Effects of Training Leaders in Needs-Based Methods of Running Meetings

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Abstract

This study evaluated the effects of brief training in how to lead organizational meetings. The training was based on an attendee-needs-based model of running meetings. Twelve mid-level managers completed the training. The study showed a significant pre to post increase in the number of needs-based behaviors displayed by meeting leaders and in attendee ratings of meeting satisfaction and meeting productivity. The results provide preliminary evidence that the training can lead to positive effects. The results also provide evidence in support of the needs-based model of running organizational meetings.

Introduction

Organizational meetings are essential to the running of businesses, government agencies, community groups, sports groups, and many other organizations (Chaney & Lyden, 1998; Spinks & Wells, 1995). They provide a method of exchanging information, discussing ideas and reaching decisions (Leach, Rogelberg, Warr, & Burnfield, 2009). Meetings can increase feelings of belonging for team members, build trust, and enhance the status of leaders and attendees alike (Bratkovic, 2007; Chaney & Lyden, 1998; Harvard Business School, 2006). In addition, properly run meetings can lead to valuable achievements within an organization (Spinks & Wells, 1995).

Conversely, meetings can be costly due to the time spent away from other tasks (Carlozzi, 1999; Chaney & Lyden, 1998). On average, managers spend two to four hours per day in meetings, with one third of that time wasted (Bratkovic, 2007; Carlozzi, 1999; Tyler, 2000).

Associated costs can include travel, food, and accommodation expenses (Leach et al., 2009). Meetings can also have demoralizing effects on attendees, if the verbal or nonverbal messages sent by leaders or attendees are negative (Rogelberg et al., 2007; Tyler, 2000). If meeting attendees feel that their time is not well spent, meetings can decrease motivation to perform well in other tasks (Baran, Rhoades Shanock, Rogelberg, & Scott, 2012; Rogelberg, Leach, Warr, & Burnfield, 2006).

Table 1
Maslow's hierarchy of needs as applied to meeting-attendees

Need	How they can be met by the meeting leader
Social	Feeling valued by others
	Being part of an appealing group
Self-esteem	Sense of accomplishment
	Receiving recognition
	Having status in the group
Self-actualisation	Provision of autonomy
	Ability to demonstrate creativity

A correlational study by Malouff, Calic, McGrory, Murrell, and Schutte (2012) provided initial support for a model of meeting-leader behaviors that can help satisfy attendees' needs. In that study, the researchers intended the leader behaviors to satisfy higher-order needs in Maslow's needs hierarchy, as relevant to meeting-attendees (Table 1). Malouff and colleagues developed a list of 19 meeting-leader behaviors that (a) flowed from experts' recommendations and (b) were consistent with Maslow's (1970; 1998) model of needs as applied to meeting attendees. Table 2 lists the 19 recommended leader behaviors. The study showed there was an association between needs-based meeting-leader behaviors and attendee satisfaction with the meeting and attendee ratings of meeting productivity. Among the specific leader behaviors with associations with attendee ratings of the meetings were encouraging group decision making and summarizing the decisions made. The results were consistent with Maslow's model applied to running meetings and consistent with the view of some experts (Leach et al., 2009) that satisfying the needs of attendees is a crucial indicator of the value of conducting a meeting. Although the findings of the study of Malouff et al. (2012) supported the recommended set of leader behaviors, the correlational nature of the study makes causal conclusions unwarranted. Further, the results do not provide any indication that it is feasible to change these behaviors in meeting leaders.

Perkins (2009) provided the results of a pioneering study that examined the impact of intensive individual training designed to enhance meeting-leader skills. The training goal was for the leaders to show some behaviors frequently (e.g., summarizing, supporting) and some behaviors rarely, if at all (e.g., giving information, disagreeing). The training occurred over several months, with business executives who paid the researcher for executive coaching. Pre and post observations by the researcher at meetings showed that the leaders significantly improved on 7 of 9 targeted behaviors. Three of the behaviors, supporting, summarizing, and testing for

consensus, overlapped to some degree with those studied by Malouff et al. (2012). The Perkins study did not collect any data on satisfaction with the meeting or productivity of the meeting. However, the findings did suggest that training can change meeting-leader behavior.

The purposes of this study were to test the impact of brief training intended to modify the 19 needs-related behaviors studied by Malouff et al. (2012). The specific hypotheses were:
Hyp. 1: That training of meeting leaders in these behaviors would lead to improvements in their meeting-leader behavior.
Hyp. 2: That the training would lead to higher attendee ratings of satisfaction with the meeting and productivity of the meeting.

