

More Effective Meetings

"Do or do not ... there is no try." *Yoda*

I don't like to spend time in endless meetings talking about stuff that isn't going to get anything done. I have meetings, but they're short, prompt and to the point. Eli Broad, Fortune 500 entrepreneur

Reality Check

I am on track if:

- our meetings achieve their articulated purpose
- we involve the right people and each fulfil their role
- we manage our time effectively, participants feel a suitable process was followed and there was value in their participation
- people are clear about decisions that have been made and commit to what needs to be done in the agreed time frame

Warning signs are if:

- lots of decisions are made in the meeting but nothing actually gets done!
- people feel the meeting was not of value - 'a waste of time'
- the right people are not contributing to discussions
- we think meetings are the primary way to meet a 'need'. Other mechanisms may be more effective and appropriate.

Things I can do to improve my effectiveness in running meetings:

- **First determine if a meeting is even necessary!** Ask yourself, what is the right mechanism to communicate this information? Can the same information be covered in a memo, email, report or video? Or a brief 1:1? Do the issues warrant exploration?...with more stakeholders?
- **Understand the basics of effective meetings.**
 - Think about what you need **before** the meeting - **planning and preparation**
 - Think about what is important **during** the meeting - **meeting execution**
 - And think about what needs to happen **after** the meeting - **follow up**

Effective Meetings : Critical Success factors

- Clear meeting purpose – with specific meeting objectives
- Agenda designed to achieve that purpose / objectives, within an appropriate amount of time allocated for achieving that result
- Right people in the room - timing, location
- Meeting leader to manage preparation, execution and follow up
- Opportunity for attendees to participate and contribute
- Opportunity for decisions to be made
- Clarity about what is to be done next , by whom + by when?

Things to do BEFORE the meeting - Planning and Preparation

- **Have a clearly understood and agreed purpose** – By the end of the meeting, I want the group to ...
 - Make a decision?
 - Generate ideas?
 - Have shared information?
 - Buy-in to the issue?
 - Leave with an action plan?
 - This helps to confirm the need for a meeting, to plan the contents of the meeting and who should be there
 - You may also have specific **objectives** associated with the purpose.
- **Decide who should attend the meeting and the role they are the play?**
 - Who's input do we need? Who benefits from attending? Who is responsible?
 - Who should chair / facilitate? Who should record results?
- **Determine an agenda for the meeting.** An agenda is a *process* designed to achieve some objectives. Design is critical - spend the time up front!
- When **designing** the agenda, consider the **results** you must achieve by the meeting's end. Also consider these **factors**:



- *Priorities – what must be covered?*
- *Sequence – what order should things be discussed?*
- *Timing – how much time for each topic?*
- *Responsibility – who is addressing each topic?*
- *Date, time and location – what is best for each of these issues?*
- *Other business - the possibility of needing time for unplanned issues*
- **Determine what preparation is required before the meeting.** What needs to be read, researched by various parties etc?
- **Book a time** when critical people can attend, and **book a room** suitable for the size of the group, with access to resources such as whiteboards, visual aids etc if appropriate.
 - If your meeting goes for more than 90 minutes, you should schedule a 5-10min break.
 - Consider if you need to provide food or refreshments
- **Circulate the agenda** well in advance of the meeting and seek feedback about any changes that are required. Ensure any information people need to read before the meeting is distributed in time for them to read it properly. If appropriate, articulate any preparation expectations...'Before the meeting, you'll need to...talk to ... consider options for ...have read XYZ...'

Things to do DURING the meeting - Execution

- **Start on time!** Take note of who is there. Don't wait for latecomers or recap for them - you need to build a culture where it is expected to arrive on time! Waiting doesn't respect the people who made it at the agreed time.
- **Reconfirm the purpose of the meeting, and briefly outline the agenda.** Check if there need to be any changes to the agenda. Make people feel welcome, communicate how the meeting will operate, and the expectations for those in attendance.
- **Articulate the roles** of people in the meeting, especially the meeting leader, and if appropriate - the minute taker & timekeeper. It is important to manage the

meeting well; guided by the agenda to achieve the meeting purpose. Decide if you are going to take notes about all things discussed, or just what is agreed and requiring further attention / action.

