



Make meetings matter

Purpose-driven meetings result in ROI

Time is money.

Meetings take time and, therefore, either become an expense or an investment.

How efficient are your company's meetings? Do they drive the right results? Do they engage team members in effective ideation and problem-solving? Do they lead to clearly defined action steps? Or are they energy, productivity and creativity zappers?

Senior managers spend 23 hours a week in meetings, yet more than 70 percent feel that this time is unproductive, inefficient or interferes with them completing more strategic work. A study by Michael Mankins, Chris Brahm, and Gregory Caimi at Bain & Co. showed that 15 percent of an organization's time is spent in meetings.

How does this compare with your company?

Crafting a rigorous protocol for meetings is not only good practice, but it is also within our control. To get started, consider these disciplines:

1. Send out pre-work with adequate timing and an agenda that includes clear expectations so people can properly prepare.
2. Craft an agenda format that includes the purpose for the meeting, expectations and desired outcomes (modify as needed). Define who will present, how much time they have and importantly, before the meeting ends, define the action steps, owners and deadline.

General meeting format

- » Purpose (Why are we meeting?)
- » Expectations (What is expected from you/us/others?)
- » Desired outcomes (What do we hope to accomplish?)

Agenda topics

- » Make a list of the agenda topics, allocate how much time will be spent on each and stick to it.

- » Create a list of next steps, assign a leader for them and a due date. Keep an update on their status.

Round robin questions

- » What did you like about today's meeting that we need to continue?
- » How could we improve our meetings in the future?

3. Invite only those who are responsible for the work, decision-makers or those who need to know now.
4. Define the meeting leader who is responsible for facilitating and keeping everyone focused and engaged.
5. Create a project roadmap for the group so everyone involved in the project understands the plan and has a clear line of sight about what is expected and can check in regarding progress. This can be accomplished using a Word or Excel document on a shared drive or a project management software such as Basecamp, Monday or EasyProjects. That information should be sent out within 24 hours of the meeting by the meeting leader.
6. Schedule follow-up meetings. Be sure to invite only those individuals who are needed for the discussion. Updates can be captured via email or the project management software for people to see.
7. When issues arise, bring together only those people who are needed to resolve the issue. Send a memo to everyone else who may need to know or will benefit.

Consider crafting a code of conduct for meetings so everyone understands how they are expected to "show up," engage and assist those who detour from the agenda.

Meetings cost money and therefore an improvement creates a return on investment; ask your mid-level and senior leaders

to capture the amount of time they spend in meetings for a month and then quantify that time as a cost. For example, a seven-person mid-level managers' weekly meeting (average salary \$70,000/year/person) costs the company \$235 per hour for seven people, or \$12,250 per year.

Then ask each manager to identify which meetings, if any, are unnecessary for them to attend. One manager at a financial services company identified three meetings where she could read the meeting minutes instead of attending the meeting; this freed her up to reallocate six hours a week to strategic projects. She was promoted a year later.

Establishing an approach to meetings where expectations are defined, participation required and accountability for deliverables tracked fosters higher productivity, engagement, creativity and collaborative problem-solving.

Let's make meetings matter. ■



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