



DESIGNING
EFFECTIVE
MEETINGS

— AND —

MEETING
AGENDAS

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At HopeLab, we use these ideas and tools to tap the full potential of our meetings. They help us frame questions, shape agendas, and identify and reach the desired outcomes.

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MEETING PITFALLS TO AVOID

Meetings fail because:

- We don't distinguish the content (what we want to achieve), from the process (how we manage or facilitate participants' contributions).
- We view meetings as events, not as decision-making or problem-solving processes.
- People are not clear about the purpose of meetings or what is expected of them.
- People engage in discussion for the sake of discussion. They so enjoy the exchange of opinions that conversation continues despite agreement.
- We don't not allow each participant a meaningful amount of time to contribute.
- We are not clear about our decision-making methods.

KINDS OF MEETINGS

1. Information Dump

This meeting is used to convey information and clarify it. Be clear about the purpose of this meeting or the group will start problem-solving. Be sure to entertain only questions that deal with clarifying the information.

2. Problem Solving

The purpose of this meeting is to get all the information out so you can clarify the priority issue before making a decision. This meeting should go through the problem-solving process:

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| a. Identify the problem to be solved. | d. Generate possible solutions. |
| b. Gather data about the problem. | e. Evaluate solutions. |
| c. Analyze the data. | f. Decide on a solution. |

3. Decision making

The purpose of this meeting is to make a decision on a clearly defined issue. Often, a problem-solving meeting leads to a decision-making meeting.

4. Discussion

The purpose of this meeting is to "knock around ideas" and generate new ideas.

KEY QUESTIONS

Kick off your meeting with these questions. We find them helpful for clarifying goals and outcomes.

1. What is the issue?
2. How much time do we have to talk?
3. What is needed as a result of our talking?
4. What is the decision-making method?
5. What is the agenda (the series of questions we will answer) to discuss the issue?
6. Where will this go from here?

CHOOSING A DECISION-MAKING METHOD

1. Unilateral

Use this decision-making method when there is an emergency (e.g., the building is on fire), you have been charged by the group to make a decision (e.g., what kind of sandwiches to order for lunch), or the decision has consequences for only you (e.g., wanting a Bic Click or a Parker Jotter).

2. Unilateral with Input

Use this decision-making method when the issue isn't important enough to spend a lot of time on it, but you want to know what people think.

3. Majority Rule

Use this decision-making method when the group needs to make a decision, but it isn't so vital that people will not be on board if the decision doesn't go their way. This decision-making method is often used to move through relatively small matters quickly in order to get to the larger issue. Be careful if you have split votes. This might reflect deeper issues that will hang the group up later on. Use majority rule when the group agrees that the answer isn't important enough to work toward consensus.

4. Consensus

Use this decision-making method when it is critical that everyone can understand the reasoning behind the decision and live with it. Consensus does not mean that everyone agrees with the decision with the same level of enthusiasm. When buy-in is critical and group understanding of the rationale is important for implementation, consensus is the best process.

5. Consensus through a Work Team

Soliciting input from a larger group is less cumbersome when you appoint a smaller work team to get input from the larger group and reach consensus amongst themselves. In using smaller work teams, be clear: Who do we need consensus from? Our work team? A portion of the staff? The whole staff?

SAMPLE AGENDA

Agenda

-
- 9:00 Overview of the meeting context and agenda
- What is the context of our work?
 - What do we hope to accomplish today? What are our desired outcomes?
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- 9:10 What are the facts related to our issue?
- What are the trends?
 - What data do we have to support the trends?
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- 9:20 What do we believe are the possible causes of these trends?
-
- 10:00 What specific actions will we take to turn this trend around?
- What will we do?
 - Who will do what?
 - When do we expect to see results?
 - When will we meet again to evaluate our progress?
-
- 10:45 Break
-
- 11:00 How can we increase participation in the planning process?
- What are we looking for in terms of participation?
 - What are the barriers to this kind of participation?
 - What are the best next steps to move forward?
-
- 11:45 Wrap up
- What decisions and assignments did we make?
 - What is next meeting's agenda?
 - Meeting evaluation.
-
- 12:00 Adjourn

ACTION MINUTES GRID

Use this chart to capture the most important outcomes of your meeting.

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Credit: This document was originally crafted by Susan Edsall, organization and management consultant and facilitator.



EXPLORE AT HOPELAB.ORG

1991 Broadway Street, Suite 136
Redwood City, CA 94063-1957
Phone: (650) 569-5900
Fax: (650) 569-5901