CREATING A CULTURE OF ACCOUNTABILITY IN YOUR MEETINGS!
Meeting Planning and Facilitation Tools

In their successful best seller, <u>Execution, the Discipline of Getting Things Done</u>, Larry Bossidy and Ram Charan defined Execution as " a systematic process of rigorously discussing how's and what's, questioning, tenaciously following through, and ensuring accountability. . . a systematic way of exposing reality and acting on it."

Many organizations have people who are great at coming up with new ideas, but the Company that thrives in this marketplace is the one who can execute - implement those ideas through to fruition. . . getting the product to market on time. . . making those deadlines. . . meeting those deliverables.

In a MicroSoft Office Survey, time spent in meetings each week worldwide – 5.6 hours. 69 % of those surveyed said that the meetings were unproductive. In the United States, time spent in meetings each week was 5.5 hours, and 71% of those surveyed said they were unproductive. (www.leadingedgealliance.com/issues/2005/summer/productivity/)

Meetings are where it happens (or not.) People come together to share information, collaborate, problem solve, and make decisions. It is the microcosm of the Organization's culture. It exemplifies "how we do things around here."

So if we plan to create a Culture of Execution, where we really get things done - why not start with our meetings!

In this article, we explore 5 critical elements of designing and delivering a successful, meeting that yields tangible, focused outcomes: planning the meeting, meeting facilitation, helpful rules, facilitation tools, decision making tools, and tools for ensuring accountability.

Planning the Meeting

There is a useful acronym for meeting planning and ensuring that critical components are addressed. It is P.A.R.R.E.

P - Purpose
- Do we really need to have a meeting or might the information be shared in another venue?
- What is the main purpose of the meeting?

- Is the meeting for 1) information sharing 2) decision making 3) problem solving 4) all three?
- What outcomes does each participant want / expect?

A - Agenda
- What is the agenda for the meeting?
- Who needs to have input into it?
- Are each of the topics allotted enough time?
- When does it need to be sent out?
- How will the agenda be posted at the meeting to ensure we stay focused and on time?

R - Roles
- Who is the facilitator? How experienced are they with process facilitation – directing the meeting focus and keeping people on time and on track?
- What are the other roles needed - scribe, time keeper, synthesizer?
- Who should we be sure we include in the meeting?
- Who might not need to be there?
- Who will be doing what at the meeting?

R - Rules
- What are the ground rules / agreements for participant behavior?
- How will we post them at the meeting?
- How will we ensure that they are followed?

E - Environment
- What is the best environment / set-up for this meeting?
- How will the room / tables and chairs be arranged?
- Will people all be facing each other to encourage dialogue?
- What furniture in the room many become barriers or distractions?
- What activities might best encourage participation?
- What activities might best achieve the purpose?
- What supplies might we need?

Meeting Facilitation

In thinking about meeting facilitation, we must remember the two key components – Content and Process. The Content is the "What" of the meeting – the tasks to accomplish, the projects to execute, or the products to deliver. The Process is the "How" of the meeting – the relationship between participants and the way people communicate with each other

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Focus on . . .	And remember the importance of . . .
The What	The How
The Content	The Process
The Project	The Team
The Product	The Relationship

If the Project Leader or Team Leader is very invested in the outcome of the meeting content, it is often advisable to have a neutral, skilled facilitator to lead the meeting and focus on process. That way, the team leader can fully participate and have a voice in the decision making around meeting content, while the facilitator can ensure all people are heard and all issues are addressed in the most efficient way. Many Companies have trained facilitators in house. If not, calculate the cost of ineffective meetings that never seem to have closure or clear results. Weigh that cost with the benefit of hiring an external, process facilitator who can ensure the work gets done in the most efficient and collaborative way.

Helpful Rules

Agreements for Effective Discussion:
- One person speaks at a time
- No blame
- Manage technology – cell phones on vibrate
- Confidentiality
- Etc.

Rules for Brainstorming (Divergent Thinking):
- Defer judgment
- Write everything down – anything goes
- Work for quantity
- Piggy back / build on each other's ideas

Rules for Decision Making (Convergent Thinking):
- Decide on the decision making process ahead of time
- Be deliberate
- Use objective criteria
- Be constructive – make suggested changes

Facilitation Tools

Great Questions: Great questions are the magic tool for excellent facilitation. Questioning techniques are needed to promote divergent thinking and convergent thinking. They encourage participation, redirect the conversations, keep discussions focused, and check in with the group for alignment around content and process.

