ARE MEETINGS OUR COLLECTIVE VALUE: MULTIPLE INTELLIGENT APPROACH TO LEADING MEETINGS: MATTER OD STRATEGY, NOT ONLY OPERATION?

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Abstract Meetings are part of everyday life of managers. Unfortunately, often too little attention is dedicated to them, therefore the paper addresses the role of the meetings in avoiding the threats to cross-group collaboration of different departments. The paper emphasizes collaboration blind spot which happens when managers do not do the first step in collaboration implementation correctly which is identifying the potential threats each group involved in the potential collaboration might feel. People often feel potential collaboration as a threat to their identity and legitimacy of their existing group and therefore act defensively or even avoid collaboration. We position meetings as a key element of organizational culture which needs to be professionaly managed and address them as a strategical tool for achieving organizational success in an efficient way.

1   Introduction and theoretical overview

Culture (Groysberg, Lee, Price, & Cheng, 2018, p. 45) manifests goals through values and guides performance based on shared collective norms. Culture is hard to grasp as much of it is hidden in unspoken social patterns (Groysberg, Lee, Price & Cheng, 2018, p. 46). Leadership and culture are linked in its core. Leaders and founders start cultures and establish values that can remain for years to come. However, in order for cultures to stay the same, leaders need to nurture the elements that keep culture alive. Meetings are one of the cultural artefacts. By observing meetings we can observe culture at its microlevel. How do employees communicate with eachother at the meetings? Who has the power (in)formally at the meeting? Who is invited to the meeting – wider or narrow group of stakeholders?

Organizational culture is researched with employee surveys and questionnaires, but not always presenting the whole picture (Corritore, Goldberg, & Srivastava, 2020, p. 79). What we say is important to us is often not reflected in how we respond in situations, that is why observing the dynamics at the meeting is a valuable data input about our values as part of our dynamic culture. Corritore, Goldberg and Srivastava (2020) found out that the rate at which employees adapt to the changes in the culture is what determines success of the organization and that cognitive diversity in teams aids in ideation phase but hinders execution of the ideas. Therefore, cultures need to be based on shared core values and at the same time promote diversity which drives creativity and innovation (Corritore, Goldberg, & Srivastava, 2020, p. 79). Nowadays, most companies work in global business setting, therefore leaders need to look for employees who are good at cultural adaptability so they can adopt fast and conform to changing organizational norms at the meetings they have with different business partners across sectors, disciplines (Corritore, Goldberg, & Srivastava, 2020, p. 80). Managers who aim for stability and seek for cultural fit focus short term on preserving culture as they got used to, but at the same time close the door to advancement and long term success.

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Just by analyzing the group of people who discusses a certain topic we can get a glimpse into whether these are practices of sustainable leadership within specific organizational unit. Avery and Bergsteiner (2011a; 2011b) have identified 23 sustainable leadership practices where leaders can audit their organizations and slowly implement needed advancements in those practices (Avery & Hughes, 2013). Many companies do not take care of culture nurishing and let it unmanaged or leave it to human resource manager to deal with it (Groysberg, Lee, Price, & Cheng, 2018, p. 46).

Many leaders underestimate the power and dynamics of culture at the level of meetings and are then surprised when their strategy implementation is unsuccessful (Groysberg, Lee, Price, & Cheng, 2018). Groysberg, Lee, Price and Cheng (2018) claim that culture can be managed. Our aim is to see how culture at the operational level of meetings within the organization can and needs to be managed in order to achieve results we want which is the aim of having meeetings in the first place. But too many leaders too often leave meetings to just getting together and talk to the employees instead of professionally manage meetings to talk with strategic stakeholders about the matter discussed.

