

Purpose

DECIDE THE SPECIFIC OUTCOMES YOU WANT TO ACHIEVE

Outcomes are specific, measurable results that you want to reach in the meeting. For example, if the purpose is stated as “decide on concepts to present to management,” an outcome might be “agree on three concepts that meet our criteria.” If the purpose is to learn the features of a new software program, an outcome might be “demonstrate ability to download data from server to desktop computers.” Such outcomes are specific and measurable. When you achieve them, you know you have accomplished the stated purpose.

Not all purposes can be evaluated by achieving specific outcomes. This is especially true if the purpose is something softer, such as networking or team building, or if the outcomes will be played out throughout a period of time. Let’s say you have completed an in-house survey that indicates your employee morale is low. You decide to initiate a meeting, with the stated purpose to “generate ideas for improving employee morale.” Although the ultimate outcome might be to eventually improve morale by X percent, as indicated by a follow-up survey, it would be impossible to know whether you will have achieved this outcome at the end of the meeting. All you can do is generate ideas and options that you *hope* will eventually achieve that outcome. In such cases, limit the meeting outcome to what can actually be accomplished in the meeting itself. For example, “generate ideas for two to three department-level initiatives to test during the third quarter.”

Take a moment now to reflect on a recent meeting you have initiated or attended. Was the purpose clear? Was everyone attending aware of the purpose? Were specific outcomes attached to the purpose?

Making an agenda is much easier when you have spent some time getting clear on the meeting’s purpose and anticipated outcomes. Agenda preparation will be covered in detail in Chapter 4.