# University of Victoria | Human Resources

# Facilitating Effective Meetings

## Self Learning Guide

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## Photocopy Provisions

## Introduction to the Self Learning Package

The Self Learning Package Series is based on a few key principles:

1. People are their own best experts.
2. People are competent in their work and enjoy improving their professional and personal skills.
3. People learn best when they are responsible for their own learning.
4. People need an opportunity to learn at their own pace and for their own reasons.
5. People need information that is flexible enough for them to adapt to incorporate their own cultural, religious, and economic beliefs and customs.

The Self Learning Package Series has very simple objectives:

1. To summarize a wealth of general and basic information into manageable resources for people to use personally and professionally;
2. To provide this information in readable and practical resources that will give people the opportunity to learn for themselves, at their own pace, some or all of the information presented;
3. To help people integrate their communication, leadership and supervision, learning and personal growth skills into one body of information;
4. To provide people with further references and ideas to continue their self-directed learning.

**Note: This self learning package will take approximately 30 minutes to complete.**

# Introduction

In today's business environments, it is impossible not to attend meetings. Staff meetings, project meetings, task force meetings, planning and coordinating meetings….the list is endless.  The worst thing about many of these meetings is that they are poorly run and waste valuable time.

Over the past decade, there's been a growing recognition that effective meetings happen when proper attention has been paid to the process elements and when proceedings are skilfully facilitated. When meetings are skilfully facilitated, the outcomes are superior decisions, accompanied by full understanding of the decision, buy-in and effective implementation.

Not surprisingly then, meeting facilitation has been called the core competency of the 21st Century. The good news is that it is not difficult to learn how to use the tools that can increase the effectiveness and collaboration of your meetings.

**Learning Outcomes**

**After completing this self-learning package you will be able to:**
- Understand the role of the meeting leader in managing any meeting
- Learn the fundamentals of how to prepare for, start, manage and close a meeting
- Identify process tools that can help create an open and safe forum for discussion
- Learn how to handle counterproductive behaviour

**My Personal Learning Objectives**

My personal learning objectives are:

# Characteristics of Effective & Ineffective Meetings

***Exercise:***

Before you begin to review the process of facilitating effective meetings, take a few minutes to reflect. Reflect on your own experience and describe the characteristics of an effective and ineffective meeting.  When you're done, compare your answers with the author's suggested responses in the Appendix.

| Effective Meeting | Ineffective Meeting |
|---|---|
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# The Fundamentals of Meeting Management

Meeting leaders aim for exceptional outcomes or decisions that are supported with the commitment required to see them effectively implemented. To assist you in achieving those results, the following process map describes five steps that contribute to a successful meeting.

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┌──────────┐      ┌──────────┐      ┌──────────┐
│ 1. Plan  │ ───▶ │ 2. Start │ ───▶ │3. Conduct│
└──────────┘      └──────────┘      └──────────┘
                                          │
     ┌────────────────────────────────────┘
     ▼
┌──────────┐      ┌──────────────┐
│ 4. Close │ ───▶ │ 5. Follow-Up │
└──────────┘      └──────────────┘
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┌──────────┐
│ 1. Plan  │
└──────────┘
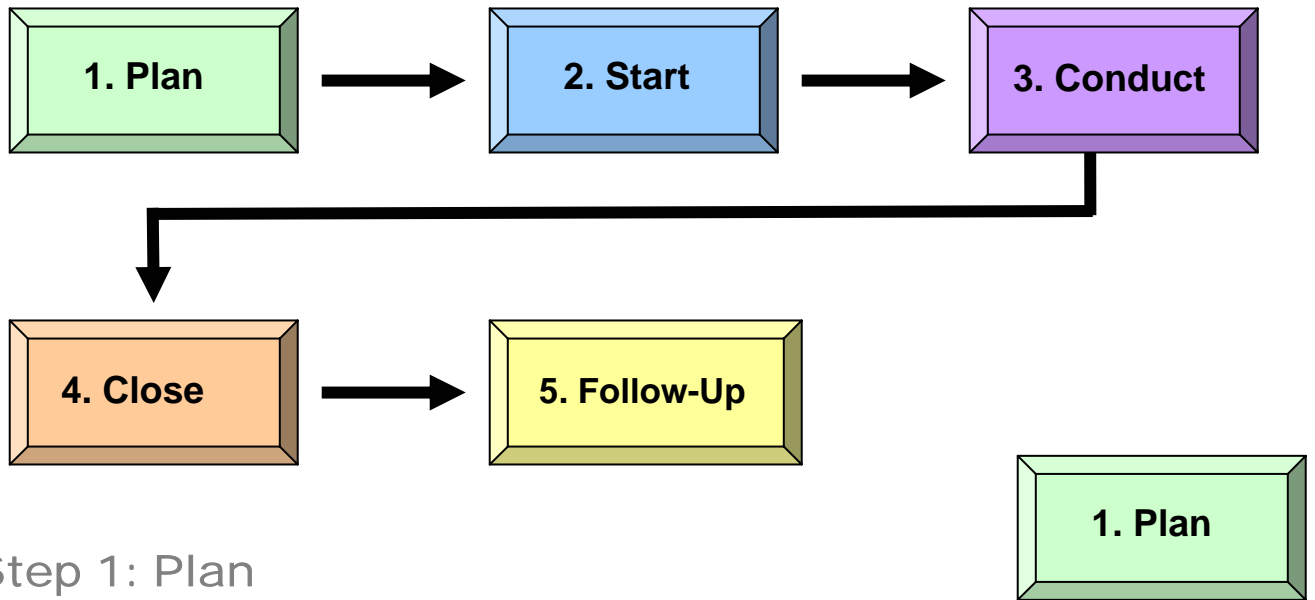
## Step 1: Plan

