

Are the starts of your meetings messy? Try OPA

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OPA is a simple method to frame the start of a meeting and engage all participants. Objective, Plan, Agreement: three steps to clarify the exchange and gain efficiency.

How many meetings start with at least one participant who doesn't know why they're there, why they agreed to the meeting, and especially when and how they'll be able to escape it?

To avoid this situation, there is a simple and effective method that allows you to take charge of a meeting and engage all participants from the beginning: the **OPA**.

The OPA in Three Acts

O for Objective

Too often, the objective of a meeting is implied or even forgotten, because the initiator of the meeting assumes everyone knows it. Yet, stating this objective is essential, even if it seems obvious. It's always good to set the framework so everyone knows why they're there. However, the meeting's objective must **include all participants** and importantly be **action-oriented**.

A classic example heard in a prospecting meeting: "*The objective of this meeting is to present our services in terms of...*" A typical example of a passive objective. Once the presentation is done, the objective is met, and the client can calmly end the meeting. "*Thank you, I'll call you back!*"

Another slightly more elaborate example: *"Today, we're here to discover your needs and explore how our offering could meet them."* Much better because there is an end goal, but still very self-centered, as the exploration aims to sell the offering.

In both cases, there's a subtle mix between the objective and what will be done during the meeting.

I propose a much simpler and clearer objective, for example, for a prospecting meeting:

"The objective of our meeting is to see how we could work together."

And here, you might say that this example doesn't state what will be done, unlike the first two examples. And you would be right. Because that's the point. We only announce the common objective.

P for Plan or Proposal

Once the objective is established, the path to achieving it must be outlined. The plan doesn't need to be exhaustive, but it should provide an overview of the steps ahead. This helps structure the meeting and informs the participants.

For example:

"I propose to give you some insights about our company so you know who we are. I will then give you the floor so I can understand your organization, your projects, and current topics. This will allow us to see how our offer could address your challenges."

The various stages of the meeting are announced, and everyone knows the path to achieving the initially stated objective.

A for Agreement

The final element of the method, the agreement, is the step to ensure everyone is on the same page.

"Does all this suit you?" is the minimalist version of the agreement. But this start of the meeting lacks a component, the expected duration. And even if the agenda indicates a time block and thus a duration, it's always good to ensure that the meeting participants are also aligned on the time each of them has planned to spend together. For example:

"We have planned 30 minutes for this exchange, does that still work for you?"

By opening a form of negotiation to agree on all terms, the question ensures the full mental availability of the participant(s) throughout the meeting.

"Yes, but then we're stuck with a 30-minute slot!"

Yes and no. Yes, because you've agreed, so it's important to adhere to that agreement. And no, because nothing prevents you 5 minutes before the end from pausing the meeting to ask:

"We initially planned 30 minutes for this first exchange, and I see we have a lot more to share. I can continue for another twenty minutes. Is that okay with you, or would you prefer to schedule another follow-up to continue our discussions?"

Professional and considerate of our future partner.

Why the OPA is a Good Idea

The OPA is a universal technique that can be used in all types of meetings: prospecting, negotiation, project follow-up, recruitment interviews, and much more. It sets a clear framework, provides a tempo, and ensures smooth interaction, regardless of our interlocutor.

Ready to try it in your next meeting?