

Chairpersonship: a not completely straightforward component of the executive committee

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The chairpersonship is the most important component of an executive committee.

What does the chairperson do and what skills do they need to have?

The full executive committee of an association is responsible for the association's business. It has the right and the obligation to deal with matters pertaining to the association and to represent it externally. This is laid down by law. If the articles of association do not flesh this out in more detail, the executive committee itself may organise itself and its tasks in a such way as it sees fit. For example, it may decide to introduce a remit system.

What is the chairperson allowed or obligated to do?

Unless otherwise provided for in the articles of association, the chairperson is required as a matter of principle to ensure that the executive committee is able to function and actually undertakes the tasks required of it.

The chairperson is the contact person for the outside world, and therefore needs to be well informed of all important issues, be able to provide information competently and must undertake representation functions. The chairperson is required to attend events that are of importance for the association. If the association has an office or operations, the chairperson is usually required to be in close contact with the managers there. He or she will mediate between those places and the full executive committee, ensuring an adequate flow of information to both sides.

Generally speaking, the chairperson is responsible for running general meetings.

What is the chairperson's most important task?

The chairperson's most important task is managing the executive committee. This is a particularly challenging task. This is because an executive committee consists of members who are at the same level and are to be treated as such. All members of the committee are therefore equally responsible for association matters and everyone is expected to contribute. As such, this calls for a cooperative management approach. The chairperson does not have more rights than anyone else, just more or other tasks to complete. Running and preparing for executive committee meetings are both part of these tasks. This includes careful planning and providing an overview of the association's main issues and activities. The executive committee's work takes place at regularly held meetings.

What happens at executive committee meetings?

The executive committee discusses relevant topics and agenda items, makes decisions and allocates tasks. The chairperson plans the executive committee meetings, sends out invitations with the list of agenda items to be discussed and usually presides over the meetings. The chairperson checks which items need to be discussed and when, and which preparations are needed for these items to be discussed and decided upon. Before the next meeting, he or she checks whether items have been resolved and whether any agreement need to be made.

What else is involved?

The personal aspects of committee-related work are just as important as the tasks already mentioned. With this in mind, the chairperson is required to check on the well-being of executive committee and association members, as well as keep an eye on the general atmosphere. Is everyone included and happy? Is everyone taking on roughly the same amount of tasks and obligations? Are difficult topics also able to be discussed? Is there any tension, and if so how can this be resolved? It goes without saying that all executive committee members can and should ensure that the general mood on the committee is peaceful, but the chairperson is the one who has an obligation to do this. Handing out praise and encouragement can work wonders.

This sounds like an extensive list of tasks and requirements, and it is!

To ensure that this workload doesn't become overbearing and the chairperson can continue to enjoy his or her tasks, tasks should be well distributed among all members of the executive committee. And of course, the chairperson would probably also appreciate some positive feedback every now and then!