

Business Challenge

The productivity drain that inefficient business meetings present in today's organizations is generally understood and reluctantly tolerated. Like airport security, sticker shock at the gas pumps or partisanship on Capitol Hill, the status quo of poorly managed business meetings has been around for so long that organizations have built a reluctant acceptance to an obvious problem - *until now*.

Today, virtually every commercial, government and non-profit organization on earth will invest significant amounts of capital when gathering their human resources for business meetings. The goal of these meetings is typically to manage operations and to solve business challenges. The unfortunate reality is that the average performance of these business meetings is downright poor, leading to tremendous inefficiency and waste of precious human and capital resources. Organizations can no longer afford to tolerate this productivity drain.

Current economic conditions have driven productivity improvement in our businesses from aspirational desire to competitive need. Businesses are demanding more efficient ways to work in order to reduce cost and improve execution. This demand for greater productivity coupled with innovation that brings technological power into the palms of our hands, has created an opportunity for organizations to eliminate the waste found in today's business meetings. However, in order to seize this opportunity, organizations must first address some underlying problems.

Current State

To understand how we address the meeting productivity challenge facing our organizations today, we must first understand the key contributing factors. We also must acknowledge that the historical approach of improving meeting 'facilitation' capability is misguided. Our objective should be to get **tangible results** from our business meetings, not to have them effectively facilitated. This "meeting facilitation" approach has spawned conventional corporate wisdom that tells us the solution to our meeting productivity woes is to:

1. Be more selective when calling a meeting
2. Provide a meeting agenda
3. Invite only attendees that are absolutely necessary for the meeting
4. Ensure attendees stay on track and avoid meeting derailment
5. Take copious meeting minutes to be distributed after meetings
6. Appropriately delegate "to-do's" or "action items" to be completed by a specific date.

This conventional "wisdom" has been around for decades and it's time to face the fact that these are not the solutions to our meeting productivity challenges. While there's certainly some merit to the items mentioned above, and meeting facilitation skills are important, simply focusing on these factors treats the symptoms of the problem without addressing the underlying root causes.

As long as organizations continue focusing on these "best practices" they're never going to get to the fundamental issues that must be addressed to deliver outstanding business meetings, consistently. The reality is that there are a few key factors that must be understood and mastered, in order for organizations to deliver the return on meeting investment, which should be expected.

Underlying Causes

Investment Awareness

One significant contributor to poor business meeting performance stems from the lack of appreciation and awareness of the value (and cost) of human capital. In other words, we lack respect for the investment that is made in today's meetings. Without this awareness we risk mistreating our meeting time like a spoiled teenager mistreats a new BMW. Meeting managers must recognize the investment made, and therefore the need for a return on investment, in order to ensure they deliver the commensurate value.

For example, a project manager in your organization schedules a one hour meeting with six other colleagues to discuss project progress, issues and risks. Let's say the average person in the meeting costs \$70/hour in salary and benefits. Does the project manager walk into the meeting room with awareness that this meeting is costing his/her organization approximately \$500? Do they think about this meeting ensuring tangible value commensurate with its' significant investment? The reality is that most likely, the answer to both of these questions is no.

Some could argue that \$500 is not a significant amount of money in the relative scheme of things, but the reality is that most medium to large organizations have dozens or hundreds of these business meetings taking place each day. This can cost an organization tens to hundreds of thousands of dollars per month, and nobody is monitoring their effectiveness or measuring their results.

How different would meetings be planned, executed and reported if the meeting manager was funding the meeting from their own pocket? Would they still call the meeting? Would it be completed faster? How quickly would they look to get their colleagues back to work? Would they look to extract as much value from the meeting time as possible? Would they be more diligent overall?

Respecting the investment of human capital is fundamental to making today's organizations more productive in their business meetings - but this is just a start. Even the most cost-conscious meeting manager will fail at managing effective meetings if they don't confront the elephant in the middle of our meeting rooms – *meeting ambiguity*.

