

Formal Managerial Meetings: Are they effective or not?

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Abstract

Meetings have become a formality that often ensures “lots of talk about work but less work”. It is due to this reason that the term is now widely detested in the corporate world, although it is still widely used.

A study was conducted to analyze the effectiveness of meetings in a corporate outfit. The study provides an insight into what managers feel about the scores of meetings that they attend but also discusses how the meetings could improve better communication in the future.

The research for this study has been conducted through a questionnaire, along with observations, interviews and personal experiences of the managerial level employees.

1. INTRODUCTION

Meetings are regarded as an important tool of communication in an organization. As Peter Drucker observes [1]: “In an ideally designed structure there would be no meetings. Everybody would know what he needs to know to do his job. We meet because people holding different jobs have to cooperate to get a specific task done. We meet because the knowledge and experience needed in a specific situation are not available in one head, but have to be pieced together out of the experience and knowledge of several people.” Going by this analysis, it is indeed utmost important for the members of an organization to meet frequently or at least occasionally to analyze their past performance and chart out a strategy for the future. There appears to be very little substitute to this conventional method.

2. ORGANIZATIONAL MEETINGS

Generally speaking, meetings are meant for discussions, sharing directions and exchanging dialogues on major issues. Nevertheless, little or no time is being left to see that the issues are implemented properly. “Meetings are an inevitable consequence of running any organization. They provide their members with some degree of psychological satisfaction. However, they must not be allowed to degenerate into a pointless routine (“we always meet on Monday morning, whether or not there is anything”).” A common myth about meetings is that they keep minutes and waste hours.

Indeed, meetings are important but they also induct confusions if not properly used. “Meetings are basically the purposive discourse between two or more people.” It is

equally important that a proper context is defined for the necessity to meet formally.

In 1998, a study of over 100 organizations was conducted in which respondents were asked to rank the upward and downward communication techniques used in their organizations. Surprisingly, formal meetings were ranked at eight in the upward communications in organizations: “At their best, meetings can be an extremely useful forum for making key decisions and coordinating the activities of the people and departments”. [2].

Theoretically, the interaction of the participants should lead to good decisions based on the combined intelligence of the group. Whether the meetings held to solve a problem or to share information, the participants gain a sense of involvement and importance from their attendance. Because they share in the decision, they accept it and are committed to seeing it succeed.

At their worst, meetings are unproductive and frustrating. They waste everyone’s time and they are expensive. More important, poor meetings may actually be counterproductive, because they may result in bad decisions.[3]

3. J & P COATS PAKISTAN (PVT.) LTD.

With the rightful claim of making enough thread every four hours to reach the moon and back; Coats PLC is the largest global thread supplier in more than 60 countries. It has a history of expertise to rely on when it comes in producing best threads.

Since 1948, J & P Coats Pakistan (Pvt.) Ltd. is a member of the Coats PLC Group UK; manufacturers of quality threads all over the world [4].

4. FORMAL MEETINGS AT J & P COATS PAKISTAN

The study puts formal meetings at J&P Coats in the following categories:

Committee Meetings: They are held every month and depend mainly on the submission of the monthly report to the headquarters at UK. The attendees are the Division Directors and the Managing Director. They discuss major issues at the top level and share the progress of each division at the operational level.

Sales Meetings: These are weekly meetings that take place within the Marketing department every Wednesday. Managers of the marketing department and the Marketing Director attend these meetings. They assess the activities of the marketing professionals in the field and take decisions on the various activities in the department.

Mill Meetings: Managers of the Manufacturing and the Logistics departments attend Mill Meetings every Monday. The aim of these meetings is to develop the collaboration between both the departments and facilitate in solving various issues. However, attendance is not mandatory. A manager present in one meeting may not be there in the next one, depending upon the agenda of the meeting.

Debtors Meeting: The Sales Personnel, Managers, Marketing Director and the Finance Director meet on the first Wednesday of every month to identify the delayed payments of the customers, bad debts and ways to collect maximum accounts receivables in the coming month.

ISO Meeting: J&P Coats Pakistan is an ISO certified organization and is therefore obliged to certify the procedures of ISO. A meeting is scheduled every four months with the quality department, the directors and the internal auditors to review the procedures and their adherence in the organization. Internal auditors are selected by the organization, which are mostly the managers from various departments.

Management Briefings: At the end of every year, the Managing Director presents the yearly progress of the organization along with the future plans. This is the most formal meeting and only managerial level employees participate in this important event.

Apart from above mentioned, there are various other meetings, which are formally conducted depending on the priorities. Such meetings are both inter-divisional as well as intra-divisional.

5. RESPONSE

Following are some observations on the effectiveness of formal meetings:

- The fallacy revolving around meetings is not correct and at J&P Coats, the meetings are only conducted when required. The Managing Director says: "The much maligned meetings are the lifeblood of any business organization."
- Meetings could go out of hand if not controlled properly. But at the same time meetings are very fruitful for interaction among the employees of the organization.
- Most of the members do not participate in the meeting and they are made to participate by the

Chair of the meeting. He/she acts as a facilitator and the role is more focused towards keeping meaningful discussions keeping the results in line.

- Sometimes comments are taken personally and tempers do flare, but an open communication atmosphere curbs this and it is taken as speaking ones mind and ideas. This is one way towards being creative.
- Informal meetings rule the meetings scenario and are seen to be conducted more often than formal ones, but it cannot be said that the informal ones can do help in doing away with the formal ones, because of their ease etc. Both are equally effective and one cannot take the place of another.
- When there is no need for a person to be present in a meeting, he/she is not called upon, but if in the middle of a meeting something comes up that needs the input of someone who is not present; then that person is called to join the meeting. This however seldom happens.
- The informal meetings take shorter time and are easy to conduct. They hardly take 15-20 minutes. Such meetings provide a comfortable atmosphere and helps in communicating effectively.
- The most difficult part of a meeting is to keep it focused and to urge everyone to participate actively. This also includes keeping the dominators of the meeting at bay and letting other come up as well.

6. CONCLUSION

The study on "Meetings at J&P Coats Pakistan Pvt. Ltd." highlights the importance of organizational communication. If on the one hand, too many ill-planned and useless meetings waste time, fewer meetings can also lead to poor communications, lack of teamwork and bad decisions. Morale and productivity can suffer at either extreme. Investing some time in meetings before holding them may result in reaping the benefits of higher job satisfaction and improved productivity. Effective measures could evaporate the frustration in the meetings. Optimal meetings achieve objectives effectively and efficiently. Such as encouraging the employees in their work leads to the improved output.

Most of the time, managers are asked to provide the agenda of the upcoming meeting, which leads to the worthy participation and by the majority participants. Though formal meetings at the Karachi head office are only being researched, it has been recommended that future research should include the Lahore office as well.

Meetings could be more effective by following the requisites of meetings strictly, which consist of meeting minutes, agenda etc. These steps will also assist the organization in keeping up with the ISO requirement of “documenting everything”.

To gauge the effectiveness of meetings at J&P Coats Pakistan, with other global offices, a comparison study is being recommended. The process will kick off with the initial comparison between Regional Coats offices in India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.

REFERENCES

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- [4] www.coatsplc.co.uk/