How to Run an Effective Meeting

As remote working becomes normal and we seek to maximise our effectiveness, it is important that we all consider our reliance on virtual meetings, think about whether we need them all and adopt some simple guidelines that can help us all to make improvements.

Volume of Meetings

We are all arranging more formal Microsoft Teams meetings – it's one of the easiest ways for us to communicate. And, in these times where some of us have few other calendar points in our diaries (like a scheduled lunch break, travel time, moving from space to space), it's easy for us to jump to this as the default, with the result that often colleagues have back to back meetings for much of the day.

Do we really need a Meeting?

Is a Microsoft Teams meeting the best way to deal with this challenge? We should ask ourselves:

- Does this issue warrant a stand alone Teams Meeting? Is it time sensitive? Could it wait until a scheduled 121 or another scheduled meeting?
- Is a phone call with someone else quicker, easier and more efficient?
- Is this one for the chat? Or for an email, at least to start with?

If you do consider you need a standalone Microsoft Teams meeting – does it need an hour? Could it be 30 minutes with good planning to free up diaries? If you need longer than 30 minutes, you might consider a 45 minute slot in order that attendees can have a comfort break in between meetings.

Given the volume of meetings, it is more important than ever to keep meetings to time. Many people have other meetings straight afterwards and/or have blocked the next time slot to work on scheduled tasks. Many of us have done the silent wave 'bye', put 'I really need to jump off this call, I have another one' into the chat or interrupted a colleague mid-flow to say we need to get to another meeting! And many of us are the same people to have been the one to say 'can we have another ten minutes?'.

TIPS

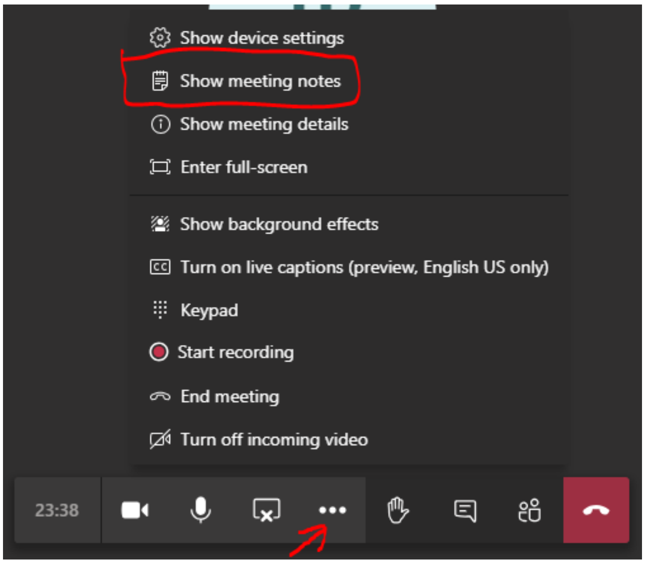
The tips below give us all some pointers to help reduce the number of meetings and make them more efficient when we do have them. Not all of the pointers will be relevant for every meeting, of course, but they do show the range of options and tools we can use to be more effective and productive.

Pre-Meeting Admin

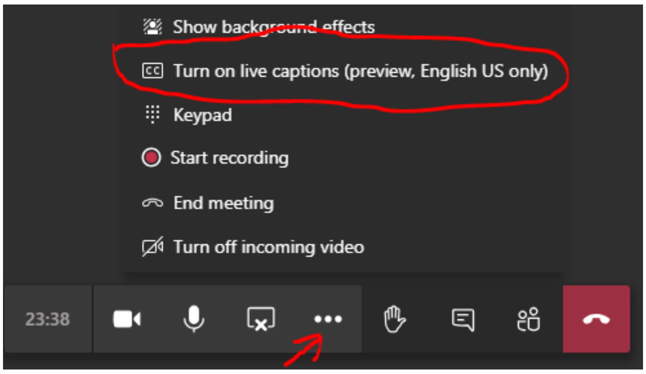
- Set clear objectives for the meeting and, if appropriate, consult other attendees.
- Consider if someone needs to minute the meeting and, if so, assign someone to this task.
- Consider who needs to attend the meeting and only invite those people.
- Think about the timing of the meeting. It needs to be inclusive – take account of people's commitments including caring responsibilities and find a time that works for everyone.
- For internal meetings the Outlook Scheduling Assistant helps identify when people are free.
- Platforms such as Doodle poll or LinkedIn can help to find the most suitable time for everyone.
- Set an agenda:
    - A timed agenda is useful in ensuring that attendees stay focused on the meeting's objectives and minimises the risk of overrunning on certain agenda items.
    - Depending on the length of the meeting consider scheduling a comfort break.
    - Make sure your agenda items help support you in achieving your overall objective.

Meeting Admin

- All relevant documents should be prepared and circulated in good time before the meeting – papers should usually go out at least a week in advance.
- Give people enough time to review them and for you to respond to any comments raised.
  - Papers can be circulated with the meeting invite. They can also be saved under the 'Documents' tab on Microsoft Teams so they are visible to all the attendees.
- Minutes:
  - Keep minutes short and relevant and include clear actions. It is helpful to include a table of actions, who they have been assigned to and any deadlines. This can be reviewed at the start of the next meeting so you can keep track of progress.
    - If using Microsoft Teams, notes can be taken during the meeting:
      - Select the 3 dots as pictured below. Click on 'Show meeting notes' and select 'Take notes. These will be saved in the 'Notes' tab and can be viewed by all attendees.



  - To ensure the meeting is inclusive, you should make people aware that if they have a hearing impairment they can switch on live captions as seen below.



Post-Meeting Admin

- Send out minutes and action points as soon as possible so people have a record of what has happened and what needs to be completed. Remind people to take note of their own actions!
  - If you used Microsoft Teams you should post a version there.
  - You can also save notes in the Microsoft Teams meeting (see 'Meeting Admin').

    - If meeting with external attendees, you may need to send the minutes via email.
- At the end of the meeting set a time and date for the next meeting **if necessary** (see above!).
- Once a date is agreed, send out Microsoft Teams Invites as soon as possible.