Method

Participants

We recruited participants through social networking media, contacts with colleagues and professional acquaintances, and invitations sent to local businesses. To be eligible for the study, participants had to run organizational meetings on a regular basis, at least every two weeks, with individuals who regularly attended the meetings. The sample of 12 leaders consisted of 8 men and 4 women, whose ages ranged from 27 to 44 (M=33.9, SD=5.9). Leaders came from a variety of organizations, including managers in engineering (N=4), information technology (N=3), marketing (N=2), government (N=2), and human resources (N=1).

Measures

Meeting Leader Behavior Checklist. Malouff et al. (2012) developed a checklist to monitor the use of 19 meeting-leader behaviors in their research on a needs-based model for organizational leadership. In that study, the behaviors listed in Table 2 were rated by one of the researchers. In the present study, they were self-rated by meeting leaders. Meeting leaders marked either yes or no to indicate whether they had shown a listed behavior during a meeting. The 19 behaviors are scored 1 for yes and 0 for no; thus total scores can range from 0 to 19. The previous use of this questionnaire showed it had reasonably good reliability, Cronbach's alpha = .77 (Malouff et al., 2012). Cronbach's alpha for the checklist, using the 12 sets of pre-intervention self-report data, was .56 in the present study. Previous use of the scale provided initial evidence of validity as it was associated with attendee ratings of satisfaction and productivity

Organizational Meeting Satisfaction Scale. The Organizational Meeting Satisfaction Scale consists of five statements, which are rated using a 7-point Likert scale. The scale, developed by Malouff et al (2012), involves slightly modified versions of the five items of Diener, Emmons, Larsen, and Griffin's (1985) widely used Satisfaction with Life Scale. A sample item is: *In most ways I am satisfied with the meeting*. Response options included 1=strongly disagree, 2=moderately disagree, 3=slightly disagree, 4=neither agree nor disagree, 5=slightly agree, 6=moderately agree, and 7=strongly agree. Scores are the mean of the responses

to the five statements. The scale has previously shown good reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of .96 (Malouff et al, 2012) and again in the current study with alpha = .83 in nine raters at pre-training. It has shown some evidence of construct validity with significant correlations with a single item rating of productivity (Malouff et al., 2012).

Organizational Meeting Productivity Scale. Malouff et al. (2012) used a single-item questionnaire to measure perceived meeting productivity in their study. As multiple item measures are more reliable than a single-item measure (Shum, O'Gorman, & Myors, 2006) and no other suitable measures existed to measure this construct, we developed the Organizational Meeting Productivity Scale. It parallels the Organizational Meeting Satisfaction Scale, with five statements relating to productivity using the same seven response options. Scores are the mean of the responses to the five statements and can range from 1-7. The single item previously used by Malouff et al. (2012), *The meeting was productive*, is one of the five items. We developed the four other items in consultation with colleagues who regularly attend meetings and who were not involved as participants in this study. These items were: *The aims of the meeting were met; The meeting was a good use of my time; The meeting time was well spent; The organization will benefit because of what happened in this meeting.* Cronbach's alpha for the productivity scale in this study, using the item ratings of nine attendees, was .90.

Training and Trainers

The training consisted of four components: (1) a detailed, written explanation of the 19 behaviors, (2) instructions to observe someone else running a meeting, while looking for the 19 behaviors, (3) an hour-long in-person discussion of components 1 and 2, and (4) assigned self-monitoring of leader behavior at subsequent meetings. At the in-person session, the trainer modeled the 19 behaviors. The in-person training content focused on the model underlying the 19 meeting-leader behaviors and their association with meeting-attendee needs. The trainer conducted the sessions with one to five trainees at a time. The sessions involved discussion of each behavior in detail, focusing on why the behavior was important and methods for including the behavior in future meetings. At the end of the workshop session we asked participants to implement as many of the 19 behaviors in their meetings as possible.

Two of us (Douglass and Rangan) provided the leader training. Both were familiar with the model underlying the 19 meeting-leader behaviors and had previously run employee training. Douglass, based in Brisbane, trained seven leaders; Rangan, based in Sydney, trained five leaders.

Procedure

We asked the leaders to (1) identify meeting attendees who might be willing to rate meetings run by the leader, (2) provide them with written information we had prepared about the study, and (3) pass on our contact details to the attendees. It was then up to the attendees to contact us for further information about the study. This process helped ensure attendees did not feel coerced into participating, given it was likely the meeting leader held a position of power

above them in their organization. If no attendees volunteered to complete ratings for the study, meeting leaders were still able to participate in the training. In total 11 attendees agreed to participate. We collected data at pre-training, completed the training about two weeks later, and then collected post-training data about two weeks after that.