Meeting Ambiguity

A second significant contributor to poor meeting performance is the cloud of ambiguity that we allow to penetrate our meeting rooms and conference calls. We've all heard the expression that "clarity is power". Well the opposite is equally true, "ambiguity is weakness", when it comes to meeting productivity and delivering results. Ambiguity provides camouflage for inefficiency, and today's business meetings are rife with ambiguity, uncertainty, and other clarity killing confusion.

Think about it, how often do meeting attendees *enter* a meeting knowing the business meeting objectives, the agenda for accomplishing those objectives, and how much time it's estimated to take? For some organizations the answer might be "regularly". The truth is that some organizations do a fair job at *planning* their business meetings. So the follow up questions are: How often do meeting attendees *leave* a meeting:

- Knowing exactly what action items were identified, who is on point, and when the actions are due?
- Knowing what key decisions were made and the rationale?
- Knowing what issues were identified, who's accountable for managing the issues?
- Knowing what risks were identified and who is accountable for coming up with a mitigation strategy?

- Knowing what key points were captured that can/should to be communicated with those not present?

Very few organizations can answer each of these questions “regularly”. The truth is, with rare exception, today’s organizations do an extremely poor job at ensuring clarity before, during and after a business meeting. How can we possibly expect to achieve a productive business meeting environment if the stakeholders in our business meetings are not crystal clear on the outcomes? The bad news is you can’t. The good news is that MeetingResult has a solution.

Even with respect for the human capital investment in meetings, and improved clarity of outcomes, there resides another contributing factor so important that it must be addressed – *stakeholder accountability*.

Stakeholder Accountability

A third contributing factor is related to the ambiguity problem referenced above, but it has its own characteristics that must be addressed - Stakeholder Accountability. The overall importance of accountability in organizations has been well documented and goes well beyond the scope of this document. Accountability is something that must be injected into our meeting rooms in order for organizations to demonstrate productivity and performance.

Imagine a football team breaking their offensive huddle without accountability of assignments (who to block, who’s getting the football, what patterns to run), as well as execution of those assignments. We all know their performance would be poor at best. The same holds true for business meeting performance. How is it acceptable to break from a business meeting without ensuring clear understanding of accountability of assignments?

Accountability in a meeting management context refers to meeting managers and stakeholders fulfilling their role before, during, and after a business meeting. Think about your organization for a moment. How often are meeting materials sent out well in advance of the meeting and read by meeting attendees who arrive on time, fully engaged in the meetings discussion (i.e. not focused on their Blackberry, iPhone or other electronic gadget)? How often does each stakeholder exit the meeting with full understanding and ownership of what they need to do, when, and why? How often does everyone else in the meeting understand everyone else’s accountability?

Very few organizations can even pretend to answer “regularly” to any of the questions raised above. The truth is that poor accountability in our business meetings is a microcosm of the larger accountability culture that exists in our organizations today. The good news is that organizations do not need to solve for the latter in order to influence a meeting culture of accountability.

Accountability is an easier concept to grasp than it is to implement, but establishing the proper process and discipline can go a long way towards increasing business meeting performance. It’s amazing what teams can accomplish when individuals know their accountability, and when they know that everyone else knows their accountability. There is still another important factor that must be present in order to support all of the factors mentioned thus far to enable organizations to deliver consistent business meeting productivity – *meeting manager follow through*.

Meeting Manager Follow Through

The fourth major contributor to poor meeting performance is the lack of follow through after a meeting. We’ve covered the concept of accountability in the previous section as it pertains to stakeholders fulfilling

their role before during and after a business meeting. 'Follow-through' is an important part of instilling a clarity rich accountability culture and focuses on the meeting manager's responsibility to make sure that meeting results are properly documented and communicated.

