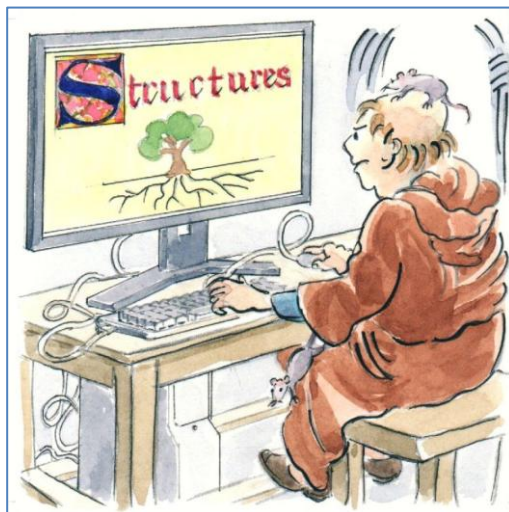


How to lead effective meetings

A DIY training aid



W8 Workshops series: Structures

This DIY workshop was first published on the website in August 2026. It is copyright © John Truscott. You may download this file and/or print up to 30 copies without charge provided no part of the heading or text is altered or omitted or you may adapt the material for local use – see below. There are also hand-out sheets for all participants.

This material for the leader/enabler takes the form of a DIY workshop for all who administer or chair meetings of any kind in a church or mission agency.

Its aim is to help people enable effective meetings with opportunities for exercises to put this into practice. It is, in essence, a write-up of my own training on this topic over many years.

Explanation for leaders and enablers

This material can be used by individuals but it is really designed for a Ministers' or church group with a leader/enabler, preferably someone who is not part of the host network and so not linked to particular people or viewpoints. It can be run fairly quickly over three hours with a 20 minute break or, more carefully, over five hours with appropriate breaks.

You may want to adapt what is presented in print here so that it better fits your local context. This write-up gives you a structure and a possible text to work from.

You are welcome to rework this for an event with some reasonable variation and without copyright restriction, other than to acknowledge source, please, and point to my website.

There are a number of practical exercises to take part in throughout but these can be selected from those given.

The material is based on a number of items on this website and these are clearly referenced so that you can check those out to give a fuller picture if required. There are also ten handout sheets for everyone to use covering headings and exercises. These come at points in this material marked with this symbol  and a handout reference.

There is another workshop that I have run many times called *Mission-shaped Church Councils* which follows the text of Article A24 on this website and this is described briefly in what follows.

1: Understanding meetings

Most people ask 'When?' or 'How?' when they should ask 'Why?'

It is worth going right back to basics and asking why we have meetings at all. The introductory exercises look at the advantages of getting several people together over one person making all the decisions, and what participants have experienced in how meetings can go horribly wrong with suggestions for the causes for this.

EXERCISE 1 *Handout 9*

In groups of three list and share all the advantages participants can think of for getting a group of people together to take decisions.

You might want to differentiate between in-person meetings and those conducted with the use of tech such as Teams or Zoom.

Then share the results for each group in a plenary session with comments from the leader for each suggestion. Meetings can offer wisdom, community, shared experience and variety of view.

EXERCISE 2 *Handout 9*

In the same groups share stories of what people have seen going wrong in meetings (with some care not to point the finger at other people in the room!). What might the causes be for each one of these? How can these causes be corrected?

Groups that meet include:

Think now more widely into all kinds of gathering when people get together to take decisions. Consider the kind of people, the number, the culture, decision-making, the room and layout in each of the following.

- A House of Commons debate
- A School Governors' meeting
- The Allotments Society AGM
- The family meeting over supper
- A church PCC or Trustees
- A 'committee' you are involved in

These differ significantly in terms of formality, membership and purpose. A church meeting may often have a mix of 'business' people well used to meetings at work and those who have never been on a decision-making body before and for whom language of quorum, agenda, motion and amendment is completely new.

Consider the accepted seating layout for each of these settings. Ask what impressions the layout might have for the meetings. Take, for example, the House of Commons.

We return to seating layouts shortly.

