

Canadian OR Leaders • CORL CORRAL

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Pearls of Wisdom

Meetings, Bloody Meetings – What are we Doing?

Meetings: An Addiction to Conquer!

It is time to take an inventory of meetings, do a personal assessment, and make some changes!

We have anonymous groups for all other addictions so lets build a *Meetings Anonymous Organization (MAO)*. MAO is based on taking the daily, all consumptive need to "call a meeting" and change it to "lets go for a drink or a coffee". This approach is a whole lot more fun and we might get to know and understand our colleagues a little better. At any rate, the new health news is that we should have three drinks a day (especially red wine) for improved cardiovascular health so meetings could become a lot healthier.

Definition of Meetings: A collective discussion or assembly of more than one individual for a face to face encounter, frequently with a pre set agenda (that may have been generated from another meeting), often with a preset length of time that seems to usually be calculated in hours, or multiples thereof. This timeline seems to be based on tradition rather than the actual need for information to be shared or decisions to be made.

Why are meetings called, held, mandated, organized and ordered based on a routine that seems to be carved in stone?

Don't take offense- there are many vital, well run, productive, essential, mandatory meetings that are well organized and have effective outcomes that are in line with the time and cost involved. However, the many meetings can vary from this ideal. The reason for holding or attending meetings

include, but are not limited to, the following:

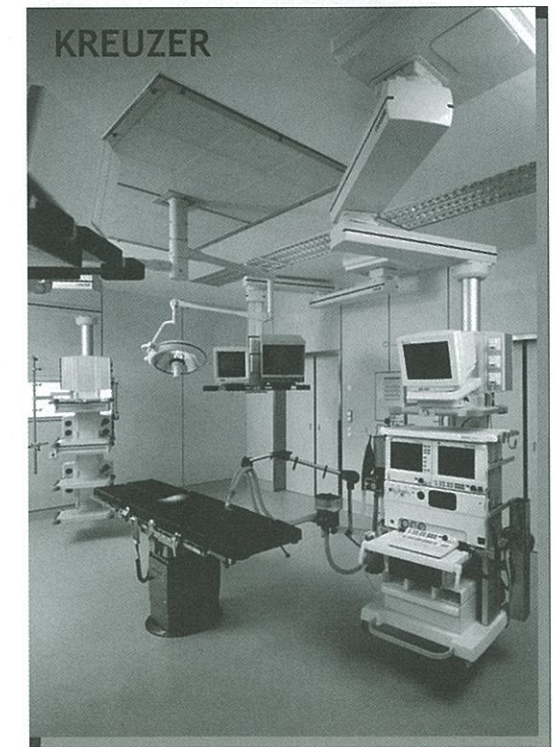
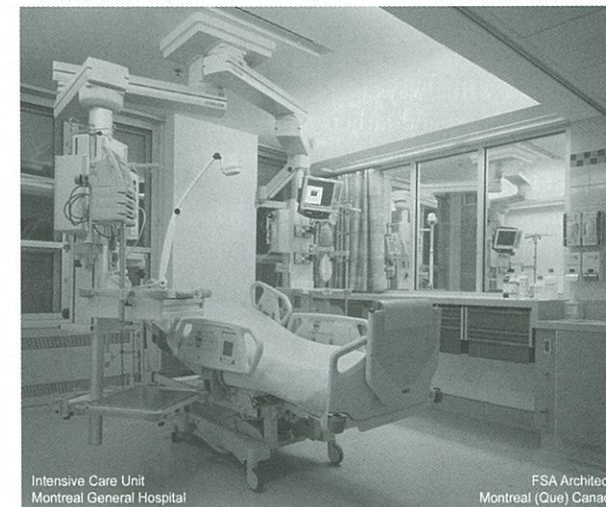
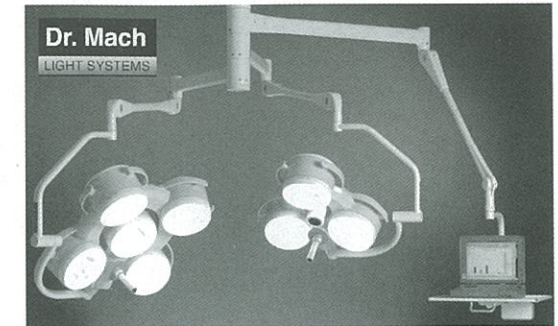
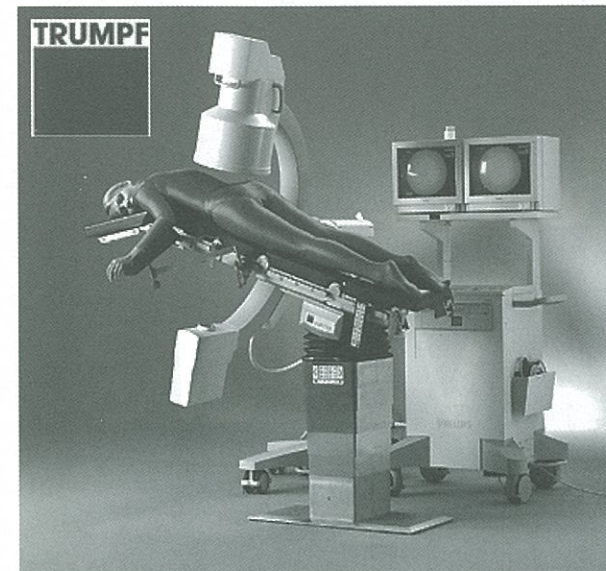
- The terms of Reference state so; the by-laws state so; the CQI requires; a policy statement mandates it.
- The belief that multi stakeholders must have input into decisions because we live in a democracy
- The desire to attend every meeting in order to protect your turf. Some would say this is a way to avoid the real issues and the workplace environment
- Humans beings are social creatures; the debate, discussion, and challenges that are an integral part of meetings help fulfil the social need
- Meetings help us meet challenges, find support and form strategies
- By obtaining Input from expert members we help ensure likelihood of success
- Demands to remain current in specific areas such as policies and procedures require multidisciplinary input on an ongoing basis
- The belief that because the work is shared then the input must also be shared
- Many meetings are used as a controlled form of internal communication
- The fast paced changes in information and technology result in the need for frequent planning changes
- Fiscal and government agendas are the driving force behind many meetings

What do staff think about meetings? It's not pretty!