- **Limit interruptions** by asking people to turn their phones to silent.
- As topics are explored, the **meeting leader** should **encourage** the appropriate people to **lead their piece of the agenda** and **encourage contributions** from appropriate people.
 - Follow up any previous actions and take **note of new decisions + actions**
 - Encourage people to explore only **one issue at a time** and to be courteous to allow one person to speak at a time.
 - **Role model** the behaviours you expect of others.
 - *Consider there will be people with **different communication styles** in the meeting. See the notes on 'considering different preferences' below.*
 - *Tip : observe what is happening. Are you spending more time on problems or on opportunities? What impact is this having on team culture?*
- **Tune in to the 'vibe' and move things along / slow them down accordingly**
 - **If you are going over time** - call for a decision, agree to defer the decision or assign decision to a smaller sub-group.
 - Don't use the meeting time to conduct business that only involves one or two people – do this **outside the meeting**.
- **Summarise** what has been **discussed / agreed** before moving on to the next topic.
- **Confirm** who has taken away **actions** and **how / when** these will be followed up. Do not underestimate the importance of this step! Often lots of discussion and decisions are made in meetings, but these are not always represented by action once everyone leaves! End with a commitment to action and ensure it is clear who is responsible. (Fred, we've agreed that XYZ needs to be done by ABC. Can you commit to that? Is the time frame reasonable? Can you see any roadblocks we need to overcome? Do you need anything further...?)
- **Allow a Q&A session** at the end of the meeting - this is more efficient than random questions during the meeting.

- **Thank people** for their attendance and contribution, and **validate** if the purpose of the meeting has been met. Allow time at the end of the meeting to **review the meeting** itself and identify improvements for future meetings.
- **Adjourn** early if meeting finishes before scheduled end time.

Things to do AFTER the meeting - Follow Up

- Arrange for a prompt distribution of **meeting minutes** – capturing key decisions and actions
- **Follow up** progress on these actions as agreed. This might be in the normal course of business, or in another meeting. Ensure this follow up happens, and people are held accountable for their commitments.
- Put **unfinished business** on the next agenda, **follow up previous commitments**.

Using MBTI* knowledge for more effective meetings

Think about the **MBTI communication preferences of those who are coming to the meeting**

People Who Prefer Extraversion:

- Often answer questions immediately. They do their thinking as they speak.
- Are more talkative, energetic, and may appear more overtly enthusiastic about the topic
- Often prefer action to reflection
- May talk over one another, so may seem shallow and intruding to Introverts
- Like to explore a broad range of topics

Talk – think – Talk
Talk things through

People Who Prefer Introversion:

- Need time to gather their thoughts before speaking (don't like being put 'on the spot')
- Reflect and think before acting / speaking
- Want to know you before becoming self-disclosing
- Often wait to see what someone else says first
- Become drained and tired interacting with people so can seem withdrawn and secretive to Extraverts
- Like to explore a narrower range of topics in more detail

Think – Talk – Think
Think things through

Using

To assist people who prefer Extraversion:

- If you can, arrange face-to-face meetings. If that's not possible, use the telephone
- Allow time during the meeting for discussion, questions and exploration
- Be prepared for a discussion that covers a wide range of subjects
- Allow the extroverts to think aloud, and develop ideas as they are talking
- Be prepared for the extrovert to take, or expect, immediate action

To assist people who prefer Introversion:

- Provide an agenda and any written materials ahead of time
- Avoid jumping from one topic to another, and enable more in depth discussion if warranted before moving to the next agenda item
- Subtly invite the contribution of those not actively participating in the discussion after the talkers have communicated their views
- If an unplanned topic is to be discussed, allow brief reflection time before discussion to enable the I's to get their thoughts together
- After the meeting, document the key points / decisions of the meeting

Some risks to manage with remote meetings**

Meetings held with people that are not in the same room can be even more challenging. In addition to the advice elsewhere in this guide, consider the following tips for risks that need to be managed:

It is easy to get distracted / be tempted to multi-task / 'vague out' during remote meetings

Be explicit about these risks. Agree to

- Turn off other phones
- Commit to stay out of email
- Commit to focus – to 'be present'

Keep pace up, focus, ask questions. It is less boring to listen to dialogue than monologue.

Don't let meetings drag on!

It can be hard for remote people to know when to speak so invite them deliberately, espec. if some remote & some face-to-face.

Do a 'roll call' to solicit input. Make this random so people have to focus! (eg 1-2 people every 10 mins).

Consider checking in to see how people are 'feeling' during the call too.

Consider asking people to push their 'mute' button when not talking to reduce background noise

Have a back-up plan if technology fails