In today's organizations there is typically one of two outputs resulting from a business meeting:

1. Meeting minutes are captured and distributed to meeting attendees. Typically these minutes:
 - Include a dump of information and discussion points that occurred during the meeting (irrespective of their importance/value).
 - Can take days or even weeks for a meeting manager or administrator to assemble and distribute.
 - Will not be reviewed by meeting attendees as they will not take the time to sift through all of the meeting minutes to determine the pieces relevant to them.
 - Will overwhelm other stakeholders (e.g. who did not attend the meeting) who are then forced to wade through the vast amount of information in order to derive the salient points.
2. No reporting on meeting results is performed.
 - More often than not meeting managers do not document and communicate the important points of a business meeting. The burden of documenting business meeting minutes is so great that many meeting managers just stop doing it.
 - This leads to meeting attendees relying on their personal notes and/or their memory to take key points forward and fulfill their role.
 - Stakeholders who did not attend the meeting rely on word of mouth to learn about the important events in a meeting.

Lack of consistent follow-through on meeting outcomes is a pervasive business problem. Considering the time and effort that it takes to document meeting minutes, it is somewhat understandable as to why this is the case. Additionally, meeting managers recognize that many meeting stakeholders are too busy to read through a mountain of meeting minutes. Therefore, you end up with the current state – no documentation.

Unfortunately without consistent follow-through, organizations diminish their opportunity to enforce accountability and combat ambiguity. Without documenting and communicating results, stakeholders are at risk of being left uninformed about key points, decisions, actions, issues and risks that could impact their business. Follow-through is a must for consistently delivering productive business meetings. The good news is, there is an effective and efficient way to get it done.

Our point of view is that today's average business meeting can be characterized by an under-appreciation of meeting cost, overly ambiguous objectives and outcomes, a lack of demonstrated accountability on the part of meeting managers and stakeholders, and poor follow-through on meeting documentation and communication. If this is not true in your organization we applaud you and ask that you share your experience and success stories with us at www.meetingresult.com. For all other organizations we invite you to invest in the MeetingResult Methodology.

MeetingResult Methodology

The purpose of this section is to introduce the reader to the MeetingResult (MR) Methodology. The following is not a script for implementing the MR Methodology nor is it designed to be instructional on how to manage the MR process. It is a framework that if properly implemented will combat the four main meeting problems that we discussed above. If you are interested in additional information on how to implement the framework within your organization please contact a MeetingResult sales representative at sales@meetingresult.com to schedule an appointment to discuss our training and consulting services.

MR Methodology focuses on three key meeting phases (Plan, Execute, Results) designed to help individuals and organizations address the underlying problems that exist in today's business meetings (described above). By implementing this simple but powerful methodology, organizations can realize significant improvement in the consistent delivery of productive business meetings.

Meeting Planning

"If I had eight hours to chop down a tree, I'd spend six hours sharpening my ax". – Abraham Lincoln

Planning is the most simple and straight forward component of the MR Methodology. This is also the phase that most meeting managers perform in some way shape or form. The purpose of planning is to clarify the meeting objectives, confirm that the meeting is necessary, and that stakeholders are equipped to fulfill their roles. Key steps in the planning process include:

- Prepare and distribute a meeting agenda that includes the following components:
 - Meeting Objectives – Develop specific and measurable business objectives that will be evaluated at the end of each business meeting (note that objectives should be assessed to determine that a meeting is the most effective and efficient way to accomplish the objectives)
 - Agenda Items – A planned sequence of meeting events designed to meet the stated objectives with estimated time and agenda leader(s)
 - Meeting Attendees – Individuals that are *necessary* to execute the agenda and meet the stated meeting objectives
 - Meeting Logistics – Date, time, duration, conference call/web meeting information
 - Meeting Materials – Meeting documents that will be used by meeting attendees in the meeting to execute each agenda item and achieve the stated objectives
 - Meeting Protocol – Specific instructions and/or ground rules for how this particular meeting will be executed (this includes expectations for attendance, delegates, pre-work, material mailing, post-meeting documentation and reporting, etc.)
- Estimate the cost of the meeting
 - Develop an estimate based on the number of individuals attending the meeting and their level/rates to arrive at an approximate cost for conducting the meeting
 - This step is done primarily for the purposes of the meeting manager and may or may not be shared with other meeting stakeholders
 - Confirm that the accomplishment of the business objectives is worth the cost of the meeting (if not, consider alternatives such as email, off-line discussions, etc.)

