

Roles of Ordinary Meeting Members for Enhanced Communication in Society

Martha Ada Onjewu

Abstract

Communication is very vital to the existence of human beings who in turn coexist in societies where they form themselves into various unions and associations which engage meeting as the means of communication for the achievement of their goals and the satisfaction of their needs. Hence the need to take quality decisions for the good of all at meetings but it seems that majority of floor members of meetings don't realise that they have equal stake in decision-making and so put up many negative attitudes towards meetings. The aim of this paper is to let such floor members know that without them executive committee members may not take the best informed decisions at meetings for the common good. Using a survey research design by perusing empirical data it was found out that ordinary or floor members of meetings are not just required to form a quorum but have many other very key functions like ratifying the decisions of executive committee members, proposing motions, debating on motions and voting to decide motions among many others all of which are being affected by their rather negative attitude. The conclusion of the paper is that floor members must put away all their negative attitudes in order to aid executive committee members come up with the best possible decisions at meetings since they are equal stakeholders and also joint beneficiaries of the decisions that are reached by being punctual to meetings remaining to the end, contributing actively to every decision making process among other responsibilities.

Keywords: *Communication; Decision Making; Participation; Decision Making; Equal stakeholders*

Introduction

Without communication, society would be dead as there would not be a more meaningful means of achieving tasks and goals. Communication is very vital in facilitating societal living. Many unions, associations or institutions exist to satisfy the demands of human existence as key to achieving both human and societal goals (Vellal, 2016). Also, Forsyth (2006, p.90) adds that 'Communication lies in the heart of effective group performance'.

Overtime, our world has become very complex. What now obtains as a norm is to have series of large and small affiliations within our cities, towns and villages. For instance, there are usually many trade unions, tribal and religious associations with social gatherings all for the aim of satisfying the competing needs of people in society, Hence, it implies that associations are formed with the aim to meet some goals which its members could identify with.

In our world of today, people join committees, unions, societies or associations at times compulsorily like the ones at work places and those for professional bodies or voluntarily like the ones in the civil society. Whether at work or otherwise, every association has goals to be achieved that are often very attractive towards the advancement of their cause at a glance or at the onset but which eventually turn out too difficult to be achieved due to some bottlenecks experienced during their decision-making process at meetings by at times their executive committee members as well as ordinary members.

Among the bottle necks of committees or associations towards achieving their goals is the poor management of all members concerned and particularly ordinary meeting members who are usually more in number during most meetings. Meanwhile, all unions and associations cannot do without meetings which according to Keyser (2019) are vital if well managed in helping people feel included and trusted that they are team members as well as making it possible for them to contribute to the success of their unions, institutions and associations.

Association or union members are either executive committee members which means those at the helm of affairs with floor or ordinary members to support them. Both executive and ordinary members of every committee, union or association are equally useful to the successful execution of the tasks necessary for the achievement of their goals because although executive committee members are at the helm of affairs they are expected to be leaders and not bosses over the ordinary or floor members (Onjewu, 2020) which they need to succeed in whatever task they have to perform towards the achievement of their goals; every member's hands should be on deck for the success that is expected. The executive council members cannot do it all alone, since, even when decisions are taken at their level, the decisions need to be ratified in the general house by the ordinary or floor members of every meeting before the executive members can carry them out which is to say that the floor members are equally as important as the executive council members in every committee, association or union; they are hence both part and parcel of the same coin!

The problem of concern here is that no matter how efficient the Chair of any meeting is, not much would be achieved without the active participation of

other executive members as well as the floor members. Unfortunately, however, majority of floor members, particularly, are oblivious of this fact and continue to put up many negative attitudes at meetings resulting to having meetings that are not effective in our society (Keyser. 2019).

The aim of this article therefore is to enlighten meeting floor members of their importance to the success of decision making and implementation during meetings as well as to educate them on some of their roles for participation in order for meetings to be more effective in making more informed decisions that profit both executive committee members with floor members and the society at large.

Decision Making at Committee or Association Meetings

Decision-making at associations, unions and most other affiliations take place at two levels. The first is the executive committee level where an idea is conceived or an information is received, deliberations are held to arrive at some proposals which do not qualify to be acted upon but referred to the general house where the floor members accept some, throw some to the ground or vote to finally arrive at the best possible decision. At times, floor members being in the majority alongside executive committee members cast their votes for a decision that is eventually taken culminating in a resolution. The other level of decision-making is at the floor of the house of meetings during Any Other Business (AOB), when ordinary or floor members also have the opportunity of raising motions that when dully seconded are debated or voted upon leading to the passing of a resolution. So, at both levels of decision-making, floor members' participation is key. Floor members are therefore an extension of the executive committee who should contribute as much as possible in every meeting's decision making process (NA, 2017).

