

### **A Structure for Effective Meetings**

Do you hate meetings?

Are yours tight and efficient and aimed at driving results and increasing connection?

Or do you often find team members rambling on and not saying anything meaningful?

Of the hundreds of companies I've worked with over the past 30 years, I repeatedly see only six types of communication...

Info Sharing

Sharing Oneself

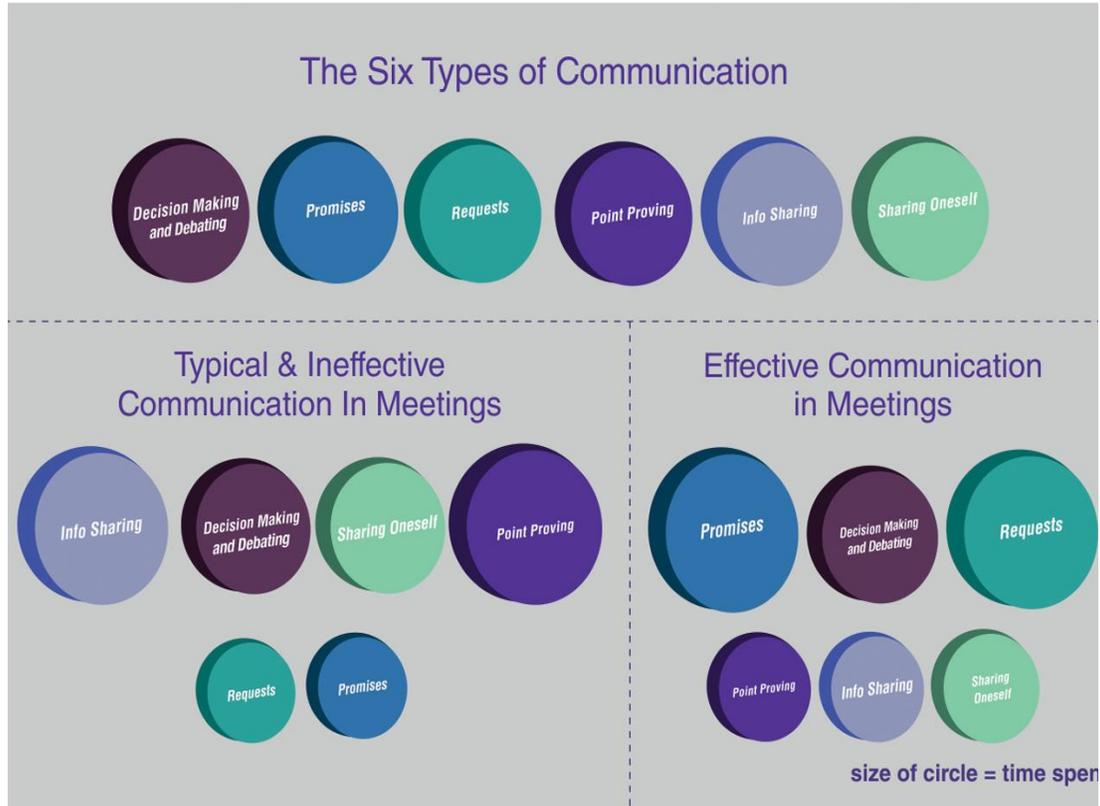
Decision Making & Debating

Point Proving

Promises

Requests

...and only two of them drive results.



What communication types are most prevalent in your culture?

Look at the chart above. Are your meetings dominated by lots of Info Sharing, lots of Sharing of Oneself, some Debating, Decision Making and Point Proving and regrettably few Requests and Promises?

You're not alone.

We have meetings because we want to reach a conclusion of some sort. To make meetings matter you'll want to:

- 1. Set the meeting's intention in advance: what exactly do you want to accomplish?**

If it's simply to share info that is *not* highly sensitive (sensitive = HR matters or conflict resolution), then send an email instead. If it's to get everyone aligned and to allocate work, then set a tight agenda and wrap the meeting within 45 minutes (or take a break then, as people are maxing

out on their attention span). The key is allow *only enough* info sharing to solicit requests from parties who need something and promises from those who will deliver. If it's a company meeting/update session for the team, keep it short with segments for summary result info, current obstacles and plans to overcome them, future goals, a short education session and celebration of people/recent accomplishments.

Is the meeting's purpose to share your thoughts/feelings? Have a one-on-one huddle for 10-15 minutes instead.

Is it to debate or point prove? How necessary is that?

**2. Invite the doers, decision-makers, impacted parties only.**

Often meetings are too crowded because too many unnecessary people are invited. The point of the meeting is to get stuff done as a group. Get the people in the room who will facilitate that or be affected by it. Everyone else should be executing on their own—outside of the room!

**3. Make prompt start times the standard.**

Set a standard for arrival to ensure meetings start on time. When you tell everyone to arrive 5 minutes early to get settled in and catch up with colleagues you'll be able to start promptly. Some of our clients set a consequence for late arrivals: latecomers are either not admitted (the door is locked once the meeting starts), or they pay \$20 if 5 minutes late, \$50 if 6-10 minutes late. Beyond that they're too late. Also no meeting time is spent catching up latecomers—they'll need to catch up on their own time.

**4. Have a clear meeting leader and tight time-boxed agenda.**

The meeting leader's task is to keep everyone on track and drive to results. Once each key point of the meeting is mapped out, keep the focus on achieving your intention. Other topics and side conversations will be handled off line later with the appropriate parties present. Whether the goal is to solve detailed problems or simply get agreement to move forward, be sure to assign responsibilities based on Requests and Promises. The responsible individuals will follow through post-meeting.

**5. Manage communication and feedback.**

Our clients find having three different colors of index cards handy helps. When a person is talking if the others hold up a card they can “participate” silently—which gives the speaker swift feedback. For example, holding up a green card means “I agree,” pink means “I disagree/that concerns me,” white means “I want to talk when they’re done.” The meeting moderator nods/acknowledges the person that wants to be on the Talking List and then makes sure the talkers go in order. You’ll be amazed at how this streamlines and shortens your meetings, while giving everyone a chance to feel “heard.”

**6. Send a recap email of all responsibilities post-meeting.**

The meeting leader will summarize the Requests, Promises and details of each. Remember a vague Request (can you get me info on our top advertisers?) versus a clear and explicit Request (can you get me a report of our top 50 advertisers in the USA with spending history for the past 5 years in a spreadsheet by 4pm this Friday?) will help the Promise-maker succeed. The meeting leader’s job is to ensure all participants are set up to succeed in executing their Promises.

The result of the above is meetings that are efficient, effective, and keep your team happy and executing with high accountability—and in their Smart State. Further, it’ll reduce frustration, boredom and disengaged team members.

Do what our clients do: enlarge the graphic above, post it on your conference room wall and train your team to communicate to drive results.

Then you’ll learn to *love* meetings!