

## Meeting Skills

Meetings have the potential to be productive and efficient, but they can also be unproductive and time-consuming.

During productive meetings, team members collaborate within a set timeframe to achieve a defined goal. An efficient leader creates a supportive environment where ideas can easily flow. The net effect is "synergy," which occurs when the talents and knowledge of individuals combine to create a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. The aim of every meeting should be this.

Unfortunately, this objective is not consistently met. There are numerous unproductive meetings that result in significant time and financial losses. We have all experienced such meetings and are familiar with their symptoms.

- During team meetings, the leader may allow team members to speak at length, resulting in the loss of focus on the meeting objective.
- Some team members arrive late, resulting in the repetition of material for them and causing time loss, while punctual members may feel bored and resentful.
- The leader may prioritize the input of a few individuals, potentially hindering or excluding the contributions of other team members.
- The leader does not assign or record the responsibilities needed to achieve the meeting objective, causing members to leave the meeting unsure of their roles in accomplishing this objective.

Inefficiently conducted meetings have negative impacts on business as they incur multiple expenses. They use company time and money inefficiently. People may choose to avoid meetings, resulting in team members not sharing their knowledge and expertise. The result is a limitation of creativity among experienced members and a hinderance to the growth of younger staff members. It can also indicate that the team is unable to reach its full potential, as the collaborative advantages of teamwork are forfeited.

This session covers the necessary skills for conducting effective meetings, both good and great, while avoiding poorly led ones. The document provides three practical guidelines for creating and conducting effective meetings and explains specific meeting management techniques.

This session also explores the aspect of becoming an effective participant in meetings, which contributes to their smooth running. After completing this session, you will have the necessary tools for conducting effective meetings and participating actively in meetings led by others.

Meeting skills involve both running a successful meeting and being an effective meeting participant. In this session, we will be focusing on the skills required for running effective meetings, as well as providing some general advice on how to participate in the meeting

process. Before we discuss the guidelines for running effective meetings, please reflect on your experience with meetings in general.

## Action

Typically, it is straightforward to identify the reasons behind a poor meeting. Some common issues include lack of agenda, lack of control over the discussion, and going over the allotted time. Sometimes, it is not clear why a meeting was successful. Consider one or more successful meetings you have attended in the past, and respond to the following questions:

What made the meetings so great?

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What actions did the leaders take to achieve the objectives of the meetings?

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What actions did the participants take to support the meeting process?

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Now that you have written your answers, let's compare them with the meeting guidelines provided in this session.

## What Makes a Meeting Effective?

Successful meetings require thorough preparation and a knowledgeable leader. A good leader understands that effective meetings should adhere to three guidelines.

### **Guideline 1: Ensure that the meeting has a clearly defined objective.**

Participants should have a clear understanding of the purpose of the meeting and the tasks that need to be accomplished to achieve the objective.

### **Guideline 2: Please try to keep the meeting as short as possible.**

Participants should be aware that the meeting will only take the necessary amount of time to achieve its objective.

### **Guideline 1: The meeting should adhere to a logical and organized process.**

At the conclusion of a meeting, participants should have a clear understanding of the logical process that was followed and be aware of the specific steps required to achieve the meeting's objective.

"Meetings take minutes and last hours"

This joke is often used to highlight the common issue of meetings lasting too long.

The minimum amount of time required for a meeting will depend on its objectives. However, participants typically have a general sense of how long a meeting should last and may only perceive it as "dragging on" if it exceeds this expected duration.

A corporate manager became frustrated by lengthy meetings in his company. He decided to never conduct such meetings when in a leadership position, implementing a strict rule that none of his meetings would exceed one hour in duration. He implemented and strictly enforced this rule. The result? At the meeting's end, they cheered for him! It turned out that they'd long been waiting for someone to take this lead!

The following section will provide detailed information on each of the three guidelines, allowing you to understand how to apply them in your job and other areas of your life. Now, let's discuss a topic that may not be enjoyable for everyone - bad meetings.

We have all experienced unproductive meetings, haven't we? It feels like walking into a swamp. When facing challenges, it is common to have trouble, confusion, and slow progress, leading to a sense of wonder about the decision that led to this situation. After navigating through the swamp, one is relieved to have made it out safely and does not wish to go through the experience again. If you think you're the only one suffering through bad meetings, take a look at the findings of the study mentioned below.

According to a study conducted by MCI, a majority of professionals believe that more than 50% of meeting time is wasted. Additionally, 91% of respondents admitted to daydreaming during meetings, 73% said they conducted other work, and 39% admitted to falling asleep.

Source: American Management Association  
<http://www.amanet.org/movingahead/editorial.cfm?Ed=279>

These statistics are concerning, but it's important to note that these problems can be prevented. To prevent them and effectively lead meetings, it is recommended to follow these practical guidelines.

### **Guideline 1: The meeting should have a clearly defined objective.**

Prior to leading a meeting, it is important to have a clear understanding of the desired outcome and weigh the benefits against the costs. Here is a guide to determine if the meeting has a clear purpose: The objective should achieve something specific, indicating that a definite outcome is desired.

