Guidelines for organizing meetings & culture of conversation

The University of Graz actively strives to create an environment in which the diverse experiences, skills and potentials of our employees are valued and promoted as a key foundation for cooperation. Among other things, the university therefore attaches great importance to the compatibility of work, family and private life and is taking further steps towards an organizational culture that is sensitive to life phases and life contexts. These topics are embedded in the Diversity Mission Statement, the 2023-2028 Action Plan and the Equal Opportunities Plan 2017 pursuant to Section 20b of the Universities Act. Survey results at the University of Graz (e.g., "Work-Life Balance", "Psychological risk assessment") show that the compatibility of career and care obligations (in the academic field) in particular is a challenge for everyone involved. The organizing of meetings and the culture of conversation play an important role in everyday work life. After all, meetings take up a significant amount of the work day, thus several aspects such as professional as well as private appointments, teaching times, science-to-public activities, social commitments, care responsibilities, diverse working hours, and more should be taken into account in the scheduling process.

For this reason, this guideline pools practical suggestions on how to organize meetings, which benefits not only the participants wellbeing but also their commitment within the group. Further ideas and suggestions can be found in the video "Team diversity" (in German, but with English subtitles) by the AntiBias-Circle. In addition, the University of Graz offers services for all staff (see e.g., UniHelp on the intranet), for example in the form of coaching or team coaching services (intranet).

The following aspects can be taken into account when **planning meeting times**:

- Plan meeting dates on a **long-term basis** if possible
- Hold **meetings at times when as many colleagues as possible can attend** (e.g. including those working part-time or with care commitments)
- **Use digital communication tools** (video or telephone conferences) to enable the participation of colleagues who cannot be on site physically
- If appropriate, use **online appointment surveys** to arrange appointments (www.termino.gv.at is recommended as a data protection-compliant tool)
- Set meetings with a **clearly defined time frame** and, if possible, limit them to a **maximum of 90 minutes**
- If possible, choose **meeting locations** that are conveniently situated, accessible, and can be adapted to the needs of the participants if necessary (e.g., noise, light)
- Give all participants the **opportunity to contribute topics** and if necessary **communicate** these to all participants **before the meeting**
- Prepare meetings **as structured as possible** (objectives & expected results for the topics or agenda items, expected time required for the meeting points) and communicate this information in advance if necessary. Schedule **breaks** for longer meetings
- If **documents** are used in a meeting, **send them** to all participants in advance **in accessible digital formats**

Attention can be paid to the following aspects **during the meetings**:

- Meetings should start and end **on time**; if it becomes apparent that a meeting will take longer than planned, this should be discussed with all participants
- Ensure that **all participants have a say** in (important) decisions and can contribute their opinions
- Record important results in a **memo** and/or define people who will **inform colleagues who were not present**
- Make sure to take turns when it comes to **minute taking** (and **moderating**, if possible)
- **As a supervisor,** if possible and reasonable**, share your own opinion last**, otherwise the opinion of the employees could be distorted

"We treat one another with respect and appreciation". This and all other principles of the Code of Ethics and Conduct of the University of Graz (intranet) should be respected not only in meetings, but also in everyday work life in the interests of a positive culture of discussion. Attention can be paid, among others, to the following aspects:

- **Appreciative communication:** This is characterized by respectful interaction, regardless of whether you are expressing criticism or praise. Important characteristics of appreciative communication include a friendly choice of words, allowing others to express themselves, recognizing achievements, and objective, solution-oriented feedback.

- **Clarity and precision:** Thoughts and information should be formulated in an understandable, structured way and without unnecessary digressions. Misunderstandings often arise from unclear or ambiguous statements. It is therefore important to express yourself clearly, explain technical terms where necessary and structure messages in a comprehensible way.

- **Constructive feedback:** Feedback is an essential part of a positive discussion culture, but should always be constructive and solution-oriented. This includes formulating feedback specifically and objectively and offering suggestions for improvement.

- **Solution orientation:** Instead of focusing on problems, a good culture of communication can focus on possible solutions. Solution-oriented communication is characterized by the fact that it does not get stuck in blame or negative discussions, but instead looks for constructive ways to overcome challenges. This includes asking specific questions ("How can we do this better in the future?") and focusing on actionable measures.

This guide is based in part on the following articles:

Geisel, S., & Frohnert, K. (2021). Arbeitszeiten flexibel gestalten – Leitsätze für eine moderne Arbeitszeitkultur. In Klaffke, M. (Hrsg.). Generation-Management. Wiesbaden: Springer.

Rogelberg, S. G. (2019). *The surprising science of meetings: How you can lead your team to peak performance*. Oxford University Press.

Rosenberg, M. B. (2016). *Gewaltfreie Kommunikation: Eine Sprache des Lebens*. Paderborn: Junfermann Verlag.

Voß, E. & Würtemberger, S. (2023). *Vielfalt im Employee Lifecycle (S. 177-211)*. Wiesbaden: Springer