Culture is the »tacit social order of an organization« (Groysberg, Lee, Price & Cheng, 2018, p. 46). Norms within one culture define what we support, accept, encourage or reject and that is why setting »rules of the game« at the beginning of the meeting makes a lot of sense for our work to run smoothly and in order to achieve productive results. Culture and its metaphors (Grah, Dimovski, & Peterlin, 2018) are shared, pervasive, enduring and implicit (Groysberg, Lee, Price, & Cheng, 2018, p. 46). Groysberg, Lee, Price and Cheng (2018) classify cultures according to how people inetract (independent to interdependent) and their response to change (flexibility to stability); 1) caring; 2) purpose; 3) learning; 4) enjoyment; 5) results; 6) authority; 7) safety; and 8) order.

»Results« culture is the most present cultural style (Groysberg, Lee, Price, & Cheng, 2018, p. 51). However, in the world of constant change and crisis there is the trend towards »learning« cultural style. If you want to change or evolve cultural style Groysberg, Lee, Price and Cheng (2018) found four successful practices: 1) articulate the aspiration; 2) select and develop leaders who align with the target culture; 3) use organizational conversations about culture to

underscore the importance of change; and 4) reinforce the desired change through organizational design.

It is possible and necessary to improve performance through cultural style change (Groysberg, Lee, Price, & Cheng, 2018, p. 52): 1) leaders need to audit existing organizational culture; 2) leaders need to define with their co-workers target culture they wish to implement; 3) leaders need to be good at change management, social innovation (Roblek, Meško, Dimovski, & Peterlin, 2019), organizational design, conversation and find approproate leadership model at operational, tactical and startegic level.

In order to become more productive at meetings we need a »buy in« from top management level that this is important in our culture. First, we need to audit our cultural style, analyze our heritage, expressed and live values, what are our subcultures of each of the departments, what are the leadership approaches we value and practice, we need to identify team dynamics by carefully researching key elements of our cultural style's strenghts and weaknesses. We need to examine what kind of impact do our meetings have and how we carry them out. A wide group of stakeholders needs to be involved in the meeting cultural style audit if one wishes to gain an in-depth and reliable scan of the situation. In the next stage we can set meeting cultural style we wish to reach in the future because we want to work on the weaknesses we identified in the way we carry our meetings in the presen tor expand good practices of leading meetings in some departments also to other organizational units in the corporation.

One-on-one meetings are the most common, accounting for 42% of CEO's meetings, followed by meeting with 2-5 participants (21%), the emphasis on one-on-one and small group meetings makes sense for enabling delegation and relationship building and allows confidentiality (Porter, & Nohria, 2018). CEOs initiate more than half (51%) of their meetings themselves (Porter, & Nohria, 2018). 72% of CEO's time is spend at the meetings (Porter, & Nohria, 2018, p. 53). Meetings usually last one hour (32%), 1-2 hours (21%), 30 minutes (23%), less than 15 minutes (7%), 2-5 hours (13%), 5 hours (4%) (Porter, & Nohria, 2018, p. 53).

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We need to be aware that changing the culture of leading meetings will be openly perceived by the employees. Therefore, we need to change the culture of meetings slowly and with care in order not to scare employees and make sure that we guide them step by step through the cultural change of the meetings. Words can help but they can also ruin our efforts, therefore leaders need to be careful in their daily actions of how they organize, plan, lead and exercise their power at the daily meetings with their staff. Just by paying attention to organizational conversations one can grasp what the cultural attitude towards meetings within the organization is. Do employees talk about meetings »*We had another of those marathon meetings*:« or »*We had a breakthrough at our meeting*.«

National and regional cultures in which the company is based influences organizational culture. Meetings support the implementation of strategy (Peterlin, Dimovski, Tvaronavičiene, Grah, & Kaklauskas, 2018) and organizational design, therefore eventhough they are often perceived as a minor issue and therefore neglected in management they are secret enablers of performance and organizational success as routine is what builds us.

Employees nowadays want psychological safety which plays key contextual role in the meetings. If employees at the meeting feel emotionally safe they are willing to share more of their experiences and knowledge. People who feel hurt close themselves and if more colleagues feel hurt they will cause pain to eachother that is why emotionally intelligent meeting environment needs to be managed but first of all awareness of it needs to be developed and supported by top management.

