

By Amanda Visser

How to make all those meetings count

To ensure that meetings are productive, relevant and on point, it is important to make sure they are called for the right reasons and with only the necessary people in attendance.

We often hear people say that they were in meetings “the whole day” – almost as if it is something to brag about.

Meetings are an essential part of managing a business, creating collaboration, inviting ideas, and keeping stakeholders aligned, says **Nick Najjar, founder and MD of consulting and coaching firm Synergist.**

However, meetings also have the ability to frustrate team members and are all too often blamed for people not having enough time to do their “real work”.

According to the US Bureau of Labour Statistics, around \$37bn is wasted annually in the US on unnecessary meetings.

Technology has transformed the way meetings are being held, with an increase in so-called online or virtual meetings (Google Hangouts, ezTalks cloud meetings, Zoom, ReadyTalk).

But the old-fashioned meeting with actual human interaction seems to still rule where people are in the same room, communicating, debating issues and getting solutions, says **René Barnard, executive business coach at Metagen.**



René Barnard
Executive business coach at Metagen



Nick Najjar
MD of Synergist

inviting the wrong people, getting side-tracked, and not implementing good ideas from previous meetings.

Barnard says if the objective of the meeting is not to invite or hear other ideas but to get buy-in on the manager’s own ideas, productivity is stifled, and mistrust is created.

Good ideas that are not implemented has exactly the same effect. “The lack of implementation leads to meetings where the minutes or actions of the previous meetings are the agenda items for the next meeting,” says Barnard.

The lack of a proper structure to a meeting is a sure way to get people to check out, says Geoff Feldon, director and business coach at Wyed4biz.

A major mistake leaders make is to invite everyone to the meeting without due regard for whether they should be there. If there are clear objectives of what the meeting is about and what it should achieve, it is easier to decide who should be there and who should not be there, says Feldon.

If the culture is right, people will attend the meetings they need to be at because they need to make an input, or they need the information shared at the meeting.

Meeting for the sake of meeting

“Unproductive meetings, I have found, are the ones

where there is a meeting because it is Monday and it is nine o’clock.”

Feldon has done away with “monthly management meetings” where the production manager, financial manager, operational manager, human resource manager, the sales manager and the MD meet for hours – simply regurgitating what they did last month.

Charlie Harary, senior director of capital markets at RXR Realty, a real estate company based in New York, quotes the famous line attributed to *Star Trek’s* Captain Kirk: “A meeting is an event at which the minutes are kept, and the hours are lost.”

In a blog post on meetings, Harary says we assume it is better to “over-invite” to a meeting. That way of thinking may make sense for the year-end party, but not for corporate meetings.

“The more people in a meeting, the less responsibility each person has. If each person does not feel necessary, they will not be as diligent to follow up on discussed items. They will assume that others will do it.”

By limiting “spectators”, meetings will be shorter, more engaging and easier to have effective follow-up, blogs Harary. Amazon has a “two pizza rule” – it should be enough to feed the people at the meeting.

Productivity killers

According to Najjar, productivity and creativity killers during meetings also include people being late, the meeting running over time and having dominant participants who do not allow contributions from others.

“It is incumbent on the meeting leader to make the meeting engaging, to stick to the rules, and to avoid the productivity and creativity killer traps,” he says.

Barnard suggests appointing a chairman and a time-keeper to avoid someone dominating a meeting. Rotate the functions at future meetings.

“Meetings can be powerful and empowering, and entrepreneurs who are doing it on their own need to connect with people or mentors who can challenge them and give advice when necessary.”

She says it is important to meet with outside partners, brainstorming partners, coaches or networking connections who can offer new insights or constructive feedback.

Doing it right

Not all meetings have to be about talking all the time. Getting people to sit in silence for a few minutes to focus their minds on the objective of the meeting has been used effectively by Amazon.

Barnard suggests sending the agenda to the invited employees before the meeting, allowing them to prepare and gather their thoughts.

Feldon says not all meetings will have a “desired outcome”. Stop the agony and adjourn, restate the objective and regroup within a day or two, perhaps with less people and no chairs. ■

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Photo: Supplied

Congratulations to Tatenda Rametsi, who won the book prize in a recent quiz. This edition’s quiz will be available online via fin24.com/finweek from 22 October.

