

# In Practice

## Meetings, Stressful Meetings

Creating more work teams doesn't always lead to greater productivity and higher morale. In fact, in some companies, the advent of much-touted team-based work arrangements actually increases employee stress.

It may not be the teams themselves that are fault. Leading stress factors for teams are actually associated with meetings.

The average length of time for serving on a team is 25 months. Some team members actually work on teams full time, adding up to a whole lot of team meetings.

So what drives team members crazy about meetings? A few of the most worrisome problems: participants' inability to stay focused during meetings, the difficulty they may have in reaching consensus, too much time spent in meetings, playing "catch up" after meetings, and a dearth of capable meeting leadership.

What can companies do to enhance team meetings? According to Linda Moran, co-author of *Self-Directed Work Teams: The New American Challenge*, companies must nourish teams if teamwork is to succeed. Another ticket to success, she says, is specialized training in how to work on teams, including meeting facilitation and participation.

Moran offers executives these additional team-management tips:

- ▶ Allow teams time for learning and for meetings—even if productivity suffers initially.
- ▶ Train team leaders adequately for their role, with a focus on quick intervention when problems arise.
- ▶ Identify and provide needed financial and human resources when they are needed.



- ▶ Use temporary or contract workers to help even out distribution of work and to enhance team creativity.
- ▶ Minimize differences between voluntary and mandatory participation; make it clear that "teamwork" and "regular work" are equally important.
- ▶ Offer team members opportunities to learn multiple skills.

*Why do team members hate going to meetings? Here are some strategies for reducing their stress levels.*

## State Employees Flex Their Options

Who says that government workplaces are rigid, old-fashioned, and backward-thinking bureaucracies?

According to survey data compiled by the Families and Work Institute, many employees of state governments take advantage of the same kinds of flexible work arrangements that are becoming more and more common in the private sector. In some states, the state government employs more people than any other single employer, so that can add up to a significant number of workers



### Home, Sweet Home

It's another bad-weather Monday, and you're fighting your way to work with thousands of other commuters. Want some relief? Try telecommuting—one of the fastest growing trends in U.S. business for increasing workforce productivity and supporting organization reengineering. That's according to a recent survey report by Olsten Corporation.

Nearly one-third of companies surveyed about automated workplace issues now encourage telecommuting—working from home using computer and telecommunication technologies that link people and data readily from almost anywhere.

"Industries [that] are more technologically advanced have embraced telecommuting in greater numbers than other businesses," says Gordon Bingham, senior vice-president at Olsten. But currently, only 9 percent of all employees in these companies take advantage of the benefit, in spite of across-the-board reports of notably increased productivity for telecommuters.

Telecommuting appears to span organizational charts, but professional-level employees telecommute the most. Most likely, the trend to use work-at-home benefits will increase as businesses realize that office work does not always have to be done in the office.

tives who have useful, specific information to share with high-school students about job descriptions, salary ranges, qualifications, tips for getting started, and industry trends. The publication will be distributed monthly during the school year at no cost.

For further information contact Marie Gentile at 718/343-3937 or fax information to *The Job Scene* at 718/343-3975.

### Surfing for Training Data

The next time you need to check a training or development resource, trying tapping into Training and Seminar Locators's data base on the Internet.

At no cost, you can search four resource categories:

- ▶ scheduled resources
- ▶ resources offered in response to customer requests
- ▶ training and development products
- ▶ training and meeting facilities, including satellite downlink sites.

Users can search categories in any combination. Each resource includes data about location, dates, prices, content, target audience, and contacts.

To access the data base, use the World Wide Web home page address <http://www.tasl.com/tasl/home.html>. Resource providers may apply to be listed in the data base by going to the World Wide Web address <http://www.tasl.com/tasl/database.com>.

For further information, contact Marge Sweeny at e-mail address [mms@tasl.com](mailto:mms@tasl.com) or phone 510/735-8275.

### Still Say No

For years U.S. employers have been quietly fighting—and funding—America's so-called "war on drugs." Estimates of the costs for lost worker productivity related to drug use range between \$8 billion and \$34 billion.

The effects of drug use, say data from a National Institute of Mental Health survey, depend on the intensity of use. That's not surprising. But the survey—which looked at 18,571 adults in large and medium-size cities from 1980 to 1984—also turned up some surprising results about how and

who are working in more flexible ways.

Unfortunately, many of those arrangements seem to take place on a piecemeal basis. Few states have specific written or formal policies that address alternative work styles and schedules.

Here's a wrap-up of what some of the states are doing in the realm of flexible work arrangements:

**Flextime** is used in all 50 states plus Washington, D.C., generally at the discretion of the manager. Only Arkansas has a formal policy.

