

Member's Quarterly

Spring 2026 Edition

Feature

Making the Most of Meetings

Lead with total success

How often have you heard people talk about the time they waste sitting in meetings? Ideally, meetings are held because people need to come together for a specific purpose. Meetings are most effective when the right people are at the gathering, having robust dialogue around meaningful topics that enable decision and action.

The chair has the responsibility for setting up, leading and closing meetings. Factors contributing to meeting effectiveness include having a clear purpose; maintaining focus and effectively managing the agenda; having clear agreements on participation, communication and meeting etiquette; and transparent decision-making with details of the follow-up action required noted.

Clarify the purpose of the meeting:

Distribute the agenda in advance. Where possible, invite meeting participants to identify relevant agenda items that pertain to the topic to be discussed. Ensure the agenda is organized and timed, and items are categorized. Categories can include for information purposes, input, discussion, action or for a decision.

Maintain the focus:

Introduce the agenda and ask for clarification questions at the beginning of the meeting. Stick to the items to be discussed and ensure participants stay on topic. Use the 'parking lot concept' or 'list of future agenda items' for issues or topics raised that need to be addressed but are not relevant to what is being discussed.

Manage the agenda:

Be vigilant about progressing through the agenda in an orderly fashion. Keep to the allotted time to cover all agenda items. Encourage presenters maintain their focus and stick to their predetermined time limits. Check with presenters ahead of time to allocate the time available for sharing their content and allowing for questions either throughout or at the end of their content. Clarify the need to include time for questions into the overall allotment.

Outline the rules of participation:

Invite the group to establish group norms and rules regarding involvement. Operate by the general rules for meeting etiquette as set. Ensure all voices are heard either live at the meeting or by soliciting input before the meeting starts. Manage the dynamics between participants. Encourage meaningful contributions and encourage people to speak clearly and offer new information rather than repeat what others have said for the sake of hearing themselves speak. Manage over or under-participation in a way that respects the diversity of people and views being offered. Managing participation can be accomplished by inviting others' opinions, using statements such as 'would like to hear differing views' or 'hear from some of the people we have not heard from yet.' Do not put undue pressure on those who cannot effectively contribute on the spot.

Expect participation:

Establish the expectation that participants come prepared. Ideally, a meeting provides an opportunity for



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all voices to be heard. However, respect that up to 15-20% of the world's population is neurodivergent. Realize that not everyone will be comfortable speaking at the meeting, so use alternative ways of gathering their input on agenda items before the meeting. Invite email comments on agenda items ahead of time or check in to determine an individual's comfort level to speak to the item. Ensure their input is presented.

Remain impartial:

As the chair, it's essential to remain neutral. If the chair does need to weigh in and offer an opinion, do it in such a way as not to shut down others' participation. Ask questions to ensure understanding and invite contrary views.

Use inviting language:

Words and phrases such as 'yes but' or 'I don't agree' tend to limit or shut down participation. Resist the urge to weigh in in this way. Get curious and ask a question instead.

Summarize at the end of each agenda item:

Ensure a common understanding of the way forward. This can be accomplished by asking participants what they are taking away from what has been discussed. The chair can fill in the gaps if anything needs to be added to the summary.

Identify the action to be taken as a result of a decision:

Identify the action to be taken by clarifying the 'who, what and by when' for each action decided. Identify supports or resources required to action the decision.

Summarize at the end of the meeting:

Ensure all agenda items have been addressed. Note the items that require additional discussion and those to be added to a new agenda.

Evaluate the meeting's effectiveness:

Develop and use a tool that allows for evaluating the meeting's effectiveness. Consider separate chair and participant evaluations. Look for and implement improvement opportunities.

Hosting effective and productive meetings is an excellent way to respect employees' time and contribute to workload management and workplace effectiveness. Chairing meetings requires more than presiding over a get-together to chat about things. Developing the skill to lead meetings is a vital management skill.

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