

Meetings in Team Projects

This document outlines a well-tested formal meeting process that will ensure that meetings are effective. It specifies a meeting agenda format, the meeting process to follow, and the format to capture the minutes.

Meeting Agenda

The goal of a formal team meeting is to communicate status, make decisions as a team and adjust the short-term work plan (captured as action items). The meeting agenda helps ensure that meetings are productive. The meeting agenda contains the following sections: (i) Information Updates/Reminders, (ii) Decisions Needed, and (iii) General Items.

Information Updates/Reminders section is a summary of the information that needs to be communicated to the entire team. For example, team leader can provide a short summary of client meeting or use it to remind the team of any critical deadlines.

Decisions Needed section contains a list of items that need to be discussed as a team with an intention of making a decision. The quality of a decision (good decisions do not need to be changed/amended) as well as the time it takes to make a decision depend on the information available to make a choice. If an item is on this section of the agenda, the team leader should ensure that the team has sufficient information available to arrive at a quick decision. If an idea is being floated for the first time, then put it into “General Items” section.

General Items section contains a list of items that need to be discussed with an intention of creating “actions”. In a good and well-run meeting, most items on this list are discussed, and specific actions arise from that discussion. A team member acquires (or is assigned) and is responsible for an action. Only “one” team member should be responsible for an action.

Example Meeting Agenda for Project Crimson

Date/Location: on 21-May-2015 at 14:30 in ABC123

Information Updates/Reminders

=====

- * Internal target date for Test plan is 28-May-20015
- * Bob is concerned about team members not using git yet!

Decisions Needed

=====

- * Need to confirm recommended coding standard (Coding standard selected and rationale is attached to this agenda)
- * Formal team meeting day/time needs to change. ZZ is unable to attend due to changed part-time work schedule.

General Items

=====

- * Why is git not being used?
- * The graphics library currently in use is not very effective. KK will present issues and potential ideas to resolve situation.
- * Categories for defect classification. Orthogonal or not?

Meeting Process

Assumptions

- Team leader circulates the agenda before the meeting (12 hours is minimum, 18-24 hours is ideal).
- All team members have read the meeting agenda.

Roles

Chair (~Team Leader): Chairs the meeting and is responsible for controlling the meeting.

Minute Taker (~Deputy Team Leader): Records the meeting minutes and is responsible for circulation of meeting minutes as well as the agenda for the meeting.

Meeting Process Steps

1. Chair starts the meeting formally.
2. Chair presents a short summary of the current state of the project, highlighting any key accomplishments (max. 3 minutes)
3. All team members talk for 1 min. giving a status update. The format is: "*I completed ...*", "*I am currently working on ...*", "*I am having issues with ...*", "*The next tasks for me are ...*". Members present this information clock-wise from the team-leader.
4. The Chair now reads all items on the agenda. At the end, they formally call for any other items to be added to the agenda. New items are added to the agenda only if sufficient information is available to discuss the item.
5. Minute Taker starts the stop-watch and records the "start time for the meeting" in HH:mm 24-hour format. **[CRITICAL STEP]**
6. Each item on the agenda is discussed sequentially. If item is "NOT" on the agenda it is "**NOT**" discussed. (Refer to Step 4 for *what-if* situations)
7. If the discussion is stuck or protracted -- chair will cull it and an action item is raised for issue to be discussed after the meeting. The maximum time allocated for any single agenda item is 5 minutes. The only way out of this is to request more time when the agenda is set.
8. If actions arise from any agenda item discussion, then they are recorded in the "actions" section of the meeting minutes. Every action has a person responsible for it along with a target date. The target date is NOT a dead-line, but it is the date on which progress is reported.
9. If a *decision* is made in the meeting, then these decisions are recorded in the "decisions" section of the meeting minutes. Notes to provide rationale for the decision is also recorded.
10. If an action arises due to a decision -- then that is recorded in the "actions" section of the meeting minutes.
11. If all agenda items were not discussed by end of the meeting time -- these are also recorded in the meeting minutes.
12. At the end of the meeting, the Chair formally closes the meeting. Timer is stopped. Team is informed of the time spent in the meeting.
13. The Minute Taker will read out the meeting minutes. All team members that have actions verbally acknowledge the actions assigned to them.
14. The meeting minutes are shared with the "team" immediately (online) or within 2 hours (in the case of email). This should include reference to/attachment of the agenda used. The agenda is added, since most of the time there are changes made to it at the start of the meeting and new items are added. Meeting agenda and minutes are recorded in a simple or "plain text format".

Recommended Format for Meeting Minutes

The minutes are generally recorded in two sections: (i) Actions, and (ii) Decisions.

Example Meeting Minutes for Project Crimson

Date/Location: 23-Mar-2015, ABC123

Decisions

=====

- * Development environment will be Eclipse IDE 3.6.x.
- * IEEE 888 will be standard used for quality control. This standard has been selected based on the recommendation of GP who investigated 4 alternatives.
- * Rudolf will be responsible for the web site. He is replacing Bart who will be assisting programming team.

[NOTE: Decision is recorded first, followed by an optional rationale]

Actions

=====

25-Mar, RA, New template for web site will be submitted for review
28-Mar, CM, Identify libraries for MD5 (working with KP)

[NOTE: Columns in actions are: Target date, Person responsible and brief note about the task including outcome description].

Actions

Meeting should record actions with a target date and assign the person responsible for that action. Ideally the action description contains the outcome required (i.e. a report, working code example, recommendation, test script etc). If an action is complex and a target date cannot be estimated in the meeting, then the action should **instead** be to scope/analyse the task sufficiently to be able to provide a valid estimate.

The aim of a formal team meeting is “not” to analyse and scope work, but to allocate work items as well as to synchronise the team by communicating the current status of the project. You might organise a separate sub-team meeting between relevant people to do a task like “analyse scope” or “develop backend architecture”

Decisions

Decisions are made with the information available. Hence, the quality of the decision is dependent on the quality of information used to make the choice. In a well-run meeting the information as well as a recommendation is presented to the team as part of the agenda item (attachments are also acceptable). The team members tend to ask questions to clarify and arrive at a decision (or) can choose to request further information.