Worksheets - Meetings (3): Managing a meeting

Dear all

As you may know, we are developing a major new project, Project Z. I am attaching a short summary of the project for your information.

In order for the project to be a success, we need to get input and support from as many departments as possible. With this in mind, I'd like to set up a Project Team, including at least one member from each department, to meet once a month to discuss the project.

I realise this is a busy time of year for many departments, but I'd like to stress that this project is of vital importance to the future growth of our organisation. There is no work involved for team members, apart from reading project documentation, attending the monthly team meetings, offering ideas and helping us to identify and solve potential problems.

I believe membership of the team will also be beneficial for individual members, as they will gain a better understanding of this project and, more generally, the way the organisation works as a whole. Members will also gain invaluable experience of project management. Also, as the meetings will be conducted in English, it will be a good chance for team members to develop their communication skills in English.

So could I ask each of you to nominate one or two suitable people from your department to be on the team? Please could you get back to me by the end of this week with your nominations?

Many thanks and best regards

AngelaFott, Project Co-ordinator

Dear all

First of all, welcome to the Project Z Team. I'm very excited about this project, and I'm convinced that with your support and ideas, we can make it a tremendous success. I'm attaching some background documents so you can familiarise yourself with the project aims and scope.

I'd like to organise the first meeting some time next week, as early as possible (preferably on Monday or Tuesday). Could I therefore ask you to let me know your availability for next week, so I can find a time that suits most people? The first meeting should last no more than one hour. Please email me with your availability, ideallytoday (Monday) or tomorrow morning at the latest.

Thanks a lot

Angela Fott, Project Co-ordinator

Dear all

Thanks to everyone who sent me their availability. Based on the information I received, I'd like to invite you to our first meeting on Tuesday 21stFebruary from 14.30 to 15.30 in the small conference room. Coffee and biscuits will be provided.

I'm attaching an agenda. Please make sure you have read the agenda carefully before the meeting, as well as the briefing documents that I sent on Monday (attached again for your reference).

Thanks a lot and see you on Tuesday.

AngelaFott, Project Co-ordinator

Agenda
Date: 21st February
Time: 14.30 – 15.30
Location: Small conference room

1.   Presentation: Background to the project, aims, scope
2.   Questions and answers
3.   Brainstorming: ideas for the launch event
4.   Action points
5.   Schedule for next month's meeting
6.   AOB

Dear all

Thanks to everyone who came to our first meeting yesterday. I think it was an incredibly productive meeting, and your contributions and ideas were extremely valuable.

As promised, I'm attaching the meeting minutes. Please check them carefully, especially the list of Action Points at the end, to make sure I have recorded everything correctly, and let me know if I need to correct anything. I'll email people individually about specific Action Points.

As we discussed, our next meeting will be on 20th March from 15.00 to 16.00. I'll be in touch closer to that date with an agenda for that meeting.

Thanks again for all your support.All the best.

Angela Fott, Project Co-ordinator

Analysis

1. Look at the first email. Discuss these questions.

a. Why do you think Angela didn't start with a full explanation of the project?
b. In the second paragraph, which two phrases does Angela use to show the reason for something?
c. What is the purpose of the third paragraph? What two techniques does she use to achieve this purpose?
d. What is the purpose of the fourth paragraph? What short word does Angela use twice to explain reasons?
e. Do you think Angela is specific enough in her call to action in the final paragraph?

2. Look at the second email. Discuss these questions.

a. How does Angela try to develop motivation and enthusiasm in her first paragraph?
b. What techniques does Angela use in the second paragraph to be flexible but still guide the decision-making process?

3. Look at the third email and the agenda. Discuss these questions.

a. What important information does Angela include in the first paragraph?
b. Which of her two requests sounds stronger, the one in the first paragraph or the one in the second? Why do you think this is?
c. Do you think the agenda contains too much or too little information?
d. What does AOB mean at the end of the agenda?

4. Look at the fourth email. Discuss these questions.

a. Why do you think Angela is so enthusiastic in her opening paragraph?
b. Why does Angela stress the importance of checking and correcting the minutes?
c. How does Angela refer to previous conversation in paragraphs 2 and 3?

5. Underline all the useful phrases and techniques that you could use in your own emails. Try to find at least one phrase for each of the following functions.

a. Referring to previous knowledge or conversations
b. Referring to attachments
c. Explaining reasons
d. Explaining what you want to do
e. Showing understanding
f. Emphasising key information
g. Dealing with potential problems
h. Explaining key benefits
i. Making requests
j. Setting deadlines
k. Expressing enthusiasm
l. Making suggestions
m. Explaining practical details
n. Expressing thanks
o. Explaining your plans

Practice

In pairs, plan a large meeting involving people from several departments. First, decide what your meeting will be about. You can use these ideas to help you:

• What is your organisation? What do you make / do?
• What is your role in the organisation?
• Is the meeting about something that is going to happen (e.g. a new project or procedure) or something that has happened (e.g. an accident, a failure)? Be as specific as possible.
• Is it a one-off meeting or the first of a series?
• How long do you expect the meeting will last?
• Who are you going to invite? Why do you want them to come?
• How can you persuade people to come to your meeting?

