

THE KNOW

Compelling Meetings

Brought to you by
Thorne Widgery

Transform your deathly boring meetings into compelling, profitable meetings...

Have you ever been in a meeting that felt unproductive and wasteful? How does such a meeting make you feel – disappointed, frustrated, demoralised?

Most people feel this way about most internal meetings, according to the research. And like rust on your car, one mediocre meeting after another quietly eats away at your business.

Allow such wasteful meetings to prevail and you'll always feel that your business is missing out on the performance and results it could and should have.



Top Tip

Here's a proven solution for you...

Great movies start with conflict. For meetings to be truly useful, meetings must also encourage constructive **conflict** as well as **collaboration**.

The outcome of a successful meeting is a good decision & an action plan that generates movement and momentum towards your business success.

Time to improve the way your meetings work?

"...improving meetings is not just an opportunity to enhance the performance of companies. It is also a way to positively impact the lives of our people." – Patrick Lencioni (author of Death by Meeting)

Internal meetings happen every week in most businesses – what an opportunity to improve your results every week!

According to a 3M Meeting Network survey of managers, 25-50 percent of the time people spend in meetings is wasted. And if managers participate in up to 15 meetings a week, like the research suggests, then better meetings could and should bring you a better, more successful business.

In a nutshell

Run your internal meetings so that bold decisions happen often and quickly. Then ensure that your decisions are supported by your people.

Love to hate meetings...

"The most justifiable reason to loathe meetings is that they don't contribute to the success of our organisations."

— Lencioni

Although people love to complain publicly about meetings, the research is inconclusive as to how many meetings are wasteful.

And yet so many bad meetings...

"Generate real human suffering in the form of anger, lethargy, and cynicism."

— Lencioni

What is clear is that your business can improve performance when internal meetings improve. So, what really matters is that you run productive and successful meetings in your business. Meetings happen too often to ignore.

Most meetings could do with more razzmatazz!

How could anybody relish an activity that is mostly passive and irrelevant to them?

Well millions do, and an industry worth £38billion a year relies on such passive and irrelevant activity.

At the movies, you, I and the world's cinema-goers are all passive for two hours or more. And movie content is mostly irrelevant. More on James Bond and the Deepwater Horizon movies shortly!

Whereas, at work, you can actively participate in meetings and the content is profoundly relevant!

So what can you learn from the movies so that your internal meetings no longer strangle or derail your business?

Decision 1st, meeting 2nd...

Before we get to the conflict and collaboration, let's make a decision.

In his book 'Read This Before Our Next Meeting' Al Pittampalli makes a strong case for putting the decision first, meeting second. Or even no meeting.

"We assume that somehow the meeting will make the decision. It never does. Meetings can't make decisions; only leaders can."

Pittampalli then suggests three grades of decision:

- Decisions of no consequence
- Decisions of low consequence
- Decisions of mid to high consequence

No consequence decisions

If a decision causes no impact to the people or the business, then simply make the decision without a meeting.

Every inconsequential decision that is made quickly, without fuss is a shot of adrenaline straight into the heart of our organisation.

A meeting about the decision is unnecessary and just slows things down.

Low consequence decisions

Low consequence decisions require very little debate but may well need collaboration to get the support from your team. If you're calling a meeting for low consequence decisions then:

It's for finalising your preliminary decision, generating buy-in, and agreeing the next steps.

For lower consequence decisions Pittampalli recommends the following meeting process:

- 1** Inform meeting attendees of your decision and reasoning in advance of the meeting (saves meeting time)
- 2** In the meeting, allow attendees to ask questions, voice concerns, propose modifications to get buy-in
- 3** You also ask questions that propel things towards action

Explain and resolve the decision as quickly as possible, so that you can get onto implementation and collaboration - an action plan is your primary tangible outcome for low consequence meetings.

What about when the stakes are higher?

The risks are greater.

For higher consequence decisions you're less focused on speed, more on the quality of the decision.

When the stakes are higher your focus is on **robust and honest debate** – constructive conflict is your friend.

Collaboration comes later.

Avoid catastrophe, nurture conflict...

When you're making high-stakes decisions you DON'T want meetings that seek immediate approval. You DO want healthy debate.

But most people shy away from conflict in meetings. Because it feels uncomfortable, conflict is mostly avoided. And that's risky. How risky? Watch the 2016 movie 'Deepwater Horizon' with Mark Wahlberg.

In April 2010, 11 people died and the worst oil spill in history devastated the Gulf of Mexico because of the Deepwater Horizon disaster. BP were required to pay \$60billion in fines and compensation.

The research into disasters like Deepwater Horizon and the Challenger Space Shuttle explosion in 1986 points to something called 'normalisation of deviance'. A culture of over-confidence resulted in decisions and meetings without sufficient debate or conflict – BP and NASA forgot to be afraid.

In their books both Lencioni and Pittampalli make a strong case for more conflict in high-stakes meetings.

For your high-stakes decisions seek conflict. Encourage debate. Praise disagreement when you see it. It's healthy and makes for better decisions and better meetings.

Movie magic comes from conflict...

By emphasising the issues, challenges and risks, you bring drama to your meetings too. So share the risks and challenges up front at the start of your meetings – just like conflict shows up at the start of a great movie.

Think about the start of every James Bond movie. In the movie 'Spectre', Daniel Craig joins the day of the dead parade in Mexico City, he survives a 'conflict' in a helicopter and then ends up in 'conflict' with 'M' played by Ralph Fiennes!

Conflict and the resolution of conflict makes movies (and meetings) compelling!