Floor members are usually more in number in majority of meetings so the tendency is that they would always carry the day with active participation because there is strength in number. If executive committee members can boast of power, ordinary meeting members can boast of number! Since, both executive and ordinary members should not be in opposition but work hand in hand towards the same goal, they should always harmonise their power with number to arrive at the best possible decisions. From the views of (Forsyth, 2006) it could be deduced that when floor members do not make their input, an executive committee soon becomes overburdened and run out of ideas. Another reason why floor members should be involved in the decision making process of meeting according to (Heller & Hindle, p.170) is that 'people implement decisions more willingly when they participate in making them'.

Otherwise, people feel that decisions are imposed on them which makes them rebellious at times and at other times nonchalant towards whatever is happening even to their own detriment.

Negative Attitude of Meeting Members

Since majority of meeting members do not realise their importance to the success of meetings, what they have instead is a very poor or negative attitude towards matters of the meetings they attend in a number of ways including the following:

- Many of them stay off for a couple of months or for more meetings than is allowed by the constitution for them to remain members yet do not even bother to reach out to the house with an excuse unless perhaps they are called on phone or visited then they give one excuse or the other as being responsible for their absence from the meeting.
- Another negative attitude of members at meetings is coming late without showing any remorse and before long, request that a matter already trashed be revisited which is wrong and unconstitutional. All members must realise that every matter deliberated upon and resolved on the floor of the house stands except if a quorum was not form. However, if a quorum was formed, the decision reached is valid and binding on all members present or absent and be they executive committee members or ordinary meeting members.
- Some meeting members are notorious noise makers who always persist in doing so after much warning or even the payment of fine during every meeting thereby not concentrating in order to make any positive contribution as well as distracting others also from concentrating to make their own contributions towards the success of meetings.
- Also meeting members could be given assignments which they would not carry out before the stipulated time required, may not attend the meeting in which they are supposed to provide the feedback on the assignment and neither would they send anybody to do so on their behalf which hinders progress.
- Similarly, I have attended a few meetings during which the secretaries were not in attendance and they did not send the minutes of the last meeting to the current meeting which left everyone present stranded. On one of those occasions the meeting had to progress without any minutes while on another of such occasions the meeting had to be called off which also hinders progress and the achievement of set goals at meetings

- Moreover, many meeting members hardly accept to carry out any responsibility at all in the first place. They would always decline on the claim that they were incapable of performing such tasks successfully without even attempting to give the assignment any try. Such meeting members behave as though whatever needs to be done is the business of others and not theirs.
- Furthermore, some meeting members are regular at meetings but they never pay their dues with others payments on the claim that they don't have the money to do so. Yet such members are the ones who would make trouble for not being given any entitlement or financial benefit.
- Yet another negative attitude of meeting members is the habit of not raising their concerns and observations on the floor of the house but rather preferring to go behind and castigate their leaders or accuse them of incompetence, favoritism, corruption, etc.
- Unfortunately too, the leadership style of some leaders of meetings is responsible for the negative behaviour of some of their members. Some leaders are more autocratic than democratic in which case they don't attempt to carry along their members in decision making. By not following due the process of decision-making a lot of members get pissed off and refuse to cooperate with such leaders thereby making it very difficult for any meaningful progress to be achieved by the meetings.
- Similarly, some meeting heads are full of several related negatives like not being time conscious, and hence, arriving late to meetings; not being focused as to easily digress, thus, resulting to the dragging of meetings endlessly, consequenting in closing late, as well as having a poor control of meeting. This results in not easily achieving set goals.
- In another vein some leaders of meeting do not do what they preach which leads to a subsequent lack of trust from their members and also as a result of such, a lot of things go wrong in their association due to the actions of the floor members that could result to not being able to achieve their desired goals. Since respect begets respect, meeting leaders must strive to do as they say realizing that the attention of all other meeting members are on them.
- Another major problem with meetings is lack of transparency in their finances. If executive committee members do not provide regular satisfactory financial reports or updates, with time, ordinary members begin to refuse to pay their dues as they become suspicious of those

involved, which creates a lot of bad blood among the ordinary members who in turn may refuse to cooperate in the tasks that should enable such meetings to succeed. Money matters easily escalate so it is advisable to prevent them from going bad in the first place. Meeting heads should put heads together with other members and resolve on the way(s) to keep their financial records and reporting on their expenses which must be adhered to. They should never keep such records in loose sheets and have the necessary back up.

