

EFFECTIVE PROJECT MEETINGS

101



INTRODUCTION: WHY PROJECT MEETINGS MATTER

Effective meetings are essential to collaborative project management. A good meeting should energize the team, making them feel connected, involved and informed. Effective meetings are essential to making informed decisions, which in turn, keeps your project on track.

Poor meetings are detrimental to project harmony and project success. Consider of the cost of a poor meeting. Four people in a meeting for one hour is pretty close to one working day when preparation time and follow-up are included. Ineffective meetings often lead to poor decisions, which carry the cost beyond the meeting itself.

It is not at all hard to run effective meetings, but you must be intentional to do so. Keep reading for **'10 Habits for Effective Project Meetings'** and **3 Sample Meeting Agendas** (Project Sponsor, Team and Brainstorm) to improve your next meeting.

10 HABITS FOR EFFECTIVE PROJECT MEETINGS

Meetings are a great way to encourage team collaboration, track progress and deal with any challenges. However, poorly run meetings are costly and draining. Follow our ten habits and enjoy more effective meetings.

1

Have a DAFT meeting! Every meeting should have the following elements:

- **D**esired Outcome: *Think about the purpose of meeting. Create the agenda to meet your objectives*
- **A**genda **F**acilitator: *The Agenda Facilitator makes sure that everyone sticks to the agenda. As the project manager, you can facilitate the meeting or appoint a facilitator to allow you to focus on the meeting itself*
- **T**ake Aways: *End the meeting with a summary of key points and actions.*

2

Review Each Meeting: At the end of each meeting, ask the team if the meeting was productive and energizing. If the answer is no, discuss how to improve the next meeting.

3

Keep Meetings Small: Try to invite individuals who actually need to be present. This tends to make meetings more productive and efficient.

4

Use Fewer Presentations: Circulate meeting materials a few days in advance to allow individuals to prepare in their own time. This will also allow you to spend more time discussing the materials during the meeting.

5

Prepare in Advance: Come prepared or let the meeting facilitator know if you are not prepared.

6

Stick to the meeting time: Start and finish on time! It can be very helpful to assign timings to an agenda to track as the meeting progresses.

7

Vary the Location and Style: If you have meetings that occur with great frequency and have the same agenda, people can get jaded every now and again. It is good to mix it up. Also consider inviting a guest speaker to your meeting for a different perspective.

8

Active Listening: Often, we do not listen properly before commenting! Moderate the meeting to ensure that the right amount of listening and talking takes place.

9

Pay Attention: Ask people not to check phones or emails, except in exceptional circumstances. Promise them a shorter, more effective meeting as a result.

10

Action Items: Projects and meetings run smoothly when the team complete their action items on time. Set this expectation. Thank people for timely completion of action items and call people out for the opposite - unless there are good reasons.

3 SAMPLE MEETING AGENDAS

Effective meetings rely on well-structured agendas that keep everyone focused on the right objectives. Here are three sample meeting agendas for the most common type of project meetings: Project Sponsor, Team and Brainstorm.

Each agenda is accompanied with some tips to maximize your meeting.

#1 PROJECT SPONSOR MEETINGS

Sponsors are really busy so you need to make good use of the meeting to gain their respect and thus their help. Try the following agenda at your next meeting.

1. Review and agree the agenda
2. Provide an update on progress and agreed goals
3. Review, discuss and resolve any open risks, issues or change requests
4. Review pending decisions
5. Other feedback for the project manager?
6. AOB
7. Summarize the meeting outcomes.

Here are some tips to make the most of this agenda outline.

1. Review and agree agenda

The sponsor might not be thinking about your project as you meet so this is a good way to get alignment as you start the meeting. Agree the desired meeting outcome before starting.

#1 PROJECT SPONSOR MEETINGS

2. Provide an update on progress and agreed goals

Use pre-agreed dashboards with the schedule, KPIs, status reports, etc. to provide an update. This will save time and allow the project sponsor to stay connected between meetings.

3. Review, discuss and resolve any open risks, issues or change requests

The meeting is an ideal opportunity to acknowledge, understand and deal with risks, issues and change requests.

4. Review pending decisions

Discuss any major decisions you need to make and get inputs to save time later on.

5. Other feedback for the project manager?

It is always good to ask the sponsor for other inputs or feedback.

6. AOB

At this stage of the meeting, cover any small points or items that need attention but should not take up the entire meeting. Keep the front part of the meeting free for the more important items.

7. Summarize the meeting outcomes

Recap the meeting in terms of decisions, outcomes or action items or all of the above.

#2

PROJECT TEAM MEETINGS

Avoid having meetings for the sake of meetings by using a clear agenda.