The time-cost of a meeting

We shall try a quick calculation. Try this with a flipchart. Meetings can be very expensive in terms of time. Take a typical PCC or Trustees meeting of:

Inputs

- 15 members, say
- meeting for two hours
- ten times a year
- with one hour per person per meeting for preparation
- and half an hour per person for travel x2
- and a total of ten hours per meeting for central planning, papers preparation
- and two hours for minute-writing.

That takes up

$15 \times (2+2) \times 10 + 120$ hours per year = 720 people hours per year.

That may not be a problem but now look at the outputs (decisions taken, progress made, information shared, etc.) over the year and comment on whether the inputs justify the level of outputs.

It really is vital that we use meeting time effectively to justify its high cost. And it is the role of the Chair to ensure that the time in and for each meeting is well spent.

Hence this DIY Workshop.

2: Clarifying purpose

The purpose 🌟 Handout 1

Two questions to ask before you even start to think of the business.

Why does the group exist?

- Start your answer 'So that ...' and not 'Because ...' 'So that' pulls you into the future, 'because' pushes you back into the past.
- If you have any say in the matter, scrap the word 'committee'! Try 'Action group', 'Activity group' or anything that implies action rather than discussion.
- It is well worth including negatives. 'The group is not expected to ...' and then list issues that are worked on elsewhere. This will help you keep to big picture rather than defaulting to detail.
- Educate the whole group so all agree and understand the purpose. Keep coming back to the purpose to save discussions that go beyond the proper boundaries.

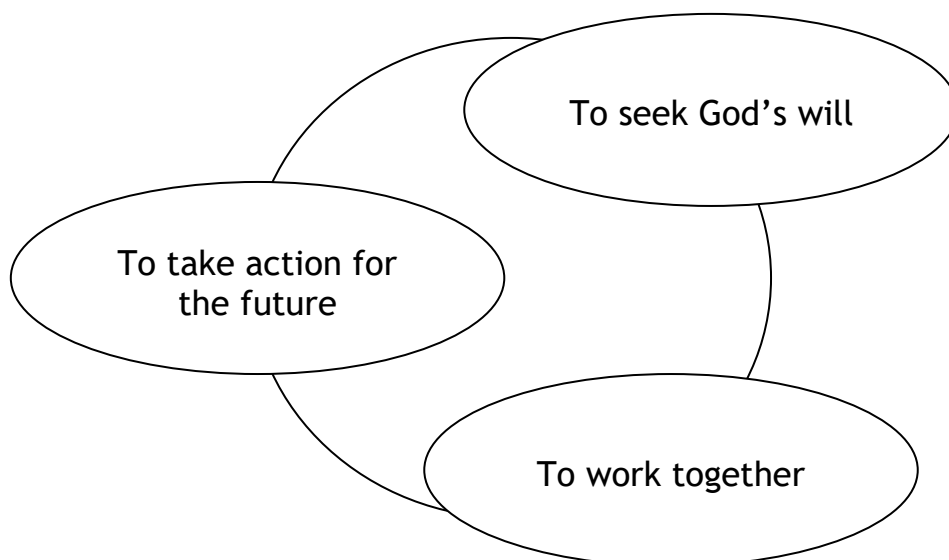
Why are we having this meeting?

- Because it is the first Thursday of an even numbered month? I hope not!
- It is helpful if the agenda can guide people towards an answer, in addition to listing the ground to be covered.
- An agenda is not a shopping list of headings. It should have enough detail in it to explain why you are looking at each item.
- The person who chairs the meeting should check the agenda beforehand to ensure it is what it should be.
- See Training Notes TN61, *Mapping out a meeting*, on this website for more on agendas.

So do not be afraid to ask the WHY? question about the group meeting and about each agenda item. If you fail to do this you will waste time on detail rather than big picture, and lose focus on what is required of you.

The three-fold purpose of any Christian business meeting 🌟 Handout 2

Here is a suggested set of three interconnecting ideas for the purpose of any Christian business meeting.



The leader gives a short talk on the three primary purposes in turn.

To seek God's will

First we meet in need of guidance. We want to fulfil that part of the Lord's Prayer that seeks God's will.

