

Facilitating Positive and Productive Meetings

Developing Meeting Participation Guidelines: One of the most powerful ways to increase the productivity of meetings is for people to develop a set of guidelines on how they should contribute and respond during a meeting. Rather than simply providing a set of guidelines based on the ideas of other people, taking the time to use the following group process, or, one that is similar to it, has proven to be very beneficial.

Experience has shown that developing a set of group guidelines provides people with clear behavioral expectations. Moreover, the value of the guidelines is increased due to the fact that the group developed and approved them. Most importantly, being involved in such a process encourages people to understand some of the major principles underlying effective meeting behaviours. Hence, when the Chair or other colleagues sitting at the table, indicate that an individual or individuals are not respecting these group-developed guidelines, the request to do so does not come from one person but stems from the entire group, which gives them much more power to influence positive behaviors or decrease negative ones!

The following group activity has been used in a wide variety of settings. It has generated many interesting and valuable suggestions. The process that has proven to be quite successful is described below.

Place the following question and instructions on a screen and review them with the group. Distribute post-its to the participants and lay out a large sheet of flip chart paper. Ask for clarifying questions, then encourage people to post their responses.

What guidelines should we use to make our meetings more positive, open, and collaborative in nature?

As individuals, on separate post-its, briefly describe potential group behaviour guidelines that you want your group to consider.

As a group, review the proposed guidelines, categorize them, and identify the three to five most important ones. Be ready to share your suggestions.

Facilitating Positive and Productive Meetings

Suggested Meeting Participation Guidelines

The following suggestions were posted on several occasions by groups that completed the above group process on meeting participation guidelines:

General:

- Understand and respect the purpose of the meeting
- Try to follow and adhere to the agenda
- Arrive on time for the meeting

Positive Contributions:

- Speak in a respectful manner
- Share ideas but do not dominate the discussion
- Acknowledge the input of others
- Build on the ideas of others
- Ask for clarifications, if required

Safe Atmosphere:

- Members feel free to share their ideas
- Clarifying questions are expected and not viewed negatively
- Disagreement is viewed as natural and healthy
- Suggestions to improve meeting processes are welcomed
- People feel psychologically safe in the meeting

The following discussion guidelines were developed by participants based on a post-its activity. The following set of guidelines are simply an example of the type of ideas that a group could generate to help facilitate effective participation.

The acronym LEARN provides a reminder of these group discussion guidelines:

- **L**isten for understanding
- **E**ncourage others to contribute
- **A**sk questions and limit “air time”
- **R**eview progress at key times (use flipcharts!)
- **N**ote results and celebrate them