

Category Review – Using Action Questions

As the meeting ends and everyone is packing up to leave, do you know who will do what, using what process, under what timeframe, and within what budget? Does your team analyze their action items with an eye toward the complex interactions of time, money, and relevance of the work to your organization's priorities?

When you build your skill at using the questions in the Action category, your meetings will never end without crucial knowledge about responsibility, accountability, time, money, and relevance—for yourself and for everyone else who owns action items in your group. Introducing more precision into your use of action questions has the potential to take your meetings up a level by generating more than a bunch of tasks and by organizing them far beyond a random to-do list.

Who will do what? Precise agency and implementation questions

Don't walk away from any meeting or work discussion with uncertainty about your responsibilities. Failing to get clarity at the start of your work will only cost you time or credibility later. Agency questions help you ask precisely about who will do what in regard to any project. They sound like this:

Precision Questioner: *"Just to confirm, you are expecting me to prepare and deliver the update on the Akira account, correct?"*

Manager: *"That's right."*

Precision Questioner: *"Could I have an hour of your time to review the update before I show it to the exec team?"*

Manager: *"Sure. When will you have the draft?"*

Precision Questioner: *"Tuesday at ten."*

Manager: *"I'm free at eleven. I'll see you then."*

Using what process, under what timeframe? Precise implementation questions

Just as you wouldn't walk away from a work discussion with uncertainty about your responsibilities, it's crucial that everyone involved in a project shares an understanding about the process and timeframe of implementation. Failing to use precise action questions can result in misunderstandings about project steps or milestones. So in your next meeting, after you've clarified the concepts and surfaced the assumptions, use precise implementation questions:

"What specific steps are we taking this week on the Akira project?"

"What project management tools are we using to ensure that we have all the elements of the project in view?"

"When is the next major milestone?" "What are the tasks that need to happen this week in order for us to hit that milestone?"

Within what budget? Precise accountability and goal analysis

If you wind up your meetings with action plan reviews, take them up a level by including action questions focused on accountability for the timeframe, budget, and relevance to broader organizational goals. Accountability for time, money, and relevance can become shared responsibilities of your team when they get used to asking questions like these:

Accountability: "Who is managing the Akira project?" "Who is the Vice President that will review our work?" "What can we do to make our manager successful in the review?"

Goal analysis: "Is completing this revision of the Akira project consistent with our quarterly goals?" "How can we make sure that the Akira project aligns with the company's mission?"

Strategic interactions of time, money, and goals: "If we delay the rollout of the new Akira project, when can we start work on our next new product?" "How will the delay in the Akira project impact our actions on other client accounts?" "If the Vice President approves the pushback in the Akira project deadlines, what steps can we take to mitigate budget shortfalls?"

Sharpening Your Skills: Use More Precise Action Questions This Week

If you want to get the benefits of more precise action questions, begin using them in any of your regular meetings. The chart below helps you focus on where you can use action questions in the next week. Sharpen your skills, starting now!

<p>Regular meetings that require action questions</p>	<p>What regular meetings or work discussions that you will hold in the next week need more questions about action? Which of the precise action questions described above will be most useful to you in those meetings?</p>
<p>Work relationships where you can use action questions</p>	<p>With which group members or colleagues do you need to get better at asking about who will do what, by when, using what process, and under what budget? Develop one strategy to ask more precise action questions for each group member and with each colleague you list.</p>
<p>Specific projects that will benefit from more precise action questions</p>	<p>Which are the key projects in your portfolio that will benefit from asking about agency, implementation processes and tools, budgetary and time constraints, and the complex interactions of all these parameters? Begin with one project: how many action questions can you generate about your project just using this category of precise questions?</p>