3.2 Group Meetings

Let's start by citing Ivan Steiner (1972, as cited in Weinberg and Gould, 1996, pp. 197-198) and his formula regarding how to define the actual productivity of a team. Steiner states that the actual productivity of a team comes from ideal productivity imposed on the processes of imperfect groups. The author believes that imperfect groups have two problems: issues with individual motivation and coordination deficits at the group level.

In this context, group meetings not only emerge as one of the most valuable communicational tools the leader has for managing the team, but also as an invaluable instrument to address the productivity, culture and climate of the team. Group meetings are just as important as individual meetings. It is the team management tool par excellence.

The meeting puts the spotlight on the leader in front of the whole group and their are a number of ways that meetings can be executed. The high performance leader must recognize the times and phases of the meeting, have a clear understanding of the objective and verify the effect of the meeting.

Our professional experience has shown us that many people endure meetings they consider to be unproductive and of little benefit: an absolute waste of time.

Throughout this unit we will try and put forward guidelines that can benefit the leader's performance in team meetings.

3.2.1 Situational Framework for Group Meetings

At first, many leaders meet with their teams in reaction to some stimulus, but as their leadership style evolves, they begin to design a meeting schedule. This points once more to the need for an annual calendar; at this stage, we will prepare an annual schedule for group meetings.

Planning an annual calendar for group meetings gives the leader and the team the necessary time to prepare and enrich their participation in meetings. When we think about an annual schedule, we are not referring to hundreds of meetings, but to the possible answers to these questions: Which meetings? At what time of the year? With what guidance?

Excessive numbers of meetings is a serious problem that leaders must avoid. Too many meetings exhaust the team, use up time and affect the value of the leader's role. Meetings are essential within a team to optimize and coordinate their functioning. The leader must find the right number so that productivity is not lost due to lack of coordination or negative emotional states (for example, tiredness and bad moods) linked to the number of meetings.

Meetings can be held according to two possible dimensions; team productivity and group climate. In addition, these meetings will be supplemented with personal meetings, in those cases in which they are required: in order to consolidate adhesion and improve role ownership; the leader will clearly explain to the athlete what is expected of them and how to achieve it (De Diego and Sagredo, 1992, p. 226), as well as the corresponding skills, and generate a more active and positive participation within the group.

Let's look more closely at the group meeting schedule: What type of meetings should it contain? When should these meetings be held? How is the effectiveness of these meetings measured?

As far as productivity is concerned, the meetings we must include in the schedule are as follows:

- **Formal Start of Year Meeting:** this is the first meeting of the year. The leader explains the rules to be followed, shares the objectives and goals to be reached by the group during the year with the entire team, and sets out the conditions for team interaction as a whole. A strategic vision is developed, the team is shown the short- and medium-term context, the short-term operational goals are described and active participation and adhesion from each participant is encouraged.

- **Weekly Planning and Review Meeting:** its objective is to review the actions performed by the team during the week, the achievements, and partial and/or full compliance with the proposed goals. The conditions for the following week are planned and the goals set earlier are modified or maintained accordingly.
- **Monthly Adjustment Meeting:** this meeting has the same purpose as the previous one, but with a more general outlook, with more information and with the intention of implementing any redirection that may be necessary to benefit team behavior. The team's results, performance and new development opportunities are analyzed. In these meetings, the leader identifies those members that need to be supported with personal meetings so that they adopt their role more fully or improve their level of performance.

- **Biannual Results Assessment Meeting:** in some organizations, this is linked to rewards or bonuses for achieving results. The leader must have a strategic vision and manage this six-monthly assessment in each monthly adjustment and balance meeting. They must generate and make concrete data available so that the team can see the progress being made and the forecast for the medium-term.

- **Daily Operations Meeting:** in organizational settings, some teams that work with indicators which fluctuate widely and work with models such as Lean Management hold these brief meetings every day to guide the team. As for sports, coaches take few minutes each day before the start of training to explain what that day's activities will consist of, the objective and where the difficulties lie. If your work environment does not change very much, we recommend using caution when incorporating daily meetings as they require a great deal of flexibility, expertise and creativity in order to avoid becoming monotonous and repetitive.

