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## Something's Wrong With My Meeting

Nothing can be more valuable than the time that colleagues and collaborators spend together creating solutions, new products and the momentum that drives progress forward. And yet, managers, business leaders and workers the world over cringe at the thought of meetings. Cartoons hang on bulletin boards and cubicles everywhere mocking the pre-meeting meeting. The word 'meeting' has become synonymous with lost productivity and a host of frustrations and disappointments.

For all the money industries throw at strategic visioning, efficiency studies and motivational seminars, little thought or effort is expended on making better use of the time that's available. We can do better than this. How many times do people leave meetings saying, "What a great meeting! We really came up with great ideas during that meeting?"

How?

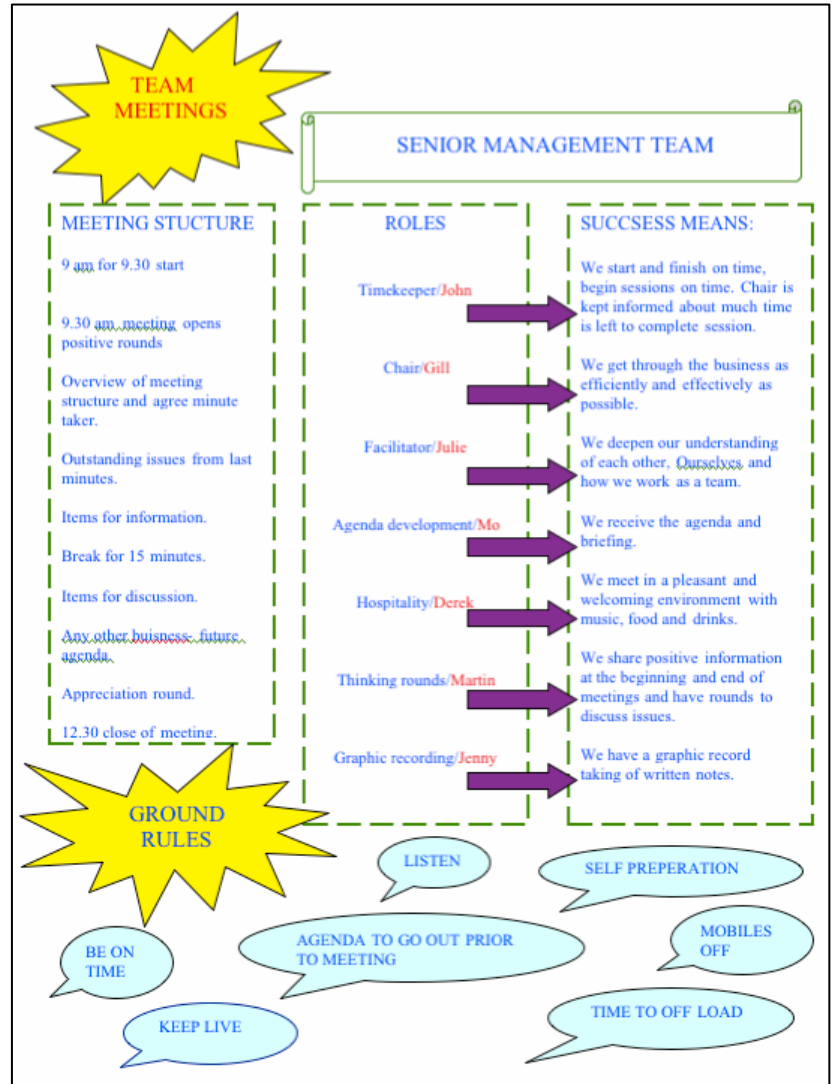
Positive and Productive Meetings (PPM) is a set of strategies initially developed by consultants in England attempting to steal back their own time and energy as well as that of the people they worked with everyday.

Over time very simple, yet effective principles became clear. If teams want to work together positively and productively, they must:

- Have a clear purpose and clear outcomes for each meeting;
- Create a process and environment where people can be listened to and think for themselves, and;
- Work to people's strengths and share responsibility for different roles in the meeting.

No two meetings are the same

PPM is not a formula applied at random to meetings without consideration. Senior management teams to front line workers have used this meeting process. It's an active process that teams undertake together, charting a course that works for them. Teams answer a series of questions and develop strategies for creating useful agendas, sharing roles, listening to each other, recording their dialogues and taking action. PPM is a process that guides teams to create their own model for collaboration, and recording this in a Meeting Map. The Meeting Map to the right indicates one of a myriad of ways teams have chosen to record their Positive and Productive Meeting practices.



## The Questions We Ask

How is this time efficient? The questions can be covered in a variety of ways and do not involve time intensive activities or discussions to address. For instance, when first introducing PPM, purpose posters help answer the question of “why we meet?” as the guiding purpose for the team meeting. As the team starts using the process, collaborative agenda development becomes a great way to continue to answer the question “why do we meet.”

