



Transform your deathly boring meetings into compelling and 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.

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

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 and an action plan that generates movement and momentum towards your business success.

Although people love to complain publicly about meetings, the research is inconclusive as to how many meetings are wasteful (see the downloadable tools for more on this).

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 razzamataz!

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

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

At the movies you, me and the world's cinema goers are **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 (see the downloadable tools for example 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.**

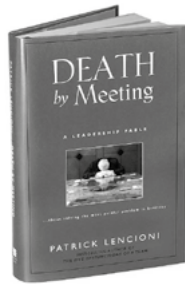
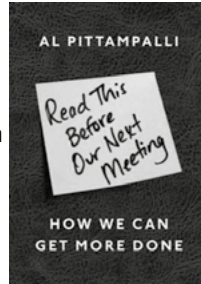
“How do I know if a decision is of low, mid or high consequence?”

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 in just one sitting – it's just 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 will inspire you to create structure in your meetings. Lencioni puts a very strong case for 4 different styles of meetings to ensure you stay on track.

You'll also find more insights, exercises and resources by checking out the downloadable tools that come with this edition of Business Bitesize.



4 helping hands 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 a '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.

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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.

More tools and information for you:

To download more insights and supporting resources use the URL link below.

Please go here <http://bit.ly/meetingsuccessstls> to make successful meetings create movement and momentum towards success in your accountancy firm.

Meetings that result in conflict and collaboration 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.

Check out the downloadable tools and resources for more details. 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.

YOUR SUPPORT TOOLS ARE HERE: Go to the link below and you'll find a selection of practical support tools to help you get a deeper understanding and develop greater skills for meeting management success.

Find the support tools to help you here - www.businessbitesize.com/remarkable_practice

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

When facing another uninspiring meeting at work start by asking yourself:

Would you and your team describe your internal meetings as energetic sources of inspiration, motivation and good decision making?

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1. The one 'Compelling Meeting' question you must ask to determine if your internal meetings are working as well as they should...
2. Avoid 'meeting stew'; use 4 types of internal meetings to drive your business forward
3. Avoid Mindless Acceptance Syndrome...
4. The 'deciding how to decide' checklist
5. The books and resources to help you uncover more insights on creating compelling meetings.

STOP thinking that meetings result in decisions

START making a decision first, then use the meeting to generate healthy, constructive debate and then collaboration and action planning

1. The one ‘Compelling Meeting’ question you must ask to determine if your internal meetings are working as well as they should...

Would you and your team describe your internal meetings as energetic sources of inspiration, motivation and good decision making?

Where is the value in this question?

The value in this question prompts you to rethink whether your internal meetings are delivering the best results for your business or not.

Because internal meetings happen every week (in most businesses) you have an opportunity to drive your business forward every week.

At the very least your meetings should maintain the status quo. What you don't want is your internal meetings holding your business back or undermining the future success of your business because of the way your meetings work (or don't work).

The structure of your internal meetings should be taken seriously because an awful lot of people express an awful lot of frustration at the (lack of) usefulness of internal meetings. One author and commentator on the power of meetings suggests:

“A meeting is an interaction where the unwilling, selected from the uninformed, led by the unsuitable, to discuss the unnecessary, are required to write a report about the unimportant.” – T A Kayser

OK, so this quote is verging on the cynical, but if your people are frustrated in every meeting, every week, you are undermining their motivation and willingness to help you drive your business forward every week.

The consequences of such frustration are disillusioned people, half-hearted people and below-par results for your business.

IMPORTANT: This question is about getting your internal meetings to be a source of inspiration, motivation and energetic action so that you secure the future success of your business.

Check out the rest of the tools here to help you run compelling and productive internal meetings that truly work for your business.

2. Avoid 'meeting stew', use 4 types of internal meetings to drive your business forward...

Patrick Lencioni (author of 'Death by Meeting') actively argues in favour of meetings, as long as they are useful and help your business move forward. Meetings are essential to business success:

"For those of us who lead and manage organisations, meetings are pretty much what we do... there is simply no substitute for a good meeting when it comes to extracting the collective wisdom of a team."

One of the reasons he suggests meetings fail is because each meeting tries to cover too much ground, too many subjects, both tactical and strategic. Meetings can be a mess because of:

"...the tendency to throw every type of issue that needs to be discussed into the same meeting, like a bad stew with too many random ingredients."

Instead of a ghastly meeting stew, why not go for a high-class tasting menu with four distinct courses?

Lencioni suggests four distinct types of meetings:

- **The daily check-in** – to avoid any confusion about daily priorities – 5-10 minutes
- **The weekly tactical** – focusing on tactical priorities of immediate concern and progress review – 45-90 minutes
- **The monthly strategic** – where you wrestle with, analyze and debate a few vital issues – 2-4 hours
- **The quarterly offsite review** – where the business as a whole is reviewed (Strategy; Team and Personnel; Competitive and Industry) – 1-2 days

So, as much as constructive conflict and drama in a meeting makes a meeting more stimulating, what about limiting the content?