The meeting objective will be determined by the problem that needs to be solved. So, ask yourself:

- Do I want a decision?
- Do I want to generate ideas?
- Do I want to communicate something?
- Do I need the team's input on company plans?

This type of planning helps ensure efficient meetings. Additionally, it enables you to utilize your time efficiently.

### **Tip:**

You may want to consider not holding a meeting.

Does that sound like odd advice? No. Before deciding to hold a meeting, it is important to consider if it is truly necessary for the subject at hand. If the topic can be effectively addressed through a memo or email, it would be more efficient and respectful of everyone's time to choose that option instead. The purpose of a meeting is to share ideas and gather input, not just to deliver information to passive participants.

**Action:**

Reflect on the last meeting you attended that failed due to unclear objectives. What is the correct way to state the objective?

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**Guideline 2: The meeting should be kept as concise as possible.**

Wasting people's time is considered a serious offense during meetings.

Consider the impact of someone arriving fifteen minutes late to a meeting with ten people. This indicates that ten individuals have been idle for a duration of fifteen minutes, during which they could have engaged in productive activities. This equates to a loss of two-and-a-half hours of company time.

In addition to the tangible negatives resulting from this situation, there are also intangible ones such as resentment toward the late person, boredom from sitting around, and lost energy and motivation. Fortunately, there is a straightforward solution for time wasting: creating and adhering to a written agenda.

Agendas serve as organizational tools for both you and the meeting participants. When used correctly, they help maintain organization and punctuality.

Agendas serve as guides to help accomplish meeting objectives and do not have to be complicated. Typically, a meeting agenda should be kept to one to two pages in length. Consider the following factors when attempting to create a good agenda.

- Priorities – what items need to be addressed first?
- Results – What are the objectives for the meeting?
- Participants – Who is required to attend the meeting for it to be successful?
- Sequence – What order should the topics be covered in?
- Timing – How long for each topic?
- Date and Time – What is the scheduled date and time for the meeting?
- Place – Where is the meeting going to be held?

Once you understand what needs to be addressed and the necessary time frame, you can then review the information that requires advance preparation.

An agenda is a useful tool for setting up expectations for active participant involvement. Passive participants can negatively impact a meeting as most individuals prefer to actively

engage rather than simply listen for an extended period. Individuals may experience boredom, restlessness, or engage in daydreaming.

To ensure active participant involvement in your meetings, consider asking yourself the following questions while writing your agenda.

- What information is necessary for the participants of the meeting to maximize their time?
- What roles are expected of them during the meeting, so that they can prepare appropriately?
- Are they only required to participate for a portion of the meeting? Do they need to be included in the meeting's minutes? (Would they receive all the information they need from the minutes?)

For example, if you have called a meeting to address a problem, please inform the participants that you expect them to think creatively and provide solutions for that problem. If you are discussing an ongoing project, each participant should summarize their progress to date and circulate the reports among members.

Another method for increasing meeting involvement and interest is to assign specific topics of discussion to different individuals. Please indicate the person who will lead the discussion or presentation for each item on the agenda. This tactic helps to increase the participants' engagement and commitment to the meeting. In most cases, individuals will be motivated to excel and contribute to the agenda.

Earlier, we mentioned that an agenda can help you stay on schedule, but we neglected to explain how. It's easy. Use your agenda as a guide for managing your time. As an example, let's say that time is limited for a specific item during a meeting. If this is the case, then there are several alternatives available.

- Discuss quickly.
- Encourage a decision to be made.
- Wait to talk about it later.
- The subcommittee is assigned to discuss it.

**Action:**

Recall the last meeting you attended that was not productive for the attendees. What is the reason or cause of this occurrence?

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**Action:**

How could the use of people's time have been improved?

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Now, let's focus on Guideline 3 and understand the specifics of a "rational procedure".

**Guideline 3: The meeting should adhere to a logical process.**

Participants should feel that they have followed a logical method to achieve the meeting objective by the time they leave any of your meetings.

Additionally, in various types of meetings, it is important to actively engage with individuals so that they can effectively participate and make meaningful contributions to the meeting's outcomes.

Participation starts prior to the meeting itself. After preparing an agenda, it is recommended to distribute it to the participants and potentially seek their feedback and ideas.

This step is useful for various reasons, including the possibility that team members may have something important to contribute. One possible scenario is that a team member may recognize that you have allocated too much or too little time to a specific task, while unintentionally overlooking other more significant tasks. Additionally, a team member may suggest that some of the items on the list have already been resolved and can be removed from further discussion. Additionally, fresh perspectives can identify any omissions in the agenda that need to be addressed. Regardless of the reason, it is crucial to gather feedback from the meeting participants regarding your proposed agenda. Now, let's focus on the meeting itself.

To encourage full participation in the meeting, various techniques can be used to ensure that all team members contribute their knowledge and expertise effectively.

**Technique 1: If some individuals are monopolizing the discussion, it is important to actively seek input from others.**

Use these tactics to do it:

- **Seek input from another individual regarding the statement made by the dominant participant.** This shifts the conversation's focus away from that individual. An example is: "Jo, what is your opinion on the points Fred has been making?"



