

ADVANCED SKILLS

Chapter 10

EFFECTIVE MEETINGS

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The way we gather matters. Gatherings consume our days and help determine the kind of world in which we live. Gathering—the conscious bringing together of people for a reason—shapes the way we think, feel, and make sense of our world.

Priya Parker
The Art of Gathering

10.1 What You Can Do to Increase the Effectiveness of Your Meetings

ABOUT THIS TOOL—In most organizations today meetings occupy a significant amount of space on the daily calendar. The authors of this research report studied meetings in a variety of organizations to determine which factors resulted in meetings that were viewed as effective and a good use of time. It is interesting to note that neither the number of participants at the meeting nor the length of the meeting impacted the perceived effectiveness of the meeting.

APPLICATION—Follow these five rules to prepare for and facilitate your meetings.

Successful meetings can be identified by the following characteristics:

1. They had a written agenda distributed in advance. (Make sure it's doable in the time allotted!)
2. The agenda was reviewed at the start of the meeting.
3. Meeting participants were involved during the meeting.
4. The meeting facilities were viewed as appropriate, i.e., good table arrangement, good lighting and heating, lack of noisy distractions.
5. All the items on the agenda were completed.

Source: Peter Scontrino and Jevon Powell, Research You Can Use—Report #2009-2, April 28, 2009, www.scontrino-powell.com

10.2 Sample Meeting Agenda

ABOUT THIS TOOL—According to a study conducted by the Annenberg School of Communications at the University of Southern California, the #1 reason most meetings fail is the absence of a well-prepared agenda. An agenda is much more than just a list of topics that will be covered. Properly constructed, it will help set attendees' expectations for what will be accomplished, provide a reliable road map from start to finish, and ensure that all participants understand the roles they are to play along the way.

APPLICATION—Use this example as a template for your meeting agendas. Distribute the agenda a day or two before the meeting.

Making Meetings Work

Date | Time | Room

Desired Outcomes

- ✓ Individual concerns surfaced and addressed
- ✓ Characteristics of and strategies to design effective meetings identified
- ✓ Useful tools and techniques demonstrated and practiced

A good agenda will make clear what is to be accomplished together

Agenda

1. Welcome, introductions, and overview
2. What questions do you have about meeting design and facilitation?
3. What are the characteristics of an effective meeting? What can you do to have more effective meetings?
4. How do you plan and design an effective meeting?
5. How can difficult behaviors be managed during a meeting?
6. What can you do to improve your meeting management?
7. Wrap up, next steps, and meeting evaluation

A brief check-in will get participants familiar with one another and oriented to the plan for the meeting.

Using questions invites participation and gets people thinking

Review and clarify action items and accountabilities at the end. Improve future meetings by making meeting evaluation an integral part of the agenda.

Source: Developed by the author

10.3 Meeting Planner Worksheet

DESIGN

DESIRED OUTCOMES—Why meet? What desirable outcomes can we accomplish by meeting?

KEY QUESTIONS—What questions must be answered to achieve these desired outcomes?

PARTICIPATIVE PROCESSES—What approaches to answering the key questions will be most effective?

DECISION MAKING—How will decisions be made?

LOGISTICS

RELEVANT PARTICIPANTS—Who needs to attend to achieve the desired outcomes?

Day	Time	Place
Materials	Equipment	Room Arrangement

ACCOMMODATION—What accommodations are needed, if any, to enable all participants to engage fully in the meeting?

ISSUES

NORMS/GROUND RULES—Are norms or ground rules needed? If so, how will these be determined?

[Example: Ask clarifying questions; Listen actively without interrupting; Balance your participation, speak and listen; Encourage everyone]

BACKGROUND—What background information will the participants need to enable their informed participation?

PROBLEMS—What problems might arise? How will you deal with them?

Source: Developed by the author

10.4 What is Consensus and How Do You Check for It?

ABOUT THIS TOOL—Be clear at the beginning of a meeting how decisions will be made. Typically, seeking consensus decisions serves the group’s purpose best because it assures all voices are heard. The working definition below has served me well in a variety of settings.

APPLICATION—Share this definition with meeting participants where concerted action is needed as an outcome of meeting. Decide which approach to checking for consensus best suits the participants’ needs. This can be done on the fly.

WHAT IS CONSENSUS?

A decision you can live with following full participation.

THREE WAYS TO CHECK FOR CONSENSUS

1

State your sense of where the group is heading on a particular topic and ask for feedback.

“I’m getting a sense that...How do you see it? Any ways you might express it differently?”

And then test any revised statement with the group.

