

All-Hands Situation Update Meeting

The all-hands situation update meeting is used by leadership to keep the entire organization informed and aligned during times of rapid change or crisis.



Recommended Content

This meeting may look similar to a high-stakes press briefing. One or more leaders will take turns sharing the content described below in the order that makes the best sense for the situation. Then, leadership will answer questions. The most senior leader should end the meeting by sharing information about the next meeting date, any requests for all staff, and expressing gratitude for everyone's efforts.

Information

- What we know: facts
- What we assume, but aren't sure about
- What we don't know and are trying to learn

Alignment

- Our Intention: what we're hoping to achieve next
- Top priority plans
- Decision-making guidance

Inspiration

- Stories: how teams get through situations like this
- Honest answers
- Inclusion: invite their insights

Guidelines

Information

Information: Facts

The facts shared here should be the kind that could be verified by a camera.

When sharing facts that come from outside your organization, such as information coming from the government, health authorities, or other sources that you can't easily verify with your own resources, explain where you got your information and which sources you consider reliable.

Fact shared in an All-Hands meeting can also be posted to an internal website as a reference for all employees.

Information: Assumptions

You will need to make some assumptions in order to plan. For example, you may be assuming that a contract will come through or that the government will approve new spending.



Clearly state your assumptions and let your team know that you want everyone to speak up should they have reason to believe those assumptions are wrong. For example, you might say:

“Here’s what we believe for now. We don't know this for sure and need to validate it, but we're making these assumptions so we can plan. If you have information we don't about this situation, don't be shy. Let us know right away so we can all make the best decisions possible.”

Information: What We Don't Know, But Want To Find Out

Tell everyone what you're trying to learn. They may have information to share that will help you learn more quickly.

Alignment

Alignment: Intention

The intention points everyone in the same direction by sharing what you're hoping to achieve together in the near term. For example, your intention might be:

- A rapid increase in production to meet unexpected demand
- A quick turn-around on a high-profile project
- A deep cut in expenses to address a sudden revenue drop
- Setting up a new supply chain when current suppliers become suddenly unavailable

When sharing this intention, explain why this is the current goal and what you hope becomes possible if this intention is achieved.

Alignment: Top Priorities

In an urgent situation, some work must go on hold to free up resources. Explain the top-priority projects so everyone knows what they should be working on and what they might let go for the moment.

Alignment: Decision-Making Guidelines

You've shared an intention and clarified the top priorities, but you can't tell everyone exactly how to achieve all this because the situation is changing too quickly.

Standardized processes and procedures can't keep up with rapidly changing situations. Instead, the most successful teams give front-line employees simple decision-making rules they can use to make decisions in the moment.

For example, when facing a short-term budget crunch, you may give regional managers the authority to cut expenses in their area, with the guidance that they should try to retain employees.



Inspiration

Stories

Share short stories about teams that have faced and overcome similar challenges in the past. If your company came through a situation like this, share how you did it. If you've never faced a challenge like this, you can share a short story from another company or even a relevant historical example.

Stories like these engage both the logical and rational part of your team's brains, helping them envision how they too might achieve success.

When the situation is fresh and everyone is anxious to understand what's happening, share your story after sharing the basic facts. In future meetings, you may choose to tell a short story first, or omit the story to keep subsequent updates brief.

Honest Answers

You may be tempted to avoid hard questions or hide scary information to keep your team from worrying. You may want to project a confidence and sense of control, and look like you know more than you really do. This desire to "take care of everyone" makes sense, but it doesn't work.

In a rapidly changing situation, everyone will be trying to figure out what's going on. In the absence of accurate information, they will make up stories to fit the facts they see - and often these stories are far worse than reality.

As a leader, you need your team making decisions based on reality. You also want them to share information that you don't have. That means you must share the real facts with them, and admit when you don't know the answer to a question.

Invitation to Participate

When the situation rapidly changes, no one has all the answers. No one will step in and make everything better for everyone else. As a leader, you can't expect to do this on your own, and your team should not sit back waiting for you to figure it all out.

End your meeting by inviting everyone to speak up with their ideas, insights, and observations. For example, you might say:

"If you have information we don't have, get it to us. This is bigger and faster than any one of us can handle on our own, so we need everyone's best ideas to succeed. Let us know.

What are we missing? What hasn't been considered? How might this go wrong?"

Frequency

Daily to Weekly



This meeting makes sure everyone has accurate information, which means you need to run it whenever the information you shared before becomes outdated.

In rapidly changing situations, you may need to run this meeting every day. As the situation stabilizes, you can decrease the meeting frequency.

Useful References

McChrystal Group

<https://www.mcchrystalgroup.com/crisis-solutions/>

General McChrystal pioneered the use of a daily all-hands update meeting during the Iraq war. This meeting radically transformed the military's ability to share information across traditional organizational boundaries, enabling them to quickly adapt to the complex attack style they faced. The McChrystal group now offers consulting and services to organizations worldwide. During the Covid-19 crisis, they led a series of free webinars describing how to run an all-hands like the one described here. Recordings from those webinars can be found online.

“Simple Rules for a Complex World”

by Donald Sull and Kathleen M. Eisenhardt

Harvard Business Review 2012

<https://hbr.org/2012/09/simple-rules-for-a-complex-world>

This article explains why giving employees a clear intention and simple decision-making rules often works better than giving detailed instructions.

The Right Story for Every Meeting

<https://blog.lucidmeetings.com/blog/the-right-story-for-every-meeting>

Paul Smith collects leadership stories you can use. In this webinar, he shared several that you can use directly or review as inspiration when selecting your own stories.

The Lucid Guide to Team Cadence Meetings

<https://www.lucidmeetings.com/meeting-types/team-cadence-meetings>

Learn more about this kind of meeting and see alternative meeting templates.