

Let's Ban the One-Way Informational Meeting



As I was sitting in a meeting today – bored out of my tree – my mind drifted to research (hey, it's what I do). It occurred to me that social media researchers have a decent message framework that can also be used for categorizing different types of meetings according to the intended audience role. And that the reason I ~~hate~~ am not particularly fond of meetings is that most employ the least effective audience role.

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Let me explain. Social media researchers, [myself included](#), have begun to classify social media messages based on whether the message is aimed at one-way *information*, two-way *dialogue*

and relationship-building, or mobilization and action (for a review, see Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012).[bibtex key=Lovejoy2012] This same framework can be applied to meetings. In *one-way informational* meetings, the audience member is intended to be a passive recipient of information. In *two-way communication* meetings, there is a real exchange of ideas and the audience member serves as conversant and generator of ideas. And lastly, there are *action-oriented* meetings, or meetings where the aim is to *get something done*, with the audience member put in the role of “doer.”

Most meetings are boring ineffective because they are devoted to the one-way delivery of information from a presenter to a passive audience. Often the inefficacy of these meetings is compounded by ineffective use of Power Point, but that's another matter. Here's the thing: Meetings where one person simply gives us a “report” are boring. They are ineffectual. Ineffective. Lacking in efficacy. You should not do them. They are a waste of time. They should be banished from the face of the planet. Those violating this rule should be (figuratively) keel-hauled.

The point is, information can be conveyed much more efficiently in any number of different ways. Meetings should be reserved for building relationships, for sharing ideas, for working through important organizational issues. In short, meetings should be used as a tool for helping move an organization toward meeting its strategic aims. They should, in other words, conform to a mobilizational action model or a two-way dialogic model. So before you schedule a meeting, ask yourself this: “Are we going to discuss or do anything that will help us meet our mission?” If the answer is “no,” then cancel the meeting or reconsider your agenda. Let's ban the one-way informational meeting.

References

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