Limit meeting content to suit the meeting you're in. If a lumpy strategic issue is flagged up in a daily or weekly meeting simply acknowledge it and add it to the agenda for your next monthly strategic meeting.

You would never eat desert with your soup, you'd save desert for later!

Check out Lencioni's excellent fable in his book 'Death By Meeting' and the detail about how high-quality meetings can and do work when the right content shows up in the right meeting.

3. Avoid Meeting Acceptance Syndrome – then make meetings more profitable – your video resources

Meeting Acceptance Syndrome (MAS) results in people accepting meeting invitations without question. It also shows how frustratingly challenging conference calls can be too.

MAS undermines your business success, check this video out...



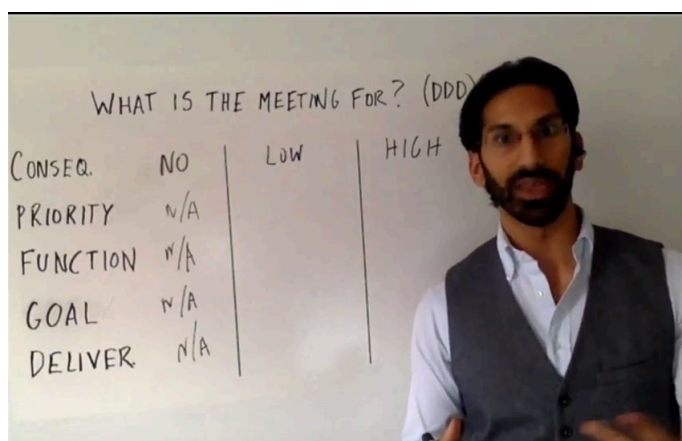
https://www.ted.com/talks/david_grady_how_to_save_the_world_or_at_least_yourself_from_bad_meetings

This video can easily flip a MAS culture in your business so that you get time back by not attending badly organised meetings. Why not share this video with your colleagues and work on a way to improve your internal meeting culture.

High, low or no consequence decisions help you decide on how you tackle your meetings.

What Pittampalli is suggesting is when a decision has to be made, you must use the checklist for 'deciding how to decide'!

See the next section for the checklist.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rJXWC5kfXK8>

4. The 'deciding how to decide' checklist

In Pittampalli's book on better meetings, he suggests...

...as a business leader/manager, when you have a decision to make, the first step is not to reach out to people either individually or in a meeting - your very first step is to **decide on how you're going to decide!**

What Pittampalli is saying is, your job is to make a decision about the level of impact, importance and consequence your decision will create. The level of importance tells you whether you need others involved in your decision as individuals or in a meeting.

- 1. Can I make this decision myself?**
- 2. Is this a decision of high, low or of no consequence?**
- 3. If a group is necessary, how and when should I involve them?**
- 4. Does the opinion of someone else matter? Or are facts sufficient?**
- 5. Can I do this with a series of one-on-one conversations instead of a meeting?**
- 6. How much time should this decision take?**

And once you have decided on the level of importance or impact of the decision, this will signpost whether or not you need to call a meeting about it.

If you think the level of consequence of the decision warrants a meeting necessary, you then need to decide whether you want to:

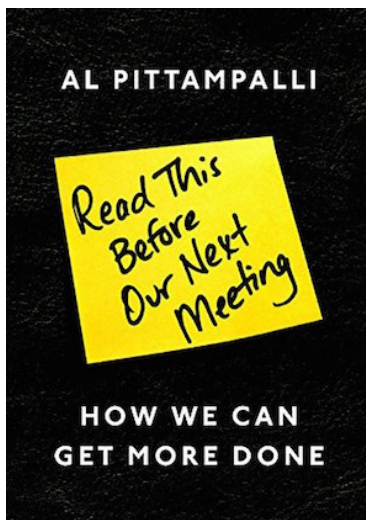
- simply inform and seek collaboration from your team on the decision or
- encourage debate about the issues involved

You can find out more about this crucial decision impact question in the Business Bitesize edition – 'Transform your deathly boring meetings into compelling and productive meetings'

5. Al Pittampalli has created a book that helps your business get more done by having less meetings. Patrick Lencioni shows you how to make the most of the meetings you must have...

Both authors promote the idea of making your meetings more compelling through the use of more drama and more conflict albeit constructive conflict.

Conflict is mostly missing from most meetings and it can have a profound impact on the outcomes and results of your meetings. And by engaging better with your people you'll profoundly improve their desire and motivation towards the work they do.



Al Pittampalli has been involved in transforming the way companies like NASA and Starbucks hold meetings – his experiences lead to his book, *'Read This Before Our Next Meeting'* which not only explains what's wrong with 'the meeting' and meeting culture, but suggests how to make meetings more effective, efficient, and worthy of attending.

Find out more here –
<http://modernmeetingstandard.com/about-al/>

Patrick Lencioni has addressed millions of people at conferences and events around the world and has authored 11 books.

In *'Death by Meeting'* Lencioni provides a route-map for running effective meetings based on his experiences at consulting company Bain & Co and Oracle.

Find out more here –
<https://www.tablegroup.com/books/dbm>

