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Leadership

Meetings and Leadership Reflection

For this assignment I'll reflect on the course readings and my own experiences to explore the tension between meetings as place to get things done and also as a mode of building rapport and relationships. I'll be drawing on the course readings, trainings from professional work, as well the concept of "emotion work" put forth by Arlie Hochschild to guide my reflections. My experiences have included 10 years of professional experience and five years of working in consulting type settings that involves planning and leading meetings.

The reading from running meetings lays out some very helpful and practical guidelines to preparing for and running a meeting. I won't outline the entire book here but will reflect on some of the general themes. First, meetings require preparation. A key insight is considering who to invite and why. One should also prepare an agenda and objectives for decisions to be made.

When in the actual meeting, you want to abide by the agenda and lead the discussion as to stay on topic. A technique I learned in work training was that if issues come up that are not on the agenda, you can "parking lot them" to discuss later either at that meeting or another meeting. It is also quite helpful if someone takes notes and action items are recapped at the end. After the meeting it is good to share the minutes and follow up on notes with reminders about action items.

All of this is consistent with my work training, "Managing Effective Business Meetings." This training also included some techniques to help foster conversation. What stood out to me is that sometimes meetings involve the discussion of complicated issues. These issues may touch on things outside the agenda. When these come up you can create a "parking lot" to put topics for discussion later in the meeting or another meeting. I believe that this is touching on a need for people to have a

certain amount of space to bring their thoughts and input to a meeting even when it doesn't fit into the agenda.

I believe Hochschild's concept of "emotion work" (<http://www.manuallabours.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Hoschild-article.pdf>) raises some important considerations for running meetings as well. Emotion work holds that people are supposed to feel certain ways and that people manage themselves and each other into these emotional scripts. Meetings then are also places where people may express and reconcile feelings. Of course, this can be done in healthy and unhealthy ways and certain situations can allow more room for variant emotions than others but nonetheless emotional work is always happening. The question then is are you allowing room for it to be done healthily, constructively, and that makes room for the whole person?

The other principle was one that I learned in a training "Strategic Relationship Building." In this training they told us to never start a meeting diving right into business. Rather, take some time to establish rapport and cultivate a common interest. We practiced this in simulation. The idea here being that meetings are not solely for conducting business but also for building relationships. I've also used this principle in leading project teams. Early in the life of a project I would start meetings with "icebreaker" type questions to establish rapport. This is because collaboration often involves colleagues asking for things from one another. This is much easier and someone will come forward with a request more quickly if he/she feels comfortable with his/her teammates. Relationship building is related to emotional work. One could think of this as managing the relationship networks that allow information, resources, and energy to flow productively and efficiently. My work experience in consulting involves a fair amount of relationship management and development.

When I reflect on our meetings we show up as whole people. I think that finding ways to deliberately but efficiently make space for this could help a meeting be more productive. This would be especially true in situations where participants are likely to encounter each other frequently over a long

period of time. If we think of institutions like a congregation as in part a constellation of relationships then it is wise to think about how you gather and if you are making space for relationships among your participants. In short, I will continue to be mindful of these tensions, to be mindful of ways to help meetings more efficiently conduct business but remembering that part of that business is emotion work. As I grow in leadership I'll be mindful of how I am facilitating relationship building with an eye towards care of the whole person and the health of the institution as a whole.