



Check-Ins are a simple routine of pausing at the beginning of a meeting to acknowledge each person, allowing them to share about how they are doing in that present moment.

It is a way to help each person reconnect to purpose, be more present and focused, connect to each other, and be more engaged during the meeting and in their work afterwards. Checking-in also creates time and space to share our joys and proud moments as well as process events and experiences in a helpful, adaptive way.

What makes a check-in successful?

- Check-ins happen before the meeting begins.
- They are planned with prompts and time limits.
- They focus on personal connections and feelings and not project updates.
- They affirm the feelings, experience, and stories that are shared.
- They are an invitation and not required. It is important to give space to allow folks to share little or pass.

Potential Benefits

When done with intention and well, check-ins have many benefits

Make groups smarter. Collective intelligence of a group is higher when all members of the group talk/participate for equal amounts of time. The Check-in primes everyone to participate, increasing the likelihood of participation throughout the time of the meeting. Researchers at Johns Hopkins University named this process, 'activation phenomenon'.

Strengthen relationships and increase connection. We all have a story, personal or professional. Sharing our stories help us to see each other as the whole, complex, and expansive humans that we are. Hearing personal stories can help increase empathy and understanding between team members.

Check-ins are not:

- Time to provide project/task updates*
- The same as icebreakers*
- An opportunity to problem-solve or give advice*
- Request folks to over-explain or give reasons for their experience*

Reveals what's true. The check-in has the potential to activate what is known as 'the unwinding of a group'. When one member takes a small risk to be vulnerable and share the reality, it gives others the permission to do the same. Our ability to take this small risk, generates a sense of safety to take additional risks of speaking up and sharing reservations– all necessary ingredients for innovation and problem solving.

Helps teams focus and align. Check-ins mark a boundary between outside and inside the meeting, and between past and present, and helps us engages, align, and focus.

Generates energy & enjoyment. The check-in can provide levity and help us de-stress in the moment. A light-hearted prompt can provide an opportunity to laugh together and connect.

Helps teams learn. Sharing a little bit about our whole-selves can reveal interests, skills, and strengths present opportunities for cross-functional assignments and professional development.

Creates psychological safety. Psychological safety is not only the absence of threat, but also the presence of connection. The check-in creates a space where someone says, 'I am here' and everyone else says, 'We see you.'

Check-Ins can have a negative impact when we...

shift attention away from speaker instead of supporting

Use information to make judgments or decisions

Slip into commiserating

Don't show openness

over-step our boundaries

Getting Started with Check-Ins

STEP ONE: *Select a prompt*

Consider the following...

Demographics of the group – ask –

how well the group knows each other?

how often do they meet?

What is the size of the group?

Who is in the group?

What are the pre-existing conditions of the group?
(Are they going through big changes, is there interpersonal conflict, are there new members or different levels of leadership present?)

Time constraints – figure out how much time you can devote to the check-in. Keep in mind that the purpose of the check-in is not to take over the meeting agenda.

Your comfort level – If your teams don't meet frequently and this is a new experience, keep the prompt light and simple. Practice with smaller groups before expanding broadly. And give yourself grace; the first time, this may feel awkward and inauthentic. Participants might be slow to share, but trust in the process. If you make a mistake, admit your mistake, and shift the style and make corrections.

STEP TWO: *Facilitate the check-in*

Sample Script

Let us do a quick check-in before we get into the meeting agenda.

To present the prompt, you might say, “From 1 to 10 how present do you feel in this moment?” “And what is one thing you can do to move the needle higher.” **[sample prompt for illustration purposes. See list of prompts below.]**

“Let’s pause to reflect on our answers for a minute. When you are ready, [name of person] we will start with you. Everyone will have 1 minute to share. After you are done, select the next person.

“We invite anyone who feels safe and comfortable to share, but feel free to say, ‘pass’ if you prefer not to share today.”

