

Key Principles of Effective Meetings

Effective communication can be achieved through formal and informal ways of working.

Quick catch-ups with the team may be appropriate for an informal daily update or there may be times when a formal meeting is required to discuss key issues relating to the team or department.

As a manager, a large proportion of your time is spent in meetings so it is vital that you run them effectively.

The consistent application of the key principles will help to ensure that your meetings are worthwhile, effective and enjoyable.

1. Necessity

Make sure the meeting is necessary. Ask yourself, 'What would be the consequences if I didn't hold this meeting?' Do not hold a meeting when it has simply become a habit or just because you want to micromanage your team.

5. Rapport

Always remember the simple, common courtesies of life, particularly if you need to win support and build relationships. Make people feel welcome by creating a comfortable environment.

9. Contribution

Ensure all participants have opportunities to participate, especially those whose preference is to reflect and consider the views of others before speaking; they often have very valuable insights.

2. Clarity of purpose

Write down the meeting objectives. Include these with any information circulated beforehand. Clarity of purpose in the minds of all attendees helps them decide:

- How best to contribute
- What is relevant/irrelevant
- How to keep on track
- Should they be there or not.

6. Recording

Take notes so that you are able to produce an accurate record of events. The detail required will depend on the nature of the meeting. Some will require formal minutes with extensive detail, others will need only a brief note of any decisions made and agreed next steps. Aim to distribute meeting notes as soon after the meeting as possible.

10. Summarise

Carry out regular and frequent summaries. This will enable everyone to check understanding and confirm what has been discussed/agreed. Research suggests that in effective meetings someone summarises at least every 5 minutes.

3. Have an agenda

Write an agenda and publish it beforehand. This will clarify what will be covered and in what order.

7. Timing

Ensure you keep time. Share a time plan with everyone - they will help you to achieve it. Take short 'time outs' to review how the agenda is progressing and whether the plan needs to be adjusted.

11. Openness and honesty

Promote openness and honesty in your meetings. The quality of conversation will be much greater if you achieve this. Challenge hidden agendas and the withholding of information. This will bring issues out into the open where they can be addressed or openly side-lined.

4. Need to attend

Be clear why each participant is attending. If they cannot help achieve the objective, then don't invite them.

8. Continuous improvement

Obtain feedback from participants on what was useful about the meeting and what you could have done differently. You could choose to do this at the end of the meeting or informally later.