

## Dear AIB 2009 Interactive Session Chair:

Thank you very much for agreeing to act as the chair for one of the 200 sessions at the upcoming 2009 AIB meeting in June.

We are grateful that you are joining the giant network of volunteers needed to make this conference happen. The purpose of this message is to forward suggestions on how to chair an interactive session, drawing upon the advice of former AIB program chairs.

Let me quote Nakiye Boyacigiller:

*"The greatest responsibility lies with the session chairs, who can 'make or break' a session through his/her ability (or inability) to skillfully manage the time, presenters, topic and audience. The chair is like a conductor of a symphony; a good conductor can make beautiful music, even when the piece is difficult or the players less experienced. Your role is to be that good conductor."*

This is especially important as since the 2006 conference, the roles of chairs and discussants have been consolidated into the session chair. The role of a good session chair will be vital in San Diego especially in the case of interactive sessions. Interactive papers will be presented in chaired, organized sessions with a roundtable format in order to encourage discussion across the individual presenters. For each author participating in interactive sessions we will allow only 5 minutes for them to briefly talk about the key contribution of their paper. No formal powerpoint or overhead presentation will be allowed. We intend that these sessions will be genuinely interactive between the participants, including between the authors themselves. To achieve this objective (and to ensure that authors respect the brief 5 minute time limit), it is crucial that we have proactive chairs for these interactive sessions. While you aren't expected to act as a discussant as such, we would appreciate it if you can help to initiate a discussion. Here you can raise common themes that cut across the individual presentations in order to stimulate the discussion among participants. The brief author presentations should ideally be structured as a conversation (i.e. short interventions and highly interactive), not as a sequence of monologues. Therefore, in this year's conference interactive session chairs have a special responsibility, and I am particularly grateful to those of you that have agreed to chair one of these sessions for us.

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### 1. GET ACQUAINTED AHEAD OF TIME WITH THE PEOPLE ON YOUR SESSION

As session chair, you are expected to contact everyone on your session ahead of time – a good time to do this would be TODAY. The simplest way to determine who is on your session is to check the AIB Program on the AIB 2009 website at: <http://aib.msu.edu/events/2009/programdetail.htm>. *Please check the time of your session and make sure you have it penciled in your agenda.*

Please download the information for your session (you can COPY and PASTE the text into MS WORD) so that you can refer to it if necessary. You can download manuscripts by using the manuscripts' ID numbers which are written in parentheses in the detailed program. To download go to the website at <http://aib.msu.edu/events/2009/GetManuscript.asp>

### 2. CIRCULATING THE PAPERS AHEAD OF TIME

Please encourage everyone on your session to read the papers ahead of time, at the very latest, on the flight to San Diego. This way, each person can attempt in their presentation for a competitive session to link their papers to the other presentations, and in an interactive session they will be able to join the discussion in an informed way, making for a more cohesive and stimulating session.

I am sending out separate guidelines to the authors for all the sessions, but feel free to email any more specific instructions as the sessions do differ in length, numbers of participants, purpose and content.

### **3. BRINGING PAPERS TO THE SESSION**

Each paper presenter should bring 30-40 copies of a summary of his/her paper to the session as a handout. Not the paper; just a summary. The handout should be no more than 2-3 pages in length, double-sided with two pages to a side (that is, four pages onto one sheet of paper). No one wants to carry dozens of papers with them when they return home, but having a 2-3 page summary during the session can be very helpful to the audience in terms of understanding the paper.

The handout should present the key points of the paper. This could be the highlights of the findings of the study, or the Abstract, Hypotheses and Tables of Results. The paper title, author(s) and their addresses should be at the top, along with the session date and time.

These handouts should be distributed by you, the chair, and/or the authors before the session starts, with the extras left at the entry doors so that people coming in to the sessions can pick up the papers. Any leftover handouts, once the session is over, should be collected by the session chair (yourself) and returned to the AIB Registration Desk. We will have a table at the exhibit hall where people can browse through leftover summaries, if they missed the session.

### **4. ORDER OF PRESENTERS**

Since the roundtable format is supposed to be interactive and less formal, feel free to modify the order of the papers from how they were outlined in the Final Program distributed at the conference, particularly if you feel the changes would improve the flow of the discussion. We are asking that each presenter remains in the session in which they're scheduled throughout that session, in courtesy to the other speakers, and again to ensure a more coherent session.

### **5. HOW TO EFFECTIVELY MANAGE THE SESSION TIME**

The physical layout of the room will be a roundtable in the center of the room with approx. 10 chairs for presenters and session chair that allow for direct interaction and then an outer ring of chairs for other participants that are more than welcome to join the discussion. There will be no computer projectors in the room. The handouts will be the main visual aids used during the presentations.