Flip Chart: The second most important facilitation tool is the flip chart. This may sound obvious, but too many people have meetings without writing everything down. Discussions get so repetitive that people don't know if they have been heard or not. When they see their ideas written clearly and accurately documented on a flip chart, they feel heard. Also, flip chart paper (rather than white boards) can be taken away to ensure confidentiality and to be used for follow up notes or at the next meeting.

Post Its: Again, documentation of ideas is essential. Large 3x5 post it notes can be used for brainstorming. A "Sharpie" pen should be used so the writing on the post it can be seen. Only one idea should be written per post it. Each idea should begin with an action verb and should be written very specifically to describe the idea being represented. By requiring this specificity, people can come to a quicker understanding and alignment around ideas being generated.

Decision Making Tools

"Lack of closure is the death of execution." This point is emphasized throughout Bossidy's and Charan's book. One of the reasons meetings never seem to end is that many team leaders do not have effective tools for bringing a group to alignment and making clear decisions.

Sticky Dots: Sticky dots can be used for multi-voting. Each person can be asked to vote on their top favorite ideas written on the flip chart or post-it notes. Using sticky dots to narrow down the ideas brings focus and alignment to the group.

Silent Voting: Post-it notes can also be used for silent voting. Just before a break, ask people to write down their favorite ideas and put them on a flip chart on the way out the door. During the break, the facilitator can tally up the votes to indicate the most popular ideas.

Pluses and Concerns: When an idea is close to closure, have each person raise their top reason for supporting the idea, and their top concern. Write all comments on a flip chart. Review each concern as a whole group to ensure all are addressed. Then, take another vote to see if consensus has been reached.
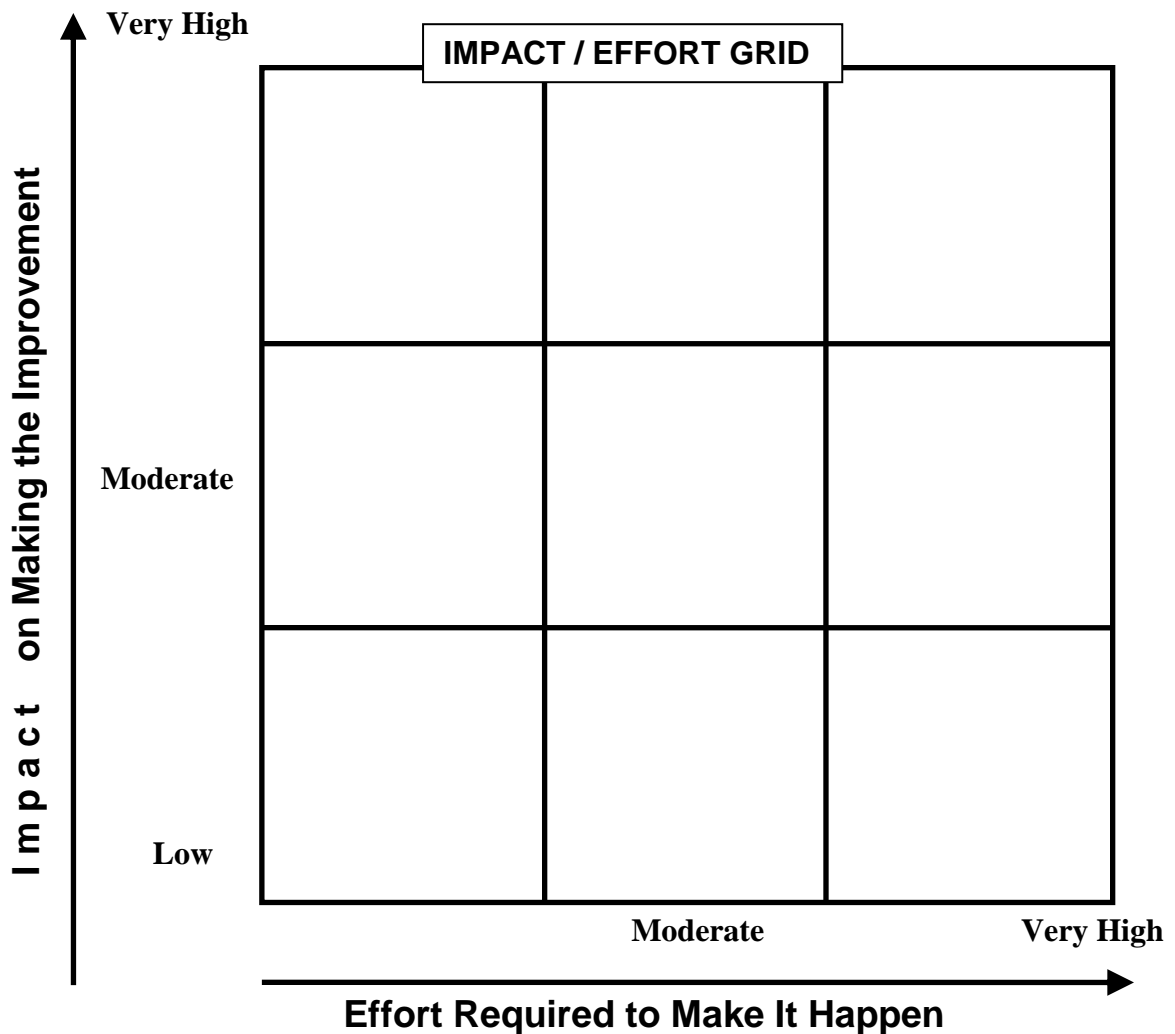
Bulls-eye: Put a big bulls-eye on a flip chart. When a decision has been made, ask people to come up to the bulls-eye and place a sticky dot on the target to indicate how they feel about the decision. Then, the facilitator knows if more discussion is needed.