Regarding the group climate, we consider it important that the annual schedule include the following:

- **Formal Start of Year Meeting:** this is the first meeting to remind the team of the norms for internal coexistence, each member should receive a written copy of the norms, and there should be clear guidelines for what behaviors are expected of them and which are not. This meeting is also used to remind team members how they should go about resolving internal disputes and what they must contribute in order to strengthen the group climate. This meeting is developed previously from a productivity point of view.

- **Informal Non Work-Related Meeting:** these meetings must also be included in the annual meeting schedule, but it is not easy to place them on the calendar. We recommend holding four of these meetings each year and leave choosing the dates up the leader's judgment. If such events become predictable and repetitive, these meetings can transform into unwelcome and counterproductive affairs.

- **Biannual climate management meeting:** the objective of these meetings is to review the group climate from the perspective of the different team members. Some organizations take advantage of this space to look at results and actions associated with feedback or climate surveys. Regarding sports or organizations that do not use specific measurements, we consider it worthwhile holding these meetings in order to look for improvement opportunities associated with consistency, cohesion and overall team identity.

- **Periodic Climate Improvement Meetings:** these meetings are not formally provided for, but the leader should be aware that they are available in the event that internal disputes arise that require their involvement. If team development progresses as indicated by the different theories, there should be no need for these types of meetings, but daily team activities may not always conform to theory. When faced with concrete threats or a specific dispute, the leader may hold these meetings to resolve problems and improve group climate.

In the table below we outline the recommended meetings for addressing productivity and team climate and their duration:

- Brief meetings: less than 30 minutes.
- Intermediate meetings: between 30 and 90 minutes.
- Long meetings: more than 90 minutes.

Table 1: Annual Meeting Schedule

Brief	Intermediate	Long
• Weekly Planning and Review Meeting. • Daily Operations Meeting.	• Monthly Adjustment Meeting. • Biannual Results Assessment Meeting. • Biannual Climate Management Meeting. • Infrequent Climate Improvement Meeting.	• Formal Start of Year Meeting. • Informal Non Work-Related Meeting.

Source: Prepared by the author.

3.2.2 Phases of Group Meetings

Group meetings, like personal meetings, have specific phases that the leader must know how to recognize and develop in order to ensure the proposed objective is met. Although the number of phases and their names are similar to those found in personal meetings, the objectives of each phase are different. Therefore, the phases of group meetings are:

1. Preparation.
2. Introduction.
3. Development.
4. Conclusion.

Preparation: the part before a group meeting requires a lot more time and analysis than prior to the personal meeting since, in addition to the situational factors, guidelines and information to be provided, the profiles of participants need to be taken into account in order to know how to address interruptions, monologues and sort out any obstacles that may arise.

It is important that the leader clearly understands which topics should be addressed with groups and which ones in individual spaces, thus they must plan strategies to ensure that the meetings do not turn into a slanging match. The leader also has to anticipate what the meeting will be about so that team members can also prepare for meetings.

Any leader who does not respect this prior stage is left very exposed and jeopardizes their ability to positively influence the team. It is important to be systematic with time management in order to ensure enough useful time to plan meetings.

Introduction: unlike in the personal meeting, the warm-up process during this stage must be minimal. Only a few minutes should be used to talk about a non work-related topic before embarking on the topic of the meeting. Once the warm-up is finished, the leader must present the topic to be addressed and the method of interaction before going on to explain the meeting's objective.

This stage requires a clear, firm and dynamic leader to quickly generate the necessary climate required by the topic in question. Time management, compliance with the objective and conflict resolution are required skills for group meetings.

Development: this is the phase that should take up most of the meeting time. This stage must be used to explain the problem in as much detail as possible, allowing the team participate insofar as time allows, with defined times to address each of the topics. The leader must make the

meeting more or less participative, depending on available time, in order to find a solution to any existing conflict.

The leader must encourage all team members to participate in the meeting whether by stating their opinions or clarifying doubts regarding the proposed assignments.

