EYE 2 EYE DEVELOPMENT

Hints and tips for effective meetings

Part 1: Setting your session up for success

Would you like the team to leave your session excited about and committed to a new plan/ change/ direction?
This toolkit gives a few reminders and tips on how to run an engaging, interactive meeting session. It is intended as a guideline that you can adapt to suit your needs so that you make the most of valuable face to face time.

Before the meeting

Planning your session

Be clear about outputs – what do you want out of the session? Why are you asking for the group's attention? (This could be to create alignment, ask them to make decisions or take action).
Who needs to be there – is this the right forum? (it can be frustrating to be involved in a session when you don't need to be involved!)

Consider your audience: What issues and concerns might they raise? What's the impact on them? What information would meet their needs? Who are the stakeholders in the room? What's in it for them?

What information will you need to bring into the session? How much depends on the type of group and personal styles. Try to keep the input as short as possible – any longer than 20 minutes and the group's energy and attention will begin to wane.

How will you make the session interactive?
If you are simply seeking to give information on a topic, do you really need to do this face to face? Often this is readily achieved via audio meetings, especially if you can send out brief, informative prereads.

Preparing your meeting participants

- Ensure that the meeting participants know in advance what the topic is, the outcomes you would like and, more importantly, what you need from them (we recommend you talk this through with the meeting convenor)

- Keep preread short (a handful of slides) and be clear about what you want people to consider when reading it. What is the purpose of the preread, discussion and your 'ask' of them? Do they need to come to the session having considered a question or with their own comments about the thrust of the content?

- **Tip** Posing a question to consider when looking though the preread aids clarity and focus.

Meeting Process: how can you achieve the outcomes you want?

Help people to think well by:

- Starting with a positive question (e.g. what's going well in your work, what are you proud of) and ask each person in turn to respond to this
- Before an open discussion create a sense of equality by giving people uninterrupted turns to respond to the question. You can do this by going round the room
- If things get stuck/ difficult, give the group a question and ask them to work with a partner and take a specific amount of time to share their thinking in response to the question with their partner (e.g. 3 minutes) – note that this is not 2 way. Then facilitate a group discussion
- Ask everyone to give their full attention. 2 simple invitations that help: 'please keep your eyes on the speaker's eyes' 'give them your full attention and stay interested in what they are thinking and are going to say next'
- Manage airtime: Remind people that for the privilege of not being interrupted, they have the responsibility to be succinct. Also invite them to say what they think (rather than what they think they may be expected to think!). This enhances the quality of discussion and breadth of thinking
- To learn more about this approach. read Nancy Kline's book Time to Think or you can contact us for more ideas and tips.

Get the group focussed: Restate the objective at the beginning of your session so that meeting participants know what's expected of them.

Help people to stay with you: Research shows that our concentration span drops after about 20 minutes, so keep any input to a minimum. Use preread to help you do this. You can also break up input by asking questions.

Think about how you will help the group engage in and remember what you do. To make the most of this time we suggest you pose a prepared question to the group which helps you get to your outcome.

Posing the right question is critical: If you pose a general question (e.g. what do you think? Any questions?), you will get general answers. So, choose a question which will help focus the discussion on the area you have chosen (check this out by thinking about how you would respond to the question you have in mind). Here are some examples to help you:

- What does success look like?
- What are we already doing that is working well?
- What can we do to achieve success?
- What are the key changes you can identify?
- How will these changes impact you/ the team/ the organisation?
- What do we need to do to ensure this works for us?
- What are our options?
- What are our success criteria?
- Which option is the best fit with our criteria?
- What are the implications of this decision for the people involved?

- What might get in the way of this? What issues can you see?
- How can we reduce the impact of these?
- What options can you identify to overcome these?
- Which option should we pursue?
- What do we need to do to move forward?
- What do we need to do to implement this?
- What's the way forward?
- How could we tackle this issue?

Give the group time to explore one question before moving on to another – for example, it's hard to identify problems and solve them at the same time!

Seeking alignment: If you want alignment – silence isn't it! Ask the group where they do/ don't agree and why and then ask for their commitment (this takes time and is generally underestimated!)

Allowing the right amount of time: If you are prompting debate/ discussion or looking for alignment, a rule of thumb is to allow half the allotted time for this.

Closing the feedback loop: At the end of your session, summarise any decisions/ actions/ next steps (ideally put them on flip chart through the session) to check for commitment and agreement. Remember to be clear about who does what, when and how you will follow up.

Finish on a high note: Getting each person in the group to say something positive can really build team cohesion and motivation in the long term. Research from Neuroscience tells us it also helps blood flow to the cortex which we need to perform Executive functions like complex problem solving. You could do this by asking each person in turn to say 1 thing that went well in the meeting. It can be even more powerful if the appreciation is individual e.g. one quality you admire in the person to your left/right.

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Part 2: Powerful agenda & meeting records

Construct your agenda in a way that helps people to think and prepare by:

- Stating the purpose for an agenda item
- Posing the agenda item as a question e.g. how can we bring our budget back on track rather? than budget overrun review
- Pose questions for people to consider in advance in relation to agenda items or any preread material you send out

Other items to consider including depending on the meeting:

- Purpose/ Objectives of meeting
- Date, Time, Location
- Who is invited/ has attended (one organisation I worked with stopped inviting you if you didn't turn up for 3 meetings)
- Item/topics for discussion, key outputs, preparation needed, who will lead/own the topic, duration (see above)
- Actions (What, by whom, by when)
- Key decisions log
- Items carried forward for future meetings

How to use

- Prepare & circulate in advance of session/ within agreed period after the meeting (e.g. 2 days)
- Can be updated and used as an ongoing record (completed actions deleted, new ones added)

Useful for

- Providing ongoing record of agreed actions, decisions.
- Ensuring everyone knows what the meeting is about and what they need to do in advance
- Progress meetings so that you can ensure actions are followed up/ completed

Watch out for

Be prepared to be flexible about timings (but review impact on aims for the meeting)
If you focus on keeping to time, this can be too rigid for more creative sessions where you are trying to generate ideas

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