

PROJECT TEAM MEETINGS

Project meetings provide the focus for activities undertaken outside the meeting. They are a vital method of communication and decision making to help meet specific objectives.

They should not be:

- Regular gatherings for no special purpose
- Axe-grinding sessions
- Talking shops
- A waste of time

Meetings are an opportunity for team members to work together, build common understanding and commitment to their designated objectives and tasks. Meetings are not the only time that team members do any work! Meetings must support teamwork, not replace it.

Effective meetings require:

A clear purpose

- *The purpose of this meeting is to . . .*

Defined outputs

- *We need to produce, agree, decide . . .*

A timed agenda

- *Start, end and agenda items*

Agreed resources

- *People required, facilities, equipment*

Meeting purpose:

The person chairing the meeting (usually the Project Manager) should clearly state its purpose of both the agenda and at the start of the meeting. The purpose might include:

- Communicating information within the team
- Providing clarification and explanation, to develop a common understanding
- Collecting views and opinions
- Discussing options and alternatives

- Examining facts and information brought by the team, for analysis
- Making decisions which require the authority of the whole team
- Team-building

The Project Manager's duties before, during and after the meeting:

- BEFORE
 - Agree the purpose of the meeting
 - Confirm a meeting is the best approach
 - Decide who needs to be there
 - Decide what information they should bring
 - Ensure everyone has an Agenda
 - Ensure everyone knows the time and place
- DURING:
 - Start and end on time
 - Ensure everyone is present
 - Ensure the objectives and agenda are agreed
 - Seek consensus
 - Ensure everyone can contribute
 - Ensure all decisions are summarised and noted
- AFTER:
 - Tackle their own agreed actions
 - Ensure others are tackling their actions (but without nagging!)
 - Review progress and meeting effectiveness

The role of a Meeting Secretary:

Sometimes it's difficult for the Project Manager to act as Secretary as well as leading the meeting and you may need to ask someone to take on this role. Unless you have a dedicated person to act as Secretary, it can help to share the workload by different people taking it in turns to act as Secretary.

- Circulate any pre-meeting information
- Collect copies of information circulated in the meeting
- Take notes of agreed decisions and action points - with timescales and responsibilities
- Agree the Minutes with the Project Manager prior to circulating them

be no surprises at team meetings with people arriving and revealing that they have not been able to complete their actions.

Team members have a responsibility to ensure the project succeeds; it is not simply the role of the Project Manager to check and chase to see if every action is being done.

The role of non-participants?

- To be given lots of action points in their absence
- To be kept in the dark about the meeting's outcome
- To be berated behind their backs for not having completed actions they knew nothing about
- To be made to feel "left out"

Consensus:

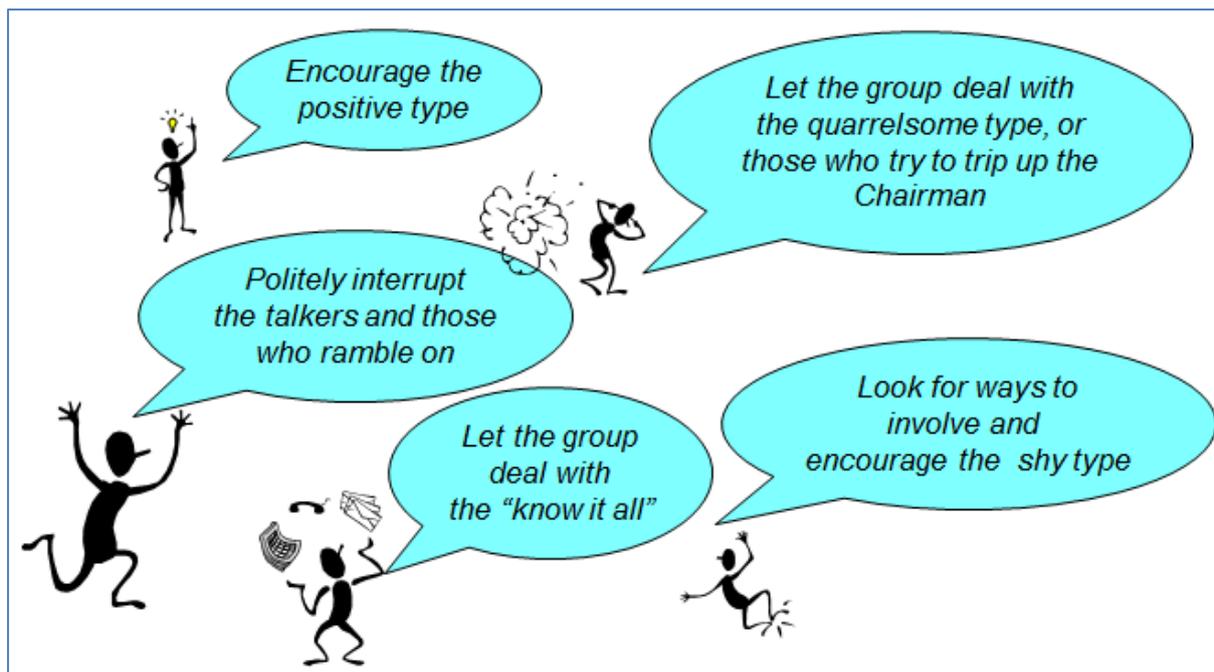
Consensus is a process by which possible alternatives are evaluated, with everyone contributing in such a way that all members are committed to the group's eventual decision. It is not "compromise". To achieve consensus takes time:

- Use group problem solving tools to ensure all data is visible and analysed openly (use whiteboards and flipcharts so everyone can see the same information)
- Work on facts and keep focused on the end objective
- Use "we" language, rather than "I" or "you" language
- Do not dodge conflict by making half-hearted compromises
- Allow thinking time - avoid snap decisions
- View different opinions as a positive contribution, not a signal to argue
- Stay positive - some disagreement is healthy and good for creativity

Controlling the meeting:

Watch out for...

- destructive arguments
- people not listening
- people not contributing
- people dominating discussions
- loss of attention



Agenda Planning:

Agendas should be “timed”. They should have a start and end time, and every agenda item should also be timed to help you manage progress during the meeting. It also makes it easier for invited guests to come into the meeting when they are needed and not have to sit through the whole meeting.

Any Other Business (AOB) should not be on the agenda; it’s often just an excuse for people not to plan or prepare for the meeting. If an item is important enough to discuss, it should be on the agenda with a designated time slot.

Meeting logistics:

Make it easy for everyone to attend by finding dates/times/venues that are convenient and take account of workloads, travel requirements and other commitments.

Shorter, more frequent meetings are preferable to longer, infrequent ones because you will be less likely to be out of touch with what’s happening in the project.

If diaries are congested, consider producing a forward meeting schedule, right at the start of the project, or at key stages. Don’t leave it to the end of one meeting to find a date for the next one. As Project Manager you need to be thinking ahead and planning for the next few meetings, in line with the overall project plan.

The Kick-off Meeting sets the scene for the project and the style you adopt will “send signals” about the likely culture it will develop. This is probably your most important meeting, so planning it carefully is essential.