Using Visual Thinking for Better Meetings

There's a big difference between a good meeting and a great meeting. Incorporating visual thinking before, during, and after your meeting will set your team up for success and help you make the most of your time together.

## Before
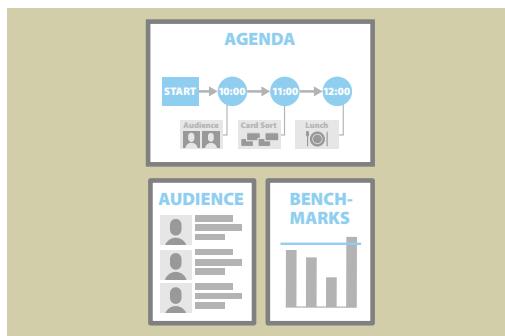
Create visual aids

Clearly defined objectives and agendas are essential to making any meeting a success, whether for a 15-minute daily team standup or a full-day workshop. Take your meeting to the next level by giving your objectives and agenda a visual presence in the room. Create posters to help participants keep the target audience, competitive benchmarks, and project goals top-of-mind. And think of your agenda as a cohesive process—each section should help you to identify information and make decisions that feed the next section or produce the final result. A visual process diagram will help participants stay on track and understand how it will all come together.

During
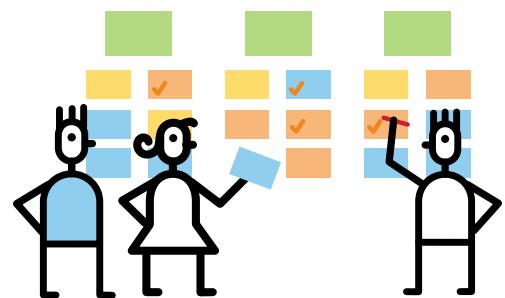
Make words tangible

All too often, the brilliant ideas and solutions that a team thinks up in a meeting are lost as conversations bounce around. One comment leads to another that's only sort of related, and before long, the team is left wondering, "Where were we, and how did we get here?" Prevent ideas from floating off into the ether by having participants use cards to jot down key words and phrases that express their thoughts and contributions to the discussion. These cards serve as a visual record of the conversations that took place. They also make it easier to sort, combine, and rank ideas and options.
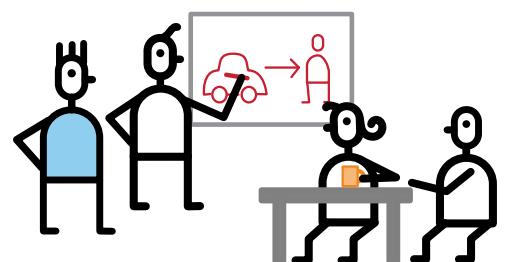
Illustrate problems and solutions

Pictures can convey complex meaning and information more quickly and clearly than words alone. To enable better idea sharing and receiving during your meeting, ask participants to draw the problem or solution as they describe it. Whiteboards are great for this type of illustration. And don't worry about trying to create a masterpiece—stick figures and squiggles are just fine. Basic shapes and connectors are all you need to communicate a process, experience, or system. When paired with an explanation, even the simplest sketch will help the team develop a shared understanding and set the stage for ideation.

After

Document for future reference

Incorporating visual thinking when planning and conducting your meeting makes it easy to document what your team accomplished. Take photos of your marked-up posters, organized cards, and whiteboard sketches. Then insert them into a simple document and add comments and notes to provide additional explanation. With little effort, you've created a visual walkthrough of your meeting that is accessible to attendees as well as those who missed it. And when you refer back to your meeting report in a week, a month, or a year, the photographs will help you recall the process and end results of your meeting more clearly than even the best meeting minutes could.

If you want to learn more about how to improve your meetings with visual thinking, get in touch at www.thoughtform.com or 412.488.8600.

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