This means that prayer is a key activity before, during and after the meeting. It means not trying to win an argument but learning together of what God might want us to do.

To take action for the future

This involves taking decisions and being focused on what comes next, not just on what has gone on before.

The purpose of a meeting is not to discuss and leave it, but to work together to make changes as necessary and to move forwards.

To work together

But all this is to take place in a sense of teamwork. We meet because we can be much more innovative as a team than as single people.

EXERCISE 3 *Handout 9*

Take any recent church/PCC meeting you were involved in. How well would you score it for each of these three in the diagram? What might be changed to increase the scores?

EXERCISE 4 *Handout 9*

Select one or more of these questions to discuss.

What would be the practical difference if any group you are part of that meets for business were to fully work to those three principles? Note how radical the three points really are.

If you were allowed a fourth principle on the purpose of a Christian business meeting that was central, what would it be?

What part should prayer and Bible study play within a meeting? And what about before and after the meeting?

Practical issues for meetings to function well Handout 3

Once purpose is sorted out consider this list of practical issues, each of which can make a big difference to the effectiveness of meetings.

Timing

- 1 Time of day and day of the week
- 2 How people are feeling as they arrive
- 3 Length of meeting

Input

- 1 Introductory papers
- 2 Background understanding
- 3 Agenda design

Comfort

- 1 Surroundings: heat, light, air, sound, distractions
- 2 Furniture especially chairs
- 3 Refreshments and breaks

Equipment

- 1 Flipchart
- 2 Tech communication tools
- 3 Resources (including spares)

Layout

- 1 Formality
- 2 Equality
- 3 Sight-lines

The value of a flipchart

It may be lo-tech but a flipchart is a valuable piece of kit for any meeting..

Use it to draft formal proposals, summarise where a discussion has got to, what buzz groups were coming up with, or lists of all kinds such as advantages and disadvantages for particular actions.

Careful use of a flipchart can bring necessary clarity to any meeting. But nominate a scribe who is not the Chair of the meeting.

3: Building the team

Most people ask ‘When?’ when they should first ask ‘Who?’  Handout 4

We focus on the printed agenda for the meetings. But there is another unprinted agenda which we ignore at our peril. That involves building a team.

Purists will point out that you cannot have a team that has been elected as teams need to be selected. But those who form the body of people to meet need to work together like a team to be effective. Work at the following and aim to draw out the practical applications.

1: We live 365 days a year

The group exists all the time not just when members come together for a meeting. This view should challenge many people.

2: We love because we want to achieve together

Christian bodies that meet for business need to display the hallmark of the Christian faith. Love implies respect and we work *‘together’*.

3: We listen to each other, so that we can hear God

Everyone’s views are important and we seek God’s voice through what others are saying. Listening is a vital activity in any meeting.

4: We are led first as a team, secondly in our meetings

The group needs leadership and each meeting needs a form of leadership. Teams need leaders and business needs structure and organisation.

This then implies the need for a Team Leader whose role is to build a team. They may also be the Chair of the team’s meetings but this is a very different role and there is good reason to split the roles between two people, the Team Leader and the Chair.

Note: this is a radical point to make and needs to be explained. It involves people skills. The role of Chair needs organisational ability.

This DIY Workshop focuses on the role of the Chair rather than the Team Leader. For the latter role read Article A45, *How to lead a team at church*, on this website.

EXERCISE 5 *Handout 9*

Take any group that meets regularly for business that you are part of. A group becomes a team when the following conditions are met.

- 1: There is a common task and vision – everyone is aiming for the same big picture.
- 2: There is an agreed way of working that everyone has signed up to.
- 3: There is a committed and closed membership who depend upon each other.
- 4: There is an identified leader of the team.

What changes are needed for your group to operate like a team?

What might be the noticed difference if this were to happen?

An alternative event

Although I ran an event with this material or similar on many occasions with a title such as *How to lead effective meetings (HTLEM)*, a more popular event was one based on Article A24, *Mission-shaped Church Councils (MSCC)*, adjusted for Church of England churches to *Mission-shaped PCCs*.

