

Team-building secrets



Clunky technology frustrates and inhibits efficiency in meetings due to misapplication or poor understanding. This results in still more meetings rather than less. Shouldn't technology serve us better? It can. Use this article to reduce the number of meetings by making the ones you have more efficient. The technology is there. Mastering it can save you time and money.

Time is money. Building a great team is about building an efficient team that moves forward confidently without wasting time. Every time your team is stuck in reverse gear, your business is losing money. For example, losing a client because you just couldn't get your hands on the latest pricing data is more than embarrassing – it's costly. Efficiency means eliminating duplicate work, streamlining business processes, cutting needless travel and reducing interruptions.

TOP TIPS for team leaders

- Mobilise your people. Let them access their email, contacts, diary, documents anywhere, anytime.
- Avoid duplicate work. Keep your people together even when they're apart.
- Keep your people up-to-date with documents accessed from a single, secured location.
- Backup your files in one centralised location.
- Reduce hardware expenditures by sharing what you already have.
- Share contacts, diaries and tasks with 'big business' e-mail features at affordable "small business prices.

Improve team productivity

Your team wants to work together, but there are too many distractions. They want to communicate, but the technology gets in the way. They need to share files, but getting the latest version wastes time. One expert needs the input from another, but doesn't take the time to share his or her work.

Sound familiar? In fact, these are shockingly common problems facing many small and large businesses everywhere.

Every time you have to stop and answer a question, you're two steps back for one step forward. It wastes time on two ends: The person doing the asking, and the person who has to stop and find the answer. Wouldn't it be better if both parties had access to the same information? If we figure that the process of asking and answering in these situations takes a minimum of 15 minutes, and such an occurrence happens a minimum of ten times daily – that adds up to 2 ½ hours of wasted labour hours a day! Get those hours back using technology to share information and communicate more efficiently.

Collaboration through technology

Teams can be effective even if they aren't all in the same place. There are several technologies that can help keep teams in touch:

- **Email.** This is the most obvious and basic communications technology but it isn't always the most efficient. Using Microsoft Outlook 2010 rules

to prioritise and highlight messages from team mates or your boss can help make it more productive.

- **Intranets.** Use a private website, such as a Microsoft SharePoint site created by Microsoft Small Business Server 2008 or [Microsoft Business Productivity Online Suite](#) (BPOS), to share files and other important information. For smaller companies or individuals, [Windows Live SkyDrive](#) stores files online and lets you share them with colleagues. You can get up to 25 GB of online storage free of charge.
- **Share diaries.** With Outlook, you can send meeting requests to colleagues that appear in their diary once accepted but by sharing your diary using Microsoft Exchange Server (again, part of Small Business Server 2008 or BPOS), you can open up their diaries and check they are free *before* sending the invitation. If you've got a customer waiting on the phone to agree a meeting time, this looks far more professional.
- **Instant messaging.** Instant messaging is a bit like sending text messages from your computer. It's great for shorter, more immediate conversations than email and, combined with 'presence information' that tells you whether or not someone is actually at their computer, it can be very responsive. Microsoft Office Communications Online, part of BPOS, makes this easy and secure.
- **Social networking.** Online social networking services such as [LinkedIn](#), [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) can be useful in businesses to build broad teams, company-wide groups or even communities of interest around the business. They are a good way of communicating with large numbers of people. Some companies use them to organise social activities, reach out to potential recruits or stay in touch with ex-employees.
- **Conferencing.** You can share your desktop to give a presentation or collaborate on a document and you can pick up detailed nuances from people's faces as they talk. [Microsoft Office Live Meeting](#), part of BPOS or available as a standalone server application, combines these features into a single, reliable, integrated system.

Creating productive team spaces

In their classic book, *Peopleware, Productive Projects and Teams*, Tom DeMarco and Timothy Lister make some important recommendations about how to improve a team's workspace to maximise productivity:

- Lots of personal space
- Lots of desk space and shelves
- Small offices with one or two people per offices
- In open plan offices, use tall partitions to create personal space
- Cut out the noise; music and hubbub kill productivity
- Eliminate interruptions (e.g. phone calls, pages etc.) They destroy concentration
- Natural light if possible, lamps in preference to overhead fluorescents if not

Running effective meetings

Good meetings are the wheels on which the whole company turns. Bad meetings are just flat tyres and speed bumps. Get them wrong and people waste time, make bad decisions, play politics and, frankly, find work boring. On the other hand, running good meetings and being a role model in the chair can be one of the most effective contributions to teamwork that you can make as a manager. Like most business activities, preparation prevents poor performance. Here are some tips for running good meetings:

- **Start with the objective.** Why are you calling the meeting? Make sure everyone understands the objective and desired outcome, ideally with an agenda.
- **Don't invite so many people.** Only invite the people who can directly contribute to the goal.
- **Do you really need it?** Maybe there's another way to make progress without a meeting. Could you use voting buttons in a round-robin email or just phone people instead?

- **Avoid groundhog day.** Always check that routine meetings are still required. When booking meetings in Outlook, set a limit on the number of times it will recur.
- **Keep it short.** Meetings expand to fill the time allocated to them. Book them short and start and end on time. Book meetings at the end of the day or just before lunch to stop people waffling. As Churchill said, the mind cannot absorb more than the seat can endure.
- **Appoint a chairperson.** Make sure someone is responsible for moving the conversation along and achieving all the objectives in the time available.
- **Track follow-ups.** There's no point in a meeting if none of the agreed action items actually takes place. Make sure that someone records the decisions - and agreed actions and that someone makes sure that they take effect. – using One Note is a great way to keep a record of meetings

For more information

- [Microsoft Business Productivity Online Suite](#)
- [Microsoft Small Business Server 2008](#)

The revolution will be digitised

Spending money on technology, improving communications and collaboration, better workplaces and making meetings more productive will, taken individually, deliver significant improvements in teamwork. Combined, they will produce nothing short of a revolution.