



Managing Meetings Training Course

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1 - Hold Effective Meetings

- (a) Have a clear objective
- (b) Have the right people attend
- (c) Prepare for the meeting
 - Venue
 - Agenda
 - Timing
- (d) Have an effective chairperson
- (e) Record and evaluate results



2 - Chairing a Meeting

- (a) Be prepared
- (b) Manage the meeting and agenda
- (c) Get balance between participation and control
- (d) Ask for clarification
- (e) Focus discussion on disagreements
- (f) Act as gatekeepers
- (g) Listen
- (h) Contain digression
- (i) Summarise
- (j) Test for consensus
- (k) End the discussion
- (l) Constantly evaluate the process



Recipe for Successful Meetings

1. Clarity in Goals

A meeting works best when everyone understands its purpose and goals. If there is confusion or disagreement, they work to resolve the issues.

Ideally the group:

- Agrees on its mission, or works together to resolve disagreement;
- Sees the mission as workable or, if necessary, narrows the mission to a workable size;
- Has a clear vision and can progress steadily toward its goal;
- Is clear about the larger project goals and about the purpose of individual steps, meetings, discussion, and decisions.

Indicators of potential trouble

- Frequent switches in directions
- Frequent arguments about what the group should do next
- Feelings that the project is too big or inappropriate
- Frustration at lack of progress
- Excessive questioning of each decision or action taken
- Floundering.



2. Clearly Defined Roles

Meetings operate most efficiently if they tap everyone's talents, and all members understand their duties and know who is responsible for what issues and tasks.

Ideally, the group:

- Has formally designated roles (all members know what is expected of everyone, especially the leader, facilitator, chair).
- Understands which roles belong to one person and which are shared, and how the shared roles are switched (for instance, using an agreed-upon procedure to rotate the job of meeting facilitator).
- Uses each member's talents, and involves everyone in group activities so no one feels left out or taken advantage of (for example, not always having women take the notes).

Indicators of potential trouble

- Roles and duty assignments that result from a pecking order.
- Confusion over who is responsible for what.
- People getting stuck with the same tedious chores.

3. Clear Communication

Good discussions depend on how well information is passed between team members.

Ideally, group members should:

- Speak with clarity and directness (for example, avoid using questions to disguise statements).
- Be succinct, avoiding long anecdotes and examples.
- Listen actively, explore rather than debate each speaker's ideas.



- Avoid interrupting and talking when others are speaking.
- Share information on many levels, for example:
 - Sensing statements ("I don't hear any disagreements with John's point. Do we all agree?")
 - Thinking statements ("There seems to be a correlation between the number of errors and the volume of work")
 - Feeling statement ("I'm disappointed that no one has taken care of this yet".)
 - Statements of intentions ("Let's run a test on the machine using materials of different thickness")

Indicators of potential trouble

- Poor speaking skills (mumbling, rambling, speaking too softly, little eye contact).
- Members are unable to say what they really feel; cautiousness; lots of tentative, conditional statements ("Do you think, maybe, that sometimes it might be that...")
- Everyone senses there is more going on than meets the eye: people's words do not match their tone of voice or mannerisms.
- Opinions expressed as facts or phrased as questions.
- Plops: statements that receive no acknowledgement or response.
- Bullying statements ("What you don't understand is..")
- Discounts ("That's not important. What's worse is...").



4. Beneficial Group Behaviours

Groups should encourage all members to use the skills and practices that make discussions and meetings more effective.

Ideally team members should:

- Initiate discussions.
- Seek information and opinions.
- Suggest procedures for reaching a goal.
- Clarify or elaborate on ideas.
- Summarise.
- Test for consensus.
- Act as gate-keepers: direct conversational traffic, avoid simultaneous conversations, throttle dominant talkers, make room for reserved talkers.
- Keep discussion from digressing.
- Compromise and be creative in resolving differences.
- Try to ease tensions in the group and work through difficult matters.
- Express the group's feeling and ask others to check that impression.
- Get the group to agree on standards ("Do we all agree to discuss this for 15 minutes and no more?").
- Refer to documentation and data.
- Praise and correct others with equal fairness; accept both praise and complaints.