Kwan (2019) found out that managers often ignore the mayor threat in implementing cross-group activities which is provoking defensive behavior. In aiming for collaboration, leaders tend to focus on initiatives, outcomes, logistics and processes and forget about the feelings of the groups they are trying to make to collaborate (Kwan, 2019). Groups of people that are asked to sacrifice their authonomy, routine, share resources, share information, might perceive this as a threat (Kwan, 2019) and defend themselves by closing up and end the collaboration process if it is not initiated in a careful way. Kwan (2019, p. 69) advises the leaders who wish to open cross-group collaboration to do a threat(s) analysis by identifying how collaboration might threaten the identity, legitimacy and/or control of the groups. In the second phase of the cross-group

collaboration initiative the leaders need to focus on logistics, processes and outcomes. It is important not to hurry the collaboration process and all the benefits we see in collaborating and dedicate enough time to how demand for collaboration can threaten groups' sense of security or reveal defensive behaviors (Kwan, 2019, p. 73). Collaborations can be revived by identifying threats to group security, taking steps to minimize the threats and discourage defensive behaviors (Kwan, 2019, p. 73).

Very important in the relationship of manager and business assistant are expectations and identification of what kind of support the manager needs. If we do not manage expectations we are very often disappointed and claim that the assistant is not adjusting, does not collaborate, works on his/her own, or does not obey. The most important step towards a successful collaboration is honest conversation in which the manager shares his/her expectations and what kind of support one wants, what suits for him/her and deciding together on the flow of processes which enable good collaboration. It is very imporant when searching for a new adminstrative assistant to think about what kind of person we need: calm/lively; creative/orderly; smiley/serious; independent/obeying. This needs to be specified in the employment ad. The more concrete we are, the more likely it is we get the person that will suit our expectations (Ilar, 2013, p. 41). Nowadays, employes need to be included into the discussion regarding the amount and time of meetings which is enabled with several IT tools, easily.

2   Methodology

Carrying out personal log or energy audit is not only useful for personal management what we know from self-leading management literature but also valuable input into our daily routine which can help us identify when it is best for us to have meetings so we have more productive outcomes. But we need to carry out energy audit on a regular basis. The next stage is to see what are energy audits of our co-workers so we can find out time windows for our meetings that suit the majority in the department. 7 international managers participated as experts in our study in 2020 where they were tracking their meetings during a period of one week. Also, 14 students participated in additional qualitative study (Vogrinc, 2008) during the study year 2020/21 at the University of Ljubljana where they shared their experienced dilemma at a meeting they were part of and

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how they would solve that challenge in the future with the knowledge gained at the Module Leading meetings. Due to word limitation only a few students were asked for permission to share their proof citations in this conference paper to illustrate the culture of leading meetings.

3   Results

Managers in our expert sample reported having 5 to 20 meetings from Monday till Friday. Sustainable leaders have meetings with key stakeholders. Meetings are seen as opportunity to put issues out on the open. Meetings are not seen as something that takes time but something that adds value by gaining different inputs from people. The business assistant needs to understand the content of the meeting and the fact that the manager needs time for peaceful preparation for the meeting.

»For me, a meeting is an ideal space/place to get informed, guided, but also to share your own ideas and be sure that they are heard. At the meetings I've been a part of, usually led by the Exec Director or Team Leader, participated all of the employees or team members. We each have a turn to share our recent activities/problemsnew ideas etc. For example if it's a weekly staff meeting, we know that it's recurring every week so we plan on being there. Usually the time is also fixed, so you know to plan other thing around that. If there is anything urgent that cannot be postponed, there is always an option to inform the leader and be excused from the meeting. This is all based on my previous experiences, talking about all of them in general.You can make sure you fit in the organizational culture by having your time managed appropriately, planning your time and activities so that you can be able to participate in all of your organization's activities« (proof citation, Manager A).