The Roles of Ordinary or Floor Members of Meetings

Contrary to popular opinion meeting productivity does not solely rest on the executive committee members but also, every meeting member's contribution is required for effectiveness of meetings and for the achievement of goals. Some of the many ways that ordinary members could contribute to meeting success as advised by (Kevin, 2019; Onjewu, 2020) are as follows:

- Being punctual with an objective mind towards the deliberations during the meeting of the day and remaining till the end of the meeting. Since most meetings have fixed dates or duration, meeting member should try had to avoid or prevent any distraction that would prevent them from attending a meeting but when the situation is beyond control, an apology should be sent.
- Actively participating in the entire process of the meeting like correcting of minutes, proposing of motions and casting vote as the need arises. Contrary to being active as listed, many meeting members would rather form groups with friends or other allies to discuss non related issues which often times distracts the meetings.
- By coming prepared to contribute ideas, time energy and resources to the success of the day's meeting with being committed to the cause of the meeting mentally and physically because, ideas no matter how good remain just intentions until time, energy and other necessary resources are invested before they blossom into achievements and projects.
- Ensuring that the meeting has an agenda for the day's meeting which is known to everyone with the tasks that need to be achieved in order to be able to focus on ensuring that the right things are said or done. It's one of the key functions of secretaries to draw up the agenda for every meeting and if possible, share it to every member before the day of the meeting. When an earlier share of agenda was not feasible, it should be presented to the house before the commencement of a meeting and if not done by the

secretary, ordinarily members are free to point it out and request for one. Every meeting deserves an agenda in order to achieve set goals without losing focus

- Paying rapt attention to every discussion or deliberation during meetings with the ears as well as mind to truly understand what is being said or done. Meeting deliberations deserve all the attention of members in order to understand what is going on and if not to ask questions if need be as well as to be capable of making meaningful contribution to the deliberations for over quality decision making which is for the common good
- Avoiding all kinds of distractions during meetings like sitting beside friends, putting away or setting phones to silent mode as well as avoiding noise making. Many ordinary meeting members are unaware that the quality of decisions reached could be affected by the distractions that they cause during meeting deliberations but this is a fact. So, because every decision made, could impact on them either positively or negatively, the wise option is to personally avoid as much as possible every action that would distract self and others for the common good of all.
- Ratifying decisions taken by the executive committee that have been referred to the house for further consideration is the role that should make ordinary meeting members realise the extent of their importance. Majority of unions and associations usually meet at the executive committee level to discuss new proposal, developments and a lot more more after which they stay any action until such is formally presented to the house for further deliberation and resolution and at times voting if need be. Since ordinary meeting members are usually more in number, with active participation, they could always influence decision making.
- Seeking for clarification about any matter being discussed as the need arises after thinking carefully before speaking in order to be logical in the contribution made, or question asked. It is equally the right of ordinary meeting members to ask question and contribute to ongoing discussion but often times, they get carried away until a decision is reached then they begin to complain which is not only irresponsible of them but embarrassing to others as well as unnecessary set back to the meeting.
- Making honest contributions to the discussion during meetings but with the mindset that the contribution might not necessarily be accepted by the house. Although every meeting member is entitled to their opinion and should be given a fair hearing during meeting deliberations, they must also realise that their viewed MUST NOT win the day over others which are

better at that point in time to the house and hence should accept the decision of the house in good fate.

- Being willing to speak out one's views otherwise nobody would know such thoughts and air them on one's behalf. Since people will never know where one stands if one does not share ideas or views and one probably might have the best idea to move the course of a meeting forward, so, please don't hold back but always express your ideas and views. However, people should endeavour to carefully articulate their ideas and buttress them adequately.
- Being courteous and respectful to every member of a meeting with avoiding being abusive or rude no matter what happens. It is obvious that nobody likes to be treated without courtesy, respect or abused for that matter while it is very true that when we give out courtesy, respect and abuse to others we receive same in same or more measure.
- Being supportive of leaders by asking if there is anything one could assist them with. Otherwise, helping to welcome other members, sharing of minutes or refreshments and making sure that the other members are comfortable and that every available material goes round everyone present go a long way to enhance meeting success. Even at meetings, being our brothers' keeper is necessary for everyone's wellbeing and the earning of a good self-esteem by individuals aside showing that one is responsible.
- Ensuring the utmost execution of every task assigned to one in good time and reporting to the house as soon as completed and without hesitating to ask for assistance, money or other necessary things. Ordinary meeting members should take absolute responsibility towards the successful and timely execution of assigned tasks. Any bottle neck encountered must immediately be brought to the notice of the members of the executive committee immediately for prompt intervention. Waiting till another meeting may be too late to salvage some situation or may lead to some ugly developments which at times could be embarrassing to the entire members.
- During meetings checking out with the people sitting close by to make sure that they are comfortable and asking if they need anything that you could be of help in providing for them. Also encouraging them to contribute to ongoing discussions and thanking them for doing so when they obliged you is another way to enhance quality decision making which is for the common good.

