## Assessing Intention and Design Process in Staff Meetings

A well designed and executed staff meeting results in affirmation of diverse and successful practices, needed change or solutions to challenges, improved morale, greater unity of purpose, a reduction of problems among staff and students, more confidence in achieving academic and social goals (to start with!).  A poorly designed staff meeting erodes all of these accomplishments, and leaves staff feeling bored, cynical, reluctant, frustrated, or upset.  A successful staff meeting has positive reverberations for students, sending teachers, administration, and support staff back into the halls with energy and resolve for improving the learning experiences of students. While it takes a whole staff to "win or lose" a staff meeting, there is a strong role for the administrative team who sees the meeting as their chance to make an impact and craft a memorable learning event for others.  It is no coincidence that this is the same approach that a successful teacher takes in designing a lesson for students.

This tool leaves off where the meeting begins; another set of skills and the infinite variety of staffs will take over at this point (you may also wish to refer to the *Facilitating and Evaluating a Meeting* tool from Pacific Slope Consortium).  Suggested uses: self-evaluation tool for administrators, group activity for school leadership groups (e.g. staff council or committee), group activity for district-level administrator meeting, inclusion in principal or vice-principal growth plan, strategic use in school achievement contract, external evaluation tool.  There is lots here to consider; pick an area of interest that fits your immediate needs and leave the rest for when you need it.

| VISION AND GOALS | |
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| **Discussion Topics** | **Discussion Questions** |
| Origin and intention of ideas | What guides your vision for the staff meeting? From where do you take your cues? What kind of work do you put into staff meeting design?  Who help |
| | Identify some of the principles by which your staff meeting operates.  Where do these ideas or values come from?  What activities in the meeting show evidence of these ideas? |
| | List some typical elements and agenda items in your meetings.  How many relate to student learning?  to staff development?  school business?  education system?  other? |
| | If an outsider reviewed this list or witnessed one of your meetings, what would they say about your school, staff, and approach to leadership? |
| Analyzing impact | What goes really well with your current staff meetings? |
| | Why does it work? Who or what is responsible for the success? |
| | How does success in a staff meeting impact your school community? |
| | What is not going well with your current staff meetings? |
| | Why does it not work? Who or what is responsible for the problems? |
| | How does lack of success in the staff meeting impact your school community? |
| Models for change | Big idea - how might the staff meeting fulfill a more transformative place in the life of your school community? |
| | Small ideas - what are your ideas or steps for addressing the problems raised above? |
| | What impresses you the most about the staff meetings at other schools or organizations? What accounts for their success? |
| | Is your staff meeting more about meeting goals, conducting business, or educational inquiry?  How would it look different if this priority was changed? |
| | What model, or set of priorities, most closely aligns what you do in the staff meeting with support and success for all students? |

| AGENDA PREPARATION | |
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| **Discussion Topics** | **Discussion Questions** |
| Elements to consider | What do you want to get out of the meeting?  What does the staff want to get out of the meeting?  Can you account for the difference? |
| | If you sense a gap in expectations, what parts are creative, and what parts are the source of problems?  How can the difference be made a creative one? |
| | Identify your broad goals for all staff meetings and your goals for the next meeting.  To what extent do they resonate with each other?  If you sense a gap, explain. |
| | Having considered what a successful staff meeting might look like, how can you map out a meeting to allow reasonable time for each of items you deem important? |
| | Identify recurring items that do not serve a purpose in achieving change or addressing known challenges.  Can these be eliminated or morphed into something useful? |
| | Will the meeting be chaired by a member of the admin team or another staff member? Rotating? Permanent? How is this process established? How often is the process evaluated? |
| | What are the expectations, powers, and limits of the chair?  How are these protocols established?  What other models for facilitating a meeting have you considered? |
| Isolating the important items | What process is used to identify potential agenda items?  Who gets to review the agenda for errors, omissions, or issues?  Is this shared with staff?  Others? |
| | What kind of ongoing checklist do you maintain to ensure emergent topics and previous commitments do not get left off the agenda?  Is this shared with staff?  Others? |
| | Is there a clear division between discussion and decision items?  If an item has the potential to go either way, is this also made clear? |
| | What is the process for making decisions?  Does your staff know how the process works? |
| | If you follow Robert's Rules or a similar protocol, is this for all items or just for decisions? How have staff been involved in determining the protocol? |
| | Will the agenda invite the full participation of staff?  Are there ideas to ponder, information to process, and clearly articulated issues to summon preparation and thoughtful response? |
| | Identify two or three red herrings or agenda items that typically irritate, confound, or sedate the participants.  Can you cull one or more from your agenda, or find an alternate means of achieving the intended goals? |
| Research and appropriate data | What role do relevant data, anecdotal evidence, or observations since the last meeting play in either determining or supporting the agenda items? |
| | How much of this data is your research (admin team), and how much is solicited by staff? Where else does/could/should it come from? |
| | How do your staff know that their expert responses may be needed at the meeting?  Is this for specific individuals (targeted responses) or all (looking for general input)? |
| | How can the meeting time best be used to gather or share relevant data? (consider the lead time needed for staff to generate thoughtful and meaningful responses) |
| | Is the agenda structured to allow both formal presentations from staff and informal contributions on agenda items?  Can contributions be made before the meeting? |

