

# AROUND CORRECTIONS

## WHAT IS A CHECK-IN?

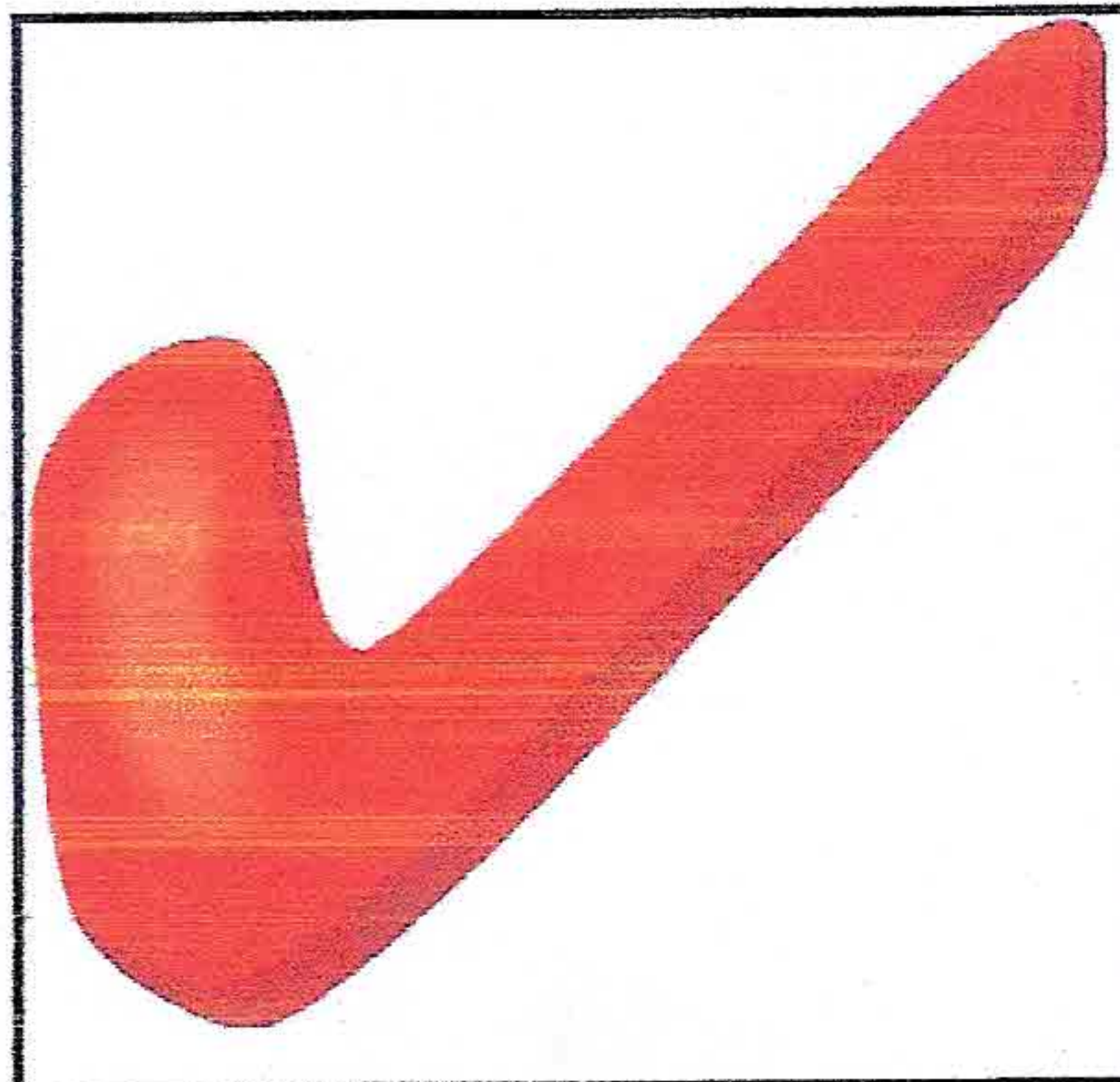
**Y**ou may have been involved in a meeting where everyone present was asked to say something before getting to the agenda, and wondered why that was done. The purpose was to encourage more participation and open dialogue in the meeting, and it is called a Check-in. Without a Check-in, many meetings run with a set pattern where a few people are dominant and speak much more, whilst others rarely or never speak. That is a bit like a six cylinder engine with only two cylinders firing. The Check-in helps to activate people's thinking and it encourages everyone to speak up and make a contribution during the meeting, rather than keeping quiet and expressing their views privately afterwards. Hearing a variety of views, and taking them into account, makes for a better quality of decision-making. Also, participation in the thinking leads people to understand and own decisions that are made, even where they don't entirely agree with the direction chosen.

Typically, a Check-in is introduced at the very start of the meeting. This serves the purpose of getting everyone 'into the room', present and attentive. At the same time it reveals the mood and receptivity of those in the meeting, which may vary for personal or business reasons. The comments made during the Check-in may indicate which agenda items require more attention than others, and may suggest further items to be added to the agenda. This can improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the meeting.

If you are leading the meeting and want to introduce a Check-in, there are several things to take into account. Firstly, think about how much time is helpful to spend on the Check-in. That varies according to who is present and for what purpose. Four or five minutes at the outset of an hour-long meeting will enhance the productivity of that meeting, whereas 15 minutes is likely to feel extravagant and interfere with getting things done. It is a good idea to tell people how long you would like to take overall for the Check-in, or perhaps to restrict them to a sentence or two.

Secondly, there is the Check-in itself. You could simply ask for a comment from each person and leave what they

choose to say entirely open, but more often you can use the Check-in purposefully to set the direction of the meeting. A good generic question is: How are you, and what do you really want us to consider in the meeting today? There are, of course, any number of questions one could usefully ask for a Check-in, and the guiding principle is to find the question that will serve this particular meeting best. You are after a question that stimulates the kind of thinking you hope people will use during the larger part of the meeting. That takes preparation and imagination, so do think about the Check-in before the start of the meeting. Repeating the same Check-in meeting after meeting is definitely not recommended.



Thirdly, you should set the sequence for the Check-in. This might be simply going in turn around room, which may be the best way if people are not very confident or familiar with the process. Alternatively you could use a tagged process by asking each speaker to choose the next speaker, which usually adds to the pace and attentiveness of those present. On some occasions it is better to let people

speak in whatever sequence they choose, making clear you would like to hear from everyone. Try different sequences and get a feel for what works best in different situations.

At the close of the meeting you should have a Check-out. This marks the close of the meeting, and enables people to contribute general views about the way the meeting went, to add what may have been overlooked, or to confirm decisions and action points. Adding a Check-out is the best way to establish learning and is highly recommended for teams that meet regularly. A generic Check-out question is: How did this meeting work for you, and what actions are you taking away with you?

Adding a Check-in and a Check-out is the simplest way to improve the quality of your meetings.

**Submitted by Peter Garrett**