Conclusion

Considering some of the roles of ordinary members of meetings spelt out above, there is no gainsaying the fact that every member of any meeting regardless of whether they are members of its executive committee or ordinary members have equal stake in their progress and the contribution of one and all is needed for the actualization of the set goals for the common good of their members and invariably of the society that they live in which is the way by which meetings or associations serve as veritable means of communication in society.

Recommendations

The following awareness and attitudes could be helpful in guiding particularly the floor members of meetings to participate actively and aid their associations or unions make the best decision for the achievement of desired goals:

- Floor members should realise that they have equal stake in the success of their association which needs to be demonstrated in many ways including attending meeting regularly, promptly, staying to the end and making logical contributions among other responsibilities.
- If floor members of an association observe any wrong doing or are unhappy with any development, rather than going behind to discuss or complain about such, they should endeavour to bring them up on the floor of the house so that such matters could be nipped in the bud. Otherwise, such matters might eventually get to the ears of the concerned distorted which could lead to causing more harm than good as well as being an embarrassment and bad blood among the parties. Even when such is not the case, speaking behind the meeting would not bring about a solution to the matter of the complaint.
- Members should be more willing to accept any task assigned to them rather than the outright rejection of such because, oftentimes, when one member rejects a task, it becomes difficult for others to accept to perform the same task. To this end, leaders should carefully select the people to assign specific tasks by making sure that anyone selected is capable of undertaking the task.
- The people assigned to carry out tasks should request to be adequately mobilized financially or otherwise, like requesting to be assigned more hands or allowed more time if necessary to facilitate the successful execution of the tasks.

- Ordinary meeting members should always have the consciousness that power is rotational; they could also be members of the executive committee someday and treat those who are at present well and give them their utmost cooperation so that when it is their turn, they too would likewise be well treated and cooperated with as it is said that one good turn deserves another!
- Every meeting member must be guided by all the items of their constitution so that nobody would seem to be above the law. To this end, the practice of humility by one and all could go a very long way in making every member of associations or unions tolerant of all the other members for a harmonious coexistence that enhances meeting success.
- The standing orders or constitution of meetings should be reviewed from time to time as the need arises so that they remain relevant to the achievement of set goals. For instance, amounts of money assigned to the different aspects of welfare tied to specific amounts of cash easily have the need for upward review because of inflation and other reasons.
- There should be no show of partiality or favoritism by any meeting leaders or others in any way in order to maintain the trust of all members for their overall success. When anyone in a meeting is found to have favourites, other members become uncomfortable around him which does not enhance the needed unity and progress of meetings.
- Every meeting leadership should ensure proper records keeping especially of her finances and give constant reports or updates to the house as stipulated by their standing orders or constitution so that everyone understands how much money is being realised and how it is expended. To this end, having an open door policy where everyone if in doubt could ask questions and be clarified could also go a long way in keeping the peace. No information concerning the income and expenditure of the meeting should be left to chance.
- During any election, ordinary meeting members should not allow themselves to be guided by sentiments, otherwise, they would end up making very costly mistakes that could take a long time to correct if at all such mistakes are correctable and also live the guilt of what has gone wrong.

REFERENCES

- Forsyth, D. R. (2006). 'Effective group meetings and decision making'. *Working for peace: A handbook of practical psychology and other tools*. In R. A. Macnail ("Ed") 88-97. Impact Publishers.
- Heller, R. & Hindle, T. (1998). *Essential Manager's Manual*. Dorling Kindersley Limited.
- Kevin, E, (2019, April 30). Four ways to make your meetings effective. <http://blog.kevineikenberry.com>
- Keyser, J. (2019, April 4). The Importance of effective meetings. <http://www.commonsenseleadership>
- NA (2017). The 4 important Meeting roles. www.freeconference.com
- Onjewu, M. A. (2020). *Essential English for All Students*. Sunjo AJ Global Links Limited.
- Vellal, A. (2016, April 25). Communication - Key to achieving your goals. [.www.linkedin.com/pulse/communication-key-achieving-your-goals](http://www.linkedin.com/pulse/communication-key-achieving-your-goals)