Mismanaged Meetings – an Often "Overlooked" Aspect of Project Management

Managing Projects & the Meetings Shoji S. Ketchem, MPM, MBA

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If the supporting meetings to a "Project" are more effective- -
the probability of achieving the project objectives are higher.

Getting Back to Basics

Like many companies, we are often bombarded with emails, meeting invitations and electronic solicitations that clog our "inbox" and make it more difficult to manage our daily schedules. One frustrating aspect of this is the subtle feeling that our time is not being well spent.

Since the late 1990's my project management career has taken me from California to Pennsylvania and now into the southern states. These projects have ranged in scope and cost, yet one consistent aspect were the associated meetings that occurred throughout the duration of each project.

Productive meetings usually start with an agenda that outlines what the project team (and additional meeting attendees) would discuss and have a list of actionable items that allow recipients to better understand the desired outcomes. During the meeting, an agenda is followed and action items are clearly aligned. Once the meeting is completed, a short time afterwards (usually within a day), the completed meeting minutes are distributed to team members.

Over the past fifteen years, I have observed (assuming a strong project charter & WBS [Work Breakdown Structure] are created, along with a Project Plan and execution of the Communication Plan, etc.) – effectively run meetings tend to lead to projects that finish closer to the original scope, schedule and budget of the project.

However, over this same course of time I have also observed a gap in the critical administrative portion of sound project management. Many "new recruits", fresh out of "school" are put into a position to "run" a project. Often times, this task may be overwhelming and the simple areas of meeting planning, preparation and execution fall short. This paper is not to point fingers at PMs, supporting team members or upper management; it is to simply point out the fact that "the basics" of effectively run meetings is falling short.

What options are available?

If your organization is fundamentally structured to support new projects, generally, there are templates within the organization to help anyone leading a project to utilize these standard templates. A short list of these templates would range from:

- Meeting Agendas
- Meeting Minutes Template
- Action Item (sortable) Matrix Sheet

The use of each template is essential for project meeting documentation and management. However, each of these takes project time to complete and disseminate. Over the past two months, I have tested an online meeting management software platform (MeetingBooster) which I have become a" fan" of.

As I have described in the essentials of meeting management (above), the use of this software with my projects teams has been a time saver. On average, I have seen a savings of 18 minutes of time per project meeting focusing on the "pre- meeting preparation" and post meeting communications.

Time Is Money

If a project manager has a means to save project time, then that "PM" will often use the "time saver" until it becomes a depleted resource! With more time on a project to focus on "management" areas instead of project administration, projects can have a greater probability of meeting the detailed objectives. I have created a breakdown of these time savings as I have observed:

Ave # of Meetings	Savings in Minutes	Subject
7		Project Meetings/week (7)
5		Follow- up & Sub- Committee Meetings (5)
Individual Meeting	2	Create Meeting Agendas based off of the previous meeting format, supported by the details of the previous meeting minutes
	4	Tasks created within the meeting minutes for distribution
	5	Consolidation of information into one document (gathering information from the Agenda, Meeting Notes, Action Items List)- - provides added times savings
	2	One Step Distribution ("hit send" for email & PDF to be sent to team/guests)
	5	Follow- Up Time is reduced to the "Push" notifications that alert team members of action items that they are responsible for. It is listed in the meeting minutes and a separate email is sent to the action items owner, prior to the due date.
	18	Subtotal Time Savings/Meeting
Weekly Saving	126	Associated Minutes Saved from Project Meeting (per week)
	90	Follow Up Meetings - Fact Finding Time Savings (per week)
	216	Weekly Time Savings in Minutes
	3,6	Weekly Savings in hours

Ave # of Meetings	Savings in Minutes	Subject
Yearly Savings	180	Yearly Time Savings in Hours/Year (50 weeks)
	$11,700	Based on a PM rate of $65/hr for total breakdown of the yearly savings

In Summary

There are genuine savings to be had using a meeting managing, project supporting software platform like MeetingBooster. It can definitely save time and leverage a PM's availability to address more pressing items than project coordination. However, the tougher job is "adoption" of the software into the daily routine/process of those leading projects. When the PM's fully use the software, adoption will come quickly. If the PM's are only users given access to the software as a supporting member of a project team, then the key time savings component may not be recognized. The realization of the time saving component will likely only occur after the team begins using it—once it does, time & money can be more readily managed