The following chart offers suggestions for teams to address the six questions.

Question	PPM Processes
Why do we meet?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Purpose poster</li> <li>• Meeting mission</li> <li>• Core responsibilities</li> <li>• Meeting outcomes</li> <li>• Agenda development</li> </ul>
How do we work together?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meeting agreements</li> <li>• Ground rules</li> <li>• Environment</li> <li>• Rounds</li> <li>• Timed talk</li> </ul>
Who does what?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitator/ chair</li> <li>• Time keeper</li> <li>• Agenda development</li> <li>• Hospitality</li> <li>• Recorder</li> <li>• Graphic recorder</li> <li>• Rounds</li> <li>• Ground rules</li> <li>• Team builder</li> <li>• Evaluation</li> </ul>
How do we review our progress?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working/not working</li> <li>• 4 + 1 questions</li> </ul>
What else can we try?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Problem solving</li> <li>• Creativity</li> <li>• Decision making</li> </ul>
How do we share actions and information?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recording the meeting</li> <li>• Feedback process</li> <li>• Graphic recording</li> </ul>

## The Meeting Process

How teams answer the six questions will determine the specifics of the process they will follow during their meetings. They record their answers on a Meeting Map. Every team's Meeting Map will look very different, but there are some steps and sequences that all teams follow to a Positive and Productive Meeting.

### Agenda Development

Prepare and share agendas prior to the meeting. Organize the agenda by separating items for information and items for discussion.

Include any papers, proposals or additional information to be presented at the meeting.

Papers inform and enhance the decision-making process and should be written with this in mind. Papers for meeting should open with the question and outcome required. The paper should be as short as possible, preferably no more than two pages.



### Create a Welcoming Environment

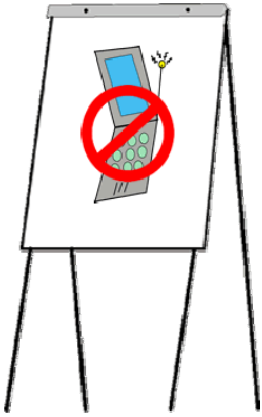
Prepare the meeting room to be welcoming and comfortable. Food, beverages, lighting and music are just some of the considerations when planning for a positive and productive meeting.

### Opening Rounds

Start with a positive uninterrupted round: "What's going well at the moment?"



## Review Ground Rules



Begin each meeting with a warm welcome and a quick review of the team's ground rules for meetings. To prevent this becoming mechanical, teams usually prefer to have ongoing ground rules that they simply read through again at the beginning of the meeting.

Teams need to share responsibility for ensuring that everyone sticks to the principles and way of running the meeting.

## Clarify Agenda and Timings

Review the agenda and check the order, content and timing. The chair will check with the group that both the order and content of the agenda is appropriate and make any changes. This could happen with another quick round.



When the agenda has been set, the chair and team may allocate time for the items for information and for items for discussion. Some teams include times on the agenda distributed before the meeting. Usually the team will tweak the time frames before they begin their conversations.



## Items for Information

Share the information items one by one. Check whether people have any questions of clarification but ensure that these do not lead into discussion. If the item needs to be discussed, transfer it to the items for discussion part of the agenda, at this or a later meeting. Getting through these items swiftly gives maximum time for thinking and discussion within the meeting.

## Items for Discussion

Ask the person who is leading the discussion item to briefly describe the situation and state the question. Then do a round to capture people's first responses to the question.

There are then several options:

- Further uninterrupted rounds
- Open discussion
- Timed talk: Split into pairs and have a set time limit for each person to think about the question aloud without interruption. Come back to the big group and do a round asking people to share their freshest thinking, including and beyond what they said in their pair work.
- Further rounds after discussion
- Occasionally asking an incisive question and then a round. An incisive question removes a limiting assumption, for example "If the senior managers gave us permission to run the on call system in whatever way we thought best – what would we do?"

It's useful to have a 3-minute rule! This prevents anyone from taking over or taking up too much time. Agree at the outset that the timekeeper can stop anyone's turn if they carry over 3 minutes.

When there appears to be an outcome or answer to the question the chair could either:

- State what they think is the answer or outcome and use a round to check agreement
- Start a round asking each person to clarify what they think is the answer or outcome.

If the group is really stuck it may be necessary to vote. If this happens, it should happen based on a question and set of possible answers or outcomes.

During the discussion items remember:

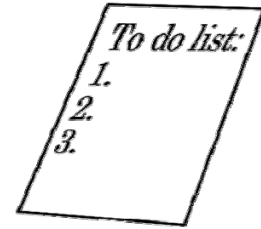
- Allow people to finish thought- don't interrupt
- Be clear about decisions already made and legal and political constraints. Ask the question, "What are the implications?" if a decision is already made.