Tips for successful facilitation:

- Keep to the time limit. When introducing the prompt, provide the time limit for sharing.
- Thank each person for sharing. Remember, this is not the space to give advice or ask for explanations or pass judgment.
- If leaders will be participating, prepare them beforehand to be open to sharing. Their presence can inhibit others from sharing openly. Their showing appropriate level of vulnerability can provide encouragement. Caution: Leaders should be open and share authentically but be mindful of oversharing or burdening team members with their issues.
- Be appropriately vulnerable yourself. Typically, leaders should go last, as we have more airtime in a meeting. The exception is the first time you conduct this activity, in which case, share first to illustrate and demonstrate the balance of openness and maintaining professional boundaries.
- Gently guide those who are over-sharing by thanking them and moving on to ensure everyone gets a turn.
- Do not be discouraged if everyone in the group does not share or their sharing feels surface level. Incorporating check-ins on a regular basis into team meetings will increase everyone’s level of comfort.
- Start simple. Once the group gets more comfortable, you can add new ways to check-in.
- Development opportunity. Invite others in the group to lead a check-in. This is a terrific way to build leadership and facilitation skills and give voice to those who may not have this opportunity frequently.

CALL to ACTION

Contact Odl@bu.edu:

If you try a check-in after this workshop and want to share your experience (both plusses and delta).

If you want to try the mood meter, please reach out for best practices and support.

Contact FSAO:

If there are mental health considerations that you wish to discuss.

A Sampling of Prompts

- From 1 to 10 how present do you feel right now? What is one thing you can do to move the needle higher.
- How are you feeling – stormy to sunny? (see image below)
- Share a bud, rose, and a thorn from your week or day?
- Share one high point from your week and one low point.
- Share gratitude for someone who contributed to your success or added value to your work.
- In one word, describe your day’s experience.
- Share one thing that you are proud of or made you smile (personal or professional.)
- What is one thing that went well (yesterday, during your shift, etc.)?
- Share a moment of awe (from yesterday, during your shift, etc.). A moment of awe is when you experience that feeling like you are a part of something bigger (e.g., looking at the stars, being part of a care team, your favorite team winning right at the buzzer, teaching something to a child, etc.)
- What is one thing that you are grateful for right now?
- What is one thing you are going to do for yourself (during your shift, after you leave, etc.)?
- Give a shout out to yourself and a shout out to someone on the team.
- Share one best thing and one challenging thing that happened (yesterday, during your shift, etc.).
- What is something funny that happened (yesterday, during your shift, this week, etc.)? It sounds odd but there is a lot of research on the benefits of healthy humor.
- What is something that you want to remember or remind yourself during your shift/ workday today?
- What is one thing that is currently giving you hope?

Advanced* – ‘Mood Meter’ by Marc Brackett (see image below). Source: *Permission to Feel: Unlocking the Power of Emotions to Help Our Kids, Ourselves, and Our Society Thrive*. Please contact ODL@bu.edu if you would like to use this as a prompt.

MOOD METER

High energy Low pleasantness					High energy High pleasantness				
Enraged	Panicked	Stressed	Jittery	Shocked	Surprised	Upbeat	Festive	Exhilarated	Ecstatic
Livid	Furious	Frustrated	Tense	Stunned	Hyper	Cheerful	Motivated	Inspired	Elated
Fuming	Frightened	Angry	Nervous	Restless	Energized	Lively	Excited	Optimistic	Enthusiastic
Anxious	Apprehensive	Worried	Irritated	Annoyed	Pleased	Focused	Happy	Proud	Thrilled
Repulsed	Troubled	Concerned	Uneasy	Peeved	Pleasant	Joyful	Hopeful	Playful	Blissful
Disgusted	Glum	Disappointed	Down	Apathetic	At Ease	Easygoing	Content	Loving	Fulfilled
Pessimistic	Morose	Discouraged	Sad	Bored	Calm	Secure	Satisfied	Grateful	Touched
Alienated	Miserable	Lonely	Disheartened	Tired	Relaxed	Chill	Restful	Blessed	Balanced
Despondent	Depressed	Sullen	Exhausted	Fatigued	Mellow	Thoughtful	Peaceful	Comfortable	Carefree
Despairing	Hopeless	Desolate	Spent	Drained	Sleepy	Complacent	Tranquil	Cozy	Serene
Low energy Low pleasantness					Low energy High pleasantness				