

What is the Business Case for Effective Meetings?

Beatrice Briggs

First, let us recognize that, in general, meetings are a huge waste of resources. The opportunity-cost of bringing people together – even virtually – to talk about an issue (or avoid talking about one) can be calculated.

The math is easy.

Think of a meeting that you are planning to convene.

- Calculate the average annual salary of the participants.
- Divide the result by 240 (number of working days in a year).
- Divide this number by 8 (number of hours in a workday – even though we know many people work more than this).
- Multiply this figure by the number of people present in the meeting.
- Multiply this figure by the hours the meeting will last.

Or use an [on-line calculator](#).

The resulting number approximates the cost of the participants' time in the meeting. (It does not include other expenses such as travel, meeting-room rental, coffee and other supplies.)

But money is not the only resource to be considered. All the participants have other things to do besides attend your meeting.

So the real question is: Can we make the meeting useful or interesting enough to hold the attention of the group and produce benefits for the organization?

Here is where smart leaders trained in group facilitation begin to add value. They are not afraid to ask – and answer - these tough questions:

- What is the purpose of this meeting?
- What do I hope to accomplish by bringing these people together?
- Does everyone I am planning to invite have something to add to the conversation? If not, why should they be present?

Assuming that there is a convincing reason for holding the meeting, the facilitative leader needs to design an agenda that will engage participants, making good use of their time and talent.

The leader/facilitator will also refuse to overload the agenda with speeches, reports and other one-way communications that tend to cause participants to pull out their smartphones and start checking email.

During the discussion, the leader with facilitation skills will keep the conversation on track, avoiding common time wasters such as going off on tangents, repeating the same point over and over, or discussing only symptoms and not solutions.

At the end of the meeting, the leader/facilitator will help the group clarify next steps and assign responsibilities, increasing the likelihood that follow up will occur.

Conclusion: The benefits of effective facilitation can be measured in economic terms, but – to paraphrase the advertisements for a well-known credit card – the value of the smiles of satisfaction on the participants' faces as they leave the meeting (that DID NOT run late): ***priceless.***

