



Do We Really Have To Meet?

One of the most common complaints I hear about corporate life is the frustration of attending meetings which are either poorly run, a waste of time, make no progress, lack purpose or are dominated by a few people - or a combination of all of the above. The elements required for a successful meeting represents a large topic. In this column I will focus on the communication that should take place before the meeting takes place....

Let's say that you have just been invited to attend a meeting at work. The invitation could be verbal (telephone or in person) or electronic (email or Outlook invitation). Before you accept I would recommend posing the following questions to the person that is organising the meeting:

- a. What is the purpose of the meeting? Understanding the intent of the meeting is a critical first step before you accept. After all, the purpose may or may not be of relevance to you and your role.
- b. Do we really need a meeting for that? Depending on the purpose, there may be alternatives to a meeting. For example, if the intent is simply to share information then it may be that people can become informed simply by reading, listening or watching suitable material.
- c. Do I have to attend? If you are not critical to the purpose of the meeting you may be exempted. The organiser may simply be polite in inviting you or they may not understand your role. It is worth challenging that you "must" be there.
- d. What is my role? It would be useful to know what is expected of you so that you can prepare appropriately. The answer to this question may also determine what you need to bring (eg information, ideas, or simply paper and a pen).
- e. How long will it take? This simple question is often overlooked. You will almost certainly be given a start time but you may not be given an end time.
- f. What will be the outcome? This final question represents a neat loop back to the first question. Understanding not just the purpose but the tangible results that are being sought will leave you well placed to decide whether to attend.

Your questions will clarify the purpose (and the outcome) and help ensure that the right people, materials and equipment are present. You may also save time by avoiding some meetings. Might this help reduce the frustration that you experience from attending the meetings conducted in your organisation?