**Part-time** work is permitted in the District of Columbia and 49 states. Benefits are prorated in most cases, although Oregon offers full benefits.

**Job-sharing** is allowed by 38 states, but only informally or for just a fraction of the workforce.

**Compressed workweeks**, such as those consisting of four 10-hour days, are permitted in California, Illinois, Maine, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Missouri, and Tennessee.

**"Flexplace,"** an arrangement that allows workers to choose where they work, is the least common. This arrangement includes such options as telecommuting, or working from home. Only Vermont has a formal policy. But five states have informal policies, and pilot programs are underway in two other states.

For an update on telecommuting in the private sector, see the box, "Home, Sweet Home."

### Ahead of the Pack in Pennsylvania

What continuing-education program for business and industry is older than frozen food, penicillin, and the Theory of Relativity? We'll give you a hint: It's celebrating its 80th birthday this year.

Created in 1915 by Pennsylvania State University to help state industries, Management Development Programs and Services has worked with more than 6,000 organizations in the public and private sectors. Its early programs served as models for similar efforts nationwide.

The program is dedicated to providing management and human resource education services to organizations and their members, worldwide.

### Back to the Future

Maybe you can't start your career all over again, but you can pass on your well-won wisdom about the workplace to teenagers through a new publication, *The Job Scene*. Scheduled to release its first issue this month, *The Job Scene* targets high-school students, aiming to fill the gap between what young people think the working world is like and what the reality actually is.

*The Job Scene* wants to hear from industry professionals, human resource managers, and training execu-



### Symptoms of Employee Drug Use

How do you know if an employee is abusing alcohol, illegal drugs, or prescription drugs? You seldom can tell for sure, says Gary Topchik, director of SilverStar Enterprises. But possible indicators include the following:

- ▶ deteriorating productivity
- ▶ inappropriate or angry interactions with co-workers or customers
- ▶ frequent absences or lateness
- ▶ continuous rapid or wandering speech
- ▶ drowsiness or frequent breaks
- ▶ changes in productivity after lunch
- ▶ accidents, errors, carelessness, or sloppy work
- ▶ occasional, unpredictable flashes of outstanding performance
- ▶ regularly borrowing money from co-workers

- ▶ drunken behavior, with or without the odor of alcohol
- ▶ possession of drug paraphernalia
- ▶ drug mottos on clothing or at workstation; drug-inspired jewelry
- ▶ possession of a variety of medicines
- ▶ association with known drug users.

Topchik reminds managers that the same symptoms can also result from other causes. Managers who observe them should report them to a trained professional who knows how to diagnose drug-related problems and make referrals.

*From the March/April 1993 issue of "Perspectives on..." newsletter, SilverStar Enterprises, 1710 Kings Way, Los Angeles, CA 90069; 213/654-5818.*

when drug users' careers are affected.

According to survey coauthor Thomas Buchmueller, moderate use of drugs may not affect the income or employment of male drug users between the ages of 18 and 29. Instead, he says, "Detrimental effects of drug abuse by young workers may not be evident until they are older."

Buchmueller, who is with the University of California's graduate school of management, in Irvine, says that the study shows that the most significant impact of drug abuse is on the income and employment of men ages 30 to 45.

Even if moderate drug users experience no notable decline in productivity, experts say they are more expensive for firms to hire and maintain, due to high turnover rates.

Study results will be published by *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*.

### Envisioning Information

People who can present data in innovative and effective ways are in great demand. And Yale professor Edward Tufte can help.

Tufte, the author of *Envisioning Information* and *The Visual Display of Quantitative Information*, is developing new methods of rendering three-dimensional reality into the two dimensions of paper or screen.

Information managers who follow Tufte's teachings can learn data-presentation techniques designed to bring them into the 21st century. Topics include the following:

- ▶ strategies for information design
- ▶ design of information displays in public spaces.
- ▶ animation and scientific visualizations
- ▶ design of computer interfaces and computer manuals
- ▶ business, scientific, research, and financial presentations
- ▶ managing for complexity and clarity
- ▶ use of color
- ▶ handling statistical data
- ▶ use of multimedia.

Tufte offers his advice through courses that include material from his upcoming book, *Visual Explanations*.

Tufte says the biggest mistake presenters make is using overheads and leaving attendees with nothing concrete to take away. Along with a multitude of handouts, Tufte's students receive a poster of Charles Minard's map of Napoleon's 1912 Russian campaign. Considered one of the best statistical graphs ever drawn, Minard's graphic plots six variables to show multivariate data, telling a complex, three-dimensional story on paper.

For further information on Tufte's courses, call 203/250-7007 or 800/822-2454.

