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Revolutionary Office Meetings

June 1, 2018  admin



The Futures Initiative Team (Spring 2018)

[Originally posted on May 24, 2018 on futuresinitiative.org, and featured in "Better Meetings Through Pedagogy" by ProfHacker, The Chronicle of Higher Education.]

Pedagogy is something we take with us when we leave a classroom, and it's something (as I learned this year at the Futures Initiative) that we can bring into office meetings to make them fresh, interesting, and invigorating. Who looks forward to office meetings? I do.

During my first year at FI, I shook off my office blues and engaged in 100% participation with my colleagues at every meeting. I became a stronger leader. My pedagogical strategies improved. And I look forward to these meetings, I show up on time, and I leave having learned something from my peers. Every. Time. That's because FI meetings draw from the same toolbox as the radical pedagogy the initiative supports and fosters at CUNY. Here's how it works.

Everyone is a Leader

Lest I sound over-eager about office meetings, let me tell you how much I hate regular meetings. I hate being talked at and lectured to for long periods of time, especially in subject matter that I specialize in and about projects that I am *supposed* to be leading. I prefer to have a conversation and to be respected for the crucial work I do and the critical role I play in making an organization function. If I am given a task to lead, I need the room to really own it, too. FI not only gives me this room and trusts in my ability to be a leader but also gives me ample *practice* leading.

At FI meetings, we rotate who leads the meeting, and by the end of the year everyone in our group has led or co-led a meeting at least twice. This distributed responsibility eases the organizational burden of leading meetings and it also distributes power equally among our fellows. Because we all have experience being leaders, we feel confident—and trusted—in our abilities. Feeling capable and feeling trusted boosts our drive to take on more responsibilities and brainstorm ideas for new projects. The skills we acquire from working within this decolonized structure are applicable in endless other spaces and places in our professional lives and in our local communities.

New Team-Built Agendas Every Week

When I came to FI, I didn't know anything beyond copying and pasting agendas. I was still learning all of the facets of the organization and familiarizing myself with multiple event spreadsheets and templates. I was a little embarrassed by how little I knew was going on right in front of me, so I

played it safe and copied and pasted the agenda from the previous week. Then I learned why I should never do that again: every week is different, and pressing needs change very quickly. That week a new tradition began.

At FI meetings, everyone takes the first 3 minutes of a meeting to write down 3 things they want to talk about, then we go around the room and share. If there's repetition, that's a good sign that's something important we need to talk about. In a shared Google Doc, we list out all of the things in a table:

Left Column = Agenda Item

Right Column = # People Who Want/Need to Talk About It

The meeting leader coordinates this activity and guides us through the agenda items starting with the most pressing, immediate, popular needs first. This works really well to (1) get 100% participation, (2) make sure everyone is getting what they need from every meeting, and (3) keep our agendas fresh and on the pulse of what's going on right now at FI. Rather than one person having to assume what's important to everyone in the group, we collectively decide what is most important and we prioritize the needs of the group efficiently and effectively.

Respecting Everyone's Time

When a single person runs meetings over and over again, it sets up a power dynamic between "leader" and "attendees" rendered passive (a.k.a. *not* leaders). This makes it difficult for "attendees" to speak up (perhaps this is starting to sound more like a classroom dynamic—that's exactly the point). It also enables a leader to go overtime or to disrespect the time of "attendees" because there are no checks and balances in place.

Our FI meetings never run over. I mean that. *Never*. We have two hours allocated for each meeting (we meet once a week) and the meeting leader watches the time and says aloud, when necessary, "I want to be cognizant of time," to gently but firmly move us along. Because we respect one another's time, we don't go over. Some things can be worked out directly between two

or three people outside of our meetings. Some things can wait until the next meeting.

Meetings Can Be Both Professional and Fun

Office meetings foster a sense of community and group identity, and, unfortunately, too many types of office meetings I've witnessed foster camaraderie over how mundane office meetings usually are or how gut-punching office hierarchies can be.

Something that makes me proud to be an FI Fellow is the fact that we get shushed for having vibrant conversations in our meetings. Our meetings are generative because our creative minds are given room to meet and interact and brainstorm and problem-solve together. We get so much done, so much more than we would if we sat in a silent room together, and we flourish in an office environment that supports us, respects us, and makes us want to exceed expectations.

I can honestly say that I am sad to say goodbye to Spring, and I'm excited for Fall, because it means I get to enter that bland, soul-crushing gray office meeting room and engage in conversations that light my creative spark and make me feel that I am part of something greater than myself. Those gray walls are actually our blank canvas. I can't wait to see what we do next year. My wish for everyone next academic year is that they get to feel as invigorated by their office meetings as I do.

Update: since this post was published, an account of the “[Anatomy of a Team Meeting](#)” has been written by my colleague, Cihan Tekay. Read her post [here](#).

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