Some of you may be thinking to yourself “this seems like a lot of work just to conduct a business meeting”. First of all, this doesn’t take very long (15 minutes for a standard one hour business meeting) once you’re skilled in how to walk through the process. Secondly, if a meeting is worth calling then it’s worth doing right!

Meeting Execution

“Out of intense complexities, intense simplicities emerge”. – Winston Churchill

The Meeting Execution phase is where the MR Methodology significantly deviates from the status quo of today’s business meetings. Meeting Execution specifically refers to the time the meeting begins until the time when the meeting is adjourned, and everything in between. The overall objective of this phase is to ensure that the maximum value is generated and captured, so that an acceptable return on investment is achieved, based on the cost of gathering the meeting attendees.

Meeting Assets

We’ll discuss the mechanics of the Meeting Execution phase in a later section. First we need to establish an essential unpinning of the MR Methodology – **meeting assets**. The Meeting Execution phase starts with a belief that the purpose of any business meeting is to generate **assets** for the organization. In other words, we believe that the content of business meetings are more than intangible discussion, status updates and debate. Rather, business meetings are designed to generate *intellectual property* in the form of thought, action, and decision that must be captured, owned and communicated in order for it to retain value.

Consider a project team that makes an important *decision* during the course of a business meeting. That decision represents a tangible business asset (i.e. item of worth) that can now be utilized by the organization to address a business problem. The organization invested capital resources (e.g. salary, materials, overhead) to identify the asset so that it can be put into service. The problem we have today is that organizations fail to treat business meetings as the asset generating machines that they truly are. As a result this intellectual property is more likely to be mismanaged or just plain missed.

The word **asset** is derived from the Latin *ad* (meaning to) and *satis* (meaning sufficiency or enough), therefore to have enough. In a financial context an asset is having enough to cover your financial obligations. In an individual context (e.g. John is an asset to our organization.) an asset is having enough skill or qualities to contribute to the organization. In a meeting management context an asset is generating enough value to effectively solve business problems - enough clarity, enough communication, and enough decision to address business challenges.

If your business meetings aren’t generating tangible assets for your organization then why are you meeting? Team bonding? While we appreciate the value of team bonding and development, there are better ways to do that than forcing stakeholders into directionless meetings. We must appreciate meetings for the asset generating capability they represent when managed effectively.

The type of meeting assets that are generated in business meetings vary from organization to organization and from meeting to meeting. Sales team meetings are going to generate different assets than project team meetings for instance. At MeetingResult we’ve established a baseline set of meeting assets that we believe are common among most if not all organizations. Organizations should develop additional asset classes that are right for their business.

The point of establishing the meeting asset is to ensure that this intellectual property is identified, captured, assigned (if applicable), and managed by the respective owner(s). We'll talk more about that process in the Meeting Execution process section below. First let's review the baseline meeting assets.

Baseline MeetingResult meeting assets include:

- Key Notes – Important thoughts, ideas or comments that need to be preserved and/or shared with other organizational stakeholders
- Action Items – A task that requires a stakeholder (or stakeholders) to take specific action or accomplish a specific outcome by a set date
- Decisions – A conclusion, determination or judgment related to a business opportunity or choice
- Issues – An identified business problem that requires attention, monitoring or resolution by a stakeholder or stakeholders
- Risks – A potential business problem that requires attention, monitoring or resolution by a stakeholder or stakeholders

Meeting Execution Process

The MeetingResult process for the execution phase is designed to help meeting managers and stakeholders accomplish the objectives established during the Planning phase, and at the same time ensure that meeting assets are appropriately identified, captured and assigned. As mentioned above, this document is not designed to be a “how to” but rather is focused on laying out the fundamentals of the process. Below we outline the fundamental steps involved in executing a meeting.

