



Grouputer

Techniques for Preparing Effective e-Collaboration Meetings

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Objective

Creating effective meeting processes is a cross between a science and an art. It is not difficult but it takes practice. Successful meeting processes take participants down a thinking guide-path that explores all aspects of the problem or issue.

The process may include reviewing documents or presentations, generating options and proposed solutions, evaluating the options, arriving at a decision and writing action plans.

The purpose of this paper is to provide assistance in the development of effective Groupware meeting processes. Most processes start with a list of questions.

Question Writing Process

The process has two defined steps:

1. Determine your meeting objective

What is the objective of your meeting ? Like the old saying “if you don’t know where you are going you’ll never get there. You must be clear on the purpose of the meeting before you start to write your questions. For example, is the primary purpose to:

- Analyze a proposal or situation
- Solve a problem
- Collect information
- Generate ideas
- Create a new product
- Obtain feedback on a report or proposal

When you have determined the reason for the meeting, write a clear statement of objectives, e.g.

‘Review the performance of the department and develop improvement strategies.’

2. Prepare the Questions

There are several ways to prepare questions. We are going to focus on two of them.

Question Templates

Grouputer allows you to create simple meeting agenda and entire business process methodologies.

- Use the Process Builder to template an entire meeting process, including all content, settings, and formats. See the chapter on Process Builder
- Use Session templates. This feature which is accessed from the Discuss tool bar enables an agenda or set of questions to be templated and displayed in column 1 of the Discuss tool. See the Discuss tool section of the manual for details.

Once built, both types of templates can be re-used at any time.

Question Types

Effective problem solving and planning processes usually use a question-based form. There are two basic question types, Open Questions and Closed Questions.

Craft the questions according to the kind of responses you are seeking. Consider the type of questions that you ask and also the sequence of your questions.

Open Questions

When you need descriptive answers and you wish to encourage discussion, start questions with:

How could we.....

In what ways would.....

Describe the.....

Closed Questions

Use closed questions for gathering data:

When was the

State how many

When was the.....

Question Sequencing

When you have assembled all the questions, check the list sequence to ensure that there is a logical thought progression, a thinking guide-path, leading to a decision or resolution of the issue.

In problem/solution meetings it is good practice to follow questions that identify problems which questions that generate solutions. Similarly, consider including questions that consider the issue from an internal organizational perspective as well as the external environment. Often problems and solutions arise externally.

Examples of simple question setting

a) Activity Audit

- Briefly describe the activity (workshop, meeting, learning event, conference or seminar).
- Make a list of the people who participate in the activity.
- What are their expectations of the activity?
- Describe how the activity is conducted.
- To what extent are their needs met by the way the activity is conducted?
- To what extent are their needs not met by the way the activity is conducted?
- Make a list of the improvements that could help make the activity more aligned with the needs of the participants.

b) Product Improvement using the Scamper Method

- Generate ideas for improving the product. How could you substitute some parts with others.
- How could you combine the product with other products or services?
- How could you adapt the product?
- How could you modify the product?
- How could you magnify features of the product?
- How could you put features of the product to new uses?
- What could you eliminate from the product?
- What could you re-arrange about the product?
- What aspects could you reverse?
- Review the ideas. Now brainstorm ideas for the new product that combine the best ideas you have generated

Customized Column Headings

Customizing column headings in the Discuss tool offers a simple but effective problem solving and planning method. Refer to the Planning Process and Problem Solving Process tables below.

Simple Planning Process		
Column Heading	Column Title	Activity
1	Statement/Objective	What must we do to (achieve, sustain, grow) (x) by (when) and how will we make it happen?

2	Issues & facts	What do we know about the market, potential customers, competitors, economy, drivers, education, business climate, business needs, technology status, processes, people.
3	Opportunities	What opportunities arise from each fact? Brainstorm.
4	Key Opportunities	Rank the Opportunities and send to results to the TeamSpace using Survey/Discuss Click on each item in the ranked list and brainstorm strategies to achieve/exploit the opportunity.
5	Strategies	Develop strategies for each Key Opportunity
6	Action plans	What are we going to do to implement the strategies?

Problem Solving Process		
Column Number	Column Title	Activity
1	Problem Statement	Type into column 1 the problem statement, e.g. "What are the barriers to and how will we overcome them?"
2	Issues and facts	Click the Problem Statement and start brainstorming ideas about what is factually know about the problem and the issues arising.
Survey	Select Key Issues	Rank the Issues Send to TeamSpace using Survey/Discuss button

4	Possible Solutions	For each of the top 5 key issues, brainstorm ideas to solve the problem
	Select Key Solutions	Survey. Send results to TeamSpace.
5	Evaluate Key Solutions	Critically analyze each Key Solution and prepare an Action Plan for each solution that meets/exceeds the evaluation criteria.

