



GUIDE TO MORE EFFICIENT & FUN ONLINE MEETINGS...



There's a ton of information out there on holding online meetings. This guide is designed to help you *facilitate* online meetings. Facilitation is an important part of any meeting but the tools it takes to do it well are a little different online.



An important thing to remember when hosting an online meeting is that none of the participants will be able to tell what's going on for other people in the group in the same way that they could in real life (IRL). An enormous amount of the information we exchange in an IRL meeting comes from the body language, facial expressions, and tones of our colleagues. In a virtual meeting space, our abilities to accurately read these cues are diminished so we're not getting as much information as we normally would. Compensating for this may be one of the biggest and most important jobs of an online facilitator. And just like any other meeting, good facilitation happens **BEFORE YOU EVEN ENTER THE ROOM**, virtual or otherwise.

PRE-MEETING...

LET THE PURPOSE GUIDE YOU

- ★ Decide on your purpose and if having a meeting truly aligns with that purpose. If you don't need active participation from others, it probably does not need to be a meeting.

SEND OUT AGENDA AND SUPPORTING MATERIALS AHEAD OF TIME

- ★ Online meetings take longer than meetings IRL and we pay less attention when we're in them. You're more likely to get to your desired outcomes if folks know what the plan is and what's expected of them ahead of time.

GUIDELINES AND EXPECTATIONS

- ★ Let people know how you will be facilitating and what the expectations are before the meeting. Here are some examples of common expectations:
 - Stay muted unless talking
 - If joining late, stay muted and type in the chat box that you've arrived. Same goes for leaving early
 - Using the camera unless we'll be moving a lot (as it can be distracting)

CHOOSE AN EFFICIENT STRUCTURE

- ★ This will be determined by your purpose and desired outcomes. If you have a large group and want a lot of feedback, consider breakout rooms, voting, and polling mechanisms.

ASK FOR SUPPORT ROLES

- ★ Some common helpful support roles are timekeeper, chat box monitor, and note-taker. You'll save time if you get these roles sorted ahead of your meeting.

If you've followed some of these guidelines before the meeting begins, you'll be well on your way to having a more efficient meeting. Of course, there's still a lot to do once you're in the virtual room together.

DURING THE MEETING...**◎ PROACTIVE FACILITATION**

Online meetings require a lot of facilitation to run smoothly. If you're typically a facilitator that hangs back and lets the group choose the flow, this will be a bigger stretch for you. You will save the group valuable time, energy, and a lot of frustration, if you're able to increase the facilitation and moderation that you provide.

COMPENSATE FOR LACK OF VISUAL AND AUDITORY CUES...

- ★ For example, since people can't see who is going to speak next, you may need to decide how a speaking order or system will go.

KEEP MUTED...

- ★ Ambient sound is amplified in these spaces. You're not being a buzzkill by muting everyone, you're increasing folks' abilities to focus and hear whoever is speaking.

CREATE SPEAKING ORDERS WHERE NEEDED...

- ★ Interrupting a speaker online is far more chaotic and difficult to disentangle than it is IRL. To help your group stay on purpose and decrease frustration, it can help to minimize the number of times someone is interrupted (by someone other than the facilitator).

IF POSSIBLE, GIVE ANY INSTRUCTIONS VERBALLY AND IN A CHAT BOX

◎ LET PEOPLE KNOW ABOUT GUIDELINES AND EXPECTATIONS**◎ USE THE FUNCTIONALITY OF THE APPLICATION**

- ★ Hand Raising
- ★ Small Groups
- ★ Polling and Voting
- ★ Chat Box
 - Be clear about what you do and don't want in the chat box and how you'll be using it

◎ EXTRA PROCESS TRANSPARENCY

- ★ Since folks can't see your facial expressions or most of what you're doing, telling them explicitly what's going on will help decrease awkward silences and increase a sense of understanding and inclusion in the group process

◎ USE VISUAL CUES

- ★ Hand signals can greatly increase our connection to one another without audio interruptions

◎ CLOSINGS

- ★ Review action items and open loops
- ★ Leave time for a closing check-out

Of course, even when we've done our best prep and our absolute best to keep the group moving along, problems will come up. Here are a few of the most common that I've seen and some of my suggestions for addressing them.

TROUBLESHOOTING...

🎯 AWKWARD SILENCES

- ★ Silences are common in any meeting and not a sign that anything bad is happening, per se. If you're asking a tough question, sometimes that silence is just an indicator that people are thinking. Something you can do to help is to name that the silence is happening and your guess about why.
- ★ Sometimes a silence is awkward because the participants don't know what is supposed to happen.

➤ Did you ask an open-ended question to the group? If so, participants may be trying to figure out who will speak. I advise asking open-ended questions in small groups for online meetings or creating a speaking order if you want the answers all together

➤ Perhaps you gave an instruction that was unclear, you might say something like, "I'm guessing based on the silence that my instructions weren't very clear. Who would be willing to repeat back the instructions for the group?"

🎯 LOW/NO PARTICIPATION

★ It's easy and fast to disengage from what's happening in an online meeting. A common reason for this to happen is that one speaker is speaking for a long time without the interest of the group. It's ok to interrupt as a facilitator to help a group stay on purpose and keep the energy up.

★ The group might not believe/trust that their input is actually wanted. This issue can frequently come up with hierarchical power structures and is unlikely to be resolved in a single meeting. However, the participation will likely increase in smaller groups.

🎯 ONE PERSON DOMINATING

★ Sometimes a person is dominating a conversation because they are trying to help move the group along. You can help by asking a question and adding that you'd like to hear especially from folks who haven't spoken.

★ Interrupting is a key facilitation skill, whether virtual or IRL. Letting people know why you're interrupting and why it serves the group can help ease the stress of interrupting.

🎯 MEETING SEEMS SLOW AND ARDUOUS

★ It might be that the process you designed is a poor fit for the group. It's ok to change course! You can say something like, "hmm, this is taking longer than I was expecting and I'm worried it's not a good use of your time. I'd like to switch courses and do _____ instead".

★ Make an agreement with the group to revisit some of the topics if needed. Online processes can sometimes take longer than those that happen in person, be easy with yourself and lower your agenda expectations!

