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Letters to Editor

THE MANAGER AND AN EFFICIENT MEETING CHAIRING

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Abstract

This paper deals with the problems of efficient meeting chairing. Meetings are one of the main of the manager's activities. The main problem of every manager is how to prepare and chair meetings so that they should be simpler and more efficient. The manager who chair the meeting have very important role. It is important to prepare and chair the meeting in the best way and to bring the meeting to a conclusion accordingly.

Keywords: manager, meeting, management, chair, efficient

1. INTRODUCTION

The profession of manager is very important and much in demand, both domestically and internationally, therefore the manager, as holder of an executive function in the company, in the public administration, the health care or educational institutions merits due attention. The basic areas of managerial activities and the managerial problems he solves on a daily basis deserve special analysis (Cole G.A., 1994).

A manager spends most of his time in a meeting of some sort. Meetings are the

manner in which the manager acts: it is at the meetings that he defines and assigns the tasks, solves problems, controls the execution of the tasks, communicates with subordinates and with his seniors, negotiates with customers and suppliers, etc (William A. Lauren S. Becca A., 2008).

This whole paper is done based on inquiry with over 250 top managers from economic companies from Serbia, on seminars for education and training of managers on the Faculty of Organizational Sciences in Belgrade. Managers have declared that they spend most of their working hours (over

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58.5%) on different meetings and that they evaluate their meetings as inefficient because of the lack of procedure or managing concept of meeting chairing.

Meetings are clearly one section of the manager's job and it is here that he accomplishes the majority of his work. Therefore it is necessary that the manager should make his meetings as simple and as efficient as possible. Efficient meetings are basics for an efficient managerial activity as well as an efficient management of a company (Robertson I., Gibbons P., Baron H., MacIver R., Nyfield G., 1999).

The problem the manager is faced daily is how to prepare and chair meetings so that they should be simpler and more efficient and as such facilitate his work. The manager has to attend a host of meetings: they often turn out to be too long and time consuming, and most frequently they are non-productive and inefficient, with no visible outcomes. Hence the meetings must be made shorter, simpler and more efficient and this is a practical problem to be carefully analysed to find the best solution (Troy V., Michael A., Frederick P., 2007; Tishler A., 2006).

The first step towards achieving this should be to identify the main problems and causes that make the meetings too long and too ineffective and propose the ways to avoid or solve them. The most common causes of inefficient meetings are the following (Jovanovic P., 2001):

1. The objective of the meeting is ambiguous and imprecise.
2. The meeting is not adequately prepared.
3. The agenda is not precisely defined.
4. The participants are not precisely listed.
5. The leader of the meeting fails to

guide and control the meeting.

6. There are too many generalized and long discussions.
7. The real ideas and proposals are missing.
8. Conclusions are imprecise and poorly defined.

Solving these problems or finding ways to diminish their negative impact will contribute to the efficiency and success of the meeting. The first step to accomplish this is to define the objective of the meeting and the need to hold a meeting at all. Then a thorough preparation of the meeting should be conducted. The meeting should be chaired in a swift, simple and efficient fashion, aided by appropriate means; it should be concluded in an equally swift and precise way, drawing conclusions that promise the accomplishment of necessary activities and tasks and of achieving the planned results. (Jovanovic P., 2007)

2. DETERMINING THE NEED FOR THE MEETING

Since the manager is the one who calls and chairs the meeting, it is his/her duty to decide whether the meeting is necessary to hold and whether it should be held at all. The need to hold a meeting is closely related to its objective. Therefore the manager has to define the objective of the meeting, since the objective itself will determine the need for the meeting to be held at all. (Jovanovic P., 2007).

Since the need to hold a meeting is directly related to objective achievement, the manager must be certain about what he/she wants to achieve by the meeting and to define this objective clearly. If the objective

is not clear and accurate, the meeting may last too long and be inefficient (Cole G.A., 1994).

Once the clear objective of the meeting is determined, it has to be analysed and discussed in detail. We must clearly state what we wish to achieve by the meeting and whether it is really possible to achieve the objective we planned. Or, whether it is possible to achieve the same objective in a faster, easier way. Sometimes it is not necessary to have a meeting; it needs only to make a phone call. Moreover, the manager may ask for written replies to questions or issues raised and thus solve the problems without calling a meeting (Frank M.O., 2004).

In deciding about whether a meeting should be held or not, one should have in mind the estimated costs of the meeting, especially in terms of the results expected. The costs of holding a meeting are in some cases too high, therefore it is much more efficient to solve problems in some other way. Absenteeism, travel and other costs, daily allowances, etc., may be so high that they simply do not justify the organization of the meeting. In such a case the manager must look out for some other ways of solving the problem (Wren D. A., Dan Voich J. R., 1994; Stoner J., Freeman R. E., 1989).

If there is the agreement that the meeting has to be held, or if this is not the issue to be decided upon as it is a regularly held meeting, the manager is faced with another problem, that of how to prepare the meeting so that it should be swift and efficient as well as how to prepare him/herself to efficiently chair the meeting and bring it to the desired conclusion.

