



Just because many of us are back in the office or working in some type of "hybrid" environment, doesn't mean we should just jump into team-forming mode. Take a moment to assess where your employees are at mentally. Have a specific, goal-oriented meeting where you say, 'We're going to talk about how to make sure that the people who are still working from home feel connected to the office. Come prepared with your ideas.'" (Read more of my meeting strategies in this [New York Times article](#).) Don't just jump into the way you were doing things before. Get perspective first.

Kristin

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WHEN SHOULD YOU FORM A TEAM?

Teams are not the panacea for all your organization's ills. Just because your company has adopted a team approach, not everything must be accomplished by teams! Especially as more people are now working remotely, it's even more important to differentiate the tasks and challenges that are best handled either by an individual working alone or by a small sub-group from the main team. Where appropriate, bring the right people together in person or virtually when the issue is:

- **Complex.** The work requires expertise from a variety of disciplines. One person doesn't have all the information or answers.
- **Non-linear.** The work occurs simultaneously and many different tasks, functions, and people are linked together.
- **High Stakes.** The problem or opportunity area affects more than a few individuals, and people have a big stake in the issue.
- **High Commitment.** The business results will require a high degree of involvement and commitment in order to develop and implement the solution.

Teams are *not* appropriate when there is:

- **No Time.** You may not be able to form a team when there is an immediate, full-blown crisis. (But you can let others know what you did after the fact.)
- **Expertise.** One person has the knowledge and resources to accomplish the task. In addition, that person should have the power and authority to implement the decision with or without others' involvement, support, and commitment.
- **No Support.** If the organization doesn't support the team efforts, don't even bother

with the team approach. For example, if management isn't open to the team's suggestions, won't provide the resources, or can't accept the team's recommendations, you're doomed.

- **No Common Ground.** Team members have no work in common — or if they do, it is clearly not the team's main line of business.

Just because you put people on a team together doesn't mean they are going to act like or work as a team. It may make perfect sense to continue treating team members as separate individuals, rather than artificially trying to weld them into a more cohesive team unit. The challenge is to divert work to where it is best accomplished. Not everything has to be tackled as a team issue.

One other note for those of you jumping on the team bandwagon: teams don't really "do" work. Teams are great at discussing, planning, and agreeing (or disagreeing) on *what* to do, but the physical and intellectual work still must be performed at the individual level. So, if you find yourself spending over 50% of your time in meetings, you have been sucked into "meeting mania." Take a good look at where you are spending your time. Ask: Is this meeting necessary? Is there a better way to help us achieve our goals? Do I have to be present? Are we making substantial progress on achieving our goal? Are we following the rules for effective meetings?

HOW TO STRUCTURE A PANEL DISCUSSION

Now that you've said "Yes! I'll moderate that upcoming panel," you may be wondering how to structure a panel discussion that will be heralded as the best part of the event! So, let's start with the basic framework of a panel.

The typical panel consists of seven tasks that are performed in the following order:

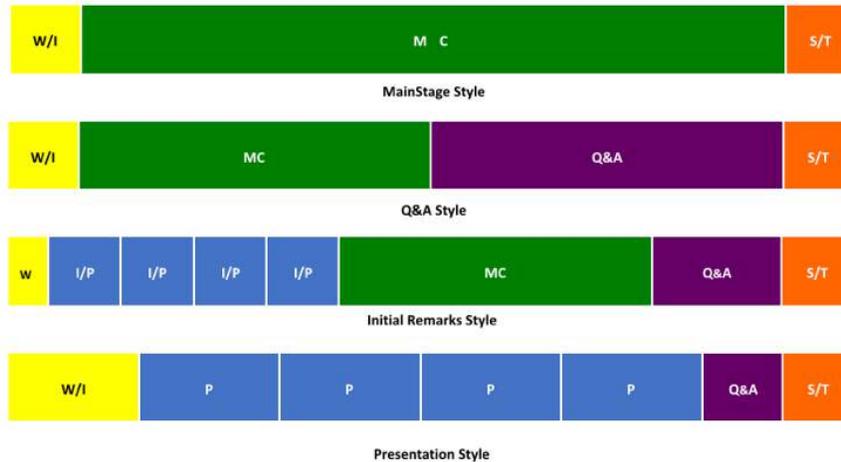
1. [Welcome](#)
2. [Panelist introductions](#)
3. [Panel presentation](#) and/or [initial remarks](#)
4. [Moderator-curated questions](#) directed to the panelists
5. [Questions from the audience](#) directed to a panelist(s)
6. [Summary](#)
7. [Thank you](#) and final administrative remarks

The panel moderator may opt to do all seven tasks, omit some, combine a few, or design a unique format to achieve the overall desired results.

A great panel moderator will spend quite a bit of time thinking about the topic, the objectives, the audience, and the promise made in the marketing materials. They consider the venue, the theme, the tone, and the duration of the event. They will also research the diverse backgrounds and points of view that each panelist brings to the table. It is only *after* this investigative work is done that the panel moderator contemplates how to structure a panel discussion.

Four Traditional Ways to Structure a Panel

While the traditional flow of the seven tasks is helpful, I prefer to think of the tasks in structured "segments" or "chunks." This provides a solid framework to keep the panel on track. For example, for a 30-60 minute panel, there are four common ways to structure a panel discussion:



1. **Mainstage Style.** A hard-hitting, short-duration panel discussion with panel members, typically the keynoter, main stage presenters, or invited panelists. There is no audience question and answer session (Q&A).
2. **Q&A Style.** A 2-5 minute introduction of the topic and panelists, 25 minutes of curated questions from the moderator, 25 minutes of audience questions ending with a summary, and thanks.
3. **Initial Remarks Style.** A 2-5 minute introduction of the topic with each panelist taking five minutes to introduce themselves and their perspectives on the topic. Then 20 minutes of curated questions from the moderator, 10-15 minutes of Q&A with the audience ending with a summary and thanks.
4. **Presentation Style.** A 2-5 minute introduction of the topic and panelists. Each panelist has 10-15 minutes of uninterrupted sharing of his or her perspective on the topic, 5-10 minutes of Q&A ending with a summary and thanks.