I am still not sure

I like it!

Terrific!
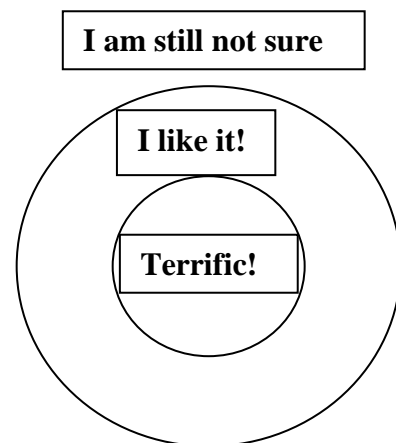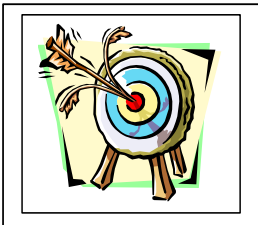
Prioritization Grid: Draw an Impact / Effort grid on a flip chart. Discuss each idea that has been brainstormed one by one and place in one of the four boxes. (Using post-it notes works well here.) All items are eventually classified in one of the following categories.

1) Easy to do and yields a big improvement
2) Easy to do but yields a small improvement
3) Difficult to do but yields a big improvement
4) Difficult to do and yields a small improvement

The results show the group which idea can be implemented immediately, which need more action planning, and which should be discarded.

Very High

| IMPACT / EFFORT GRID |

Impact on Making the Improvement

Moderate

Low

Moderate   **Very High**

Effort Required to Make It Happen

(Bens, Ingrid, Facilitation at a Glance, Goal / QPC, 2008.)

Accountability

Action Plans: All of the meeting tools and great intentions won't ensure that ideas and goals get executed. Specific, concrete action plans must be created which indicate the following:

What - What specific task or objective is is planned?

Who - Who has agreed to take ownership and make it happen?

How - What will they be doing to get it done?

Deliverable – What is the final deliverable? How will we know it is successful?

When – When will they complete the task?

These plans can be completed on "banner paper" hung on the wall for all to see. Then, each person at the meeting receives a hard copy after the meeting to keep the plan alive.

Next Steps: Just before the meeting closes, the facilitator should write, "Next Steps" on the flip chart. All next steps that need to be taken following the meeting are written on the chart with names and completion dates written next to them.

Plus / Deltas: At the end of every meeting, the facilitator should put a "Plus / Delta" chart on a flip chart. Collectively, the group should indicate what went well at the meeting (Pluses) and what needs to be different at the next meeting (Deltas.)   This reflection tool is critical for the group's meeting process to improve. It only takes 5 minutes, but it keeps the group mindful of how effective their meetings are and how they might want to improve them going forward.

Pluses	Deltas

The time spent in pre-planning and preparing for a meeting is worth its weight in gold. By making sure there is a clear and manageable agenda, good, skilled facilitator, and the necessary supplies / environment;   meetings become much more effective and efficient and enjoyable!

 Also, all ideas are heard and documented, so the group's wisdom is not lost. People feel heard; they feel included in the decision making. They are empowered to participate and become owners of the process. They know their time will be well spent. Agreements are documented in writing, so the group can keep individuals accountable for their commitments. Through effective meetings, an organization can begin to build a culture of execution – and really make things happen!