3. PREPARING THE MEETING

The next step in an efficient meeting chairing is preparing the meeting.

Preparing the meeting is of paramount importance in an efficient chairing and concluding of the meeting. An adequate preparation guarantees a swift and efficient managerial chairing as well as positive results of the meeting (Tishler A., 2006).

In order that the meeting should be well prepared, a number of things have to be done. (Posener, 2007). The first is to set the most favourable time to have the meeting, as well as to decide whether the conditions for holding the meeting are favourable. It is very important that the right date and the right time of the meeting be set. Sometimes the best solution is that the meeting be held on Monday morning; however, there are situations when the favourable term is the end of the week, the afternoon hours, the end of the work day or even after the work time is over (Frank M.O., 2004).

The site of the meeting is also important. Most often it is the premises of the respective company, however, sometimes it is more convenient to organize the meeting out of town, at a quiet, isolated place. It normally depends on the kind of the meeting and on the objectives to be gained by the meeting.

Once the meeting site is determined upon, it is important to arrange the room in which the meeting is planned to be held. This means that the seats accorded to the participants, with the name tags should be allocated. Also, the room should provide enough space for all the participants to be comfortably seated. The room should be noise-isolated, but acoustic, and also well equipped with any kinds of aids, such as audio-, video- and visual devices. The preparations should by

all means include refreshments, which will depend on the type and length of the meeting and the planned number of participants (Jovanović P., 2007).

It is also important that the number and the structure of participants be precisely determined. The total number of participants must be decided upon. This normally depends on the type of the meeting, whether the meeting requires that a large number of participants be present or whether it is just a smaller scale meeting, with a limited number of participants (Feng Lee, 2007).

The meetings attended by a smaller number of participants are generally considered to be easier to handle and usually more efficient. This means that, in the arrangement of the meeting, we should insist that the number of participants be reduced to a really possible minimum. Hence we should first decide on the participants whose presence at the meeting is indispensable and without whom the meeting cannot be held. Then comes the issue of whether there are persons that, for some reasons, should be asked to participate, those that will in some way contribute to a successful conclusion of the meeting. (Jovanović P., 2007) It is also important to decide whether it is necessary to invite any particular experts to explain certain problems and offer appropriate solutions. Finally, a decision should be made whether there is anybody that could undermine the meeting and whether such participants could be avoided for the purpose of a successful conclusion of the meeting.

The next problem to be solved in preparing the meeting is how to clearly define the problems to be discussed at the meeting. A correct definition of the topic and the method of discussion will predominantly define the efficiency of the meeting. Therefore the issues have to be defined that are to be

discussed at the meeting, as well as the methods of dealing with them. In order that this could be well done, a clear and precise agenda of the meeting has to be defined, stating the issues to be discussed. The materials and documents that might facilitate the discussion should be prepared as well as a draft of the conclusion on certain issues. These will help the meeting be conducted in a faster and a more efficient way (Young A., 1992).

All previously quoted elements refer to the preparation of the meeting itself. Besides, the manager chairing the meeting should himself prepare for the job. In order that he should chair the meeting efficiently, he must prepare certain things in advance, even make up the plan of chairing a certain meeting (Bowman C., Swart J., 2007).

The manager's preparations for chairing the meeting means that he should study the issues to be discussed in advance, go through all the documentation and the materials prepared for the meeting, make notes to help him explain his proposals better and prepare these proposals and conclusions to be consistent with the desired objectives of the meeting (Jovanovic P., Petrovic D., 2007).

The manager has to learn who his main opponents are, which their basic goals and arguments may be and whether they have any allies, or any support from a certain number of participants in the meeting. On the basis of these he should get ready to answer his opponents and prepare counter-arguments and counter-proposals.

In order to achieve his aims more easily, in preparing the meeting the manager should talk to a certain number of participants, explain the objectives of the meeting and the advantages of his proposals to them. By doing this he should acquire a body of allies and earn support in conducting the meeting.

(Senior B., Swailes S., 2007; Neuhauser C., 2007)

Even in the case of his not chairing the meeting, but only participating in it, the manager should, as a participant, undertake the majority of the above mentioned activities and then actively participate in the meeting.

4. CHAIRING THE MEETING IN A MANAGERIAL WAY

Upon the completion of all previously mentioned preparations the meeting may begin.

The manager who chair meeting have very important managerial role. If he want to finish and conclude meeting in the best way, he must execute this role very efficient (Abraham S. A., Karns L.A., Shaw K., Mena M.A., 2001; El-Sabaa S., 2001).

The manager chairing the meeting has to choose a dominant place in the conference room so that he should see of all the participants well and have a full overview of the meeting. To chair the meeting successfully, he should be relaxed and concentrated; thus he can listen carefully to all the participants and direct the discussion in a desired course (Jovanović P., 2007).