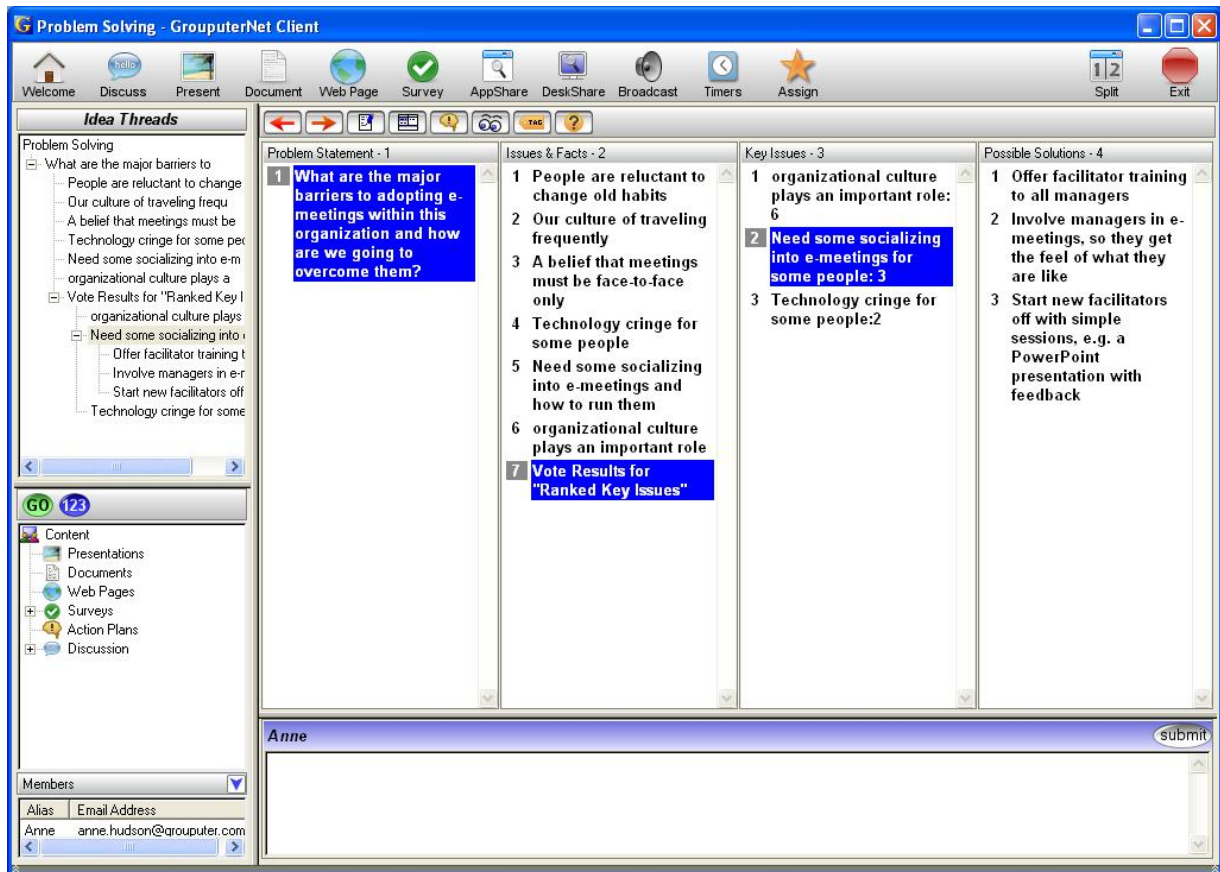


Figure showing use of customized column headings as basis of meeting process

Sample Processes

These meeting guide-paths have been used extensively with successful results.

Meeting Objective	Decision Guidepath to use
Evaluate a proposal or situation	SWOT Analysis or 6 Thinking Hats
Solve a problem	6 Thinking Hats
Collect information	Questionnaire
Generate ideas	Brainstorm
Create a strategic plan	Quick Strategic Plan
Create a new product	Scamper
Any meeting objective	Create your own agenda

1. Feedback on Plans and Proposals

This type of decision-making is based on a presentation of ideas or plans, usually in PowerPoint. At appropriate stages during the presentation, a series of questions is answered.

Example 1: Reviewing a plan or proposal

What has been overlooked?

What could be better emphasized?

What would you change?

Select the top 10 issues (one per person) and develop action plans if appropriate.

Example 2: Reviewing a proposal

Reaction: Describe your main concerns about these proposals?