The success of a meeting depends on the preparation work that has been done. This includes:

1. Defining the meeting purpose and process
2. Identifying meeting participants
3. Developing and distributing an agenda

### 1. Define the Meeting Purpose and Outcomes

The first step is to articulate the **overall** **meeting purpose**.

**Example:** *We're here today to review, brainstorm and prioritize solutions for improving our team functioning.*

The second step is to understand and clearly articulate the **expected outcomes** for each agenda topic.

### *Example:*

a. To decide on … (where we're going to move, our top 3 priorities, etc.)

b. To action plan … (how we're going to achieve our top 3 solutions, etc.)

c. To problem-solve … (bottlenecks in our distribution process, gaps identified, etc.)

d. To share information on … (our status, best practices, etc.)

### *Exercise:*

Explain the benefits of a clear purpose.  When you're done, compare your answers with the author's suggested responses in the Appendix.

## 2.  Identify Meeting Participants

When you identify meeting members consider their contribution against your rationale for inviting them to the meeting. To determine the rationale, ask yourself the following questions:

- Will each person bringing a necessary and particular expertise?
- What will they gain from attending?
- In what ways will they contribute to the decision making process?

The meeting leader's answers to these questions require subjective judgment. People are often invited to avoid offending someone or for political reasons.  Depending on the circumstances, this may be necessary, but there is a more effective method of inclusion. Inform the individual about the meeting and explain the objective. Let them know that you realize that this meeting might not be a good use of their time, so they are not expected to be there, but they are welcome. If they don't choose to come, but wish to be updated, ensure that is arranged.

## 3. Develop and Distribute an Agenda

Every meeting must have an agenda that has been developed ahead of time and distributed to the members. This allows members to do their homework (if applicable) and come prepared to make decisions or contribute to the discussions.

The agenda is often viewed as simply a list of topics to be discussed and is given little attention before the meeting. However, a well developed agenda, as illustrated below, can be a valuable meeting preparation and management tool.

### *Template: Agenda Worksheet*

**Group/Department/Unit:**                **Meeting Leader:**

**Meeting Date:**                         **Minute-taker:**

**Time:**                                 **Location:**

**Attendees:**

### Overall Meeting Purpose: (or Terms of Reference)

The purpose of this meeting is to: _____.

### Agenda:

| Topic | Purpose | Lead | Time | Come Prepared To | Outcome |
|-------|---------|------|------|------------------|---------|
| **Meeting Effectiveness** | To decide on how to improve the team meetings. | Sarah | 15 min | No preparation required | Define 2 meeting improvement techniques |

Describes what is to be achieved by the end of the discussion for each topic.

Gives members information as to what will be expected in the meeting and if advanced preparation is required.

Column to record decisions and commitments made.

**TIPS:**

- **Distribute the agenda to all participants 1 week before meeting**

# Step 2: Start

2. Start

## *A Step-by-Step Guideline to Starting a Meeting*

1. **Welcome the meeting members**.

   - Don't move to quickly into information that is important for everyone to hear as they might not be mentally present. Give them some time and space to settle down.

   - Introduce any ad hoc members.

2. **State the overall *purpose* and desired *outcomes*** of the meeting for the members. This only takes a few minutes and provides critical focus. It clarifies what the group wants to achieve. Having a clear purpose will prevent the meeting going off topic.

   - *"The purpose of today's meeting is to…"*

   - *"During this meeting we will….."*

   - *"By the end of this meeting we will…."*

3. **Check for understanding and consensus on the purposes and outcomes**.