Indicators of potential trouble

- Failure to use discussion skills
- Reliance on one person (the leader) to manager the discussion; no shared responsibility.
- People repeating points, unsure whether anyone heard them the first time.
- Discussion that are stuck; wheel-spinning; inability to let go of one topic and move onto the next.
- Discussions in the hallway after meeting are more free and more candid than those during the meeting.

5. Well-Defined Decision Procedures

You can tell a lot about how well a meeting is run by watching its decision-making process. A group should always be aware of the different ways it reaches decisions.

Ideally the group should:

- Discuss how decisions will be made, such as when to take a poll, when to decide by consensus (are there times when a decision by only a few people is acceptable?)
- Explore important issues by polling (each member is asked to vote or state an opinion verbally or in writing).
- Decide important issues by consensus.
- Test for consensus ("This seems to be our agreement. Is there anyone who feels unsure about the choice").
- Use data as the basis of decisions.



Indicators of potential trouble

- Conceding to opinions that are presented as facts with no supporting data.
- Decisions by one or two people in the group, without other members agreeing to defer to their expertise.
- Decision by a minority.
- Too-frequent recourse to "majority rules" or other easy approaches that bypass strong disagreement.
- Decision by default; people do not respond to a statement (the "plop"); silence interpreted as consent.

6. Balanced Participation

Since every member has a stake in the group's achievements, everyone should participate in discussions and decisions, share commitment to the project's success, and contribute their talents.

Ideally, the group should:

- Have reasonably balanced participation with all members contributing to most discussions.
- Build on members' natural style of participation.

Indicators of potential trouble

- Some members have too much influence, others, too little.
- Participation depends on the subject being discussed (for example, only those who know the most about a subject are actively involved; others do not even ask questions).



- Members too often contribute only at certain times in a conversation or meeting.
- Some members speak only about a certain topic ("hot buttons"-participation only when the subject touches, for example, money or training).

7. Established Ground Rules

Groups invariably establish ground rules (or "norms") for what will and will not be tolerated in the group.

Ideally, the team should:

- Have open discussions regarding ground rules, where the group discusses what behaviours are acceptable and unacceptable.
- Openly state or acknowledge norms ("We all agreed to decide the issue this way").

Indicators of potential trouble

- Certain important topics are avoided; too many subjects are taboo; conversations recur that are irrelevant to the task and harmful to the group.
- No one acknowledges the norms; everyone acts as they think the group wants them to act; no one is able to say exactly what ground rules the team follows (for example, no cracks jokes even though it was never stated that jokes would be out of place).
- Recurring differences about what is or is not acceptable behaviour.
- Behaviour that signifies irritation; for example, repeated disregard for starting and ending times.
- Conflict over assumed norms or conflicting expectation.



Some of the key areas for ground rules are:

Attendance and interruptions - Meeting time belong to the group.

Problems belong to the group not to individuals. The whole group takes the credit (and the blame).

Participation. Every member is in the group because they have something to contribute. Some rule might be necessary to ensure that everyone get the change to contribute. An example would be taking turns to give inputs.

Value everyone's contribution. This means listening carefully to what each person says; no interruptions; and giving due consideration to the opinions and ideas expressed. Don't put down other members or their ideas. Ask questions instead.

Deal with one issue at a time. Otherwise the result is confusion.

Meeting roles. Who will chair meetings? Who will take the minutes? What other roles must be filled?

Ground rules like these cannot be imposed. They must evolve and be agreed by the group before they can be effective.

8. Awareness of the Group Process

Ideally, all members should be aware of the group process - how the group works together - along with paying attention to the content of the meeting.

Ideally group members should:

- Be sensitive to non-verbal communication, for example, be aware that silence may indicate disagreement, or knowing that physical signs of agitation might indicate someone is uncomfortable with a discussion.
- See, hear, and feel group dynamics.



- Comment and intervene to correct a group process problem.
- Contribute equally to group process and meeting content.
- Choose work on group process issues and occasionally designate a team member or outsider to officially observe and report on group interactions at a meeting.

Indicators of potential trouble

- Lack of reference to undercurrent issues, particularly when the group is having difficulty.
- Pushing ahead on the task when there are non-verbal signs of resistance, confusion, or disappointment.
- Inattention to obvious non-verbal clues and shifts in the group mood.
- Members attributing motives to non-verbal behaviour ("You've been quiet during the last 30 minutes. You must not be interested in what's been said")
- Remarks that discount someone's behaviour or contribution, or group process issues ("Let's get on with the task and stop talking about that stuff").