1. Review and agree the agenda with the team
2. Review, discuss and resolve
3. Look at upcoming tasks for next week
4. Project process and approach adjustments
5. Review recently completed tasks
(Time Permitting)
6. AOB
7. Summarize the meeting outcomes.

These tips explain the suggested agenda further.

1. Review and agree agenda with the team

Bring the team to the same page as you start the meeting. Remember that the team are likely working on different tasks and on different projects, making this alignment helpful and necessary.

2. Review, discuss and resolve any open issues

Address problems at the start of the meeting when energy levels are high. Ask people for the issues and also for their suggestions on how to address the issue. This sets a clear expectation that problems are solved collaboratively, which will encourage the team to share ideas.

3. Look at upcoming tasks for next week

Spend some time looking at key tasks or deliverables due in the coming week. Allow and encourage other team members to give inputs.

#2

PROJECT TEAM MEETINGS

4. Project process and approach adjustments

If needed, review how the project is coordinated to identify any changes or adjustments needed as work progress.

5. Review recently completed tasks (Time Permitting)

Keep this item until the end of the meeting to save time! People often like to talk about what was achieved at the expense of outstanding work, which wastes valuable group meeting time.

If you would like to highlight a significant milestone or achievement, send a quick update email to the team after the meeting.

6. AOB

At this stage of the meeting, cover any small points or items that need attention but should not take up the entire meeting. Keep the front part of the meeting free for the more important items.

7. Summarize the meeting outcomes

Recap the meeting in terms of decisions, outcomes or action items or all of the above.

#3

BRAINSTORM/ PROBLEM SOLVING

Problems occur on all projects. Creative solutions are always needed to deliver on some of the project requirements. The team generally has or can come up with the solutions. You just need to give them the time and space. There are many ways to run the brainstorm style of meeting. Try the “**ABCD**” agenda as follows:

1. **A**gree the **A**im of the meeting and **A**sk lots of questions.
2. **B**rainstorm in a **B**lue sky manner all the possibilities. Allow no critique and instead encourage questions to clarify.
3. Enter into a robust but respectful set of **C**onversations with healthy **C**ritique and lots of **C**onstructive **C**onflict. At this point in the agenda, it is important to push the boundaries of the ideas being proposed.
4. **D**iscuss lots and with as much consensus as possible make good **D**ecisions. Include a mechanism to check the outcome.

Once your team becomes familiar with this template, you can use a shorter version of the “**ABCD**” agenda.

OPTION 1:

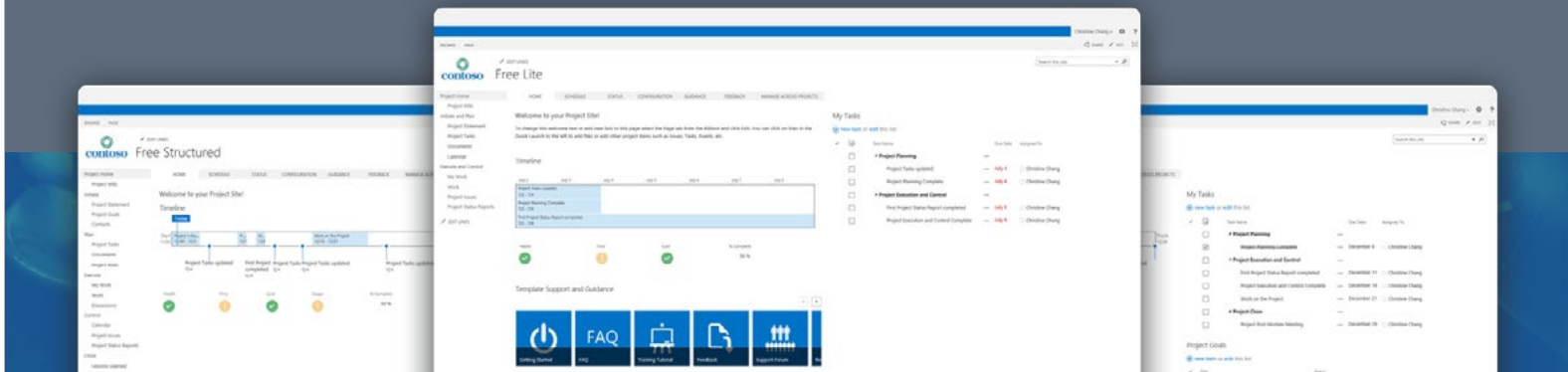
1. **A**sk questions;
Agree the **A**im
2. **B**lue-sky **B**rainstorm
3. **C**ritique with **C**onflict
4. **D**iscuss and **D**ecide.

OPTION 2:

1. **A**im
2. **B**rainstorm
3. **C**ritique
4. **D**ecide.

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