



effective committees

when committees don't work

Committees don't work well when there is:

1. Lack of long-term agenda
2. Reliance on bad information
3. Inability to focus on the right issues
4. Poor involvement by one *or more members*
5. Lack of clear purpose

when committees do work

There are at least five elements to ensure committee effectiveness:

1. **Written Committee Description.** There should be a written description of what is expected of each committee to guide the chair and members. The description should summarize the purpose of the committee, its composition and selection procedure, and the specific duties of the committee.
2. **An Effective Committee Chair.** A good committee chair needs to understand the content of the committee and have experience relevant to the work of the committee as well as proven leadership and people skills that will be essential if the committee is to work effectively. You want a good leader of people and process, someone who feels confident in guiding committee members to accomplish the task in a timely manner. The committee chair must also have confidence in the members and put the committee's success over his or her own goals. The good chair is one who can work with people, who can excite them to work together and draw out each members' best skills.
3. **Effective Members Appointed.** You need members who have been thoughtfully appointed. They should be recruited with the following question in mind: What tasks are the committee responsible for and who among our members possess the skills and experience needed to complete those tasks? Match the needs and requirements of the committee and the skills, knowledge and interests of prospective committee members.
4. **Accountability to the Central Organization.** Committees must have clear accountability. This begins with the written committee function that describes what is expected from the committee.
5. **Well-run Meetings.** If a committee meets the above four factors, then the meetings will likely be well run. If a committee reflects the first five indicators of effectiveness — a clear description of its work, a chair that knows how to lead, a solid match between the interests, skills and experience of individual members on the one hand, and the needs and requirements

of the committee on the other, a good mix of members, and direct accountability to the board – we will have the makings of excellent committee meetings. It will still be important to provide for meeting space that matches the needs of the group, a written meeting agenda and any necessary information mailed out to members in advance of the meeting.

To ensure a meeting is well run, the following factors must be achieved:

- a. Set the agenda. The agenda provides a road map for the conversation so make sure the leader has a clear agenda before the meeting starts. That agenda needs to be communicated on a handout in advance of the meeting, and any other necessary information should be e-mailed out to members in advance of the meeting.
- b. Clarify the decision-making process. The chair must clarify its decision-making process at the outset. Is it by majority vote? Is it that the chair gathers input and then he or she makes the decision? Make it clear from the outset how decisions will be made. As the CEO of Autodesk put it, “We’re very clear at the beginning of every meeting whether it’s one person’s decision or whether it’s more of a discussion to reach consensus. I think it’s a really valuable thing to understand because otherwise people can feel frustrated that they gave out their opinions, but they don’t understand the broader context for the final decision.
- c. Start on time and end on time. A definitive end time will help ensure that you accomplish what’s on your agenda and get people back to work promptly.
- d. Make sure the leader lets people speak. As the CEO of Honeywell stated, “Your job as a leader is to flush out all the facts, all the opinions, and at the end make a good decision.”
- e. End with an action plan. Determine who is responsible for what and what the timelines are. The secretary must record all time frames to make sure all action items are taken care of and followed up on.
- f. Do a meeting audit every few months. The chair should examine the results of each meeting and determine whether they are effective. Review the meetings that worked and didn’t and determine if you need every meeting.

other factors

1. Make sure an evaluation process of the committee meetings is in place. Immediate feedback is a huge factor in gauging the success of the meeting and making changes so meetings are efficient and effective
2. Post an annual calendar at the beginning of the year. Make sure your committee members know when meetings are and what is expected of them right from the outset
3. Provide an orientation for new committee members
4. Provide regular recognition to active committee members

5. The chair should privately meet with lackluster members to find out what is happening and why work isn't being performed
6. Involve committee members in developing an annual committee plan of work and make sure that the committee plans are in alignment with the overall strategic plan of the organization

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