4 - Communication

This is the fundamental 'people' skill which we use to get things done and to develop relationships with customers and colleagues. At its simplest, it can be thought of in six stages:

- (1) Objective. Define what we want to get done.
- (2) Select an appropriate method.
- (3) Select the right people to communicate with.
- (4) Match the method to the people.
- (5) Get feedback
- (6) Respond to feedback.

We go through this process automatically many times a day. In general, we are successful but with some people and in some situations communication breaks down. This is usually due to us not adapting sufficiently to the other person (stages 4 & 6).

It is easy to check our success. Did we achieve the objective? If not, the responsibility rests with us; not with the other person - whom we usually blame! The key to successful communication is our ability to adjust our approach to different individuals.



5 - Barriers to Communication

- Personality
- Attitude
- Perception
- Bias
- Stereotypes
- Gender
- Age
- Status
- Emotion
- Jumping to conclusions
- Ignoring conflicting information
- Poor communication skills
- Peer pressure
- Interest
- Knowledge
- History
- Environment
- Timing
- Time



6 - Listening

For most people, this is their weakest communication skills. Better listening comes from doing the following:

- **Concentrate.**
- **Don't interrupt.**
- **Don't judge.**
- **Clarify understanding by asking questions.**
- **Reflect back.**



7 - Questioning

One essential skill is being able to ask questions. Their purpose is to get and clarify information. In general, you should start with open questions; continue with probing questions; ask closed questions to establish critical facts; and then summarise that point. Be clear about the purpose of your questions before you ask them. Concentrate on using open and probe questions but remember not to ask too many closed questions, unless the situation really calls for it.

Question Type	Purpose	Question Form	Illustrations
OPEN	To establish rapport	Contact	Introductory questions/comments to establish the first superficial relationship and to put a person at ease.
	To explore broad background information.	General	'Please tell me about?'
	To explore opinions/attitudes	Opinion-seeking	'How do you feel about?' 'What do you think about?' Making a broad comments on a subject and then pausing in anticipation of a response (i.e. the question is hidden)
PROBE	To show interest/ encouragement Supportive statements. Key word repetition Mirror	Non-verbal noises	'Umm? Er? Ah? Oh? Hmm? together with appropriate facial expressions (smiles, raised eyes-brows) and head movements 'I see ...?' 'And then ...?' 'That's interesting ...?' (i.e. tell me more) Repetition of one or two words to encourage further response Repetition of short replay as a query.
	To seek further information	The pause Simple interrogative Comparative Extension Hypothetical	Allied to various non-verbal signals 'Why?' 'Why not?' 'How does your suggestion compare with John's?' 'How do you mean?' 'What makes you say that?' 'What would you do if ...?' 'How would you feel if....?'



Question Type	Purpose	Question Form	Illustrations
PROBE	To explore in detail particular opinion/ attitudes	Opinion investigation The reflection	'To what extent do you feel ...?' 'Just how far do you think?' 'You think that ...?' 'It seems to you that...?' 'You feel that..?'
	To demonstrate understanding/ clarify information already given. To regain control	Summary	'As I understand it ...?' 'If I've got it right....?' so what you're saying is?
CLOSED	To establish specific facts/ information	Yes/No response	'Are you ...? Do you...?' 'Have you...?' 'How big a mortgage do you want?'

Do not use counter-productive questions, they are unhelpful.

Question Type	Purpose	Question Form	Illustrations
Counter Productive	To prompt desired answer	Leading	'I take it you believe that...?' 'You don't really think that... do you?' 'You must admit that...?' 'Isn't it a fact that ...?'
	To confuse or mislead	Trick Multiple Marathon Ambiguous	'Do you drink?' Two or more questions presented as a package. 'You did say you wouldn't mind being away from home occasionally? Oh, and you do have a current driving licence, don't you? I presume it's clean? And, er, by the way ...?' etc. Asking a question in a rambling, incomprehensible way 'What about religion?'
	To prevent respondent from saying anything	Rhetorical	Answering you own question. 'do you...? Of course

