting to make everyone contribute, become aware of the difficulties, and start solving the problems that are brought up.

- *Developing consensus*

The efficiency of unified agreement vs. individual commitments is clear. When you agree as a group and set yourselves a course of action, everyone in the group becomes everyone else's conscience as well as spur. Conflicts can be resolved in the open and the final product feels "right" to the group as a whole.

- *Stimulating ideas*

The atmosphere of many people focusing on one idea brings the creative level up for all. Hearing possible solutions stimulates meeting participants to add on or take someone else's thought and run with it.

So—meetings *are* an extremely useful, actually invaluable, tool and absolutely vital in the workplace.

Comparison of What Should Be and What Is

Knowing what business meetings *should* be and what they *could* accomplish, as well as how far short they *usually* fall, can help us design new ways to run and participate in effective meetings.

Read down the list of what meetings should be; then read how they actually work. Compare *your* most recent meeting experience with each list:

IDEAL	ACTUAL
Get a sense of the whole	Passive experience
Compare notes	Boring
Share information	People don't listen
Be visible to each other	Not useful
Hear others' opinions	Fear of exposure