



# *National Competitiveness and Productivity Council*

## **Are Your Meetings Productive?**

In today's competitive business environment productivity is key to the success of enterprises. It is an essential element in helping any firm grow. In light of this, businesses should continuously work towards maintaining high levels of productivity. However, there are some day-to-day business activities that may work against this objective. One such activity is an unproductive business meeting.

In his article, 'Why Meetings Kill Productivity', author, businessman and motivational speaker Ray Williams states, 'How often have you sat through a meeting and said to yourself, "what a waste of time, I could be doing something better!" Meetings take up an ever-increasing amount of employees', and particularly managers' time. My experience in working with executives and managers is that 40-50 percent of their time is taken up with meetings, that either they call, or have to attend. Which leaves precious little time left to actually get work done.'

However contrary to Williams' opinion, meetings do not have to be completely unproductive. A poorly managed meeting does have the potential to subtract valuable time of the day. On the other hand, if well planned and executed, a meeting can prove to be a fundamental component of a productive day.

Mihir Patkar, a frequent contributor to the 'lifehacker' site, in his post 'How to Have a Meeting That Isn't a Complete Waste of Time' details some practices that can ensure that meetings are productive. Prior to any gathering, he mentions that there are three W's that need to be addressed, that is: when, who and why.

- Why- It is essential that before any meeting is called, the meeting leader should know why the meeting is called. If this is not clear, nothing constructive will be gained from the meeting. Patkar continues 'A meeting shouldn't be the place where you brainstorm ideas, you need to tell the attendees to do that in advance and show up with a clear list for discussion. Similarly, the meeting organizer should send the required reading at least three days in advance, and make it concise enough so that everyone can actually read it before they show up.'
- Who- Remember that not every individual needs to be present at every meeting. If a meeting does not require a contribution from a certain individual but this party wishes to be kept informed of the discussion; consider the option of sending the minutes after the gathering. If you are the one invited to the meeting and your workload is heavy, there are certain questions that you can ask the person inviting you that can determine whether you really need to be a part of the occurrence or not. Such questions include, 'Will all in attendance be called on to make decisions?' and 'Are you going to ask for something at the end?' Depending on the answers received one can determine whether or not your presence is needed.
- When- Patkar goes on, 'Coordinating with multiple people is difficult, but not impossible. Online meeting scheduling service, 'When Is Good' analysed 100,000 responses to 34,000 events and found that Tuesdays at 3pm is the most agreeable meeting

time for most people. Of course, you don't need to stick to that, coordinate and find out your own most agreeable time. It is also wise to remember that the length of the meeting is important too.'

Once the meeting is scheduled and participants are invited, the meeting must be focussed. Meetings can go off-track easily, and hence, time and energy can be wasted discussing matters which are not on the agenda. Productivity guru Merlin Mann says that each meeting needs a designated "parent" who steers the meeting responsibly.

In addition, it is important to ensure that extra writing material is available in case this is needed by participants. Participants should be encouraged to take notes. Notes help clarify thoughts and are also useful in post-meeting discussions. It is also essential to have a person designated to take the minutes of the meeting. Minutes provide a record of the discussion that can be mailed out to persons who need to be kept informed.

After the meeting, participants should benefit from the experience and there should be an understanding of all future plans. Patkar states, 'In his article- "Seven Imperatives to Keep Meetings on Track", Robert C. Pozen, Senior Lecturer at Harvard Business School, says there are three questions that should be asked at the end of each meeting. These questions include:

- What do we see as the next steps?
- Who should take responsibility for them?
- And what should the timeframe be?

The answers to these questions by each participant, should be recorded and sent out. In doing so it will confirm everyone from the meeting is on the same page. It will also provide accountability since no one can say they weren't sure or didn't remember what happened.'

Business meetings cannot and should not be avoided when they are necessary, but as is evident, there are certain things that can be done to make a meeting productive.

### **About the National Competitiveness and Productivity Council (NCPC)**

Established in October 2013, The National Competitiveness and Productivity Council (NCPC) is responsible for the identification of key issues related to competitiveness and productivity in Saint Lucia.

The NCPC and its Technical Secretariat is committed to providing the necessary advocacy and research to produce timely and effective recommendations to policymakers on issues that affect both competitiveness and productivity on island. For more information about productivity or on the NCPC, visit [www.stluciancpc.org](http://www.stluciancpc.org); [www.facebook.com/stluciancpc](https://www.facebook.com/stluciancpc), call 468-5571/5576 or send an e-mail to [stluciancpc@gmail.com](mailto:stluciancpc@gmail.com)