2

Ask a participant to state the consensus they hear emerging. Then, as in #1, check with the group to see how aptly the consensus has been captured.

Test any revisions with the group.

3

Go around the room and have each participant express their degree of agreement with whatever is being proposed. Use a 1 to 5 or 1 to 7 scale, such as:

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Oppose		Okay, Some Reservations		Strongly Support

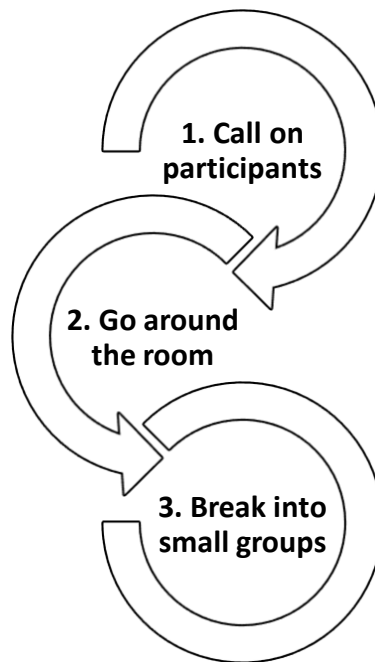
Be sure to have each participant explain the rationale behind their rating.

Revise the proposed consensus as needed and test again.

Note: Devise a scale that makes sense in light of the topic you’re considering. You can reverse the order, use emojis, whatever resonates with the group and fits the issue.

Source: Developed by the author

10.5 Three Simple Ways to Assure Full Participation



1. Call on individual participants, especially those who have been relatively quiet or overshadowed during the meeting. Ask: “How do you see it?”
2. Go around the room. Ask each participant to share their point of view on the topic under discussion. Encourage clarifying questions, but not debate.
3. Break into small groups and then have the groups report out. Pairs or trios both work great.

Source: Developed by the author

10.6 Tips for Handling Difficult Behaviors in a Meeting

APPLICATION—Study this list of difficult meeting behaviors, then practice the facilitation responses that resonate with you. Doing so will build your confidence in dealing with the problematic behavior as it arises during the meeting.

BEHAVIOR	DESCRIPTION	FACILITATION RESPONSE
Silent Partner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Quiet ○ Keeps to themselves ○ Unaccustomed to large groups 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Call on the person directly 2. Go around the room 3. Use written brainstorming 4. Use ground rules that call for everyone's participation 5. Use pairs or triads 6. Seat between two strong contributors
Immovable Object (Dominator)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ "I'd rather be right than successful" 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Paraphrase to confirm understanding 2. Ask <i>Why</i> or <i>Why not</i> questions to get at underlying hopes or fears behind the person's position. 3. Test other ideas against the Immovable Object's expressed hopes or fears 4. Say, "I respect your right to a strong opinion. Under the circumstances, I'll have to ask the group to go along with what's been decided. I'll take responsibility for it and will double-check it just to make sure. Now, let's get on with the next order of business."
Showboat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Lots of clowning and irrelevant patter 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Don't invite or encourage 2. Thank the person for the amusing contribution, then get back on track 3. Talk to the person privately 4. Give them a role 5. "Interesting, _____, what do the rest of you think about what _____ just said (or suggested)?"
Chronic Complainer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Usually alone in reason for complaint ○ Uses complaining to gain attention 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Check with the group, "How do others see this?" 2. "Tell us more" 3. Test for agreement among the group 4. "We've heard the negative solution, now let's hear the arguments in favor." 5. Structure a debate 6. If irrelevant to meeting, ask to discuss outside the group 7. If relevant, ask to discuss at a break or after the meeting.
Buzzer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Whispers and buzzes to person seated close by 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Call him or her on it 2. Ask a question 3. Bring back into circle 4. Put hand on shoulder – gentle touch 5. "Do you need something clarified" 6. "Please speak up or wait until others have a chance to join the conversation"