I have decided not to put MSCC into my DIY Workshop format because the event was simply a run through of the website Article with a number of exercises built in. A skilled presenter could run MSCC given simply the material in Article A24 and I am happy for anyone to do this.

The main differences between the two events are twofold.

First, HTLEM is designed for those who chair meetings, MSCC is designed for everyone on a church council.

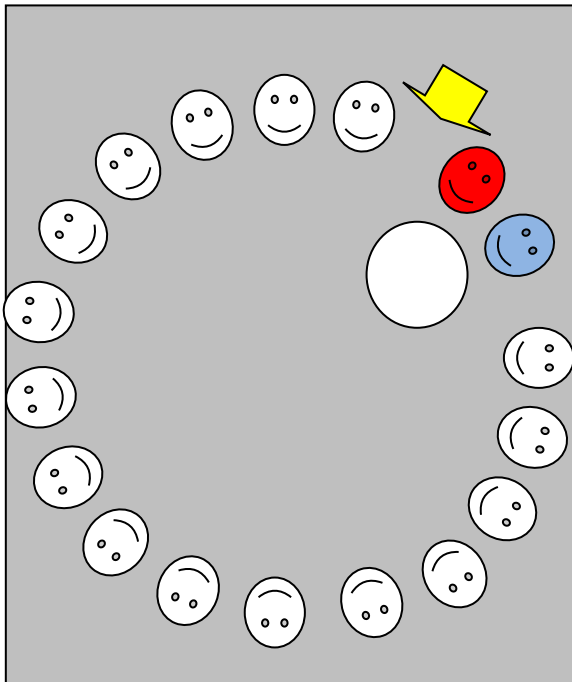
Secondly HTLEM’s aim is to make meetings more effective, MSCC’s aim is to make meetings more missional.

Article A24 may be found in the Resources section of my website in the Articles Index.

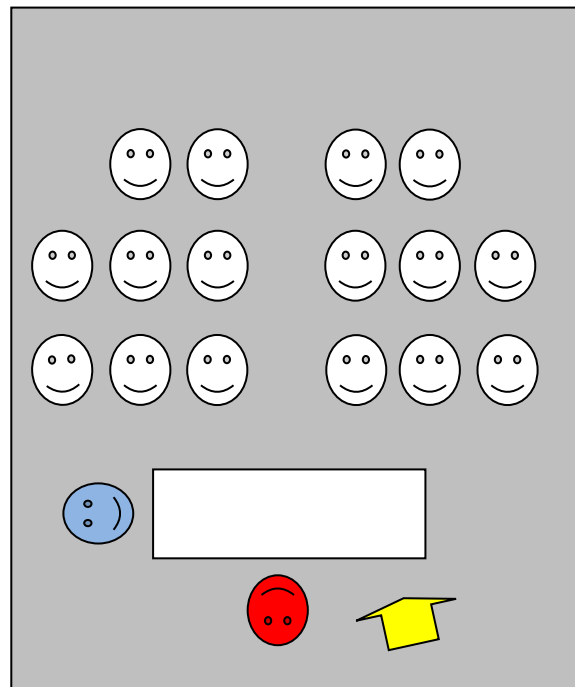
Seating layouts for a meeting Handout 5

Red is in the chair, blue is Secretary, yellow arrow represents flipchart or screen. What are the advantages and disadvantages of each layout? Would one of them work better than your present arrangements in your meetings? Which ones are good at enabling teamwork?