- Capture meeting attendance
- Review meeting objectives and agenda (confirm agenda or make adjustments as needed)
- Proceed with agenda items
 - Agenda leaders are informed of their proposed time allotment
 - Meeting assets are identified as they occur throughout the course of the meeting
 - Meeting managers are responsible for calling out the meeting assets and clarifying asset attributes (e.g. owner, due date, description)
 - Elapsed time is captured prior to moving to the next agenda item
- Complete agenda items and review each meeting asset and the associated attributes
 - Modifications to meeting assets are made as needed before they are finalized
- Confirm or deny the accomplishment of meeting objectives

As you can see, much of the meeting execution process steps are relatively standard best practice and not revolutionary in and of themselves. However the capturing of meeting assets is an essential part of the process and must not be overlooked. The process of identifying, discussing, and assigning assets in the meeting is a critical step in removing ambiguity and enforcing accountability. Also, by reviewing these assets again at the end of the meeting and then documenting them on a meeting summary report (see Results below) clarity is assured and accountability is promoted.

In addition to following this simple yet powerful process, it is essential that meeting managers have the skill necessary to ensure outstanding business meetings every time.

Meeting Execution Skills

The following is a summary of meeting management skills that are essential to supporting the MeetingResult Methodology. To learn more about how MeetingResult can help your organization develop these powerful skills please contact us at sales@meetingresult.com

Meeting Asset Identification

It is imperative that meeting managers have the awareness to focus on the meeting content and capture the intellectual property that is being created throughout the meeting management process. This awareness comes through building a skill that allows meeting managers to sift the wheat from the shaft and effectively hone in on the important points.

Meeting Managers must have the capability to identify meeting assets, capture the relevant data associated with the asset and ensure that it is assigned to an appropriate owner. Sometimes this means that meeting managers need to stop the flow of the meeting and make certain that the assets are captured properly. Asking people to repeat items is often necessary and is very useful because it forces people to focus on what is being said and documented.

Clarity Model

MeetingResult's "Clarity Model" provides the tools and skill necessary for meeting managers to combat the tendency for vague language (i.e. deletions, distortions and generalizations) that invade our meeting rooms and hurt productivity. The Clarity Model enables meeting managers to support stakeholder discussion by helping the team drive to cleaner, more precise communication.

All communication that occurs in the context of a meeting is necessarily shorthand of sorts. There just isn't enough time in a day for everyone to clearly communicate every specific detail of their idea or thought. Stakeholders seek to be as specific as they can to get their point across while at the same time eliminate extraneous information. This capability varies from individual to individual and it's the meeting manager's responsibility to help ensure that all important communication is clear to each meeting attendee.

Meeting Leadership

Earlier in this document we were a little harsh on the meeting "facilitation" approach that organizations have taken to address their meeting productivity woes. While we believe that attempting to solve meeting effectiveness issues with a pure meeting facilitation solution is misguided, we do acknowledge the importance of solid meeting facilitation skills. However the key is for meeting managers to use facilitation skills to be effective *meeting leaders* and not just to get to the end of the meeting with the appearance of order.

According to Wikipedia, meeting facilitation "concerns itself with all the tasks needed to run a productive and impartial meeting. Facilitation serves the needs of any group who are meeting with a common purpose, whether it be making a decision, solving a problem, or simply exchanging ideas and information. It does not lead the group, nor does it try to distract or to entertain."

According to MeetingResult, meeting leadership concerns itself with ensuring that the resource investment in business meetings is respected and that they deliver measurable results in the most efficient, inclusive and productive way possible.

Meeting facilitation has a very important role, but what organizations need today are more meeting leaders who are going to ensure that a specific outcome and thus value are achieved for the meeting. Simply facilitating a meeting falls short of this goal.

