

Practice name

Effective and result-driven meetings

This best practice is a solution to the following symptoms

- passive and uninspiring meetings
- discussions that do not involve the entire group
- lack of decision making
- lack of follow-up on meetings

Specific ingredients of this practice

- template-based reporting on meetings
- scheduled preparation of meetings
- respect for the time and preparation of all attendants

Prerequisites

- responsible chairman/facilitator
- sharp note-taking
- time to prepare meetings

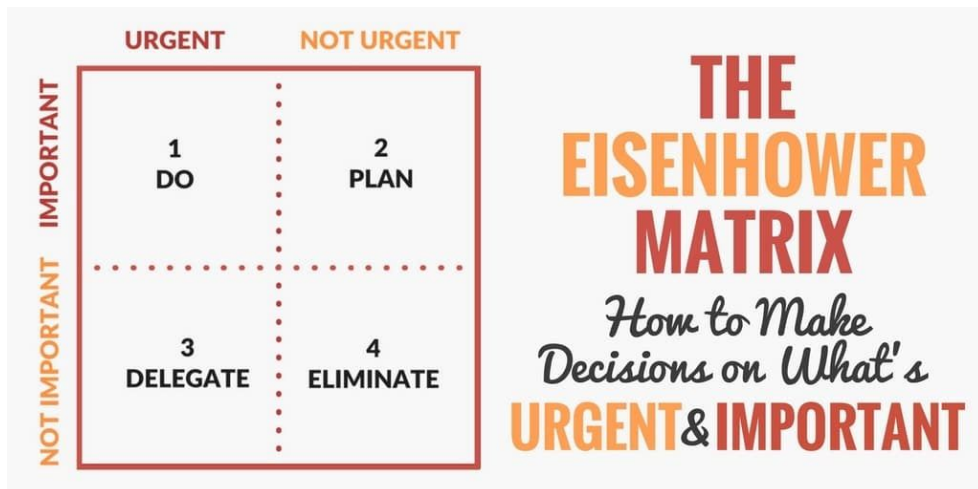
Potential side-effects

- Prepared attendants
- Activated attendants
- Attendants feel respected for the time and energy they invest in the meeting

Procedure

This procedure assumes a weekly meeting with a team with different responsibilities. The procedure starts right after sending out the meeting minutes of the last meeting. Preferably this is done at the end of the working day on which the meeting was held. The *meeting minutes template* will provide for an easy and quick way to draft these minutes.

1. Ask participants of the next meeting to send in meeting objectives for the next week. What do they want on the agenda?
2. Collect all agenda-items and prioritize. Prioritize using the Eisenhower Matrix.



3. Plan the next meeting. Keep 10 minutes for general announcements and update on tasks. No more. Then, plan about 15 minutes for every agenda item. Preferably, meetings are kept within one hour. If this means too little agenda items can be processed, plan meetings more frequently, but only in case of too many items that fall in category 1 of the Eisenhower matrix. Otherwise, just schedule agenda items for next meetings. Agenda items that are not in category 1 or 2 shouldn't be on the agenda anyway. They should be dealt with outside the meeting. Finish the meeting with 10 minutes for wrapping up and summarizing all actions that have been assigned during the meeting.

4. Decide upfront what the desired outcome of each agenda item is. In other words, when has the item been handled, when is it done? Usually this requires certain decisions to be made and certain actions to be assigned. Make sure to have defined the objective of the agenda item in a SMART way. This will also clarify what information attendants need in order to prepare for the meeting. On a more advanced level the meeting owner works out different scenarios that may unfold during the meeting and prepares for these scenarios so that they all end up meeting the objective. A prepared meeting owner as an overview of the positions of all attendants on the agenda items and thus can foresee the discussions and processes that may unfold.