In order to highlight meeting challenges at the level of different student communities, such as higher education setting, student work organizations, sports organizations and family we present bellow some of the most interesting highlights of dilemmas that students struggle with while being at the meetings and also present some of the potential solutions students provided in order to solve those dilemmas. Student A proof citation highlights the situtaion of a sports managemnt where players spend a lot of time together, therefore communication

has to be precise and in a good atmosphere where players feel the psychological safety to express themselves and tehir views which was not the case in the highlighted situation:

»The dilemma from my meeting: We had a meeting of the football players. The leader of the meeting was our coach, and our "organizer" (a person who takes care of everything; transportation, equipment, payments, necessary documents…) I was at the meeting in the role of one of the teammates. The conversation ran about what our plans and goals for the next season are. We agreed on certain topics, but unfortunately not on all. Because the relationship between the players is not what it should be, many players are sometimes afraid to express their opinion, because others will "trample" them with their ideas, which are not always the best. In short, some personalities within a team feel "more," "better," "stronger". While gathering plans, ideas, and goals, I was overwhelmed by an idea I was hesitant about. I didn't say it because I didn't dare to expose myself. However, I thought to myself that the idea was good and a few days after the meeting I debated it with other players. They said the idea didn't seem wrong to them, but it would be wise to mention it to the coach. They themselves knew very well why I did not mention it, because many times they have the same problem as I did at the meeting.

Potential solutions: After the meeting, I would approach the coach and tell him the situation and the idea. If this one was wrong I would of course accept it otherwise I would be proud because it would contribute to the development of the team.

 The meeting could take place in such a way that the coach (manager) would talk to each player about their thoughts on the previous season, plans and goals for the next one. So we would really see the opinion of each player, individually. Later, when I got the information, I would convene a joint meeting and tell the decisions. Unfortunately, this option is a bit time consuming (at least 20 players, i.e. at least 20 individual conversations)«.

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Student B proof citation highlights a real life situation of badly run meetings that ruin the cultue of the company and also hinder productivity as people are leaving the meetings, team and also the company:

»The dilemma from my meeting: I worked in a company where the same team met once a month (on first Wednesday of the month). The meeting leader took care of all the minutes of the meeting. He did not assign additional work to the employees (facilitator, timekeeper ...). The meeting lasted one and a half hour. At the beginning, he presented innovations, changes, guidelines ... It was all about how the work should be done. It was presented more monotonously, so some started talking, getting bored and the like. Shortly before the end, he asked if anyone had any praise, criticism or comment on the course of our work. Of course, no one was exposed and there was no more motivation, either. The meeting ended. Employees of the same team have long had the problem of having bad relationships with each other (envy, resentment ...), therefore smaller groups are formed. They are extremely dissatisfied with the payment for their work. A lot of people have left this team. All the while, it happens that someone leaves the job and a new member comes along. They find it hard to get to work in the morning and can't wait to go home. I notice that superiors have very little understanding for employees and their individual requests. They do not point out much action to the situation. There is never a topic of conversation in the meeting about workplace relationships, nor does anyone dare to highlight it.

Suggestions for improving the culture of leading meetings: As a manager, I would first like to have good mutual relations in the company, in order to see the success of the company itself, the product of our team cooperation. I would introduce 1 weekly meetings in the company. I would organize these as short (30min) conversations. The meeting would include the workflow of the week, team building, as much interaction between employees, as possible. Maybe I would have previously collected suggestions, criticisms, praises, requests in a dedicated box, which I would have collected before the meeting and debated with the employees at the meeting and would have looked for solutions, together. I would ask someone to write it all down. I would try to take care of the time, myself. I would try to encourage a more relaxed atmosphere with the addition of snacks and intermediate motivational texts. I would also try to do a standing meeting to

see if this has a greater effect on attention and brain activation. If anyone missed a meeting, they would treat us to a drink (joke). I myself like to be thanked very much and I also like to see if someone notices my efforts and praises me, so I would also introduce praise and reward in the workplace. Praise for a job well done. The prize, however, might be a well-organized trip at the end of the year. I would definitely recommend the managers of the company described above to listen to some of your lectures or trainings". Student C proof citation highlights the lack of knowledge and management skills about leading meetings in the pedagogical setting and student environment, therefore more focus should be given to nurturing the culture of leading meetings at the higher education level:

»The dilemma from my meeting: During the first quarantine, when the learning took place via the Internet, we had to design a rehabilitation program for the selected athlete in groups. Our cooperation was not exactly good. I think we could improve everything if we shared the tasks right at the beginning (since some members did a lot more than others), and it would also be easier if the meetings could be held live. In the meantime, there was also ambiguity, so I think that in the beginning we should set a specific goal around which the rehabilitation program took place«.