<p>Tangent Maker</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Gets group off the subject ○ Can be creative or exuberant person 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Bring the group back to the topic 2. Use a Parking Lot (a chart posted on a side wall to list topics arise during the meeting that are not on the agenda. Be sure to go to the Parking Lot before ending the meeting and ask the group what they would like to do with each item.) 3. Acknowledge what the person said, then move on 4. Set aside time for rapport building 5. Put the Tangent Makers topic on next agenda 6. Ask group, "Would you like to discuss this now instead of what we had planned on the agenda?" Go with the group's response. 7. Ask the person or the group: "How does what we're discussing right now help us achieve our agreed objective?"
<p>Heckler</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Heckles, i.e., "This is so stupid!" 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sit next to him or her 2. Put spotlight on heckler 3. Ask others in the group, "How do the rest of you feel about what _____ just said?" 4. "Let me hear some opinions similar to or different from the one _____ just gave."
<p>The Inarticulate</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Unable to state ideas clearly 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Restate and check 2. Ask if someone in the group could build on the ideas offered
<p>Data Miser</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Keeps good info to self ○ Self-conscious about appearing too smart or too good to peers ○ Fears being hung with more work 	<p>Ask them for their opinion or experience rather than put them on the spot for information.</p>
<p>Eager Helper</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Wants to help – probably for recognition 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Give specific job to do (lights, hanging charts, etc.) 2. Don't over-use 3. Thank them genuinely

Source: Developed by the author

10.7 What to Do in Each Stage of a Group's Development

ABOUT THIS TOOL—The Forming—Storming—Norming—Performing¹ group development model helps make sense of the natural evolution of groups over time.

APPLICATION—Use this chart to plan your meeting in light of the stage applicable to the group.

FORMING = confusion + uncertainty Slow down to go fast.		STORMING = debate, competition, noise You can't skip puberty!	
<p>Who are the people on this team?</p> <p>Will I be accepted or rejected here?</p> <p>Will I feel pressured or pushed?</p> <p>How important will I be?</p> <p>What role am I going to play?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Plan ahead with a good agenda distributed early ▪ Take time for personal introductions ▪ Have team members express their hopes and concerns for the project and group ▪ Talk about how you want to work together ▪ Openly acknowledge that a period of confusion often accompanies the start of a project ▪ Build in time to evaluate the meeting 	<p>Why are others not seeing things the way I do?</p> <p>Will I be able to work with these people?</p> <p>How will we ever get the task done?</p> <p>Why are some people arguing so much?</p> <p>Why are we competing instead of working together?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Listen, listen, listen ▪ Structure discussions so everyone is heard ▪ Reframe conflict as an opportunity to use energy constructively ▪ Begin focusing on the next few steps with a short-term action plan
NORMING = clarity, consensus Write it down!		PERFORMING = problem solving & focus Leverage performing into learning.	
<p>Where are we headed?</p> <p>How will we work together?</p> <p>How will we make decisions?</p> <p>How will we stay in touch?</p> <p>Will everyone live up to their commitments?</p> <p>Am I respected and valued by the group?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Test for consensus and understanding [Tool 10.3] ▪ Circulate rough drafts to get agreement on assignments, goals, timelines ▪ Consider a team charter [Tool 10.7] ▪ Structure sessions to help one another ▪ Keep a record of decisions ▪ Make team processes visual ▪ Celebrate progress by doing something fun together 	<p>What are people counting on me to do?</p> <p>Will everyone else live up to their commitments?</p> <p>Can we really deliver on time, on budget, and with quality work?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Recognize what is working well and what could be improved in tasks, processes, relationships ▪ Help one another visualize the outcome ▪ Develop processes for monitoring progress and anticipating problems ▪ Welcome data, even if it's negative ▪ Encourage constructive conflict ▪ Ask the team what is being learned that can be applied in this group or other groups ▪ Be sure the voice of all team members is heard

Source: Unknown

¹ Bruce W. Tuckman, "Developmental Sequence in Small Groups", Psychological Bulletin 63, (1965)

10.8 Team Member Rights and Responsibilities

ABOUT THIS TOOL—Mutual accountability is key to productive teams, those that reliably meet their commitments with quality work. Mutual agreement is central to project charters, the aim of which is supporting smooth operation and problem-solving among diverse teams representing multiple agencies and organizations.

APPLICATION—Share, discuss, and revise this list with the teams you lead and those of which you are a member. Periodically use it to see how the team is doing in relation to the mutual commitments this list represents.

1. You have the right to know what is happening on the project.

You have the responsibility to keep others informed of what you are doing.

2. You have the right to rely on other team members to meet their commitments.

You have the responsibility to meet your commitments.

3. You have the right to raise issues about the project that concern you.

You have the responsibility to listen to those who express their concerns.

4. You have the right to say no to someone who makes a commitment for you without checking with you first.

You have the responsibility to let others know what you expect of them and how they are doing.

5. You have the right to have adequate resources to do your job well.

You have the responsibility to do your job well.

6. You have the right to be treated with honesty and respect.

You have the responsibility to treat others with honesty and respect.

7. You have the right to share the glory of the team's success.

You have the responsibility to make the team's efforts successful.

Source: Unknown