In chairing the meeting the manager should be clear and authoritative, keeping the entire course of the meeting under control. He should first be highly persuasive in explaining his own attitudes and thus win a majority of participants. A good explanation and strong arguments are basic for guiding the meeting and the manager should be prepared to do this. He must also be able to fully answer all the questions and possible opposition and gradually make a growing number of participants see things his way

(Yukl G., 2002).

The manager must let all the participants state their attitudes and proposals if they want to. These should be listened to carefully and the manager should try to find in them some concurrence with his own proposals and arguments. Good proposals should be accepted and promptly built into the mutual objectives the meetings aims to (Henderson L. S., 2008).

If you let your collaborators state their own opinions, they will be satisfied to have participated and will be cooperative when it comes to conclusions. Try to translate and build their attitudes into their objectives and you will get a significant support in chairing the meeting and in achieving the desired objective.

If the meeting turns out to be going in a wrong direction, try to use your discussion in such a way to bring it back to initial premises and offer additional argumentation to persuade the opponents. Let your allies speak and they will support your attitudes and proposals. (Henderson L. S., 2008; Honoroff B., Opotow S., 2007) Try limiting the discussion time to stop the proposals and attitudes you do not approve of. If even then the meeting goes in the direction unfavourable for your case, make up a good explanation to terminate the meeting and continue it some other time (Jovanovic P., 2001).

Time limitations of meetings and discussions are essential in chairing the meeting competently. Sometimes these are defined beforehand, during the preparation phase of the meeting, however, in some cases the chairman has to determine or limit the time. This should be correctly estimated so that each participant wishing to do it can state his attitude, at the same time preventing the meeting to turn into a long, fruitless, endless

discussion (Milisavljević M., 1994).

In case the meeting goes as planned, it should be slowly and wisely brought to a conclusion. Discussions should be guided and limited in such a way that the participants themselves realize that the discussions are exhausted and that the meeting should be terminated.

5. CONCLUDING THE MEETING

As much as it is important to prepare and chair the meeting in an appropriate way, it is important to bring the meeting to a conclusion accordingly. All the previously made efforts in the preparations and conducting the meeting may be annihilated if the meeting is not brought to a desired conclusion and does not end with desired results (Jovanović P., 2007).

The manager's role is very important in this phase. He should be skillful and capable of observing and mentioning all fruitful discussions and proposals and streamlining and translating them into desired activities and conclusions (Wren D. A., Dan Voich J. R., 1994; Stoner J., Freeman R. E., 1989).

The first task is to define the tasks and activities to be undertaken after the meeting, appoint the people responsible for their execution and allocate the resources required. All these should be associated with the proposed conclusions and at the same time new conclusions should be proposed that correspond to the course of the meeting and fit into the desired objectives (Holden N. J., 2000).

The manager should explain that all the good proposals have been taken into consideration, and that the conclusions offered are the result of the efforts and the discussions of all the participants. It should

also be stressed that the decisions reached at the meeting provide for the realization of both the corporate and the employees' objectives and contribute to the improvement and the development of the company. This is a way to ensure the support of all or of a majority of the participants in the meeting to the proposed decisions and the activities and measures resulting from them (Hunsaker P. L., 2001).

In this phase of the meeting, namely in the concluding and ending the meeting, we must again have in mind the type of the meeting, the number and the structure of the participants, as well as the objectives to be achieved by the meeting.

6. CONSLUSION

Main goal of this paper is to present one simple procedure of meeting chairing by managers. For that purpose, the procedure that implicates clear fortification of the need for meetings, good integrative preparation of the meeting and manager himself, efficient meeting chairing by managers and wisely bringing the meeting to its end is presented. Next to these general phases given in the procedure, in order to reduce time and improve efficiency of the meetings, manager should have in mind the following proposals:

- The meeting will be more efficient if the meeting duration is set or limited beforehand;

- The participants should be required to arrive on time;

- The chairman has to organize and guide the discussion;

- The discussions should be limited in time, long discussions should be cut short;

- Decision should be made on who will be

allowed to talk on the same issue twice;
 -The use of audio and visual aids such as schemes, tables, graphs, slides, audio records, videos, computer presentations should be available (Jovanovic P., 2001).

Based on everything previously presented, it can be concluded that managers in Serbia, if they follow the management procedure presented in the paper, can guide meetings much easier and more efficiently. In that way, they will reduce total time they spend on different meetings, that will enable them to dedicate more time to solving other problems in their companies.

МЕНАџЕР И ЕФИКАСНО УПРАВЉАЊЕ САСТАКОМ

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Извод

Овај се рад бави проблемима ефикасног управљања састанцима. Састанци су једна од основних активности менаџера. Основни проблем сваког менаџера је како да припреми и води састанак како би они били једноставнији и ефикаснији. Менаџер који руководи састанком има веома значајну улогу. Важно је припремити и водити састанак на најбољи начин све до квалитетног закључења састанка.

Кључне речи: менаџер, састанак, менаџмент, вођење, ефикасност

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