All sessions are one hour and fifteen minutes (75 minutes) long. As I've mentioned already, for interactive sessions I propose that you allow presenters only 5 minutes to briefly outline the key contribution of their paper. There will be up to 8 papers in interactive sessions, but since these sessions are intended to be genuinely interactive in nature (between all the participants), and to ensure feedback to authors, I suggest that you keep speakers to 5 minutes in interactive sessions even when there are less than 8 papers. Also, it is important in these interactive sessions that the discussion of each paper is held immediately after each presentation, or at the very least, after a couple highly-related presentations. That way we can ensure that we are fair to each author in terms of the time devoted to their paper. The total amount of time for each paper in aggregate (presentation and comments) should be no more than about 9 minutes where there are 8 papers. It would be 10-11 minutes with 7 papers (75 minutes / 7 presentations), and so on. Since time will be so limited in every case, I suggest not only that the 5 minute limit on presentations must be strictly enforced, but also that presenters be strongly discouraged from responding during the session itself to the comments they receive. Such comments are typically highly defensive, they add little to the discussion, and they merely reduce the time available for further feedback to the author, which is the whole purpose of these sessions. If they wish to continue the discussion they can do so informally later after the close of the session, and during one of the breaks.

Therefore, please do enforce the time limits we have proposed for each type of session. That is, do not let a speaker run on and take time away from the speakers that follow, or from the feedback that they themselves will receive. Please do not put your speakers in the untenable situation in which the time for the session is up and others need the room, but your session hasn't yet been completed (you will be asked to leave the room at that point!) – watch the clock to see that everyone gets their fair share of the time, and the session can be concluded in good order.

Carry a small clock or stopwatch with you and two or three single sheets of paper. You can let the authors know when they have 2 minutes left, and when their time is up by writing warnings on the sheets of paper and showing them to the author. Tell the speakers ahead of time to watch for these sheets, and that we absolutely expect them to stop when the STOP sign is held up.

When in doubt about the time, tend to err in favor of Q&A from the audience.

## **6. HOW TO START A SESSION**

As chair, it is up to you to start the session. The first thing is to start on time. This is often hard to do, especially first thing in the morning when people can straggle in, but it is important to start on time, even if others join the session late. The second thing is to simply introduce the topic and the speakers. Your whole introduction should take no more than 2 minutes.

## **7. AUDIO-VISUAL EQUIPMENT**

In interactive session rooms, there will be no audio video equipment. The authors are not expected to make a formal presentation, and as such they should not expect to find a computer or a projector.

## **8. OTHER SUGGESTIONS**


Meet the participants of your session 10 minutes BEFORE the session starts so that everyone can be introduced, handouts can be distributed, and you have a chance to tell them how you wish to conduct the session. Please try to do this before the session starts, to avoid having to do this in the time of the session itself.

It also helps to give your session members your room number in the hotel or a mobile telephone number where you can be reached should an emergency occur. If that unwelcome emergency does occur please let your session members know as soon as possible, and make other plans. Please be prepared for the unexpected!

Please see specific suggestions for session chairs in the Appendix that follows and has been adapted for AIB use. The Appendix was originally presented at a workshop on improving the effectiveness of AOM sessions at The Academy of Management 1999 conference.

I look forward to seeing you all in San Diego!

Best regards



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## **APPENDIX – The Role of the Session Chair**

\* Abstracted with permission from “Making AOM Sessions Exciting!” by Jing Zhou (Texas A&M) and Russ Coff (Emory). The report was based on an AOM workshop, August 8, 1999, Chicago, IL, where the panel members were the two co-authors of the report, Sally Blount-Lyon (Chicago), Michael H. Lubatkin (Connecticut), Karl Weick (Michigan) and Edward J. Zajac (Northwestern).

*Session Chair:* Chairs must balance the needs of presenters (wishing time to get their ideas across) and the audience to design and execute an interesting session. This goes well beyond being a mere timekeeper.

Chairs are not just timekeepers. How can they organize and facilitate sessions to bring out audience participation?

### **IN PREPARATION FOR THE SESSION:**

- Create expectations for how the session will be run. Do not try to establish these in the session once authors have developed their presentations.
- Make sure everyone gets copies of the papers (authors should also get copies of other papers if possible to promote a panel discussion).
- Get slides from the presenters and serve as a mentor to inexperienced authors. This is an opportunity to alert the author that the presentation is too long before he/she is in front of an audience.

### **DURING THE SESSION:**

- DO NOT give the standard boilerplate about time, and take up too much time doing it. Tell the presenters the “rules” before the session.
- DO start out with a few words about the subject matter of the session and how each paper will contribute toward exploring that research domain.
- Session chairs must shut down inexperienced or unprepared presenters who do not conform to the prescribed time limits.
- Create an informal “first-name” atmosphere in the session to encourage discussion.