Results

Participant Flow

Twelve meeting leaders provided baseline data and completed the training. We made several attempts to get post-intervention data from all meeting leaders. This led to 11 meeting leaders providing post-intervention data. A busy work schedule following annual leave prevented one leader from responding. The final pre-post analysis was, therefore, based on 11 complete sets of meeting-leader data.

Two meeting leaders each had two attendees provide data at baseline, and seven meeting leaders had one attendee provide data at baseline. Three meeting leaders had no attendees participate in the study. At baseline, there were nine meeting leaders with data from attendees. At post-training, there were eight meeting leaders with attendee ratings, consisting of one meeting leader with two attendees and seven meeting leaders with one attendee. Four purposes of analyses, we used the attendee ratings of the eight leaders with pre and post attendee ratings.

Main analyses

Table 3 shows the pre and post-training levels of the main variables. Supporting Hyp. 1, the number of behaviors displayed by meeting leaders after training was significantly greater than those prior to training, $t(10) = 2.88$, $p = .016$, $d = 1.03$. Nine out of 11 meeting leaders showed an increase in the number of meeting-leader behaviors they exhibited in a meeting, after receiving brief training. Table 2 shows the percentage of leaders who changed each of the 19 behaviors from pre to post.

Ratings for attendee satisfaction after training were significantly higher than those prior to training, $t(7) = 4.21$, $p = .005$, $d = 1.23$. Additionally, the ratings for meeting productivity after training was significantly higher than those prior to training, $t(7) = 3.38$, $p = .009$, $d = 1.25$. These findings supported Hyp. 2. Eight out of nine attendees gave higher ratings of meeting satisfaction and productivity after the meeting leader received training.

All nine meeting leaders who showed an increase in the number of recommended behaviors received higher ratings for attendee satisfaction and meeting productivity at post-training than at pre-training.

Table 2
Comparison of the individual behaviors displayed pre and post training

Leader Behavior	Number of leaders showing the behavior		
	Pre-intervention	Post-intervention	Difference
1. Distribute meeting agenda.	7	10	+43%
2. Distribute agenda in advance of meeting.	7	10	+43%
3. Arrive before start of meeting.	8	11	+38%
4. Start on time.	6	11	+83%
5. Greet members individually or as a group.	10	10	0
6. Follow agenda.	9	11	+18%
7. Speak succinctly.	10	10	0
8. Move meeting along.	9	10	+11%
9. Encourage participation.	8	11	+38%
10. Encourage decision making.	9	9	0
11. Compliment individual members.	6	8	+33%
12. Thank all the members for something, such as attending or helping.	7	9	+29%
13. Paraphrase comments of members.	8	8	0
14. Ask open ended questions.	9	8	-11%
15. Interact respectfully with members.	11	11	0
16. Smile.	6	9	+50%
17. Say or do something interesting or entertaining.	5	9	+80%
18. Say something positive about some aspect of the future of the organization.	6	8	+33%
19. At the end of the meeting, summarize the decisions made.	7	10	+43%

Table 3
Descriptive statistics for the main variables

Measure	Time	
	Pre-Training Mean (*SD*)	Post-Training Mean (*SD*)
Leader Behaviors (N=11)	13.45 (2.94)	16.73 (1.85)
Attendee Meeting Satisfaction Rating (N=8)	5.68 (0.45)	6.39 (0.36)
Attendee Meeting Productivity Rating (N=8)	5.75 (0.60)	6.71 (0.25)

Ancillary analyses

Using change scores from pre to post regarding leader behaviors and attendee ratings, we tested whether change in leader behaviors was associated with change in attendees' ratings of meeting satisfaction and productivity. Change in leader behaviors was associated with change in both satisfaction ratings, $r(7) = .84$, $p = .01$, and productivity ratings, $r(7) = .91$, $p = .002$.

We use change scores to test whether mean effects on leader behavior, satisfaction ratings, and productivity ratings varied with which trainer was involved. There were no significant differences between trainers, with all p values .18 or greater.

At pre-training, consistent with previous research (Leach et al., 2009; Malouff et al., 2012) there was a significant correlation between level of meeting-leader behaviors and (a) attendee satisfaction, $r(8) = .82$, $p = .01$, (b) meeting productivity $r(8) = .76$, $p = 0.03$. The scores for attendee satisfaction and meeting productivity at pre-training were highly correlated, $r(8) = .96$, $p < .001$.