1. Journalist Jamal Khashoggi vanished in October after entering the Saudi Arabian consulate in which country?
2. True or false? Meghan Markle, the Duchess of Sussex, is pregnant with her first child.
3. Name the hurricane which caused major devastation in Florida in October.
4. True or false? Taylor Swift recently broke Whitney Houston’s record to become the most decorated female artist in the history of the American Music Awards.
5. Name the deputy president of the EFF.
6. In early October, a Banksy artwork shredded itself at a Sotheby’s auction in London. What is the name of the artwork?
7. Who is currently the manager of premier league football club Manchester City?
■ Pep Guardiola
■ José Mourinho
■ Ernesto Valverde
8. Which mountain range separates Spain and France?
9. Which African country is set to hold elections on 7 November?
10. In late September, hackers accessed personal data of Facebook users. How many users were affected, according to the social networking site?
■ 25m
■ 29m
■ 32m

CRYPTIC CROSSWORD

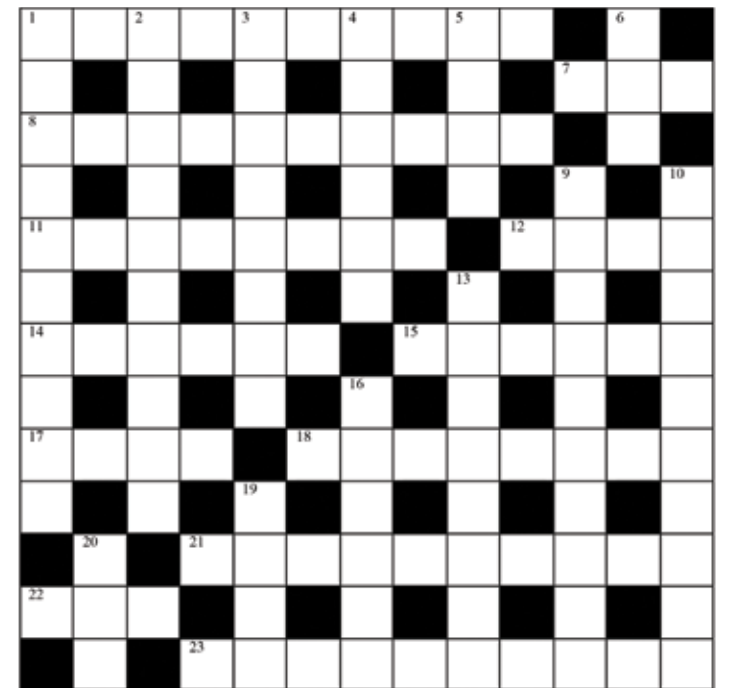
NO 719JD

ACROSS

- 1 Gorgon Bennett, friendly always (4,1,5)
- 7 & 22 Englishman’s midday companion (3,3)
- 8 Rand’s worth moving in an upward direction (10)
- 11 The French boy soldiers follow gun dog (8)
- 12 Claim to be excluding plastic supplier (4)
- 14 It’s an experience to run product review (6)
- 15 Paste re-order label on box containing sound system (6)
- 17 Back and front of group in shock (4)
- 18 Eyed up Jenny with the newsmen (8)
- 21 Admit constituents it’s no real importance (10)
- 22 See 7
- 23 My disposition - that’s about being fitter (10)

DOWN

- 1 Snail unearthed from wet planter (10)
- 2 Title of church masterpiece (4,6)
- 3 Over the moon? (2,6)
- 4 English officer holds the key (1,5)
- 5 Having lost his head, Edward’s in a spin (4)
- 6 See 20
- 9 Powerful epic (10)
- 10 Squander first neat cross to university player (6,4)
- 13 Most inclined to get unreasonable estimate (8)
- 16 Tries to communicate in a letter (6)
- 19 Doggerel taking credit away from the pulpit (4)
- 20 & 6 Cheat the steersman (3,3)



Solution to Crossword NO 718JD

ACROSS: 1 Cross-stitch; 9 Own; 10 Gallstone; 11 Ester; 13 Dualism; 14 Scathe; 16 Statin; 18 Costume; 19 Beret; 20 Lionesses; 21 Ago; 22 Storyteller
DOWN: 2 Run; 3 Sugar; 4 Salads; 5 Instant; 6 Chorister; 7 Honeysuckle; 8 Germination; 12 Transport; 15 Hauteur; 17 Jet set; 19 Basil; 21 Ave

5 RULES FOR MEETINGS

Kevan Lee, marketing director at social media management platform Buffer, suggests five “research-backed” ways to have more productive meetings.

1. Keeping meetings to 15 minutes

He says although the default in most calendar apps is 30 minutes, one can easily adjust down to 15-minute increments. Scientifically 18 minutes fit right in with the research on attention spans – apparently 10 to 18 minutes is how long most people can pay attention before checking out.

2. Setting a real timer

The effect of the timer can be traced to the “creative burst” created by limitations, constraints and deadlines. The countdown can

do the same for a meeting.

3. Taking the chairs away

The “stand-up” meeting did originate from standing. The thinking goes that the longer you stand, the more uncomfortable you get.

4. No laptops for note taking

A study by Pam Mueller from Princeton University and Daniel Oppenheimer from the University of California shows that taking notes by hand or on a laptop results in similar factual recall, but those taking notes by hand had a better conceptual recall.

5. Coat check for cellphones

Leave cell phones at the door. Research by the Marshall School of Business shows that the use of a cellphone during a meeting is frowned upon – 86% of the 500 participants think it is inappropriate to answer calls during meetings, 84% think it is inappropriate to write texts or emails during meetings and 75% think it is inappropriate to read texts or emails during meetings. ■

Source: blog.bufferapp.com