Meetings can make or break effective teamwork. They can be boring, pointless, frustrating, endless, spinning in circles – or they can be energizing, motivating, fruitful, and brief. Just as there is no single best piece of clothing, there is no single way to have a good meeting. Meetings should fit the cause and context of their application. The meeting model gallery is a starting point for creating the kind of meetings your team needs to thrive in its work.

Old and New Practices for Meetings

1. Micro Formats

Daily Scrum: A format developed within the framework of agile project management in order to support the self-organization of project teams. Daily Scrum is a regular meeting of maximum 15 minutes, held every day at the same time and place, usually standing up. Every team member gives a short answer to three questions: What did I get done since the last meeting? Which challenges came up? What will I do before the next meeting? The project progress can be visualized on a board or planning wall.

Key Indicator Report: A regular micro meeting or recurring agenda point for results-based monitoring. A short report is given by all departments on 2 or 3 fixed indicators related to the intended outcomes of an action or project.

Intense Period Debriefs: A short review after intense events, campaigns, or hot project phases. The project team conducts a debrief in order to quickly and easily assess results, lessons learned, and further needs for action. (In some cases the review is conducted by a designated external interviewer.)

Fika: Swedish practice of a joint daily coffee break (15-20 minutes) for informal information sharing and exchange. The format is open for both personal and work-related issues and themes.

Brown Bag Lunch: An informal lunch meeting (usually in the office with lunch packages brought by everyone). The lunch is held in order to discuss a work-related topic more or less closely linked to the team's regular field of engagement.

2. Open Agenda

Open Space Meeting: This kind of meeting is suitable when emerging topics cannot be planned in advance and when there is a lot of need to coordinate in bilateral and subgroup settings. In the first part of the meeting, current issues of concern are collected. Each issue is then assigned a time slot in an agenda grid (e.g. in one 30-minute time slot three issues can be discussed in parallel sessions, and then in a second, subsequent 30-minute time slot another three issues can be discussed in parallel). Team members participate only in those sessions to which they can contribute or from which they expect benefit. Those who have nothing to discuss during a particular time slot stay in the room and work on their own tasks. In the final plenary session, (e.g. 30 minutes) agreements and decisions with broader relevance can be discussed and information from the parallel sessions shared.

Semi Open Space: This format allows teams to address a wide range of topics under a number of preset headlines. Issues of concern are solicited according to set categories. Like the Open Space format, the meeting is divided into time slots to address these categories (e.g. 1st round: project related issues, 2nd round: organization related issues, 3rd round: functional issues).

Quoted Agenda: This meeting format is helpful for managing the amount of time given to informing, discussing, deciding, and action planning so that the team does not get stuck in one phase. Agenda items are solicited prior to the meeting (e.g. on a virtual platform) and are coded according to the following categories: I = Information, E = Exchange, D = Decision, A = Action. In the meeting, each category is given a time limit for discussion.

Optional Scheduling: This practice is about reducing the amount of meeting time without losing the ability to convene if needed. Meetings are only called if there is something to discuss. For efficient scheduling, it is helpful to designate regular times during which team members schedule no external appointments. (e.g. Monday afternoon, Wednesday morning).

3. Interactive Thematic Work

Knowledge Cafe/World Cafe: This meeting format helps teams to quickly explore complex issues in small rotating groups. Several sub-topics/aspects of an issue are outlined and discussed in parallel sessions on 4-5 tables. Team members rotate between tables/topics in 2-3 consecutive rounds. Arguments are documented after each parallel session and then are summed up as a jumping off point for plenary discussion.

Speed Geeking: A presentation format for larger groups. The progress or results of different projects/departments are presented in multiple rounds of parallel micro-presentations (similar to conference poster sessions or speed dating). Participants join the presenters in changing combinations.

Fishbowl: A method to work on controversial issues and complex themes of concern that don't lend themselves well to large-group discussions. Representatives of specific subgroups lead a discussion in an inner circle. The other meeting participants listen from outside of the circle. (Roles may change during the meeting.)

Deep Dive Sessions: Deep Dive Sessions ensure that tough questions and big issues don't fall victim to small, daily issues. In the framework of regular meetings, at least 50% of meeting time is devoted to intensive problem solving for an important issue.

Green and Blue Phase: A Green and Blue Phase meeting differentiates issues arising from relationships and from work content. The meeting starts with a Green (relationship) phase that consists of a 30-minute check-in, during which participants can address interpersonal problems. This clears the road for the Blue (work content) phase, where project and content issues can be effectively addressed. A closing check-out and short reflection from each member on the effectiveness of the meeting is sometimes added to the end.

Parade/Walking Meeting – A format facilitating open and creative exchange. The team (ideally no more than 6 members) discusses a sequence of issues over the course of a walk (outside or in the office). At specific locations, decisions and intermediate results are fixed.

4. Alternatives to Meetings

Consultation Process: This is an effective decision-making practice for self-organizing teams. Instead of a leadership or plenary-based decision mode, competences are completely decentralized and delegated to individual team members. Team members are free to make decisions in their wider field of competence; however, each decision requires two upfront consultations: (1) consulting a person in the organization who is particularly knowledgeable about the issue at hand, and (2) consulting a person in the organization who is particularly impacted by the decision.

Virtual Meetings: Virtual meetings can be held by video (e.g. Skype, Zoom) or phone conference (e.g. Meetgreen). Such meetings should have no more than 7 participants and should not last longer than 90 minutes. To be successful, they should have a clear, previously agreed upon agenda, effective facilitation, and well-disciplined participants. Everyone involved should be prepared to use associated technologies to improve effectiveness (parallel chat window, screen sharing programs, etc.).

Subotnik Meeting: Alluding to the Socialist tradition of community volunteer work, a Subotnik meeting emphasizes joint action over discussion and planning. The meeting has the following flow: (1) the team collects concrete tasks to be worked on, (2) needs and ideas for each task are collected by the whole team ("packing the suitcase"), (3) working groups work on the tasks in parallel, and (4) working groups present their results and the results are celebrated together. The Subotnik meeting can be a recurring alternative to regular team meetings (e.g. every first weekly meeting of the month).