Discussion

After training, compared to before training, the leaders in the study reported using a significantly higher number of meeting-leader behaviors recommended to them as serving the higher level Maslow-needs of the attendees. These findings support Hyp. 1. After meeting leaders received training, attendees reported significantly greater satisfaction with the meeting and greater meeting productivity, supporting Hyp. 2. The effects of the training on both leader behavior and attendee ratings were large, with increases of about one standard deviation from pre to post. All of the meeting leaders who had an increase in the number of behaviors shown received higher ratings for attendee satisfaction and meeting productivity at post-training than at pre-training.

The significant effect from pre to post in leader behaviors and attendee ratings, along with the significant association between level of change in leader behaviors and level of change in meeting satisfaction and productivity, provide preliminary support for the efficacy of the training in precipitating change in leader behavior and increases in meeting productivity and attendee satisfaction. The results also provide some support for the Maslow's (1998) need-focused model

of leadership applied to organizational meetings and provide preliminary support for the value of providing brief training in the applied model to meeting leaders.

There was an 83% increase in the number of meeting leaders who started their meetings on time, an 80% increase in the number of meeting leaders who said or did something interesting or entertaining and a 50% increase in those who smiled. There was a 33-43% increase in the number of leaders who distributed an agenda, distributed the agenda prior to the start of the meeting, arrived before the start of the meeting, encouraged participation, summarized at the end of the meeting, complimented individual members, and said something positive about the organization. This list of changed behaviors contains a mix of achievement-orientated behaviors and relationship-oriented behaviors.

The behaviors reported as occurring in all or almost all leaders prior to training were: greet members individually or as a group, speak succinctly, encourage decision making, and interact respectfully with members. It may be that these behaviors are common in meeting leaders. A behavior that slightly decreased (by 11%) was "asked open ended questions." It is difficult to identify why this behavior showed a decrease. It could be that the training needs adjustment relating to this behavior.

The current findings are consistent with previous correlational research (Malouff, et al., 2012) showing that leader behaviors related to meeting-attendee needs were associated with higher perceptions of meeting effectiveness and productivity. The present findings add evidence of the potential for training in the leader behaviors to produce improvements in the leader and greater satisfaction and perceptions of meeting productivity in attendees.

The present results are also consistent with findings by Perkins (2009) showing that extensive, individualized training can change meeting-leader behavior. The current results add (a) evidence of impact on attendee ratings of the meeting and (b) evidence that *brief, low-cost* training can have positive effects.

We tested for trainer effects on outcomes by comparing the outcomes of the two trainers and found no significant difference. However, the small sample size limited power to find a difference. It is possible that specific behaviors or characteristics of trainers could have an effect on training outcome.

Two scales measured attendee ratings of meetings in this study. The Meeting Satisfaction Scale and the Meeting Productivity Scale showed good reliability and some evidence of construct validity in their significant correlations with meeting-leader behavior and their changes in response to leader training. Hence the two rating scales may have potential for future use in research. However, attendee ratings of meeting satisfaction and productivity were so highly correlated with each other as to suggest that the two scales did not measure independent constructs.

It was outside the scope of the study to develop and use scales to measure whether Maslow's higher order needs were facilitated by the conduct of the meetings. However, it would be consistent with Maslow's model of needs if the changes in leader behavior led to increases in attendees' feeling valued, feeling part of an appealing group, feeling a sense of accomplishment, feeling recognized for contributions, experiencing a sense of high status in the group, feeling a sense of autonomy, and feeling an ability to be creative.

The study methods used have limitations. First, a control group was not used for the study, so causal conclusions must be tentative. Second, the study had a small sample size of leaders all in one country. The results might not generalize to different types of organizations and different cultures. Third, there is a possibility that the improvements were the result of a Hawthorne effect (Jones, 1992). Fourth, the study did not collect observational data to confirm self-report data on leader behaviors. Fifth, the study did not examine whether improvements were maintained over the long term, so it is unclear how durable the gains were. Finally, the 19 meeting-leader behavior checklist did not show good reliability at pre-training, raising a question about the appropriateness of adding individual responses for a scale score. The study methods had strengths in the use of attendee ratings as well as self-ratings of meeting leaders and in the use of inferential statistics to evaluate changes from pre-training to post.

In sum, the study provided preliminary evidence of positive effects for organizational meetings resulting from brief training in how to run meetings in ways to maximize satisfaction of attendee needs. Future research could add to the present findings by (1) including a randomly assigned control group, (2) using a large *N*, (3) collecting observational data on leader behavior, (4) collecting data on need satisfaction, and (5) including a long-term follow-up assessment.

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