Pittampalli suggests the following meeting process for high-stakes meetings:

- 1 Hold off sharing your preliminary decision – share the issue only. You then avoid 'groupthink' that naturally supports your decision (remember people mostly want to avoid conflict)
- 2 Before you share your decision, get attendees to share their thoughts on the issue (ideally before the meeting)
- 3 During the meeting reveal your decision and invite disagreement
- 4 If disagreement doesn't happen then provoke debate using questions
- 5 After robust debate, seek agreement by eliminating weak options first, then choosing from the best remaining options
- 6 If no agreement or consensus is forthcoming, you make the decision yourself

This will increase the likelihood of a good decision and avoid catastrophic decisions and actions, or indeed no decision and no actions.

You get great meetings, great decisions and buy-in from your people too.

Time to disagree

“Meetings are at best a necessary evil, why should we invest more time and energy in them than we do already?”

Good decisions, whether they're low, mid or high consequence decisions, need implementing.

And because you need others to support your decision and implement the actions, you will end up in a meeting.

And because meetings happen every week, in every business you could easily undermine the results of your business with bad meetings.

“Can't we just do without meetings if people dislike them so much?”

Because you want your business to succeed, you want to make great decisions and have wholehearted support from your people.

This makes conflict and collaboration essential to meeting management.

Making decisions first puts leaders, quite rightly, in the hot seat.

Making meetings compelling through a focus on either collaboration or conflict sets you up for greater meeting success.

But remember, decide first, meet second.

“How do I know if a decision is of low, mid or high consequence?”

What's clear is, if you grade every decision as high consequence, then no decision will be seen as high importance.

Trial and error is the best answer. You and your people could look at a series of recent decisions and agree together about which are low, medium or high consequence decisions. This can guide your thinking.

“Please tell me more”

You can read and absorb Al Pittampalli's book: 'Read this before your next meeting – how we can get more done' in just one sitting – it's only 70 small pages long. But it's packed with practical insights into running great meetings and making great decisions.

And the fable you'll find in the Patrick Lencioni book: 'Death by meeting' – will inspire you to create structure in your meetings. Lencioni puts a very strong case for four different styles of meetings to ensure you stay on track.



Most meetings could do with more razzmatazz!



Share the risks and challenges up front -just like conflict shows up at the start of a great movie.



Thorne Widgey
Business Advisors &
Chartered Accountants

Support

Supporting tools for this edition of The Know are available on businessbitesize.com/thorne_widgey

thornewidgey.co.uk

Thorne Widgey Hereford
2 Wyevale Business Park,
King's Acre, Hereford HR4 7BS
T. 01432 276 393 F. 01432 298 630
E. info@thornewidgey.co.uk

Thorne Widgey Ludlow
5 Parkway, Corve Street
Ludlow, SY8 2PG
T. 01584 872 222
E. ludlow@thornewidgey.co.uk



Four in The Know tips for you...

Internal meetings should be designed to help you make or implement decisions.

But remember, meetings do not make decisions, it's you, the leader who makes the decision.

The tone and structure of your meetings depends upon the level of importance, impact or consequence of your decision.

- 1 Before you organise a meeting, decide whether you're taking an inconsequential, low or higher level impact decision
- 2 If your decision is inconsequential and of NO impact, simply make the decision and communicate it to your people without a meeting
- 3 For LOW level impact decisions, focus on buy-in, speed and action-planning in your meeting
- 4 For HIGHER level impact decisions focus first on creating genuine debate and conflict in your meeting, then generate collaboration

Ultimate Argument:

"How do I know that a 'decision first, meeting second' approach will deliver better results for my business?"

Without a decision having been made, a meeting is simply 'talking shop' – it's like a boat sailing along without a rudder.

Test the 'decision first, meeting second' process and see if it changes the tone of the meeting and the tangible outcome of the meeting too.

STOP thinking that meetings result in decisions.

START making a decision first. Use the meeting to generate healthy, constructive debate and then collaboration and action plans.

Your next steps:

Your business success depends on your internal meeting success, especially if you have lots of meetings every week.

Who wants mediocre or wasteful meetings to undermine the performance of their business? Nobody!

As leader, take responsibility for the decision and then create the right meeting structure to reflect the level of importance or impact of your decision.

Start by making sure the decision is made before any meeting is called...

Then run one of the two suggested meeting structures - depending on whether the level of impact of the decision is low or higher.

Meetings that result in collaboration & conflict will always prove to be valuable

Both Pittampalli and Lencioni, in their books, recommend the need for conflict and debate to make internal meetings compelling.

Conflict and resolution of conflict makes movies compelling. Sharing the issues or challenges either before or during the meeting sets you up for a high-conflict discussion that will rarely be wasteful and will, like the movies, be engaging and maybe even compelling.

- 1 **As leader, take responsibility for making the decision before allowing a meeting** — Meetings don't make decisions, leaders make decisions.
- 2 **Next decide the level of impact the decision will make** — Is the decision inconsequential, of low consequence (low-impact), or of high consequence (high-impact)? This will determine what happens next.
- 3 **For inconsequential decisions, avoid a meeting** When a decision has no or very low impact on other people or the business as a whole, why have a meeting? Simply make the decision and make it happen. No need to generate debate or collaboration.
- 4 **For low-level impact decisions focus on action agreement and planning** — Share your decision, share your understanding of the issues and seek lots of collaboration on the actions.
- 5 **For higher-level impact decisions focus on creating healthy debate and conflict** — When the stakes are high, the quality of the decision matters the most, so make your decision but keep it to yourself to start with.

Share the issues at stake and, like the movies do, you'll then create a high-energy and compelling meeting that helps ensure you've made the highest quality decision. Follow this conflict meeting with a collaboration meeting to coordinate actions and people's participation.

And although daily, weekly, monthly and quarterly meetings may differ in content, you can still use the drama of the issues, risks and challenges to make your meeting compelling and fruitful.