### Noted and Quoted

“For many years, the women's movement tended to focus on the well-educated, upwardly mobile, aspiring career woman and her difficulties in the workplace.... The working mother, often a woman of color, who cleaned the glass ceiling every night and who had no career to advance was largely forgotten. The experience of women in these low-wage, dead-end jobs on the 'sticky floor' is that they are also largely ignored by their employers, even though their work is essential....

“Minority women can be said to be twice subordinate, and, as such, they experience more pay discrimination and occupational segregation than their white sisters. For minority women, the floor tends to be stickier and the ceiling lower than for white women.

“This is often the case, but not always, because...minority women do not share a common experience. The only commonality among minorities today seems to be their increasing polarization and diversification. Since few studies take this heterogeneity into account, minority women find themselves fighting stereotypes that have little basis in their lives.”

*From The American Mosaic: An In-Depth Report on the Future of Diversity at Work, by Anthony Patrick Carnevale and Susan Carol Stone. McGraw-Hill, 1995 (available through ASTD Press, 703/683-8100. Order code: CAAM. Priority code: FLM).*

### Team Building for Humanity

Experiential learning meets community service in a new executive-leadership program called Team Building for Humanity.

The intensive, multiday experiential-learning seminar incorporates Habitat for Humanity house-construction projects with adventure-learning elements and facilitation to develop learners' management skills. The approach helps participants to create social change, while bringing the value of community service to the corporate environment.

“The shared experience of doing tangible things to improve others' lives and the physical, permanent



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evidence of team success transfer directly to the workplace," says James Willis, president of Executive Edge, the firm that developed the program.

An initial partnership is underway with the Greater Cleveland Habitat for Humanity. Next, Executive Edge plans to expand its Team Building for Humanity program to more than 3,000 Habitat for Humanity affiliates worldwide. Contact the Arizona office for more information: 602/443-1762.

### Flop Sweat

That's what they call it in the entertainment industry when your best material fails to rouse the audience. In her book, *What To Say When...You're Dying on the Platform*, author Lilly Walters offers hundreds of quick fixes for such problematic situations, which—sooner or later—afflict every speaker.

For example, what do you do when a fire alarm goes off during your presentation? You might say, "That's the signal for coffee."

Is some part of you showing that shouldn't be? You could offer: "Pardon me, I didn't intend to expose any of my shortcomings."

Is the meeting room too cold? Ask, "Have they had trouble keeping you people awake in other meetings?"

Has someone asked a question you've already answered at least once? Announce, "Deja vu!"

And you can always close with: "Please drive carefully. The IRS needs you!"

### New Office Etiquette

New workplace gadgets and practices raise questions about appropriate office etiquette, says Andrew Denka, executive director of OfficeTeam, a temporary-staffing firm.

The basics of courtesy don't change, Denka notes: "Ethics, consideration for others, and professionalism never go out of style in the business world." But the fast pace of business today sometimes causes people to overlook common courtesies—especially when they face new workplace issues.

Denka offers these tips on etiquette

for the workplace of the 1990s:

**Cyber-sensitivity.** If you comfortably zip around the Internet while your workmates still struggle with the office e-mail system, be tactful. Help others develop proficiency if they ask you. But don't force electronic communication on someone who clings to written documents or meetings.

**Casual days.** For most organizations, casual does not mean sloppy. Don't assume that torn jeans and a sweatshirt is an acceptable outfit. If your firm has an official policy on dress-down days, get a copy and follow it. And remember: If in doubt, it's better to dress too conservatively than too casually.

**Fax etiquette.** Never read faxes addressed to others—that's as much an invasion of privacy as reading their mail would be. Don't use the fax to send very long documents. Call recipients before you send faxes, especially if they don't know you. Always include a cover page. And do not fax unsolicited resumes.

**Voice-mail mania.** Callers find long greetings frustrating—keep your message short and to the point. If you're making a sales call, call back rather than leaving a message on voice mail. You might strike the person as presumptuous if you ask him or her to call you back.

**Shared work space.** If you share office space with your work team, everyone must respect each other's need for uninterrupted work time. Your firm may encourage collaboration. But don't assume it's OK to frequently break the concentration of a colleague who is hard at work.

**Computer privacy.** Respect a colleague's computer files as you would respect the files in his or her desk. If you use someone else's computer, never move or alter files or change the screen format. If you share a printer, warn others before you print a long document or add unusual paper or letterhead to the bin.

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*This month's "In Practice" was compiled by Training & Development Managing Editor Catherine Petrini and free-lance writer Rebecca Thomas. Send items of interest to Haidee Allerton, "In Practice," 1640 King Street, Box 1443, Alexandria, VA 22313-2043.*