But you don't have to limit yourself to these four traditional formats. You can omit, combine, or place it before or after the event! For example, if you have a 30-minute live panel, you won't want to spend a ton of time on the welcome, intros, and wrap-up so you can move quickly into the conversation. Rather than reading the lengthy bios, you simply remind the audience that the bios are in the meeting materials. Perhaps you omit the audience Q&A portion? Or solicit questions from audience members prior to the event? Or while the panel is in session, take questions from the audience electronically and promise to respond to them in the follow-up correspondence.

Let's say you have 90 minutes – which is quite a bit more time and allows more in-depth conversations, audience interaction, and time to process the information with their peers. Perhaps you put people in small groups or breakout rooms to discuss the questions they have first and use those as a springboard for the panel discussion? Or provide insight and humor as you introduce the panelist? Allow time for initial remarks by the panelists? Or recap the discussion with the audience debriefing their takeaways? Consider also the flow from one segment to another. Do they flow naturally or will you need to create some transitions between segments?

And, I try to keep block them into 8-10 minute segments or even shorter (6-8) for virtual panels. Why? Because audiences have the attention span of a goldfish and you want to keep them engaged for the entire panel discussion!

These are all questions about the structure, flow, and timing of the panel discussion.

Which is a tad bit different than the format.

The Difference between Structure and Format in a Panel Discussion

Consider the structure to be the essential framework of the panel discussion, whereas the panel discussion format gives it life and color. The format, just like the formatting of a book (or this blog post!) makes it interesting and lively, the same thing holds true for a great panel.

Formats come in all kinds of shapes and sizes, using the theme or location of the conference, the topic of the panel, or the activities within each segment. The world is your oyster and you can pick and choose what will create an interesting discussion. [Spoiler: To make your life easier, I wrote a [book](#) on 123 different ideas you can choose from!]

Oddly enough, I find the difference between structure and format in a panel discussion is much like the chicken and the egg. Which comes first? Well, it depends on all that thinking that goes on in the planning phase. Sometimes a creative idea for the format will burst forth, and other times the time, layout, logistics constraints will dictate the structure. But they do go hand in hand, like peas and carrots. (I once saw a colleague moderate a panel discussion that used the movie Forrest Gump as the theme and the format grew from there - complete with costumes!)

FROM THE BOOKSHELF: THINK AGAIN: THE POWER OF KNOWING WHAT YOU DON'T KNOW

I've always been fascinated with understanding how people make decisions individually and collectively (including me! I'm my own little lab petri dish of thoughts!). So, I was intrigued with Adam Grant's latest book: [Think Again: The Power of Knowing What You Don't Know](#) as less-than-stellar decisions occur because of this "blind spot" - especially in this volatile and uncertain world.

Although Grant is an academic (teaches at Wharton), the book is easy to read - but a little harder to digest. Written in a conversational tone, the ideas are presented in a clear manner with examples, research, experiments, and stories. The harder part is to do the work and look in the mirror to see if and when we are on "Mount Stupid." (Although he doesn't really challenge you until hardback page 250 with a summary of 'Actions for Impact'.)

So, what are some of the ideas that resonated with me?

- **The Dunning-Kruger Effect.** It's when we lack competence that we're most likely to be brimming with overconfidence. Unless you're a complete novice, you'll overrate your abilities.
- **Mount Stupid** is the point where you have just enough information to feel self-assured about making pronouncements and passing judgment (I have been there many times...).
- **Do What Forecasters Do.** When forecasters form an opinion, they ask what would have to happen to prove it false? They then keep track of their views so they can see when they were right, wrong, and how their thinking has evolved.
- **The Value of a Challenge Network.** "Across a range of networks, when employees received tough feedback from colleagues, their default response was to avoid those coworkers or drop them from their networks altogether - and their performance suffered over the following year." Counter this tendency by creating a safe space to get feedback.
- **Debate vs Dispute.** "Simply framing a dispute as a debate rather than as a disagreement signals that you're receptive to considering dissenting opinions and

changing your mind, which in turn motivates the other person to share more information with you.

- **Be a Fact-Checker.** "(1) Interrogate information instead of simply consuming it. (2) Reject rank and popularity as a proxy for reliability and (3) Understand that the sender of information is often not its source."
- **How to Question the Expert.** To question them in a way that is not embarrassing to them or makes them look like a fool, ask these questions with a sense of curiosity: "What leads you to that assumption? Why do you think that is correct? What might happen if it's wrong? What are the uncertainties in your analysis? I understand the advantages of your recommendation. What are the disadvantages?"

And that's just the tip of the iceberg! So much great information, I am going to go back through the book with Actions for Impact in hand!

300th POWERFUL PANEL DISCUSSION TIP

Celebrating our 300th and final Powerful Panel Discussion Tip. Listen to seasoned moderators share their best practices from the last six years of the interview series. [Binge-watch the full playlist here](#), and [subscribe to the Powerful Panels Podcast](#) to listen to more discussions with guest meeting professionals, panel moderators, and panelists on how they make panel discussions livelier and more informative.



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