Consider reflecting on the ground rules halfway through the meeting.

### Review Actions

Review the actions the team has agreed to and check the agenda questions to see what needs to be communicated, to whom and how. This avoids the “ I didn’t think that was what we agreed” syndrome.



### Burning Issues

Address any burning issues at the end of the meeting. Use a quick round with the question, “Are there any pressing issues that need to be dealt with immediately?” Transfer these items to the next meeting’s agenda.

### Closing Rounds

Conclude the meeting with a round based on what has gone well in the meeting or what they found most useful about the time spent together in the meeting.

Use an “appreciation round” every so often at the end of the meeting (go round and share something that you appreciate about the person, e.g. on your left). This can seem awkward to do at first, but does give you that “internal glow” factor that is very important!



### After the Meeting

Send the agreed upon action out to people as soon as possible to ensure they are clear about their responsibilities. This should happen within a week of the meeting.

# The Positive & Productive Meeting Process



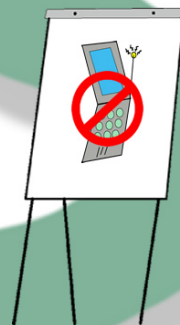
Agenda Development



Create a Welcoming Environment



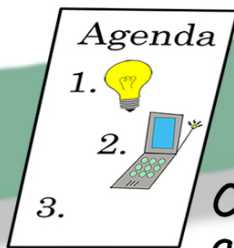
Opening Rounds



Review Ground Rules



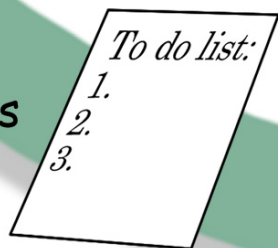
Items for Information



Clarify Agenda and Timings



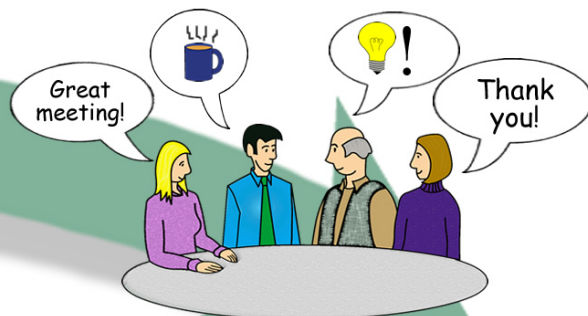
Items for Discussion



Review Actions



Burning Issues



Closing Rounds

## Roles in the meeting

Clearly there's a great deal that must be done for a team to have a Positive and Productive Meeting. Key to success is how team members share the many roles and responsibilities. Teams can have as many or as few roles as they want and should work to the individual strengths of their members. Here is a selection that teams can choose from or add to. For each role, agree with the team what success would look like, sound like or feel like.

This is how one team defined success for each of the roles:

Role	Success means:
Chair/facilitator	We get through the agenda efficiently and effectively.
Agenda Development	We receive our agenda before the meeting. The agenda is presented as questions with outcomes, and split into items for information and items for discussion.
Hospitality	We meet in a pleasant, welcoming environment with color, music, food and drinks.
Time keeper	We start and finish on time, and begin sessions after breaks on time. We allocate time for each agenda item and keep to this.
Recorder	We have actions recorded from our meeting and receive these two weeks after the meeting
Graphic recorder	We have a graphic record of our meetings
Ground Rules	We are reminded of our ground rules at the beginning of the meeting and are supported to keep to them
Rounds	We begin and end our meetings with rounds. We use rounds in for each agenda item for discussion
Team builder	We deepen our understanding of ourselves, each other, and how we work as a team.
Evaluation	We review our meetings every three months

## A Role For Everyone

While different team members will have different roles, everyone has a role to prepare for the meeting in order to get the most from the meeting. Everyone is expected to:

- Read the previous minutes
- Input to the agenda where appropriate (by identifying the question needing an answer and the outcome being sought)
- Consider their thoughts about each of the agenda items
- Read and consider any meeting papers
- Commit to spending the whole meeting time present
- Finding someone to deputise for you, if you cannot attend

## How to Move Forward

Do you look forward to attending meetings?

Are meetings energizing and engaging?

Are your meetings organized, comfortable and timely?

Do you leave meetings with clear outcomes and expectations?

If you answered no to any or all of the questions above, you have several options to bring Positive and Productive Meeting practices into your work:

- Attend a two day course to learn about using these techniques within your meetings
- Have a consultant come and work directly with your meeting team. In the morning she will introduce your team to the practical techniques and roles, so that the team can design their new meetings. In the afternoon she will coach you in your actual meeting to put what you have decided into practice.

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