Interaction: In what ways does the plan NOT make optimum use of all of our resources?

Inaction: What should we NOT do and why?

Action: What could we NOW do to make the plan better?

My Action: What will YOU do to help this team be successful (NAME + OFFER)?

Method: Create and load a template of the question agenda. Start the meeting.

2. 6 Thinking Hats

A problems solving methodology developed by Edward de Bono which investigates the problem from different perspectives and summaries the key issues to arrive at a decision.

Example of analyzing a proposal using the hats in the following order:

White Hat: describe what we know or need to know about the proposal

Black Hat: describe the problems with the proposal

Yellow Hat: describe the benefits of the proposal

Red Hat: describe how you feel about the proposal

Green Hat: what could be added to the proposal to improve it

Blue Hat: what would you do if you were the decision-maker

Method: Create and load a template. Each hat is an agenda item. Write a task. Start the meeting.

3. Quick Strategic Plans

Trend SWOT is a method of strategy planning. The rationale is to:

Review the trends that are shaping the industry, customers, competitors

Analyze the organization's current strengths and weaknesses

Brainstorm opportunities that integrate emerging trends with organizational strengths. Eliminate threats.

Create projects to exploit the opportunities (see Project Plans meeting)

Agenda

Trends: What are the major business, technology, process, skills development, service delivery trends that will impact on our business over the next five years?

Strengths/Capability: What are we already good at? What capability, resources, products/services, processes and technology do we already have that will help us remain very successful?

Weaknesses: What capability (resources, process skills, products/services and technology) do we not have or competitors might have or acquire that prevents us from becoming more successful?

Opportunities: What opportunities are there to hit the service delivery, production, product/re-invention "sweet spot" five years from now. (Review trends).

Threats: What might stop us from becoming very successful (especially technology shortfalls or poor choices). Convert Threats into Opportunities.

Method: Create and load a template of the agenda questions or build a process. Write a Task. Start the meeting.

Facilitator Prompts for Quick Strategic Plan

Trends:

What are the major businesses that will impact on our business over the next five years?

What are the major technologies that will impact on our business

What are the major development and service delivery trends that will impact on our business over the next five years?

What is happening to our demographics and how will changes affect what products and services we offer in the future?

Strengths/Capability:

What are we already good at?

What capability, resources, products/services, processes and technology do we already have that will help us remain very successful?

What do we do better than our competitors?

What business are we in?

What is our USP? (unique selling proposition - what makes what we have to offer stand out?)

What do we really want to do?

What do we choose not to do?

What unique resources do we have that give us strength?

Weaknesses:

What capability (resources, process skills, products/services and technology) do we not have

What capability (resources, process skills, products/services, strategy and technology) do we not have but our competitors might have or acquire that prevents us from becoming more successful?

Opportunities:

What opportunities are there to hit the service delivery, production, product/re-invention "sweet spot" five years from now.

Review the trends, pick three, together with 3 strengths and 3 weaknesses and craft into 3 opportunities.

Aim for the "Sweet spot" - that point where your strengths and the emerging trends come together to create something new and terrific for you.

Threats:

What might stop us from becoming very successful (especially technology and resource shortfalls or poor choices)? Select a key threat and convert it into an Opportunity.

Process Steps:

Use the process prompts in conjunction with the facilitator's etiquette of Talk, Type, Review, Summarize.

When crafting ideas for Opportunities, start by selecting a key Trend and matching it to a key Strength.

4. Project Planning

Introduction: Print the outputs from the Quick Strategic Plan meeting and ask the participants to each select the two projects they think are the most important for the business over the next year to three years. Everyone chooses what is important so that they 'buy-in' to the final plan. The session to plan each project uses the following agenda:

Name of project (less than 5 words)

Description of project (25 words or less)

First 5 steps to get started

Major milestones including completion date

Resources required (time, people, skills, technology, money)

Cost/benefits statement

Method: Create and load a template of the agenda. Write the task. Start the meeting.

5. Process Improvement

The method is a simple way to plan new or improve products and services.

Example: Planning service improvements for a fast food restaurant.

1. Make a list of all the products/services offered to customers.
2. Make a list of the customers who use fast food restaurants.
3. What are customers' expectations of fast food restaurants?
4. In what ways are customers' needs met by our fast food restaurant?
5. In what ways are customers' needs not met by our fast food restaurant?
6. If we could do anything, what would we do to better align our restaurant with our customer needs and wants? Rank the Top 5 improvements.

Develop action plans for each improvement.

Method: Prepare the questions in column 1 or create a template of the agenda. Start the meeting.

For more information or to arrange a free demonstration contact:

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