| Digital Connections | List some of the technology tools (e.g. twitter, email) you have used to prepare for the meeting: gathering input, establishing data, inviting participation, clarifying details, confirming agenda items, etc. Do you see any patterns? |
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| | Which of these tools has the most impact on setting what you feel is strong agenda? Why? |
| | Which tools could live without, ones that you could drop and replace with a face-to-face interaction? What is lost or gained with your use of technology in general? |
| | How easy is it for others to use digital tools to view, comment on, add to, or evaluate the staff meeting agenda? |
| | Does the agenda look good and read well? Would you be proud to have it used as an example? Can you envision what a living agenda document might look or sound like? |
| | Is the use of backchanneling or liveblogging (e.g. use of twitter) encouraged during the meeting? How and when were expectations established? |
| | How closely aligned are the goals of the staff meeting with the published School Achievement Contract and other growth plans accessible online, including the professional growth plans from members of the administrative team? |
| Role of guests | Think of four students that would have something powerful to share with your staff - observations, challenges, questions, or just stories. Could you include a student segment in your next meeting? |
| | Think of four district staff that would have something powerful to share with your staff. Think about matching a school project or issue with a person that can provide experience or perspective - teachers or administration from another school, board office staff, trustees, support staff, maintenance, bus drivers. Who could you invite to one of your upcoming meetings and why would that be valuable? |
| | Think of four community members that would have something powerful to share with your staff: PAC, DPAC, other parents, local businesses, First Nations representatives, civic leaders, RCMP, social workers, post-secondary educators, retired educators, etc. How might you involve the community more in your staff meetings? |

| DESIGNING THE MEETING ENVIRONMENT | |
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| **Discussion Topics** | **Discussion Questions** |
| Mindfulness of the audience | How does the total agenda as you've prepared it play to strengths of your staff, the contributions they are willing or waiting to make, and the issues you know they want addressed? |
| | What have you done to ensure a climate of inclusion - leaders on staff have a chance to offer strong contributions, but so do the internal processors, the introverts, and the slow deliberate thinkers? |
| | Thinking back on what works and what doesn't, how big a deal is trust? Are there barriers to dialogue and participation that relate back to trust? What's the history? |
| | Identify two or three areas in which distrust can be identified and/or a trust-building exercise could mend differences. Can you design one action for your next meeting, stand-alone or part of an agenda item, that restores or establishes trust in a needed area? |
| | What have you done to ensure a climate of diversity - both in terms of the kinds of activities surrounding the agenda, and the opportunities for multiple perspectives and modes of inquiry, interaction, or response? |

| (audience continued) | Fill in the blanks - comments made by an observer at your meeting: "the atmosphere was one of _____ and _____ ; the admin team has obviously cultivated a relationship with staff built on _____ and _____ , and the meeting showed expressions of the staff's _____ and _____.  It is clear that the school is providing _____ and _____ for their students." |
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| Mindfulness of the physical Space | Is it taken for granted that someone else sets up the space for the meeting?  Are they consulted and recognized for this effort? |
| | When you look around, does it look comfortable, inviting, and accessible to all?  Are there margins or blind corners that encourage hiding? (consider sight-lines and movement) |
| | Can you imagine the space arranged in a way that opens up dialogue and encourages more complete participation?  What would it take to achieve this design? |
| | If you find your space limiting, is there somewhere else on your campus you could hold your staff meetings, a space that would mirror your willingness to seek change and be flexible about the outcome? |
| | Do you need an occasional change of venue for key meetings or to disrupt limitations of your existing space (and process)?  Identify some promising and inexpensive locations in your community (including other district facilities) |
| Food & Water | How can you use nourishment to rouse staff, provide a welcome environment, and signify that whole "selves" are present in a meeting, not just staff personas? |
| | Can sharing the nosh duty be an uncontroversial way to build community with and among staff?  What other simple gestures could help build group cohesion? |
| Remembering to celebrate | What processes are used (including digital media) to identify school events worthy of praise, student achievements,and  efforts by staff? |
| | What value is placed on recent accomplishments by staff or students?  How is this expressed in the staff meeting? |
| | How can these successes be incorporated into the meeting - presentations? shared media? testimonials? displays? performances? Think of one you can try at your next meeting? |
| Planning for eventualities | What means do you have to keep the meeting within time limits? |
| | Do you have an ongoing and meeting-specific meter for assessing the willingness of staff to devote more time to an important agenda item or the meeting in general? |
| | What strategies will be used for conflict resolution and problem-solving?  To what extent are these rehearsed (pre-planned) or spontaneous (react in context)?  Does it matter? |
| | Are these primarily the strategies of the admin team, the chair, or key staff members?  How can problem-solving increasingly become a shared responsibility? |
| The Hook | How do you like to see a meeting or learning event begin?  Appropriate humour?  A Challenge?  Celebratory montage?  Anecdotes?  Displays of data?  Inquiry or powerful questions? Review of procedure or documents? Ask your staff, too, and build a repository. |
| | Identify five ways you could build anticipation at the beginning of a meeting.  Are you required?  Who else could/should be involved?  What would you need to try one? |
| | Bring it back to what your meeting is for.  Does your hook speak to student learning? staff development? school business? Where do you want your meeting to begin? |