



EFFECTIVE MEETINGS

An effective agenda sets clear expectations for what needs to occur before and during a meeting. It helps team members prepare, allocates time wisely, quickly gets everyone on the same topic, and identifies when the discussion is complete.

So, what makes a meeting effective? This really boils down to three things:

Seek input from team members. If you want your team to be engaged in meetings, make sure the agenda includes items that reflect their needs. Ask team members to suggest agenda items along with a reason why each item needs to be addressed in team setting.

Select topics that affect the entire team.

List agenda topics as questions the team needs to answer - A question enables team members to better prepare for the discussion and to monitor whether their own and others' comments are on track. Note whether the purpose of the topic is to share information, seek input for a decision, or make a decision.

Estimate a realistic amount of time for each topic - This serves two purposes.

First, it requires you to do the math — to calculate how much time the team will need for introducing the topic, answering questions, resolving different points of view, generating potential solutions, and agreeing on the action items that follow from discussion and decisions.

Second, the estimated time enables team members to either adapt their comments to fit within the allotted timeframe or to suggest that more time may be needed. The purpose of listing the time is not to stop discussion when the time has elapsed, the purpose is to get better at allocating enough time for the team to effectively and efficiently answer the questions before it.

Propose a process for addressing each agenda item. The process identifies the steps through which the team will move together to complete the discussion or make a decision. Agreeing on a process significantly increases meeting effectiveness, yet leaders rarely do it.

The process for addressing an topic/item should appear on the written agenda. When you reach that topic/item during the meeting, explain the process and seek agreement: "I suggest we use the following process. First, let's take about 10 minutes to get all the relevant information on the table. Second, let's take another 10 minutes to identify and agree on any assumptions we need to make. Third, we'll take another 10 minutes to identify and agree on the interests that should be met for any solution. Finally, we'll use about 15 minutes to craft a solution that ideally takes into account all the interests, and is consistent with our relevant information and assumptions. Any suggestions for improving this process?"

Identify who is responsible for leading each topic. Someone other than the formal meeting leader is often responsible for leading the discussion of a particular agenda item.



The Meeting's Objective - an effective meeting serves a useful purpose. This means that in it, you achieve a desired outcome. For a meeting to meet this outcome, or objective, you have to be clear about what it is.

- Do you want a decision?
- Do you want to generate ideas?
- Are you getting status reports?
- Are you communicating something?
- Are you making plans?

Any of these, and a myriad of others, is an example of a meeting objective. Before you do any meeting planning, you need to focus your objective. To help you determine what your meeting objective is, complete this sentence:

At the close of the meeting, I want the group to ...

Make the first topic "review and modify agenda as needed." Even if you and your team have jointly developed the agenda before the meeting, take a minute to see if anything needs to be changed due to late breaking events.

End the meeting with a plus/delta. If your team meets regularly, two questions form a simple continuous improvement process: What did we do well? What do we want to do differently for the next meeting? Investing five or ten minutes will enable the team to improve performance, working relationships, and team member satisfaction. Here are some questions to consider when identifying what the team has done well and what it wants to do differently:

Was the agenda distributed in time for everyone to prepare?

- How well did team members prepare for the meeting?
- How well did we estimate the time needed for each agenda item?
- How well did we allocate our time for decision making and discussion?
- How well did everyone stay on-topic? How well did team members speak up when they thought someone was off-topic?
- How effective was the process for each agenda item?



AGENDA			
<i>Date:</i>	<i>Time:</i>	<i>Duration:</i>	<i>Place:</i>
MEETING PURPOSE			

<i>Topic / Item</i>	<i>Time Allocated (Minutes)</i>	<i>Proposed process Leader</i>	<i>Topic Leader</i>	<i>Objective</i>
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				