



Drive Your Meetings to Outcomes: Key Skills for the Global Leader

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Drive Your Meetings To Outcomes: Key Skills for the Global Leader

—By Jason Myers, Chief Marketing Officer, Matrix Management Institute



Leading effective meetings is one of the key global leadership competencies sought out by organizations worldwide, yet many leaders still lack the skills needed to make sure their meetings produce outcomes. Take action to stop wasteful, unproductive meetings!

According to a [Bain & Company survey](#), senior executives spend two full days a week in meetings, which results in thousands of hours of the leaders' time wasted. Meetings are often scheduled without a clear purpose or outcome, resulting in "decision-murkey" and time spent in conversations leading nowhere in particular. Many organizations have a culture of obligatory meeting attendance and don't consider the repercussions of

taking employees away from productive work.

Organizations need to make sure that their meetings are used to accomplish things and move the work forward. People embrace meetings that help them do their jobs, instead of wasting their time.

We have three tips on how to turn your meetings around.

1. Take Charge Even When You're Not the Boss

Modern organizations require that people from different functions work together, share information and make decisions collaboratively. A meeting where this happens is very different from an old-school status meeting, where people from the same department report to the boss about what they've been working on.

The authority relationship the department team members may have to their leader defines the dynamic of such a meeting. The boss assigns tasks, asks questions, and generally drives the meeting forward. The team members may contribute to the process in various ways but their influence over the meeting's outcome is limited.

Sadly, project managers and other leaders who lead cross-functional teams still model their meetings on these old-school [in status meetings](#).

The types of activities that need to be accomplished and the dynamics of

leading a team without authority change what is required in today's meetings if they are to be effective.

First and foremost, the composition of the people attending the meeting changes: they must include members of other teams and departments, in other words, stakeholders. Leaders without authority over the people in the room need a different approach to leading and to running such a meeting.

That approach has to be collaborative and it certainly doesn't mean having a group of people sitting around, talking without a clear purpose, and getting nowhere.

Productive collaboration requires the meeting leader to follow a process in order to guide the participants to effective decisions and plans that everyone understands and can live with – otherwise known as consensus.

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The meeting leader takes charge of running the meeting, but that doesn't mean making the decisions for the group, because not only does she not have the authority to do so but the decisions

needed are often too complex for one person to make on her own. "Taking charge" of the meeting means facilitating a process that uses collaborative methods.

2. Follow a Process, Move Forward

We've all been to a meeting that started out as promising and then got stuck. Moving a meeting forward is a leadership competency most of us aren't born with.

The meeting process starts before people get together in the room and ends after they have dispersed.

To propel the meeting forward, a leader must be prepared, skilled in meeting facilitation techniques, and focused on achieving meeting outcomes.

The meeting leader first defines the purpose and expected outcomes of the meeting and then plans it with that in mind. If there isn't a clear purpose, there shouldn't be a meeting!

Meeting pre-planning phase is instrumental to its ultimate effectiveness. Pre-planning includes not only the meeting agenda, but also who should be present at a meeting. To end wasteful meetings, we must take a hard look at the culture of meeting attendance. Not everyone should attend every meeting! In fact, each meeting participant must know exactly why they are attending.

Meeting venue and other elements, such as amenities, timing and overall organizational context matter just as



much. Ever scheduled a meeting during an important conflicting event and had major stakeholders skip it due to other obligations? Ever struggled with other seemingly trivial things, such as another team barging into the conference room you thought you booked, or not enough water supplied for a long meeting on a hot day? A careful planning process will save you many a disaster.

It may sound like too much work, but careful meeting planning helps minimize the need for re-work, and even the need for subsequent meetings!

The keys to a productive "work" phase of a meeting lie within true collaboration among meeting participants and strong facilitation skills of the meeting leader.

Meetings that can't get past an agenda item, result in an argument, or get completely derailed by one person lack a skilled facilitator. All these challenges can be resolved if the person in charge of a meeting is a keen listener, can establish and enforce clear rules, nip conflict in the bud, lead the group to consensus, and continuously keep the group focused on the outcome.

[Group facilitation training](#) exists so that those of us who are not naturals

3. Keep An Eye on the Prize (AKA "Meeting Outcome")

When you focus a meeting on its intended outcomes, the meeting becomes more productive. This may sound too simple, but it's true. We live and work in a complex world, where distractions abound. Some distractions may even seem relevant or important, but a productive meeting is one that stays on track with a laser focus on what it was called to achieve.

For example, contextual information, supporting data, related challenges can take hours to consider and discuss. A meeting is not a place for lengthy discussions or group document-reading. If complex data is necessary for the group's ability to make a decision over the course of the meeting, than the meeting

Learn More:

Read our [Leading Effective Meetings Quick Guide](#) to learn more about the collaborative meeting process, core facilitation practices, and keeping the focus on the outcomes.

You can also explore our [Collaborative Meeting Management](#) training course.

at guiding the group through a meeting process, can learn necessary tools and techniques. Facilitation skill is one of the core competencies of leaders in the 21st century.

The often-ignored post-meeting phase is another component of an effective meeting. In this phase, the meeting leader finalizes and distributes the meeting minutes, any documentation produced in a meeting, or other outcomes, including plans for future meetings.

participants must have that information prior to the meeting.

Focused, outcome-based meetings allow organizations to resolve complex challenges, develop multifaceted approaches, and deliver outcomes cross-functionally.

[Complexity is inevitable](#), and focus on the outcomes does not need to simplify things that are meant to be complex, but it makes it possible for organizations, teams and individual workers to achieve common understanding, move the work forward, and make incremental improvements.

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