4. **Review the agenda with the group.** Make any changes in timing if required, additions and deferrals.

5. **Create or review *norms*** for managing personalities, conflicts, etc. (post these on a wall for easy reference if required).

## *Norms*

Meeting norms set ground rules or expectations on how people treat each other at a meeting and how they need to work together to achieve the outcomes in the time allotted. The norms focus on respecting all participants and are simple yet powerful statements about the way meetings can be run. Norms are created by the members.

***Exercise:***

Identify the benefits for a meeting leader in facilitating a discussion on creating norms. When you're done, compare your answers with the author's suggested responses in the Appendix.

***Facilitating a Group Norm Discussion***

Use any of the following questions to trigger the discussion and help members create norms:

- *"What are the supporting behaviours that will ensure the team is successful in achieving the desired outcomes of the meeting?"*
- *"What rules should we establish today that will ensure everyone feels he or she can speak up with confidence?"*
- *"What rules will help ensure that we stay on track and on time today?"*
- *"What do you believe is important for each of us to keep in mind in order to ensure this happens?"*
- *"What behaviours do we need to demonstrate if we are to have a successful meeting?"*

**<u>Examples:</u>**

- speak one at a time
- build on each other's ideas
- make sure everyone is heard – not just a few people
- we won't dismiss any idea without really exploring it
- all ideas will be listened to carefully
- confidentiality: "what said here, stays here"

**TIPS:**

- **Norms work best when they describe very specific behaviour.  For example, "everyone must respect each other".  Everyone may have a different perception as to what that would sound like or look like, therefore, ask the group, "What behaviour will tell you that members are respecting each other?"**
- **If the group meets regularly, review the agreements briefly before each meeting.**

6. **Clarify and agree on team member roles**: chairperson, facilitator, minute taker, timekeeper and scribe. Productive meetings require people to play defined roles. The following chart provides a summary of the role and their responsibilities.

| Role | Responsibilities |
|---|---|
| *Chairperson* | <ul><li>runs the meeting with defined rules</li><li>offers opinions and engages in discussion if they choose too</li><li>plays an active role as both decision maker and opinion leader</li></ul> |
| *Facilitator* | <ul><li>designs the process of the meeting</li><li>manages participation</li><li>keeps things on track</li><li>remains neutral and focuses on *how* issues are being discussed</li><li>supports the group's effectiveness</li></ul> |
| *Minute taker* | <ul><li>takes brief and accurate notes of what's discussed and the decisions made</li></ul> |
| *Timekeeper* | <ul><li>someone who keeps track of the time</li></ul> |
| *Scribe* | <ul><li>a group member who volunteers to help the facilitator record group comments on a flipchart and/or written meeting record</li></ul> |

## *Balancing the Role of Chairperson and Facilitator*

What is the difference here?

| Chair when you want to: | Facilitate when you want to: |
|---|---|
| • review past minutes and agenda items<br><br>• hear members report back or exchange information<br><br>• remain accountable for decisions | • promotes participation and shifts ownership<br><br>• engage people in planning, problem solving, and relationship building<br><br>• promotes membership decision making |

**3. Conduct**

## Step 3: Conduct

This step is where the bulk of the tasks are accomplished through discussion, decision making and problem solving.

At this step, the meeting leader will be required to:

1.  manage participation and
2.  make periodic process checks

### *1. Manage Participation*

This section will address how to generate participation, deal with difficult behaviour and when and how to intervene.

### *Generating Participation*

There are many excellent techniques available to get even the most reluctant and shy participant to play an active part. The following two examples are techniques that offer anonymity to members and generate lots of participation.

| Technique | Process |
|---|---|
| 1.  Discussion Partners | • can used at the start of any discussion<br>• pose a question to a large group<br>• ask everyone to find a partner to discuss the question |

| Technique | Process |
|---|---|
| | • have each pair share the highlights of their discussion |
| 2.  Tossed Salad | • place a plastic bowl on a table<br>• give small pieces of paper and ask people to write one idea per paper<br>• have them toss their slips into the bowl<br>• when everyone has finished writing, have one person "toss the salad"<br>• pass around the bowl so that each person can take out as many slips as they tossed<br>• go around the table and have people share their ideas |

***Exercise:***

What other techniques can you add?

 

 

 

 

 

 

 

 

### *Dealing with Difficult Behaviour*

Generally, people demonstrating non-productive behaviours are experiencing fear, frustration, or there is a need that isn't being met. It may not be their intent to sabotage the meeting and they may not be aware of the impact of their behaviour on others.