- S** **Specific** Target a specific area for improvement
- M** **Measurable** Quantify or suggest an indicator of progress
- A** **Assignable** Specify who will do it
- R** **Realistic** What results can realistically be achieved
- T** **Time-related** Specify when the result(s) can be achieved

5. Distribute the agenda (see template) with the objective per agenda item. This way, every attendant knows the expected outcome upfront and can take responsibility for preparing.
6. The meeting itself. The meeting itself follows these steps:
 - a. Start at the designated time. Don't wait for latecomers, as only professional behavior should be rewarded.
 - b. Go through all the actions in the meeting minutes of the previous meetings. The only answer required from the action holder is "yes" or "not finished yet". The numbering of the actions indicates the initial date of the action. If many team members have a growing number of open actions, address this issue as an agenda item. If it is specific attendants only, explain that this is an issue that will be dealt with outside of the meeting between the meeting owner and the specific attendant. The default behavior should be to have actions finished by their due date. Any other behavior needs to be addressed.
 - c. Start the next agenda item. Give a very brief introduction (everyone has had the ability to prepare), and restate the objective of the agenda item. Hand over to the person responsible for introducing this item on the agenda. The

meeting owner now only focuses on reaching the desired outcome. Be very strict on:

- i. Repeating information that was in the pre-meeting briefing
- ii. One-on-one discussions
- iii. Side-steps that divert from reaching the objective

Note down only actions and decisions that are decided upon by the entire group. Make it clear that an action is going to be noted, who the action owner is and when the action is due. Same for decisions, create full clarity that a decision has been reached, make sure all participants know and accept the impact of this decision.

If during the discussion on an agenda item it becomes clear an attendant has not prepared for this specific agenda item, this participant is to be told not to interfere with the process of adequate decision making. Keep a positive focus on the attendants that did come prepared.

When the assigned time for the agenda item is almost over, stop the agenda item. With the group, decide if the item can be finalized or that it is to be moved over to next meeting and that another item of this meeting is going to be skipped. Make sure everyone understands the impact of this decision on the agenda of this and further meetings.

- d. Finalize the agenda item. Summarize actions and decisions. Move to the next agenda item.
 - e. At the final agenda item, summarize all actions and decision, check if all attendants have the next meeting scheduled, and thank everyone.
7. Finish the meeting on time, keep your promise about the time the meeting was going to take.
 8. After the meeting, work out the meeting minutes according to the template and the actions and decisions agreed upon. Don't add new stuff, only items that have been discussed and agreed upon. If all is well, writing the meeting minutes should not take more than 15 minutes. Send out the meeting minutes as soon after the meeting as possible, but never more than 24 hours later. Lead by example.

Notes

- The procedure above has been written in a quite straightforward way. It might suggest that as a meeting owner you could orchestrate meetings from beginning to end. That is not the purpose of this procedure. The way you as a meeting owner guarantee inclusion and qualitative decision making is up to you. Have a look at some of the other best practices on prototype.work to get more ideas on how to improve the quality of your decision making.

TEMPLATE AGENDA

1. Status actions last meeting (10 min)
2. Agenda item 1 (15 minutes)
 - The objective of this agenda item:
 - i. [objective 1]
 - ii. [objective 2]
 - Required outcome of this agenda item:
 - i. [outcome 1]
 - ii. [outcome 2]
3. Agenda item 1 (15 minutes)
 - The objective of this agenda item:
 - i. [objective 1]
 - ii. [objective 2]
 - Required outcome of this agenda item:
 - i. [outcome 1]
 - ii. [outcome 2]
4. Wrap-up (10 minutes)

TEMPLATE MEETING MINUTES

[name of meeting]

Date	
Participants	

Agenda

1. Status actions last meeting (10 min)
2. Agenda item 1 (15 minutes)
3. Agenda item 1 (15 minutes)
4. Wrap-up (10 minutes)

Decisions

Decision number	Decision
weeknr-number	Short description of decision
12-2	<i>We will celebrate with the entire team when we meet the goal of X on Y.</i>

[Decisions are numbered with the number of the week in which the decision was taken, followed by a regular number. Decisions appear in the meeting minutes of the meeting the decision was taken and one more meeting after. Then, the decision is removed from the list to keep the list brief. The weeknumber helps in determining when a decision has to be removed from the list.]

Actions

Action number	Action	Owner	Due date	Status
weeknr-number	Action	Name of action owner	Date when action is to be finished	Open/DONE
12-1	<i>Deliver template for meetings</i>	<i>Nigel</i>	<i>April 17</i>	

[Actions are number in the same way as decisions. Actions are set to DONE in the meeting minutes the action was actually reported done. They are removed from the meeting minutes after the next meeting. So finished actions only appear once in meeting minutes.]