- **Ask the participant who is currently speaking to wrap up their remarks.** An example is: "Fred, you have raised several interesting points." Could you please provide a summary for us?
- **Ask the quieter members of the group for their thoughts.** An example is: "Janet, you have not yet spoken." What is your opinion?

## **Technique 2: After each important agenda item, ensure that everyone understands by summarizing the conclusion.**

Be sensible when summarizing. Use them only for significant or complex items, not for minor points that are evident to everyone. After summarizing the discussion, request confirmation from individuals that your summary was accurate.

## **Technique 3: Take appropriate minutes.**

As the meeting chair, it is important to assign a team member the responsibility of taking minutes, taking into consideration the circumstances and your own preferences. Please select a person who can effectively summarize and communicate meeting information in a clear and understandable manner for all team members. Minutes must be suitable. For instance, if the briefing notes are required for individuals who did not attend the meeting, they should provide a comprehensive explanation of the conclusions. If a list of agreed-upon actions is all that is needed, they can be shorter. Some meetings, especially those called to address specific issues, may not require minutes.

## **Technique 4: Observe the body language of team members and make any necessary adjustments.**

During a meeting, it is important to observe team members' body language in order to ensure their focus. If participants are displaying signs of restlessness or disengagement, it may be beneficial to provide them with a brief break. The saying "The mind can absorb only what the seat can endure" reminds us to take breaks when necessary. In a meeting, if one team member is dominating the conversation, it may be helpful to take them aside and kindly explain that others should have the opportunity to contribute.

## **Technique 5: Please keep the meeting focused on the topic.**

It is important to always keep the meeting objective in mind. Participants in meetings often deviate from the main topic due to their own personal needs and desires. It is important to remember that as the leader, they expect you to keep them on topic, whether consciously or unconsciously. Keeping the meeting on topic and accomplishing the stated objectives in an efficient way will earn you the respect of participants, even though it may feel challenging at times.



## **Technique 6: Please provide a summary of the meeting.**

I will be sending out the minutes promptly to summarize the next steps and inform everyone. This method effectively helps to maintain everyone's focus on the meeting's objectives and outcomes.

## **Technique 7: Handle the necessary follow-up accordingly.**

In meetings that are part of a series, such as routine coordination meetings, it is important to ensure that participants have followed through on their previous commitments. It is helpful to review previous minutes and monitor the completion of these activities in the next meeting. Without a disciplined approach, these meetings can easily become unproductive.

After the meeting concludes, it is recommended to allocate some time for a debriefing session to assess the successes and areas for improvement. Assess the meeting's effectiveness by considering how well the objective was achieved. This aids in the ongoing improvement of hosting efficient meetings.

### **Action:**

Consider the details of the most recent meeting you attended, focusing on the meeting process itself. Please answer the questions below.

What improvements could be made to the process to increase the effectiveness of the meeting?

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What steps would you have taken to ensure that the meeting was more efficient in terms of time management?

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## Tip

After each meeting, conduct an analysis of what was successful and what was not. Consider it as a form of "quality control." Inquire about the participants' preferences and dislikes and solicit their suggestions on enhancing the meeting process. Please implement the best suggestions.

We have previously discussed the importance of being an effective meeting leader, but it is equally important to learn how to participate effectively in a meeting when you are not in a leadership role.

## Being an Effective Meeting Participant

Before we discuss the qualities of a good meeting participant, take some time to reflect on your own by completing the following activity.

### Action:

Reflect on past meetings where participants, including yourself, have contributed to the success of the meeting. Please answer the following questions.

What actions did you take that led to the meeting being successful?

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What actions did other participants take that contributed to the success of the meeting?

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The key to being a good meeting participant is active and positive involvement in the meeting process. Here are three methods that can be used to achieve this involvement.

**1. It is recommended to read the agenda in advance and understand the purpose of the meeting.**

This act can assist in organizing thoughts before a meeting, allowing individuals to formulate ideas on the subject to be discussed and effectively express them when everyone is present.

**2. Please share your thoughts and ideas.**

Please share your ideas with other meeting participants when it is appropriate to do so. The company hired you for your intellectual capabilities, not just to fill a seat. Please provide suggestions that align with the goal of the meeting. Additionally, it is important to offer constructive criticism when you disagree with certain ideas in a mature and respectful manner.

**3. Please ask others for their opinions.**

Meetings ideally involve the concept of "synergy," where the contributions of different individuals lead to the development of better approaches to opportunities and problems than could be achieved by one person alone.

## Key Learning Points

To effectively lead meetings, it is recommended to follow three guidelines.

**Guideline 1: The meeting should have a clearly defined objective.**

The objective should achieve a specific outcome.

**Guideline 2: The meeting should be efficient and timely.**

Creating an agenda is essential for effective time management during meetings, as it ensures everyone stays focused and punctual.

**Guideline 3: The meeting should adhere to a logical process.**

Participants should leave the meeting feeling that they have contributed to the process and had a say in achieving the objective, rather than feeling excluded from a dictatorial decision-making process.