***Exercise:***

Identify behaviours that hinder the group process.  Brainstorm strategies on how to deal with each of the behaviours.  When you're done, compare your answers with the author's suggested responses in the Appendix.

| BEHAVIOUR TYPE | OCCURS WHEN | STRATEGIES TO DEAL WITH BEHAVIOUR |
|---|---|---|
| Silence | Members do not participate. | |
| Monopolizing | A member dominates the discussion. They may repeat themselves or interrupt. | |
| Intimidating | A member has a strong opinion on an issue and intimidates others and discounts their ideas. | |
| Overly agreeable | A member doesn't take a firm position/agrees with everyone. | |
| Negativity | Presents a negative or critical attitude. May find fault with the process or describe the meeting as a waste of time | |

*Interventions*

During a meeting, a meeting leader may need to intervene. An "intervention" is described as any action or set of actions to deliberately improve the functioning of the group.

Examples of when a meeting leader would intervene

- Two people are having a side conversation
- People are interrupting
- The discussion is stuck or off track
- When participant body language, tone and/or words indicate negativity
- When people appear to be arguing

Interventions are risky but the situation can worsen if the meeting leader does not address it.

When making an intervention we suggest the following steps:

## Step 1: Describe what you're observing:

- *"I've noticed people coming and going during this meeting."*

## Step 2: Redirect the group's behaviour:

- *Ask* members for their suggestions:
  - *"What can you do to make sure this doesn't happen again?"*

*Intervention Wording for Specific Situations*

The following describes a few common scenarios and suggested intervention responses.

| Common Scenario | Response |
| --- | --- |
| When one person *dominates* the discussion: | "*Sarah, I'm noticing that we've heard quite a lot from you. I'm concerned that we have not heard from others. Please hold the rest of your comments until the end so that others can be heard.*" |
| When someone is being *sarcastic*: | "*Ellen, I'm afraid your good ideas aren't being heard because of the tone of voice* |

| | |
|---|---|
| | *you're using. How about stating that again, only in a more neutral way?*" |
| When the meeting has totally *digressed*: | "*I'd like to point out that we have now digressed and are onto another topic.  Is this the topic the team wants to discus or should we park it and go back to the original agenda item?* |
| When everyone has *fallen* silent: | *"I'm noticing the level of energy has dropped. I'm concerned we may be stalled. What can we do to get things going again?"* |
| When two people are *discounting* each other's ideas without giving them a fair hearing: | *"I'm noticing that you're discounting each other's ideas rather quickly. Please summarize what the other person said before stating your points."* |
| When people display overt *body language* rather than say what they think: | *"I see you are tapping your fingers and rolling your eyes. Tell us what that means…are we going to slow? Or are we missing major points?"* |

## *2.  Make Periodic Process Checks*

What is process checking? It is a technique used during meetings to keep things on track. This involves paying attention to process and putting the discussion on hold. There are four elements in process checking:

1. ***Check the Purpose:*** use this when the conversation seems to be stuck or when people appear to be confused. Ask:
   - *"Is everyone still clear about what's being discussed?"*

2. ***Check the Process:*** use this to verify if the approach is working. Ask:
   - "*We agreed that we would use this tool. How do you think this approach is working: should we try something else?*"

3. ***Check the Pace:*** use this when things seem to be dragging or moving to fast, or anytime people look frustrated. Ask:
   - *"Is this session dragging or are you feeling rushed?"*

4. **Check the Pulse:** use this when members look distracted or tired, by asking:

- *"Is anyone feeling like they've dropped out?"*

Use periodic checks at least once during an hour length meeting. In a full day meeting, do several checks, just before each break. The benefits of meeting checks are: they reassure the meeting group process is working well: solutions being discussed will work; member's feelings are being identified and addressed; and it encourages innovative thinking.
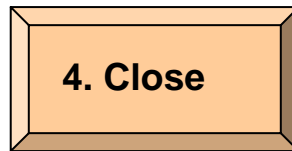
**NOTES AND IDEAS**

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## Step 4: Close

> **4. Close**

Too often, groups run out of time and people are dashing out of the meeting room before the discussion has been properly closed.

Time your discussion to summarize the decisions made, review commitments to action, including *who* will do *what* and *when.*

*Exercise:*

Let's hear from you: What are the benefits of reviewing the commitments to action and recapping the decisions? When you're done, compare your answers with the author's suggested responses in the Appendix.

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This is also a great opportunity to solicit agenda items for the next meeting and review the time and location.

One final step when closing a meeting is to evaluate its effectiveness. The following are two suggestions to evaluate a meeting:

1.  **Conduct a Force-Field Analysis** – this involves asking:
    - "What were the likes or strengths of today's meeting?"
    - "What were the dislikes of today's meeting?'
    - "What suggestions do you have to correct the dislikes?"

