

traffic, frustration can lead us into being more adversarial.

Why do people who call meetings steal discussion time by delivering lengthy PowerPoint presentations?

Largely to dominate the meeting and to shut people up. It's done in the name of democracy and information – and often serves neither.

Why do more people in a meeting achieve less than fewer people do – and vice versa?

It's obviously a function of bad behaviour (see the rogues' gallery). The more people around the table, the more interrupting, aggression and inconsiderate behaviour we are likely to see. But I suspect it also has a great deal to do with the convention of meetings being chaired, not led. Having a chairperson encourages people to display contrary attitudes. We hear and see the model in broadcast media every day. The excuse: 'It makes good radio, or television.' Maybe we should excuse offenders by saying that they are doing it 'to make good meetings'. But our rational self tells us it doesn't.

It's obvious that back-to-back meetings are a bad idea, but everyone does it.

Until the world accepts Tony Crabbe's view that 'crazy-busy' is quite simply crazy, some of the most able people we know will continue to have their lives blighted by too many meetings, and particularly meetings that run into each other. Two meetings in a row, and you waste the second half of the first one worrying about the next one. Three in a row, and you'll forget everything about the first two, quite apart from being mentally drained in the third one. Fear can be a factor here too. But a perverse desire to be important and at the heart of everything doesn't help.

Why do we spend so much of our time in meetings, when we don't enjoy them very much, and when we know they are hugely inefficient?

See the answer above.

Why do people focus on laptop, tablet or phone, rather than the people they are with?

This is a phenomenon that we see not just in meetings, but everywhere – family gatherings, tête-a-tête dinners, sports day, the theatre, for goodness' sake! Yes, FOMO and fear of being fired are factors. But this is the age of the selfie, which it seems to me extends way beyond taking pictures of oneself, to the overwhelming self-importance of casting ME as the ultimate star who constantly needs to be in touch with one's adoring public. It definitely doesn't help teamwork, or make meetings more civilised and successful.

MEETINGS: A ROGUES' GALLERY



EGO

Mainly concerned with him/herself. Conceited, arrogant, self-centred and self-serving. Not collegiate



ADVERSO

Beyond devil's advocacy into negative behaviour, thinking and comments



WRECKO

A fully-fledged meeting wrecker. Completely counterproductive. Exclude from meetings if possible



DOMINO

Dominating. Forceful. Macho. Alpha. Inclined to take meetings where he/she wants to go, even if others don't. Taking over a meeting is time-wasting as well as irritating



INTERRUPTO

Interrupts and overtalks continually. It is a habit many people develop to try to attract attention



DEFO

Won't listen



CHATO

Prone to side conversations and asides to the detriment of the flow of the meeting



CONECTADO

Connected not to the meeting but to their mobile network or the internet. On one or more screens, texting, emailing



COSISAYSO

'Here's what we must agree on'. Based on the leader's view, with no justification except 'because I say so'

A NEW KIND OF MEETING IS NEEDED

I felt we needed new vocabulary to describe a new generation of meeting and my experience with advertising assessment clients over the years gave me confidence that managed/orchestrated meetings worked better. This is why I wrote about it in my book, *Mote*.

I took *Mote* from the word for meeting in Middle English. To this day it still means meeting in Swedish, Danish and Norwegian, give or take some of those Scandinavian diacritics. A mote is a lean, agile, carefully orchestrated meeting, run on team lines, and lubricated by empathy and goodwill. A series of motes will lead to great decisions, take ambitious projects to fulfilment and manage transformational change.

A mote is led by a leader (not a chair), and managed by a new breed of meeting professional, called a navigator. The carefully selected team in the room are moters, and the guys on video or telephone link are remoters. When we mote, we work not to a rambling agenda, but to a highly focused motion. Mote is an innovation designed to combat the problem head-on and provide an opportunity to transform the way we meet and work together.

In my search for a more motivating meeting culture, I have been inspired by some fine thinkers, and I would like to single out three significant recent books: Tony Crabbe (*Busy*), Roman Krznaric (*Empathy – A Handbook for Revolution*), Daniel Levitin (*The Organized Mind*), and one from a while back, *What Got You Here Won't Get You There* by Marshall Goldsmith.

Crabbe is passionate that we should not accept being 'crazy busy'. Krznaric is dedicated to persuading governments, companies and individuals that we can make no progress without empathy – the quality of being able to imagine oneself in another's shoes. Levitin counsels against trying to multitask. Goldsmith takes issue with bad habits and bad behaviour.

A collaborative and empathic spirit can make all types of meetings more fruitful, as well as improving the atmosphere in the workplace as a whole.

I've written *Mote* to get people to think more about meetings, not because I think I have all the answers. In the end it will be down to them to decide whether to behave better, use meetings more sensibly, and to be more proactive and less deterministic about meetings.

TEN WAYS TO MAKE MEETINGS MORE PRODUCTIVE

So what can we do to make meetings better? Here are ten suggestions for the ones that matter – meetings to drive change, important projects and big decisions.

- Appoint a leader, not a chair.
- Develop meeting professionals (just as we rely on specialists in HR, IT, finance and so on).
- Never assume one meeting will do. Simply getting the stakeholders round a table once won't work. You have to schedule a series.
- Plan every meeting in advance, and share the goal with all the participants.
- Don't try involving everyone from the outset. Start small. Add people one or two at a time and let them go when they have made their contribution.
- Encourage everyone to see meetings as a team activity – not a free-for-all.
- Analyse the way your company uses meetings and shoot for at least a 20% reduction in the number of meetings you have, the number of attendees, and the number of items on the agenda.
- As far as possible ban, or at least discourage, back-to-backs.
- Tell your people that you value co-operation and collaboration over any kind of adversarial behaviour.
- Remind them that meetings are the way they work together, and that everyone will be judged on the successful outcome of meetings.

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