

Creating O.P.E.N. Meetings for Stronger Contributions

In a typical meeting, do you look at the clock thinking: “What was the point of this meeting?” or, “Why are we re-visiting decisions we settled last time?” These are common thoughts. Many people have attended meetings where it seemed to be a waste of time, rather than an investment. However; they’ve likely also been in meetings where they say: “We accomplished more than I thought we would” or “My ideas were heard. I can support the outcome.”

What makes the difference?

As HR professionals who are increasingly asked to design meetings to gather input and promote dialogue, you need to do much more than set the time and define the agenda. Check to ensure that your design includes these key elements for meetings to be O.P.E.N.

O) Overview of Issues:

Be clear on the reason(s) for the meeting and on the related issues

- Know its purpose
- Know the desired outcomes
- Know how the results will be used

Knowing these points in advance allows you to determine what information is needed to build an overview of the issues and create stronger insights. With this, you can ensure that the right people, with the relevant wisdom and data, will be invited, prepared and involved.

P) Prepared and Effective Process:

The purpose and desired outcomes will influence the way information needs to be shared, how input should be gathered, and what type of decision-making is needed; that is, what process(es) the meeting should use. Effective processes will encourage useful participant involvement. For example, if the meeting’s purpose is to generate product ideas, then brainstorming techniques would be valuable. If, instead, the purpose is to assess the success of a product launch, then consider using reflective thinking methods.

E) Energized, Engaged People

Successfully defining and planning the first two steps will help to engage participants, but more actions are needed. Check that participants’ expectations match the meeting goals. This may mean polling them beforehand, or doing an “agenda check-in” to begin the meeting. Create a comfortable and respectful meeting environment. This could involve creating a team charter or “operating principles” to encourage open involvement. Designate a meeting leader who ensures the meeting stays on track, honours the operating principles, and allows full participation.

N) Next Steps for Action

Meetings with a clearly stated purpose and outcome will lead to a list of required actions. The meeting must include an agenda item to clarify the meeting insights and decisions. A process to define “who will do what by when” and, “how” will help people think – “this meeting was valuable and I know what will happen next.”

Effective meetings require planning and thought. Next time you are asked to lead or design a meeting, think about how you can create a more O.P.E.N. meeting to create stronger contributions and achieve the meeting goals.

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Originally published: GVHRPA Newsletter, March 2005