- Meetings take key people out of the "real work" environment so they are not visible and therefore do not really know what is going on
- "They" have meetings to decide our lives and we are not involved in the discussion or decision

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- "They" are not here for me when I need them - "they" are in a meeting!
- Meetings take too much time and the real needs in the department are compromised as a result
- We don't get any post-meeting communication about what decisions were made and why they were made. (Note that even if minutes are made available staff are unlikely to read them or to assimilate the content)
- Meetings are a waste of time that are not necessarily based on a real need

The dynamics and profiling of meeting attendees – The Good, The Bad and the Ugly! Remember that most people are at a meeting because of their position not necessarily because of what they can contribute!

The "Good Dudes" – We want to keep them because they:

- Meet for the intended purpose or as mandated by constitution, standards, by-laws, or special needs
- Are always on time and always prepared
- Have read the minutes and look for substantive issues or errors, not trivial points, grammar, or spelling
- Take leadership roles in executive positions but don't hog them year after year
- Bring agendas, and provide information needed at the meeting in an organized fashion
- Are always cognizant of time and maintain a focused discussion
- Volunteer to do off-line work and circulate it in advance of the next meeting. Set an expectation that information distributed has been read
- Tolerance for excuses must only include being a patient in ICU or death certificate – accountability is critical.
- Are keen to stay on track, move forward

efficiently and effectively to keep meeting length and frequency to a minimum

- Terminate Ad Hoc meetings that never seem to go away
- Attempt to get the "Bad Dudes" and The "Ugly Dudes" on track

The "Bad Dudes" – Need to get focused, get organized or get out! They:

- Go to meetings just because it's on the list of things to do or because of the position routines
- Are always a few minutes late and have an "other things are more important" attitude
- May believe that being late shows you are important or that others will be late so you should be late to save your own time
- Never read materials that were distributed. Their commitment to the process appears to be weak
- Arrive with no agenda or minutes, scrambling to borrow them, and causing a general disruption that results in a loss of 15 or 20 minutes while they get in sync with the meeting
- Are never prepared, make off the cuff irrelevant comments that destroy their credibility
- Tend to be disorganized, contribute nothing, and take nothing back to the staff
- Are probably oblivious to they impact they have on the group – it is unlikely their impact is intentional

The "Ugly Dudes"— They need to channel the negative energy into creative assistance! These individuals:

- Go to meetings because of their position or they have an axe to grind
- May or may not be on time; operate on a personal or hidden agenda with bullying tactics that are highly visible

- May or may not occupy key executive positions
- Argumentative, nitpicking, rude, hog the floor, loud, abrasive, pig-headed, disrespectful of other members' positions, responsibilities, and views
- Make meetings go off track, produce negative emotions and behaviour that derail the intended purpose of the meeting. All the while they are driving their own views or agenda
- Do not give credit to anyone. They are destructive to the purpose and the outcome of the meeting

The Ideal Meeting Profile – Time for Measuring Meeting Outputs!

- Establish a Motto and Operations Expectations that incorporate such aspects as member functions, responsibilities and accountability; a code of conduct; issue resolution processes; and effectiveness measures.
- Review the group's performance every 6 months or more and update the need for the meetings, goals for length of time, the desired results, and areas for improvement
- Select a Chair, a secretary, and a time monitor who are absolutely committed to efficient, focused, effective meetings and will help others stick to this goal
- Ensure agendas and minutes are received by attendees in adequate, agreed upon time; put in place consequences, with some humour, for those who are ill prepared have the group plan up front how they will deal with late comers.
- Develop and stick to a minute taking format that clearly identifies the topic, issue, the action to be taken, by whom and an expected date of completion (EDOC)
- Minimize the extraneous chatter, digression from meeting and DO NOT include in the minutes.
- Determine the expected date members can

expect the minutes – hold the secretary to that – thereby eliminating excuses of insufficient lead time for work to be completed

- Do an audit of minutes and accomplishments quarterly and annually. Ask yourself are you value for dollars spent to your organization. Be tough on ensuring outcomes, refocus or disband
- Start the meeting on the minute intended. As stragglers walk in late identify their time of arrival and record in the written minutes
- Get rid of the hourly concept and break it down into 15 minutes blocks. Plan like you were paying by the minute!
- At the end of each meeting ask – what did we accomplish? do the members feel good about the outcome? did we use our time wisely? if not, why not? This may need to be submitted by members in writing until they are comfortable about speaking out with no fear of retribution.
- End on time and leave the meeting and go back to productive work – do not hang around and waste time. Too many people seem to not know what to do if a meeting finishes early
- Instead of going to all meetings use teleconferencing for some – phone dealings are much more precise, focused and use less time; long rambling dissertations are not tolerated on phone calls.
- Calculate the dollar value of the attendance at these meetings and equate that to the actions and decisions made at each meeting. Would the meeting have been worth it if it had to show a profit?

We talk about balance in our work life and balance in our personal life. Now lets get some balance in **meeting... bloody meetings!** Make every minute count and the hours will take care of themselves. 🌸