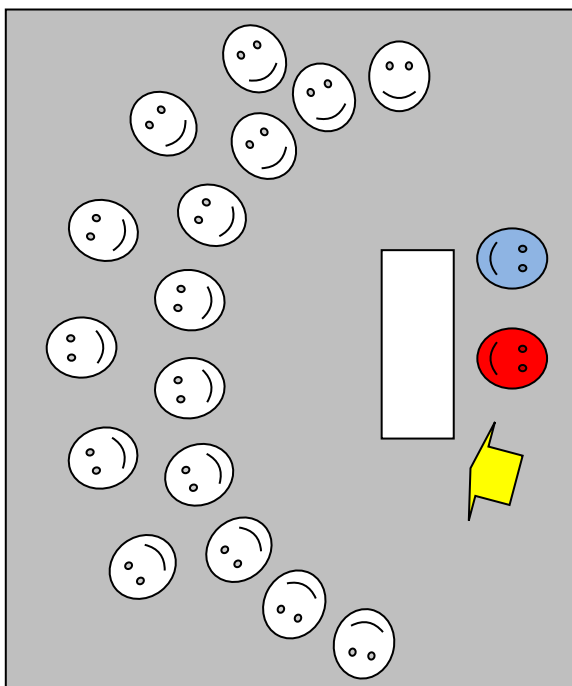
A



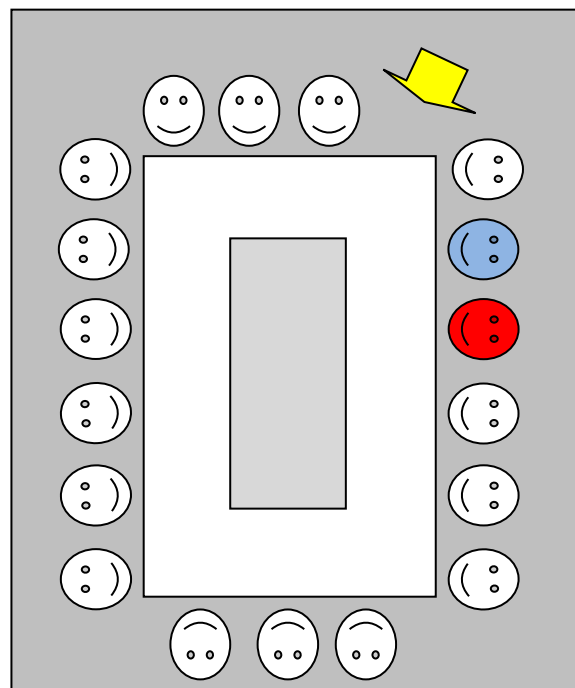
B



C



D



4: Sitting in the chair

This final section looks at practical ways in which we may chair a meeting. This part of the workshop is based on two website items. First, Training Notes TN13, *A purpose statement for those who chair*, and then Article A5, *How to chair meetings – an orchestral approach*. It is recommended that leaders of this workshop become familiar with the whole content of both these items which are summarised in what follows. They are followed by practical exercises in the use of one's body and hands.

A purpose statement for those who chair Handout 6

Here is a list of seven areas which a good Chair will pay attention to. Note the mnemonic!

THEOLOGY

Ensuring there is good theological insight available when necessary, but also ensuring that the meeting welcomes the attendance of the Holy Spirit.

Beware the danger of starting with prayer and then asking Jesus, as it were, to wait outside while the meeting proceeds, inviting him back again for The Grace at the end!

It is more important to pray immediately before key decisions are taken or when a discussion gets tied up in knots.

OVERSIGHT

When a group of people meet, someone needs to be the leader, clearly in charge.

This workshop assumes there are two distinct leadership roles, the Team Leader and the Chair. The team leader has a 24/7 role of building a team who can work together. But during the meeting the Chair is in charge and should be respected.

The Chair needs to be on the ball all the time. It is a role that calls for special skills in bringing out everyone's views.

CLARITY

Helping the group to know the answers to the 'Why?' questions, sorting out a complicated discussion, helping everyone understand.

Each agenda item needs a short explanation as to what the issues are and what the group is being asked to do: discuss, decide, or what. Then a complicated discussion needs to be summarised and clarified so it is clear where the meeting has got to. The Chair is also responsible for keeping the discussion within boundaries so the meeting does not go beyond its own role.

HARMONY

Bringing in all the members at the right times and helping people to listen to each other and to seek the same purpose. The meeting is not to play in unison but blend in harmony. The meeting should be a symphony not a cacophony nor a concerto. More about orchestras shortly.

So one of the key roles for the Chair is to enable everyone to listen to each other and learn from each other. This means bringing in the quieter members in a gentle way and not letting the talkative members hold the floor.

