



## Project Team Meetings: Progress or Problem?

Surely, one of the more challenging situations that employees face at work is to be assigned (or volunteering) to be a member of a project team. Regardless of the situation of the project or its vitality for the company, the automatic understanding when an employee is placed on a project team is that they will complete their own job duties while adding the duties associated with the project team. It is no wonder that these project team assignments are often considered problematic for project team members. Even when team members are excited and motivated to work on an important project, that still doesn't change the need for the demanding skills of balancing time and effort between their regular job duties and those of the project.

Over the years, we've helped literally hundreds of project leaders and project teams to navigate the demands that projects warrant. We have heard the team members' laments and their frustration over the time demands associated with meeting project deadlines.

Perhaps the loudest of those complaints from project team members center around project team meetings. We hear team members tell us that there are too many meetings, that they take too long, that they aren't well organized or managed and that they often actually slow the project work down rather than expedite it. Our approach to helping project leaders through the challenge of team-meeting planning is based on the principles of effective meeting management, customized a bit to fit the project structure.

With a bit of introspective analysis, it is reasonable to view well-managed projects as comprised

of just two elements: a good plan and effective communication associated with that plan. Our guidelines for well-managed project team meetings follow those two components carefully.

Here is some of the focus that minimizes the reluctance and resistance to project team meetings:

How long will your meeting run? This can be assessed from: your agenda, the time when team members are most available, and a reasonable decision about how much material can be absorbed in the meeting.

There is also a trust and integrity factor associated with meeting duration. If our meeting announcement says the meeting will be one hour, then at the one-hour mark or maybe a few minutes prior, the meeting leader needs to let people have a guilt-free opportunity to leave.

*"Before we go on, I see that we are just about up to our stated meeting time, and I respect your time management demands. If you need to leave, I understand, and we will connect with you later to catch you up on what you missed. I suspect that we have perhaps 15 or 20 minutes remaining for our agenda, and if you can stay, I would really appreciate it."*

The agenda should be as detailed as possible and sent to team members prior to the meeting. Aside from serving as a subtle reminder, it also shows the team that the leader has a thought-out, careful purpose for the meeting. Sometimes the agenda can be timed per item, based on the leader's assumption about how much time

(OVER)

an item warrants. Items on the agenda can also have specific team members' names to present an item to minimize the likelihood that the leader will dominate the meeting.

Once the leader is clear on what he/she wants to accomplish, then each agenda item can be tallied and the meeting duration identified. If the total tally is longer than is reasonable, then the leader can prioritize which items are most vital now and which can wait until the next meeting.

Establishing meeting objectives is the answer to team members' questions: Why should I go to this meeting? What do we expect to accomplish? How does the meeting content relate to the Project Plan?

We have seen very effective agendas with the objectives of the meeting stated up front and prominently. Remember that the Project Plan drives everything about the project, and there should be a direct connection between the Plan and the reasons and content for this meeting.

Before the close of the meeting, someone attending should be prepared to summarize what was accomplished during the meeting. This person can often be assigned prior to the meeting, so they know it will be their responsibility to offer the summary. Often this person is responsible for the meeting minutes as well. The minutes should be posted for all team members as soon as possible after the meeting. The summary should include any specific assignments made during the meeting as well as any unresolved issues that require more time and research.

Often, project leaders will follow-up the meeting with a bullet-point summary email to the team, perhaps with the date for the next meeting. This is especially effective to assure ownership of assignments made during the meeting.

Once a project leader has created a solid project plan, then the next requirement is the communication and implementation of that plan. Effective project team meetings is a vital component of that communication process.

