

# BAMBOO MEETING GUIDE

How To

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You probably have a team meeting coming up soon. These meetings usually involve updates on the team's progress, information from higher-ups, and opportunities for team members to voice their complaints. However, these meetings often lack a focus on improving the organization or stimulating meaningful debate. In many cases, the same information could have been conveyed through email. Let's be honest: nearly all of these meetings could have been an email.

One potential solution is to eliminate these meetings. However, regular face-to-face interactions with your team are crucial for maintaining a solid connection. Therefore, exploring ways to make these meetings more valuable (though not necessarily more productive) may be worth exploring.

## BUT HOW?

I enjoy TED videos—short videos on a narrow topic with some very engaging personalities that can foster great conversation. One day I was thinking of ways to improve engagement across the organization – reduce silos and raise the level of discussion. Going through a shared experience, even one as short as a TED video might provide some common ground to open up discussion beyond just status updates or complaints about office politics. I introduced this concept for team meetings, focusing on dialogue and improvement within my department. I then opened it up to everyone in the organization and labeled them Bamboo Meetings.

The name Bamboo Meeting came from a TEDx video by Garr Reynolds on lessons he's drawn from Japanese culture. The lesson from bamboo is that it is resilient and flexible – much like our organizations should be. I used Garr's video in the first Bamboo Meeting I held, thus the name.

## HOLDING A BAMBOO MEETING IS PRETTY SIMPLE:

1. Find a short video that presents a concept, idea, or controversy relevant to the work. You can be very broad about how you define relevance here, but be cautious about things too controversial at the beginning. You want to allow your team to gain cultural traction in debate. It's best if the video has some humor to lighten the mood and put people into a frame to discuss openly. Avoid the desire to present a topic yourself. There is a benefit to having an outside party, in this case, a video, show a topic where you can participate in the discussion. If you present the topic, you run the risk that your team will feel the need

to agree with whatever position you've staked out because of a lack of psychological safety in your group.

2. Frame the video in terms of discussion points. This is your chance as a leader to set the tone. Are there issues that should be discussed in the organization? Why did you choose this video? I include questions you might find helpful for each Bamboo Meeting I've prepared. Pick from those or make your own. Consider what questions to raise, and ensure they are relevant to your organization or department's challenge. It's generally a good idea to limit it to a few questions at most – don't go through a lightning round – you're looking to go deeper than usual here.
3. Alternatively, you can present a larger number of questions or topics and use lean-coffee-style voting to drive the discussion. However, I've found less utility with this approach; your mileage may vary.

Once you've selected your video and prepared your questions and framing, running the Bamboo Meeting is very simple:

In your meeting, introduce the topic. The first time you're running a Bamboo Meeting, let the group know the intent and how this meeting will be different from the usual staff meeting.

1. Show the video. (it's crucial here that any video you use should be short; the TED guidelines are helpful, so keep it under 18 minutes.)
2. Discuss. This can start with opening it up to the group, or you can kick things off with your selected question or talking points to drive the discussion.

## **TIMING AND SCHEDULE**

If you have this as part of your regular staff meeting, use the initial time to review status updates or any items for communication and leave the later part of the meeting for the Bamboo Meeting. This can also allow you to invite others while avoiding having them sit through boring updates. It's recommended, however, to have a Bamboo Meeting as a stand-alone event and avoid just slapping it on the back of your existing meetings (which, again, should probably be an e-mail)

## **SELECTING A LOCATION**

Ideally, look for a unique place to hold your meeting. If you usually have staff meetings in your office or a nearby conference room, try switching up floors – do the meeting in another

department, the cafe, or outside. Break up the default context to put people in a different frame of mind.

## **BAMBOO MEETINGS IN A LARGER ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT**

You can also host Bamboo Meetings for general attendance to engage the larger organization. See if your department is interested in taking this on as a service to the organization. The process is the same; you must account for this with location and schedule. I've run Bamboo Meetings with over a hundred participants successfully.

## **GETTING STARTED**

I've provided a set of Bamboo Meeting decks with associated videos you can use to get started. These subjects should be broadly applicable to just about any organization. Use the template provided to think about how these concepts are important to your specific context. This is critical – make the information useful to your organization. Modify the deck or other visuals as necessary for the discussion. I only ask that you keep the links to this page intact so others can find it.

You can go in any order you wish, but I recommend starting with the Lessons from Bamboo first, as this sets the stage for why you're having such a special meeting in the first place.

## **FEEDBACK WELCOME**

If you have any feedback on this process, videos you think are interesting, or have a Bamboo Meeting topic you've created, [I'd love to hear about it](#) – and if you like, I'll include it in the series.