Conclusion: the end of the meeting is when conclusions reached must be explained and shared. Therefore, it is necessary for a team member to act as secretary and draft minutes or a transcript that includes what the entire team has expressed. Furthermore, it is recommended that a copy of the conclusions be sent to each team member through the channels considered necessary. It is not enough to have an idea of the agreements reached, which can become distorted over time, facts based on concrete information set out in a document are necessary.

Remember that it is vital for a copy of any internal coexistence norms presented at the meeting to be given to each team member. This detail must not be overlooked otherwise it invalidates the reason for the meeting and can affect the group climate.

When they close the meeting, the leader must not ignore anything significant that was raised in the meeting that was not related to its objective. On the contrary, the leader must take note of these topics and emphasize that they will be treated according to the specifics of each requirement.

3.2.3 Types of Group Meetings

Let us explain the different types of group meetings we consider to be the most important according to their content and format:

- **Operational Meetings:** the sole focus of these meetings is addressing productivity, above all, in the short-term. The frequency with which these meetings occur varies, but they concentrate on reviewing goals, the actions performed and on adjusting future tasks.

- **Strategic Meetings:** these are aimed at the medium- and/or long-term where the leader redirects the focus from what is happening now to conduct a general and panoramic overview. These meetings are used to define development strategies, determine and assess the development of the team vision and allow it to satisfactorily adapt to upcoming scenarios.

- **Cohesion Meetings:** these focus on cooperating together to achieve a task or on strengthening interpersonal ties. In task cohesion meetings, the leader sets out the situation for the team to generate improvement opportunities; in social cohesion meetings, the leader abandons hierarchy to interact with the rest of the team members on a level playing field.

- **Face-to-Face Meetings:** these are performed in person and can have different objectives related to group climate or productivity.

- **Virtual Meetings:** these are conducted using new formats that include unconventional channels that overcome difficulties related to distance. They make it possible to develop effective meetings that meet objectives. Virtual channels allow the leader to reconcile with the team's daily routine. Team members already use social media, virtual conferences and mobile phones; therefore, adapting the content and format of a meeting to these channels can be very effective: such means are as novel as they are necessary. We recommend holding a combination of scheduled face-to-face and virtual meetings, but to never suspend meetings just because they cannot be held face-to-face. New communication channels have to be assessed positively.

- **Management Meetings:** in these meetings, which are often held without much notice to address specific issues that arise suddenly related to productivity, the leader sets out the actions, time frames and new goals the team must follow without allowing any time or space for team members to discuss the topics in detail. The topics are usually of low to medium complexity and require a fast

solution from the leader, which is why the meeting must be concrete and management oriented.

- **Participative Meetings:** since the topic to be addressed requires consensus and a high-quality response, the leader admits participation and requests the opinion of all team members, although defining the actions to be performed is left to the leader. The leader opens themselves up to enriching their viewpoint and comparing other approaches to improve their own decision-making process. These meetings often take place in teams whose members show a higher level of skill and knowledge, and occupy an important position in the environment in which they operate. Meetings can be related to both productivity and group climate.

- **Democratic Meetings:** these stand apart because decisions are made by the majority. The leader sets out the situation and all team members explain their viewpoint or choose one of the proposed options and decide by voting. This type of meeting is generally held to define topics associated with social cohesion and non work-related meetings.

- **Performance Meetings:** their focus is on team actions. These meetings analyze compliance with the execution plan established to assess the level of transfer of the trained or developed skills. The focus of the assessment is on what the team did and did not do in relation to the result. These meetings are often held the day after a competition or at other important moments for the team. Data that has been rated by the leader enriches the team outlook and helps build awareness of the performance achieved.

- **Results Meetings:** these are used to examine the statistics and values associated with the team accomplishing short- and medium-term results objectives. The leader needs to come to these meetings with accurate information (concrete data) and clear decisions in order to maintain, consolidate or reverse the achieved results.

3.2.4 Suggestions for Implementing Group Meetings

In this section we will make some recommendations for holding effective group meetings based on our professional experience, taking into account the information described in the preceding paragraphs:

- **Be Punctual and Expect Punctuality:** How the meeting starts establishes the climate, intensity and seriousness that the leader wishes to convey to the meeting. If the start is delayed due to the absence of a participant, the leader will be rewarding tardiness and visibly diminishing the importance of an action understood as important to the team.