2.  **Post an Exit Survey** - three or four questions are written on a flipchart paper and posted near an exit. Meeting members fill it out upon leaving the meeting. The meeting leader summarizes the results and discusses them at the start of the next meeting.

*Sample Exit Survey*

*Output* – To what extent did we achieve what we needed to?

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Poor | Fair | Satisfactory | Good | Excellent |

*Organization* – How effective was the meeting structure?

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Poor | Fair | Satisfactory | Good | Excellent |

***Decision Making*** – How well-thought-out were our decision?

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Poor | Fair | Satisfactory | Good | Excellent |

***Action Plans*** – How clear and achievable are our action plans?

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Poor | Fair | Satisfactory | Good | Excellent |

## Step 5: Follow Up

**5. Follow-Up**
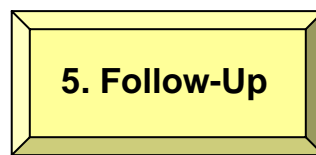
After the meeting, a meeting leader will make arrangements to distribute or post the meeting minutes promptly, file the agenda, notes and other documents and ensure assignments are completed.

# Appendix

## *Answers to Page 2*

| Effective Meeting | Ineffective Meeting |
|---|---|
| **Objective**. Objectives are clear, concise, and have agreement. | Lack of clarity about the meeting goal. |
| **Agenda**. A clear, timed agenda is prepared and provided to participants before the meeting. | A vague agenda. |
| **Meeting Type**. The type of meeting is clear to all participants. | No time limits on discussions. |
| **Use of Time**. The meeting is a good use of people's time. | No process. |
| **Clear Roles**: People know what's expected of them. | No one facilitating discussions. |
| **Preparation.** Participants and leader are well-prepared. | Discussion that go off track or spin in circles. |
| **Decision-Making Power**. Clarity about decision making procedures are determined ahead of time. | Lack of closure. |
| Effective member behaviours. | A few people dominating while others sit passively. |
| Periodic process checks. | No detailed action plans. |
| **Group Norms**. Created by the members and posted in the meeting room. | No evaluation at the end of the meeting. |
| Detailed and clear minutes. | |
| Specific follow up plans. | |
| A post meeting evaluation. | |

## *Answers to Page 4*

- addresses 'why' the group has come together to discuss a specific agenda item or topic
- provides clarity, structure and direction

## *Answers to Page 7*

### *Why Create Norms?*

- all groups or teams need guidelines to ensure a cooperative and supportive climate
- best tool for heading off potential conflict

## *Answers to Page 11*

| Behaviour Type | Occurs When | Strategies To Deal with Behaviour |
|---|---|---|
| Silence | Members do not participate. | • Invite their participation, E.g. "You haven't had a chance to share your thoughts, what ideas do you have?"<br>• Highlight the importance of full participation. |
| Monopolizing | A member dominates the discussion. They may repeat themselves or interrupt. | • Acknowledge their contribution, and then call on someone else. |
| Intimidating | A member has a strong opinion on an issue and intimidates others and discounts their ideas. | • Acknowledge their position, emphasize that not everyone feels as they do. Explain for the meeting to be successful everyone must be heard.<br>• Describe the impact of their behavior on the meeting: E.g. "When you speak so adamantly, and dismiss others' ideas, some members may be hesitant to put forth ideas that may be critical to our success." |
| Overly Agreeable | A member doesn't take a firm position/agrees with everyone. | • Be direct. Ask everyone to describe their position on the item/issue. |
| Negativity | Presents a negative or critical attitude. May find fault with the process or describe the meeting as a waste of time | • Help prevent this by ensuring the right people are invited to the meeting, i.e. that everyone has something to contribute or to gain.<br>• Get them involved by giving them a role, |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | e.g. note taker, time keeper, etc. |
| | | • Refer to the Norms |
| | | • Talk with him/her privately if they are an ongoing member of the team. |
| | | • Ask them if there is anything that can be done to have them feel more positively about the process. |

## *Answers to Page 15*

Why review the commitments to action?

- Prevent the post meeting "I didn't think *that* was what we decided" syndrome.

- Confirms consensus.

- Increases the likelihood that individuals will follow through on commitments made in the meeting.

- Ensures that meeting members leave the meeting with a sense of accomplishment.

# Recommended Reading List

Barner, Robert W. *Team Troubleshooter.* Davies-Black Publishing, 2001.

Bens, Ingrid. *Facilitating with Ease.* Jossey-Bass, 2005.

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