



ENABLING QUALITY IMPROVEMENT IN PRACTICE

Tower Hamlets Our Latest Newsletter (27/01/2020)



Getting the most from your discussions: EQUIP shares guidelines, and new training dates

We've waxed lyrical about effective meetings skills: how to set a helpful agenda, take good minutes, assign meeting roles, evaluate meetings and improve the process... something we haven't touched upon (yet!) is the art of hosting effective discussions. So, within the effective meeting framework we've discussed in time (and which hopefully broadly mirror how you work with your teams and coaches), how can we enhance our discussions and team participation? Here's a helpful list of stuff that you no doubt already know... but bringing our deeper wisdom into the conscious mind can often be helpful, so here goes:

- **Prep!** This means, basically:
 - o Share any pre-reading in advance, a couple of days before the meeting at least. Keep it short (a board with a 289 page pack conveys more with this single fact that with the actual content of the papers), and make sure people know *in advance* what you expect of them. If you're circulating the outcome of an idea you've tested, perhaps with a run chart, ask people to come with at least three ideas on how to improve the process.
- **Open the discussion** with a structure that helps the team know what is being discussed, and participate most usefully: share the **purpose, focus and boundaries** of what you're discussing, and **start the conversation with an open, opening question**.
- **Listen.** Give each speaker undivided attention, checking that you're really focusing on what they're saying, rather than on what you want to say in

return. Bring your curiosity to the discussion, one step ahead of your own thoughts. And don't worry, your own opinions are still there, no one is

stealing them. A good way to stay in listening mode is to restate someone's key points in your own words.

- **Ask for clarification.** If you're unclear, just ask someone to repeat their points, perhaps using different words, or data, or examples. Until you understand. If you don't understand, there is probably a reason, and sharing your confusion is a gift to the group as a whole.
- **Manage participation.** This is where your team's **facilitator role** comes in: make sure the facilitator is bringing everyone into the conversation, inviting participation and input from those less vocal or forthcoming.
- **Summarize:** every so often, summarize. Make the point of what has been said or agreed. This is how adults learn: by punctuating important moments with summarization. It's like the top coat when you get a manicure, it protects the polish so this can last a nice long time.
- **Manage time.** If one part of the agenda is taking longer than planned, be explicit about taking time from other agenda items. But don't just "let it happen". The **timekeeper's role** is to clock when you are running over time before that happens, and as soon as it happens. And, for the love of cake, finish on time!!! Rarely does an effective discussion take a very long time. If it does, we've probably walked through woods rather than down a straight road. And sure, that can happen... but then the journey is longer for everyone.
- **Corral digressions.** I hide my face in my hands here. But gently remind team members to avoid overlong examples or irrelevant discussions. This is where your handy **parking lot** comes in. Use it. Parking is free. The stuff that goes on it is far from unimportant: it just needs a separate space.
- **Close the discussion.** The person who holds the **leader role** (traditionally the chair) helps the team close conversations when there is nothing more to be gained from them, and be clear on the decision reached. If you finish early – awesome! A meeting can close earlier than planned, there is no divine guidance that says use every possible minute available on the topic. All that time might be needed, it might not.

If you want a tastier sample of tools for better meetings and more impactful improvement strategies, our **new training dates** have been released:

EQUIP Basics: 7th February (half-day)

EQUIP in Action: 4th February, 17th March and 5th May

To book, visit <https://equiptowerhamlets.nhs.uk/support-and-training/>.

And that, folks, is a wrap. Have a week of good discussions, and hope this little toolkit packs in some helpful reminders!

Meetings don't have to be endless to be eternal. *James E. Faust*

Virginia