AGREEMENT

Bringing everyone to a decision which they feel they have taken, rather than having one imposed on them. The Chair is there to bring everyone to this point so a decision can be taken and is therefore watching the timing so that decisions do not get taken too quickly while avoiding unnecessary time spent on an issue which is not central to the point in question.

INVOLVEMENT

Ensuring that action is agreed and taken, with all playing their part. This might mean breaking the meeting into buzz groups for five minutes to enable quieter members to express their views in a small group

REVIEW

Helping the group to assess the meeting and develop their teamwork for the next. It is not normal for a group to review their performance but this is a brilliant way of building skill in meeting. What has gone well in the meeting? What could have been done better? What have we achieved? Where have we failed? If you want to improve it is essential to review.

For further details of these points, see Training Notes TN13, *A purpose statement for those who chair*, on the website

How to chair meetings – an orchestral approach Handout 7

There are four sections of advice, all linked to a symphony orchestra under a conductor. Note that there is a certain amount of overlap with the previous input but some repetition is helpful.

1: Prepare the symphony

Study the score

Your score is the agenda. Do your homework. Which items could be tricky? How can you bring the quieter members in? How might the timing go?

Gather the orchestra

Have you got the right people coming for each item? Do you need to invite extra people for any business? Who are your experts on what you will be discussing?

Rehearse the concert

Have you done all the necessary research? Have the papers explained everything people need to make an informed decision? Are there people who will be threatened by any items you are discussing?

Set out the platform

Have you got the best seating layout for the business in hand? And the right kind of chairs for some long items? Watch where people sit as they arrive: are some trying to hide, while others want to take control.

Check the recording

Check you have a minute taker. Do you need a flipchart? Do you have the minutes of the last meeting as some items follow on from one meeting to the next?

2: Attend to the orchestra

Tune the instruments

Ensure everyone is clear about the purpose of the group and the items under consideration at this meeting. It is your responsibility for everyone to have the correct big picture in view.

Send clear messages

Your body language must not go into relax gear. You need to be on top of each item and each speaker and people must notice that this is the case. Breathe some urgency into the business.

Watch all sections

Keep an eye on everyone's body language to see when people are bored, or angry or in agreement. Keep an eye on who wants to speak next. Observe everything.

Repeat key themes

If someone says something which is not clear to

EXERCISE 6 to break up input Handout 9

This workshop has argued that there should be two leadership roles for a Church Council or other body that meets regularly (see page 5). You need a Team Leader to build the team and a Chair to run the meetings.

It would make the position clearer if these were two different people, especially as they call for different gifts.

Team leadership calls for people with leadership gifts. Chairing calls for organisational skills to make the meetings effective.

Discuss in groups what the team leadership role might look like and then react to the following statement.

In most cases the Minister should be the Team Leader and not the Chair provided a gifted Chair is available. They are in a much stronger position at meetings if not in the chair because they can speak their mind. Building the team goes more closely with a Minister role. (And, yes, I am aware of what Anglican legislation says about the Minister being the ex officio PCC Chair! But they can hand over the role.)

others or even to you, ask them to rephrase it or do that yourself. Underline key statements and keep the meeting on track.

Show no favouritism

Your role is to be impartial so hold back on your own views as much as you can. Just as a conductor must not have favourite sections of the orchestra.

3: Select the tempo

Study the whole symphony

Studying the score is not enough. How does this meeting fit into the life of the church? Plan each agenda item in the context of the whole and keep the big picture in view all the time.

Choose the right speeds

Some items are straightforward and should be able to be dealt with without delay. But perhaps one item is going to be painful for some and needs to be taken really slowly and carefully. Just like a conductor of a symphony.

Keep the orchestra in time

Be very careful if you announce a timed agenda because that puts a value on each item. Better for you have aims for timing but not to make them public. But then keep everyone on time.

Avoid conducting from the keyboard

The Chair should aim never to talk for more than a minute and to keep his or her own views under wraps, at least in the early part of a discussion. The Chair has power – best not to overuse it.

Judge the concluding speed

Great conductors know how to bring a closing piece of music to a climax and the speed is part of that. With each discussion it may be better to close it at speed rather than letting it run out of steam.