Student D proof citation demonstrates a dilemma that is very often the source of conflict in many organizations, especially healthcare – scheduling:

»The dilemma from my meeting: Some time ago, I attended a meeting aimed at organizing and setting on-call students in the dormitory. Each on-call time was paid, so most of the students were very interested in getting their on-call appointments. Problems arose as soon as a representative of the home handed a list to the participants of the meeting, on which the free terms of duty were written. The list traveled from student to student, thus filling up more and more time frames. When one of the students, who was on the other side of the room, got his hand in hand, all the deadlines were already occupied. Thus, almost half of the students were left without their appointment. Of course, there were immediate conflicts between the participants of the meeting and also between the leader of the meeting.

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Potential solutions

I believe that the meeting leader should choose another way to share free on-call time. First of all, the leader should present to all participants the dates that have been announced for on-call time. The list should then be displayed on a projector to make it easier for participants to follow what is happening. After that, the leader should enable the distribution of free appointments by filling in the appointments for each day separately. In doing so, he should take into account that each student would come to the queue first, and only then could he assign the same students several terms«.

Student E proof citation highlights the many tasks a leader of the meeting has to pay attention to. Those things are often not seen to others. Responsibility of all the meeting stakeholders is key for successful outcome of the meeting:

»The dilemma at my meeting: In the spring 2020 I attended a meeting of sports and cultural association from our village. We organized the traditional Cultural Weekend event, which takes place in the first week of July from Thursday to Sunday. It was necessary to book a band, provide the ruloes fort he games and ask local farmers to offer home-made products on stalls and obtain all necessary permits to run the event and other necessary things, such as setting up a stage, benches and stalls.

Potential solutions:

I have noticed above all that the members are very unresponsive and no one would like to take on any particular responsibility. I would solve the problem by dividing the members into several smaller groups of 3 people and one of these three would be the leader. The members of the group would therefore have the task of taking care of a certain thing. You would agree among yourself who will do what. Example - choosing a suitable band: Everyone could write 5 ideas on the sheets and then choose the most suitable three candidates from those. Together, all three would consult on price frameworks, then each would call one ensemble. Once all the bids were collected, we could jointly decide on one group and negotiate further. The group leader could be informed about current events

regarding the organization via an excel document, where everyone would report on the progress of a certain component of the organization«.

4   Conclusion

Managers try to adapt to the work culture while trying to make necessary changes in work process in order to meet the goals set by the company's owners and top management. Managers in our expert sample have weekly meetings, mostly lasting for one hour. Usually, the meeting leader prepares the new topics for the meeting, writes the minutes, allows opposing positions until they agree on the deliverables and time frame for the activities. The minutes are sent to the participants by e-mail and it serves as week's work agenda in many situations. Weekly meetings set the pace for the department. Common dilemmas that appear in leading meetings were identified: 1) duration of the meetings is often longer than 1 hour and then the efficiency droppes; 2) The number of topics for the meeting increases during the meeting because of the unplanned developments in the work; and 3) overlapping meeting roles is challenging and demands delegation.

Students demonstrate that they are involved in meetings a lot and lack proper management skills of their meetings, therefore we can conclude that meetings among colleagues need to be given more strategical attention also in higher educational setting in order to develop future managers. Also, we can see that many meetings - students reported - are not led in a multiple intelligent way which causes lower productivity and bad organizational culture. Meetings are the basic unit of organizational culture and proof citation shows the collaboration blind spot already at the level of student groups, when we invite students from different study fields to work together on a project, they often ask if they can work with the students from the same study field and need to be assigned into interdisciplinary teams.

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