- **Avoid having too many meetings:** schedule the number of meetings that are necessary, possible and which contribute to team growth. Too many has the same effect as not enough in relation to the importance that the leader assigns to the coordination of group activities. The idea is to encourage quality over quantity.

- **Avoid Monologues:** act quickly against actors who tend to monopolize communication. It is important to encourage the participation of everyone and avoid monologues and the formation of groups within the meeting. The space is useful to generate answers and solutions; under no circumstances should it be used to compound existing differences.
- **Avoid Passive Participation:** it is important to prevent attendees from not participating; encourage each and every team member to give their opinion and participate actively. The meeting is a space for interaction where the leader must foster and generate greater adhesion among all participants. As for anyone who does not actively cooperate, address the topic with them at the next individual meeting.

- **Do Not Lose Sight of the Focus of the Meeting:** quite often, sudden disputes or difficulties finding a solution to the conflict put forward in the meeting means having to address a topic that was not contemplated. The leader must convey the feeling that they will be the one to speak about certain topics at all times.

- **Respect the Established Duration:** "meetingitis" is caused by the change of focus, too many anecdotes and meetings that run overtime. The leader must assign time to each topic and make sure it is followed, regardless of whether the topic has been dealt with. This will send a cultural message to the entire team that has repercussions for future meetings which will be much more productive in terms of administration and time management.

- **Record the Meeting:** it is vital that a written record or minutes containing everything expressed at the meeting be prepared so that each team member can analyze it carefully in their own time, in order to ensure that there are no ambiguities and concrete data is the norm in the group coordination space.

- **Use New Virtual Formats:** video conferences, chat and social networks offer effectiveness and their use by us is well-established. Sometimes we hear stories where someone missed a meeting because they were not at the scheduled meeting place or a meeting was not held because some team member was traveling. These occurrences no longer constitute a problem: a mobile telephone is all you need nowadays to hold an effective meeting. The use of the Whatsapp application has proven useful in the field of sports for holding chats lasting less than a minute. These channels are usually only used for recreation or social purposes; we recommend using these means to continue managing climate, but also include addressing productivity.

- **Incorporate Humor:** using humor is essential in order for meetings to be effective. We are not looking to hold meetings to tell jokes, but instead use humor to ease tensions, change the attention focus and recover the mental energy needed to deal with a complex topic. When the meeting gets bogged down; when there is adhesion but no quality, the recommendation is to take a brief timeout through humor before redirecting attention toward a solution-focus.

- **Avoid Interruptions:** from all sources; try and ensure meetings progress without interruptions from directors, the press, colleagues from other areas, telephone calls or e-mails. The meeting serves to optimize coordination, but if this space includes interruptions, our intention to generate suitable behavior will be hampered.

- **Evaluate the Meetings:** use simple anonymous surveys or other more sophisticated mechanisms to try and assess the impact of meetings and invite proposals for improvement opportunities. If the bond with team members is close and consolidated, take advantage of personal meetings to ask for feedback on the different team meetings. Write down suggestions and comments, do not be too quick to argue or refute an opinion as you will only show that you do not know how to accept feedback: the key is to understand criticism as a true opportunity for improvement.

This concludes our discussion on the role of a high performance leader. The objective of this module was to provide a general overview of the main actions, skills to develop, the dimensions to manage and the communicational tools to use. The path ahead is long and the contributions in this area are innumerable. We also hope that we have made our own contribution and, moreover, generated a desire to investigate further and search for more information that brings you closer to leadership.

Table 2: Communicational Calendar of the High Performance Leader

Tools / Dimensions	Group Meetings	Personal Meetings
Productivity	• Start of Year Meeting. • Daily Operations Meeting. • Weekly Planning and Review Meeting. • Monthly Adjustment Meeting. • Biannual Results Analysis Meeting.	• Exploration. • Feedback. • Vision. • Assessment.
Group Climate	• Start of Year Meeting. • Informal Meeting. • Maintenance Meeting. • Sporadic Meetings.	• Exploration. • Vision. • Assessment.
Individual Development		• Exploration. • Vision. • Assessment.

Source: Prepared by the author.

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