Ground Rules for Consultative Groups

Exercise - Setting The Ground Rules - Contracting

This exercise is designed for newly formed consultative groups to set ground rules for the behaviour of group members and to set out a constitution for the group.

The exercise should take about an hour. All members of the consultative committee should be involved.

You will need a flipchart

Ask the group to brainstorm what sort of behaviour they would expect from fellow members of the consultative committee. Also ask them what sort of behaviour impedes good meetings

Write up the responses on a flip chart.

They should come up with the following responses:

Positive behaviour
Listen to what other people are saying
Don’t belittle other people
Only one person should talk at a time
Avoid private conversations whilst someone else is speaking
Be patient with other delegates and appreciate the other person’s point of view
Give freely of your experience
Enter into discussions enthusiastically
If you don’t understand – ask. There are no stupid questions – only questions.
Keep an open mind about ideas put forward by other members of the group.
- Establish at the beginning of the meeting exactly what the problem you are trying to solve, and be prepared for to discuss this again later in the meeting.
- Establish a relaxed climate which explicitly states that all ideas will be welcome during the “brainstorming” phase of the meeting. Without a strong chairman, participants invariably forget this rule and start to criticise ideas too early.
- Record all ideas on a flipchart where everyone can see them. If an idea is not recorded openly, the person who raised it will not rest until it is recorded.

The most important influence on any meeting, particularly a creative meeting, is the chairman. The chairman needs to be impartial, strong (to set ground rules and make sure they are enforced), supportive and enthusiastic.
**Negative behaviour**
Points scoring – don’t turn the meeting into a sixth form debating society.
Invite senior experts with reputations to preserve.
Hold it at 5pm on Friday afternoon.
Turn up the heating, and allow interruptions such as telephone calls and noisy drills outside.
Seat all of the self important, loud people at one end of the table.
Spend the first twenty minutes discussing minutes from the previous meeting.
Allow distractions away from the main problem.
Do not write down the ideas that are put forward.
Critically analyse every idea as soon at it is raised.
The fear of making mistakes and being laughed at is probably the most significant barrier to being creative.

**Ask the group to set out what they think the rules for the joint consultative committee should be**

**Write down the responses on a flipchart.**

**The group should discuss the following issues:**
Joint consultative committee constitution - checklist

When drafting the constitution of a joint consultative committee the following elements should be covered:

- the title and objectives of the committee
- its terms of reference - the matters it can and cannot discuss and its powers
- its composition:
  (i) employee representatives (number, constituents)
  (ii) management representatives
  (iii) co-option and ex-officio provisions
  (iv) named deputies for representatives
  (v) method for obtaining members, appointment, election, etc
- election procedure
  (i) who organises
  (ii) when held
  (iii) qualifications of candidates and voters
  (iv) nominations
  (v) voting arrangements
- the period of office of members and arrangements for their retirement
- electing/nominating officers of committee, that is: chairperson, secretary
- meeting arrangements
  (i) frequency, advance notice
  (ii) when and where held
(iii) procedure for placing items on agenda
(iv) arrangement for minutes
(v) quorum
(vi) duration of meetings

• facilities for committee members

(i) time-off for liaising with constituents
(ii) payment while attending meetings

• reporting arrangements

(i) publication of minutes
(ii) methods of reporting back
(iii) responsibilities of members

• method of altering constitution.