Meeting Results

“A crank is someone with a new idea – until it catches on”. – Mark Twain

The Meeting Results Phase is straight forward yet critical to ensuring clarity, accountability and follow-through. As you may recall from the earlier discussion, meeting managers typically do one of two things here 1) send out extensive meeting minutes or 2) do nothing. The MeetingResult “results phase” focuses on delivering a meeting summary report that captures all of the important meeting assets and nothing more.

Key steps in the meeting results phase include:

- Prepare and distribute a meeting summary report includes the following components:
 - Meeting Objective Assessment – Communicate the objectives of the meeting and whether or not they were accomplished
 - Agenda Items – Identify the agenda items that were completed and those that were not completed (optional information is to include the time it took for each agenda item) and the actual leader of the agenda item (if different from the original leader)
 - Meeting Attendees – Document who attended, who didn't attend and who attended for part of the meeting
 - Meeting Logistics – Date, time, duration, conference call/web meeting information
 - Meeting Assets – Document all of the meeting assets captured and the relevant details (description, dates, owner etc.)
 - Other Messages – Any additional messages that should be shared with the team related to the meeting ('thank you', next meeting date, etc)
- Meeting summary report must be distributed no later than 24 hours after the meeting occurred
 - Stakeholders should be asked to review and comment/edit as needed
- A final meeting summary report should be distributed (if edits were made and accepted)
- The meeting manager should then take a few moments to assess the meeting, the assets that were generated and confirm whether or not the meeting was worth the investment made (based on the original cost estimate)

Please don't hesitate to contact us (sales@meetingresult.com) if you have any questions or would like any additional information. We sincerely wish you all the best in your business meetings and your business pursuits.

About MeetingResult Products & Services

Our mission at MeetingResult LLC is to rid the world of bad meetings by helping businesses like yours improve the way they plan, execute and follow through on meetings each and every day. MeetingResult LLC

provides technology products and service solutions that help organizations solve the pervasive and draining problem of inefficient, ineffective and outright wasteful business meetings.

MeetingResult for iPad

Available on the Apple Inc. App Store, MeetingResult for iPad combines the technological power and simplicity of the iPad with proven MeetingResult best practices, resulting in powerfully productive meetings with measurable results.

This app is designed for business professionals and organizations that are committed to demonstrating a measurable return on their meeting investment. MeetingResult enables meeting managers of all skill levels to consistently and effectively plan and execute outstanding business meetings. Further, MeetingResult for iPad enables users to measure their business meeting results, as well as effortlessly report those results to key stakeholders.

With a powerful meeting manager dashboard and integration with Google Docs, Evernote and DropBox, MeetingResult for iPad is the most comprehensive meeting management app on the market today.

MeetingResult for the Cloud

Available as in in-app purchase or directly through our website at www.meetingresult.com, MeetingResult for the Cloud extends the functionality available on the iPad and introduces cloud enabled features that dramatically improve meeting productivity. New features include email workflow, full text search, social tagging features and advanced reporting and analytics that will provide incredible insight into meeting performance. All data is synced to our Cloud service to provide a reliable backup and features like action item reminders and social tagging will happen automatically once the meeting data is synced. The vision for our MeetingResult technology products is to provide a comprehensive, cross-platform meeting management capability that will automate and streamline the implementation of our MeetingResult Meeting System resulting in fewer, faster more focused meetings.

MeetingResult Consulting & Training

With proven MeetingResult process, methodology and change management strategies, MeetingResult Consulting & Training services help organizations improve business meeting productivity.

- Baseline current state of meetings
- Leverage our MeetingResult best practice meeting process to create a standard meeting management process tailored for each organization
- Train business professionals to deliver consistently efficient and productive business meetings
- Train business professionals on using our software which automates our meeting system
- Quantify improvements in terms of productivity improvements

Contact us today at sales@meetingresult.com to see how we can help you improve your business meetings.