

Meeting Logistics

Meeting Logistics are the 'glue' that can hold a team together. Having consistent procedures for how team meetings are conducted assists all team members in knowing how to interact, gets items to the Team for discussion and action, and how to actively participate in the planning and work of the Team. Using a few of these tools, processes and strategies, everyone can become a skilled facilitator of effective meetings. A good meeting not only helps the team get work done in the context of their plan, but also makes use of the pooled talents of the group, empowers team members and creates a sense community and connection with each other.

Meeting Infrastructure

Description

Have you sat through meetings that seem endless? Everyone talks at once, no one listens? Only the team leader talks, and you wonder why you are there? Nothing gets done, you leave confused about why there was a meeting at all? A few simple techniques to establish a meeting infrastructure, processes for discussion and decision making can result in meetings that are effective and productive.

Facilitator Role

Work with the team to establish meeting procedures. Consider which Team Building strategies are appropriate for the work at hand. Consistently use Meeting Logistics so that they become routine for your team. Develop or refine your skills as a facilitator of the strategic planning process. Be aware of the Stages of Teams and Communication skills to provide leadership through the tough times and conflict that all high performing teams experience on their way to productivity and achievement of your team's vision

Agenda

Description

An agenda is critical to ensuring productive meetings. An agenda, by definition, is 'a plan for things to be done or addressed'. It provides focus for the purpose of the meeting and clarity about the priority of items to address.

An agenda communicates to everyone the flow and order of items to be addressed. Everyone should have a paper or electronic copy of the agenda. It's a perfect place to take notes. Team members can record what occurred, items assigned to them, important dates or follow up actions, etc.

For ongoing meetings, a 'standing' agenda may be developed. A standing agenda lists standard topical areas to attend to at each meeting such as 'old business', 'new business', 'problem solving' 'agenda and date for next meeting'. Specific items can then be filled in under the appropriate headings.

Using a Parking Lot is a simple and effective tool for tracking important items, not germane to a current discussion, but important for the team to address at another time or later in the meeting. Use the Parking Lot regularly as a 'to do' list, or to compile agenda items for the next meeting.

Work started but not completed may be delegated to a smaller group or a person to prepare as a draft, shared with team members at the next meeting or sooner if needed. Or that item can be put on a 'Parking Lot' for first attention at the next meeting.

Facilitator Role

The facilitator typically prepares the agenda. Begin by establishing the amount of time allotted for the meeting. For ongoing meetings, it is helpful to busy people to put in place a regular schedule of meetings, such as the third Thursday of the month, quarterly on the first Monday, etc. Having the dates up front gives team members the opportunity to hold those dates in advance. Sometimes more frequent or longer meetings are required to address pressing issues, meet timelines, organize for a pending event, etc.

An agenda lists the starting and ending times of the meeting, letting everyone know the exact time commitment expected. It also lists the time period allotted to discuss each item to be addressed.

Determine the priority work to be addressed. Discern how much and which items can be effectively discussed, planned, decided, completed during the established meeting time. Nothing is more frustrating to a team than having progress thwarted by the lack of time to adequately address the work.

During the meeting, keep the discussion moving forward. Use summarizing and paraphrasing to signal that one discussion is winding up, and it's time to move on to another item in the agenda. For critical or time sensitive items, ask the team if they prefer to extend the time period or meeting time, revamp the agenda, add items to Parking Lot for additional work later or assigned to team members at a time after the meeting ends.

End each meeting by summarizing what took place, decisions made, responsibilities assigned to team members, disposition of items on the Parking Lot, etc. Elicit items from the team for the next meeting's agenda. Debrief the effectiveness of the meeting. Ask for suggestions for improvement. Confirm the date, time and place for the next meeting.

Meeting Roles and Structure

Description

Formal and informal meetings are more productive when there is some internal structure. Assigning roles during the meeting to team members is regarded as a best practice.

Consistent use of internal meeting structure quickly becomes the habit of the team, needing little explanation each time. Team members are more likely to look forward to meeting when they know their time and their input will be valued and respected. Meetings become a safe place where the team can discuss sensitive and contentious issues. Orient new team members to how the team works together.

Facilitator Role

'Teach' Team members to use these roles. They can be standing roles based on team member preferences, or roles that are rotated among members.

<i>Facilitator</i>	Keeps meeting moving, as outlined in the agenda. Establishes collaborative/cooperative practices. Ensures everyone participates. Starts and ends the meeting on time. Assigns roles and responsibilities for actions that arise from the meeting. Reviews and summarizes meeting decisions. Intervenes with team members that take meeting agenda off track. Consistently uses agreed upon team processes.
<i>Note taker</i>	Records details of meeting, aligned with established meeting practices. Asks questions to clarify and summarizes for accuracy as needed. Shares with all other team members.
<i>Timekeeper</i>	Signals team about timelines within the agenda, as well as when the end of agreed upon meeting time is near (such as a 5 minute warning).
<i>Process observer</i>	Is attentive to consistently using agreed upon meeting processes with fidelity. Reminds team of guidelines as needed. Asks questions if team gets off track. Brings effective use of team building techniques to the attention of the team to reinforce their use.
<i>Meeting Evaluation</i>	The facilitator debriefs what occurred during the meeting. A short evaluation of what took place and 'how it went' provides feedback to the team. Evaluate what was effective and accomplished as well as identifying areas or processes to improve and maintain.

Communication Channels

Description

Electronic communication among teams is routine. Communication takes place through email, conference calls, internet meeting platforms, text messages, shared documents, shared websites, etc. All forms of electronic communication can save team members travel time to and from a physical location.

It is crucial for a team spend some time meeting face-to-face. Important decisions are best made in this way. Nonverbal communication is difficult to discern when the team is not together. It is necessary to spend time in person to establish professional and personal relationships. After doing so, electronic communication may be a more efficient mode for continuing to work.

Facilitator Role

<i>Contact List</i>	Provide all team members with a list of contact information for each person. Assign someone to keep the list updated. Use the list as a sign in for each meeting, asking individuals to update as needed.
<i>Alternate Meeting Formats</i>	Explore electronic forms of meeting and communicating that are available, accessible and comfortable for all team members. Assure connectivity. Look for new modes of communication.
<i>Orient New Team Members</i>	As new team members join, ensure they are able to use established communication channels.
<i>Quick Contact Information</i>	Unanticipated and unexpected situations or an emergency can impact plans for in person events and meetings. Ensure there is a process established to quickly alert team members. Have a process for who initiates the alert.
