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Change Management Practice

QUESTION: HOW DO YOU IMPROVE STRATEGY EXECUTION CAPABILITY?

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Answer: improve the quality of your meeting practices; eight ways to improve quality of your meetings



Our claim that the quality of an organisation's meeting practices is a lead indicator of the leadership's ability to execute strategy. Put differently, organisations that improve their meeting and coordination practices, greatly increase the likelihood of delivering on their strategic objectives.

Ask any manager why they attend meetings and you will be surprised to hear just how many managers attend them without any understanding of their role in the meeting. It is common for meeting attendees to have little idea if their participation will deliver on their expectations and in addition, what they will take away in terms of actionable deliverables. Clearly, meetings like these are contributing little towards the attainment of organisational goals. Further, ask most people what motivates them to attend meetings and you will learn that many people are driven by a need to be seen to attend, to know what is going on and a concern not to miss out on some knowledge that their peers have acquired. Such a meeting culture as this is depressingly uninspiring. However, allowing it to continue is not an individual failing but an organisational malpractice that requires leadership and courage to rectify. A failure

to put in place strong and appropriate meeting practices can end up costing an organisation literally millions.

In writing this article we conducted some research. This revealed a good understanding of the efficiencies to be gained through benchmarking and workflow analysis. However, the research also revealed a distinct lack of management literature and quantitative evidence regarding organisational waste due to poorly designed and ineffectual meeting practices.

There is a basic lack of understanding concerning the organisational cost incurred through weak coordination, poor cross-functional alignment and badly conceived and run meetings.

Well-run meetings are an important aspect of work place coordination and are vital to drive forward organisational strategy. If done well, they connect executive teams, managers and employees to the organisational mission. They create meaning and purpose for individuals and bind them to organisational objectives. Crucially, they also create understanding, can be highly motivational and generate the 'corporate energy' that drives organisations forward towards delivering on their strategic goals.

"...the quality of an organisations meeting practices is an effective barometer of an organisation's leadership capability"

We believe that the quality of an organisations meeting practices is an effective barometer of an organisation's leadership capability. Thus, the quality of an organisation's meeting practices is a bi-product of its leadership quality.

Where organisations build their capability to run effective meetings effectively, they dramatically improve their ability to execute strategy. Using a discipline called Commitment-based Management to design and manage meeting practices, is a very effective way to build management capability and dramatically improve the effectiveness of an organisations meetings.

We consider that there are eight conditions necessary to set-up an effective meeting practice and create high performing teams. They are as follows:

1. Get the right attendance: Every person attending has clear responsibility and authority to make decisions. In practice that means no one in the room should have to seek authority from others not attending and no one in the room is there without clarity of purpose.
2. Clarify the Goal and outcomes required: Ensure there is a clear articulation of the goals and purpose of the meeting and circulate this to attendees in advance and ensure people understand the meeting context.
3. Promote conflict: It is healthy to publically debate the right things to do and meetings are a perfect forum for these discussions. Without robust debate, individuals may not commit themselves to the outcomes sought. This results in passive resistance and non-effective actions and follow through.
4. Seek individual commitment: Each request for action is personal to an individual. By asking them to directly take responsibility for an outcome you are making them personally accountable for its delivery.
5. Openly discuss what individuals need to be successful: In delivering on actions, if an individual is unclear what is required of them, suggest they reconsider the original request and come back with a formed view of what conditions need to be in place for them to be successful.
6. Hold individuals accountable for their commitments: When a commitment is due to be delivered on, ensure it is accepted as being complete, and that the requestor to declares their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the result.
7. Only discuss exceptions and the future action required to deliver on the original commitment: Do not waste valuable meeting time on reporting progress but instead, save that for a written report, circulated to meeting attendees for review prior to the meeting. Instead, focus on areas that are not achieving the right outcomes in relation to the commitments made.
8. Be supportive and encourage people to take on commitments: Praise success and do not punish the holders of under or non delivered commitments. Instead, focus on how to avoid the situation reoccurring in the future. Use one-to-one check-ins to unearth problematic commitment holders.

In reality the conditions will not be easy to achieve. Ennovate adopts a pragmatic and flexible approach. This tailors adherence to the eight conditions, to the length and difficulty of the journey the client organisation needs to undertake to create the conditions for an effective meeting practice.

Changes to practices in the workplace require individuals to change their behaviour. Whether it is a conscious decision or not, all individuals make trade-offs when deciding to change their behaviour. For the individual, the benefit of a change in behaviour needs to outweigh the opportunity cost of giving up a behaviour that has benefited them in the past. To achieve a successful execution of strategy, a key requirement for leaders, is to tie together the personal benefits of individual changes in behaviour with the organisational benefits. This essential alignment of personal benefit to organisational benefit requires one-to-one coaching between the meeting leader and the individual attendees.

Engaging in working to build this alignment is the foundation of effective meetings and is inextricably tied to the effectiveness of commitments made within those meetings. Creating a purpose and meaning that explicitly links an individual's actions to the attainment of an organisational objective, may be all it takes to drive a fundamental improvement in strategy execution.

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