When you have a strong idea about the purpose of your meeting, write one or more emails to set up the meeting and invite participants. You can use Angela's writing to give you ideas, copying as much as you like from her emails. You don't have to write three emails: just write as much or as little as you think necessary to set up your meeting.

1	Angela:	OK, so let me start by welcoming you all to our first meeting. Thanks a lot for volunteering to join the team, and thanks also for coming. Your support is very much appreciated. I'm going to begin with a brief presentation now on the background to the project […]
	Angela:	[…] Right … so that brings me to the end of the presentation. Are there any questions?
	Bruno:	Er … yes, I have a question. It all seems like a nice idea, but I'm really not sure it's going to work in practice.
	Christina:	Yeah, me too. Where's the money coming from, for example?
	Angela:	Well, that's really two questions. Christina, I'll come back to your question in a moment. Bruno, what exactly is it that you're worried about?
	Bruno:	I think you're being too ambitious about the number of customers who are going to be interested.
7	Diego:	No, I disagree. I think it's a really interesting project. I'd certainly be interested.
	Angela:	OK, that's great to hear, Diego, but I'm not sure that's what Bruno's worried about. Bruno, do you think the project isn't interesting enough, or that only a small number will be interested?
	Bruno:	Well, a bit of both, but mainly it's about reaching large numbers of people with our marketing campaign. If we can get the marketing right, then the numbers are fine.
	Angela:	So you're saying we need to give more thought to the marketing side of things, rather than changing the project itself?
	Bruno:	Well, both really.
12	Angela:	OK … so let's take them one at a time. What would you say are the main issues related to marketing? [...]

13	Angela:	[…] OK, so we've identified a possible problem with the marketing, and there are concerns that the project itself might not be very interesting to large numbers of people.
	Diego:	Well, that's easy enough to fix. We could make the logo a bit simpler, for example.
	Bruno:	Simpler? No, I think it's too simple already.
	Angela:	Well, hang on a second. I don't think we should be going into this much detail at this stage. Remember, we've only got an hour today. Perhaps we can come back to identifying very specific recommendations at our next meeting.We can certainly talk about the logo then … I'll just add it to my notes.

17	Angela:	But I want to come back to something Christina said earlier. Christina, you said you were worried about costs?
	Christina:	Yes, well … I'm not sure …
	Diego:	Christina's always worried about costs!
	Angela:	OK, Diego, can you let Christina finish, please?
	Christina:	No, it's OK. I've, er … it's not important.
	Angela:	Are you sure? Do you think we'll have problems getting money from head office to launch this?
	Christina:	No, no, it's not that. I'm sure the money will come, but I'm worried that it means there'll be less money for other projects.
24	Angela:	OK, well, I think that's really a question for senior management. All I know is that the money for this project is guaranteed by head office, but I can't say anything about other projects. Diego, perhaps you could answer Christina's question, briefly? […]

25	Angela:	[…] Great, well, we've had lots of good ideas already, and I've got pages of really useful notes. Erik, you've been very quiet. Do you have anything to add?
	Erik:	Er … no, it all looks fine to me.
	Angela:	Really? I was hoping you might be able to say something about the logistics of bringing so many people onto our site for the launch. What would you say are the main issues?
	Erik:	Well, er, there are two main issues: evacuation procedure and security. But we have procedures for both of these on our intranet.
	Angela:	Great. Could you send round a link to those procedures? I just want to be extra sure we're not missing anything important. Like … I don't know, if we need to pay for additional security guards for the launch event.
	Erik:	Well, yes, that's a good point. I'll have a look and get back to you at the next meeting.
	Angela:	That would be really useful, thanks. And I'll add it to the list of Action Points …Erik to send round the links to two procedures, and report back on potential problems with our launch event. […]
32	Angela:	[…] OK, so if nobody has any more questions at this stage … no? … I'd like to move on to the next point on the agenda, which is a brainstorming session on the launch event. …

Analysis

Underline useful phrases that Angela uses which you could use to manage your own meeting.Try to find at least one phrase for each of the following functions.

a. Welcoming and thanking
b. Signalling different stages of the meeting
c. Avoiding trying to deal with two or more points at once
d. Asking somebody to be more specific
e. Dealing with interruptions
f. Checking whether you've understood
g. Summarising
h. Keeping the meeting focused on the agenda
i. Recording notes and minutes
j. Prompting people to get involved, especially people who don't want to speak
k. Requesting specific action

Practice

Work in groups of four. Each of you will spend around five minutes managing the meeting you planned earlier.

First, explain the background to your meeting to the other people in your group. Make sure they know who they are and why they're there.

When you're ready, get the meeting started and try to manage the problems that arise.

The other students are attendees. Make sure the chairperson has a few problems to manage, such as:

•   questions that are not really relevant to the meeting topic;
•   interruptions before somebody has finished an important point;
•   participants who don't want to get involved;
•   too many ideas at the same time.

But don't make it too difficult for the chairperson, though. Remember, you'll have to chair a meeting yourself too!