4: Direct the players**Learn from the greatest conductor**

How the meetings incorporate prayer, silence and Bible input is the responsibility of the Chair. Be careful to avoid the dangers of leading the meeting with spiritual blackmail ('I feel God is telling us to agree to option C') or the 'nod to God' approach (a quick prayer to start, then nothing more until the Grace at the end).

Draw in those who are not playing

Ideas to help quieter members contribute include guiding them in when you know they have a contribution to make, breaking into small

groups, suggesting that people write down what they want to say in advance, or go round each member in turn with no comment from others allowed. If someone never speaks at a meeting that is the Chair's fault, not theirs. Make a special point of encouraging and thanking quieter members.

Control the wannabe soloists

You need to control those who have too much to say. By all means interrupt them if necessary, agree as a group some principles of debate and have a quiet word with such people outside the meeting. The next section deals with how you can use your hands to control speakers.

Retune those who go off-key

Some speakers will lead the discussion off the main point and you need to see this and deal with it at once. Phrases to use include, 'So the point you are making is...?', 'which part of the paper are you basing this on?', 'that is a point for another time – we need to focus on our agenda'.

Consider whether you are the right conductor

Chairing is a skilled role and few people are good at it. Perhaps you would be better as the Team Leader rather than the Chair. Make sure you have the gifts for this role if you are to continue in it. See Exercise 6 on this point. The Chair is not a status role but an enabling one.

See Article A5 on the website for a fuller text.

Using your body to control the meeting **Handout 8**

This is now the time for some practical work on the body language the Chair can use to control the meeting. The workshop leader needs to be confident enough to demonstrate the various actions and then give everyone the chance to try it out for themselves.

The Chair should be alert throughout the whole meeting, sitting upright in their chair and paying careful attention to all that is going on, (which is much more than just what a speaker is saying). They need to keep an eye open for people's reactions to what is being said and watching for group reactions and possible people to call to speak too.

Smiling at a speaker and nodding occasionally is a good way of encouraging a quieter member. Use a neutral face for someone who is saying too much and interrupt when you can.

Thank every speaker and ask for clarification on any point that you feel is not clear to everyone.

But the most effective way to control the meeting is with arm and hand. Elbow on table palm towards speaker to encourage them to stop speaking. A finger raised or both hands

together may be used if this is not working (try it!). Elbow on table palm raised gives encouragement for speaker to continue

EXERCISE 7 **Handout 9**

Have a plenary demonstration and discussion on how facial expression and use of hands and arms can control the meeting.

Try some demonstrations on what is suggested in the text here.

Obtain people's views on what can be done with specific speakers: (1) a very quiet and shy member, (2) a loud, over-talkative one and (3) one who goes off on a tangent or raises a pet subject or issue.



Resources

Here is a listing of items on my website relating to church meetings. Go to the Resources section of the site.

Note that there is more to leading a meeting than what has been covered in this workshop. These items can fill out the previous pages.

Articles

- A5 How to chair meetings* *
- A20 Annual meetings *can* be different
- A24 Mission-shaped Church Councils
- A40 Going deeper into meetings – planning
- A41 Going deeper into meetings – people

Training Notes

- TN8 Major decisions: a new approach
- TN13 A purpose statement for those who chair* *
- TN45 Are you sure it's minutes you need?
- TN61 Mapping out a meeting (agendas)
- TN71 Seatings for meetings* *
- TN97 How to minute a meeting
- TN118 Why, exactly, are we meeting?* *
- TN125 How to take major decisions
- TN128 Effective staff meetings
- TN147 The role of the PCC
- TN150 Prayer at church business meetings

* * This event contains a significant amount of material from these items.

This training aid is available at <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/DIY-Workshops-index> then W8. See also a range of other Articles and Training Notes listed in the text.

John's resources are marked for filing categories of Leadership, Management, Structures, Planning, Communication, Administration. File W8 under Structures.

John Truscott, 24 High Grove, St Albans, AL3 5SU

Tel: 01727 568325

Email: john@john-truscott.co.uk

Web: <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk>