

Effective Meetings

A Practicing Management Seminar

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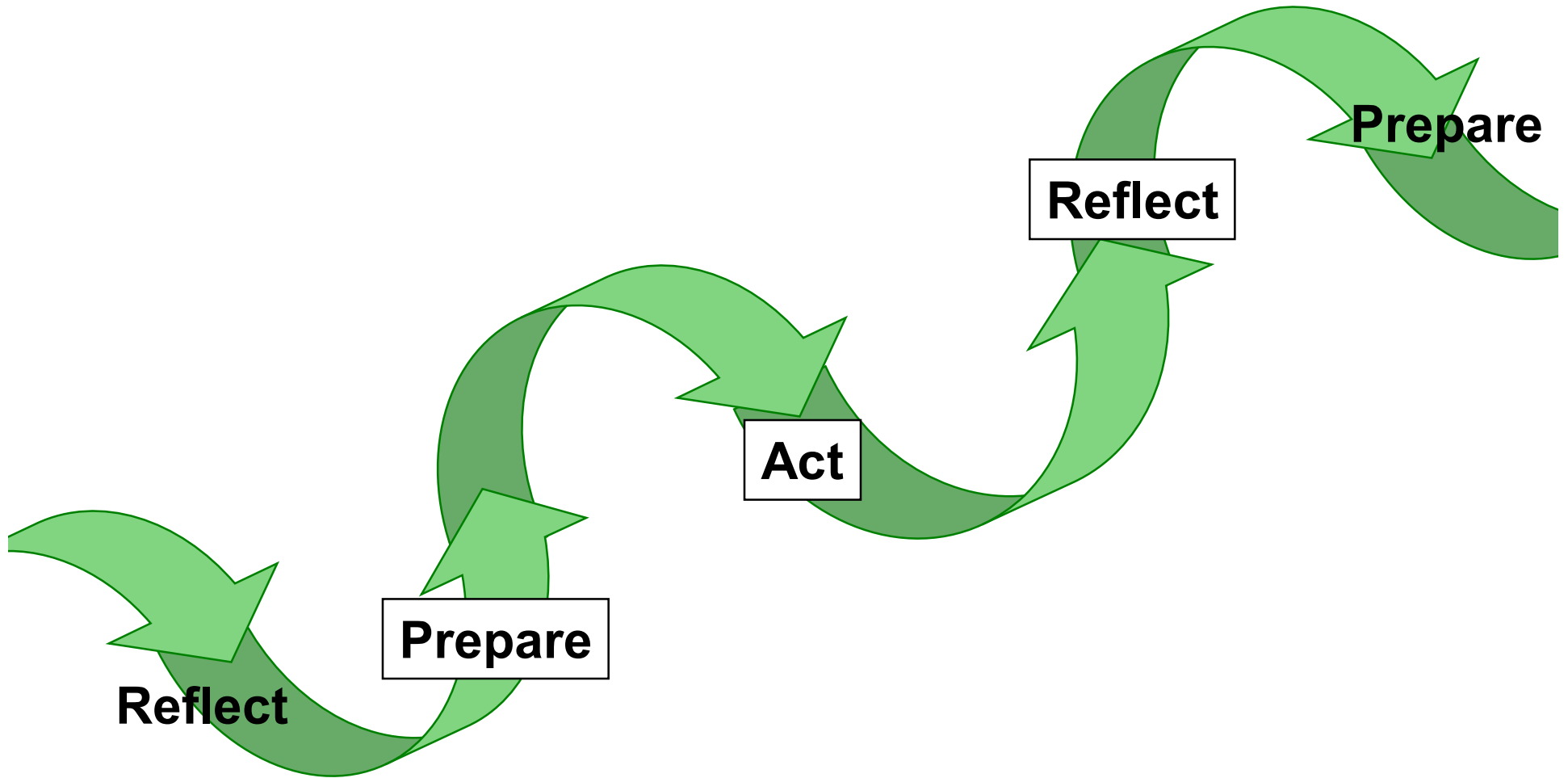
Jonathan Lehrich

Associate Director of the MIT Leadership Center

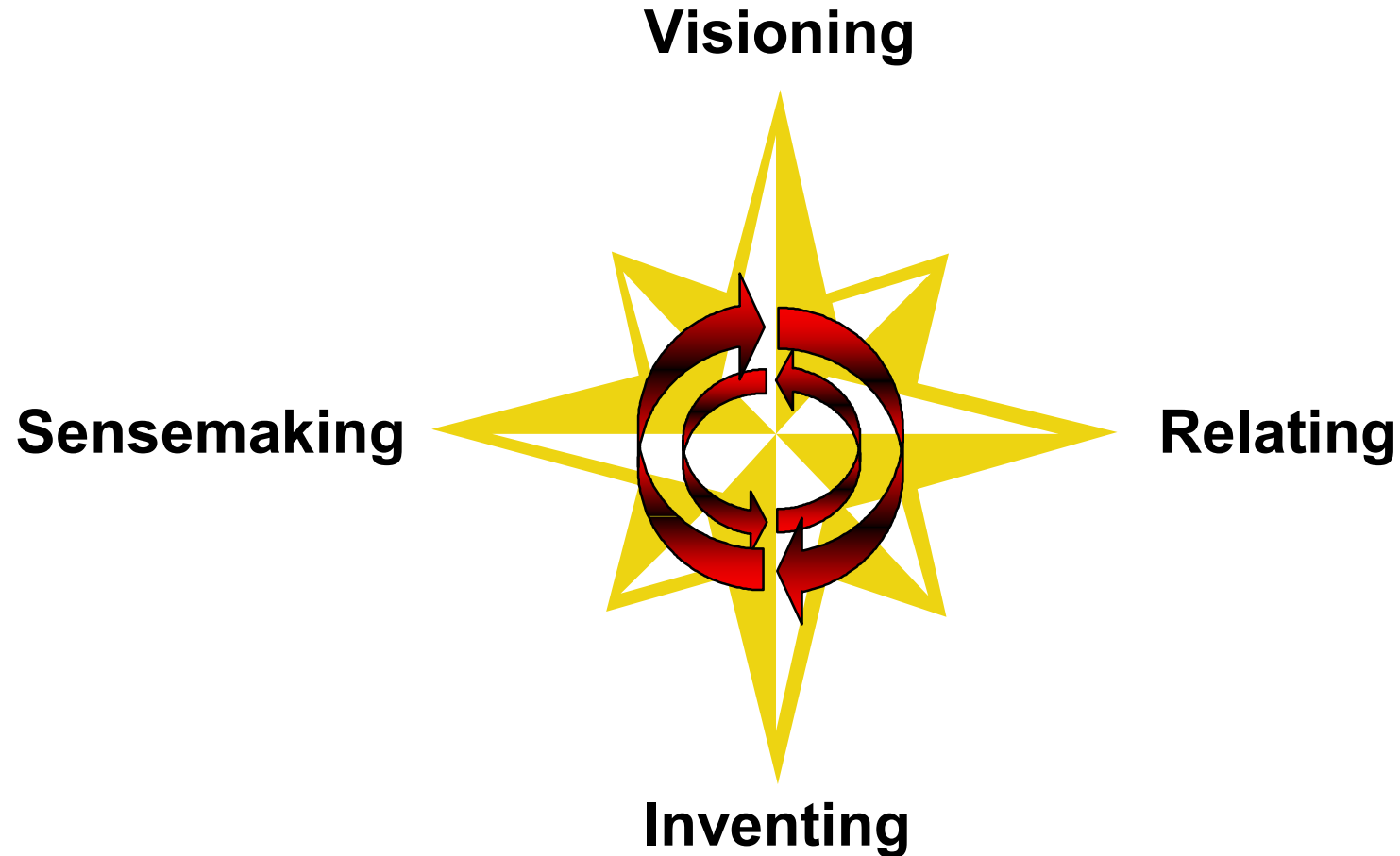
*We just seem to meet and meet and meet
and we never seem to do anything.*

Richard Collard, senior manager, Network Operations, Federal Express

Practicing Management



The Distributed Leadership Model



Meetings are where the work gets done

More and more companies are team-based companies, and in team-based companies most work gets done in meetings.

Jon Ryburg, organizational psychologist

Bad meetings make bad organizations

Meetings matter because that's where an organization's culture perpetuates itself. Meetings are how an organization says, "You are a member." So if every day we go to boring meetings full of boring people, then we can't help but think that this is a boring company. Bad meetings are a source of negative messages about our company and ourselves.

William R. Daniels, consultant and author

**What makes a meeting
stink?**

**What does it feel like to
be in such a meeting?**

A typology of meetings

- Status or update meetings
 - Reporting
 - Building commitment, sharing
- Meetings to elicit feedback or learn
 - Focus groups
- Work meetings
 - Planning
 - Brainstorming
 - Deciding, evaluating
- Meetings that shouldn't have happened

What can you do before and after the meeting to make it more effective?

note to self

**What do you do *during*
meetings to make them
effective?**

Roles in meetings

Roles in meetings

The Talker You know what I'm talking about. People who think talking is the same as contributing. On bad days I'm that guy.

The Boss This person may or may not actually be the boss. The main strategy is to get everyone talking and working together constructively, then use the political capital he's just gained to hijack the meeting and implement his own agenda at the last minute. Get on his good side, because he'll be the boss eventually.

The Sigher This guy (almost always a guy) will audibly sigh whenever he disagrees with something. If pressed, he'll refuse to go into details.

The Lurker Sits in the meeting, slightly aloof, and doesn't participate at all. He may offer a single quietly stated opinion near the end of the meeting. Mostly harmless.

The Stealth Lurker You might think this guy is a real lurker, but he isn't. He's the one who says nothing for the whole meeting then offers a single quietly stated opinion near the end. Then, no matter what everyone else agreed on, his plan gets implemented. How did it happen? Who knows.

The Meanderer This one is like the talker, except he meanders all over and creates long, drawn out metaphors that nobody understands.

The Killer Aims to destroy other people rather than win arguments or get his way. This guy is annoying but not really dangerous since he is easily recognized.

The Productive, Reasonable Contributor If you get three of these people together in a meeting you should talk about quitting and starting a new company.

Types of roles Benne and Sheats

- Task roles
 - behaviors intended to accomplish or facilitate the group's work, its function
- Maintenance
 - behaviors intended to establish, maintain, improve, or repair a group's socio-emotional climate
- Individual roles
 - behaviors that take away from the group's function and focus mainly upon an individual's needs/wants

Task Roles

1. An **individual** contributes ideas and suggestions; proposes solutions, decisions, new ideas; restates old ideas in novel ways.
2. The **information seeker** asks for clarification in terms of the accuracy of comments; asks for information or facts relevant to accomplishing group tasks; and suggests information if needed for decisions.
3. The **information giver** offers facts or generalizations that may relate to personal experiences and are pertinent to the task. Research results also are included here.
4. The **opinion seeker** asks for clarification or validation of member's opinions.
5. The **opinion giver** states beliefs and opinions about suggestions made and indicates what members' attitudes should be.
6. The **elaborator-clarifier** elaborates ideas and other contributions, offers rationales for suggestions; and tries to deduce how an idea or a suggestion would work if adopted by the group/organization.
7. The **coordinator** clarifies relationships among information, opinions, ideas; suggests an integration of ideas.
8. The **diagnostician** indicates what task-oriented problems are and possible solutions.
9. The **orienter-summarizer** summarize interaction, points out departures from agreed-on goals, brings members back to the central issues, and raises questions about the direction in which the group/ organization is headed.
10. The **energizer** prods group/organization members to action. He/she acts as a group cheerleader.
11. The **procedure developer** handles routine tasks such as seating arrangements, obtaining equipment, and handing out pertinent papers.
12. The **secretary** keeps notes on member/group progress and keeps group documents/materials ready for use and for safety.
13. The **evaluator-critic** analyzes accomplishments and checks to see that consensus has been reached.

Maintenance Roles

1. The ***supporter-encourager*** praises, agrees with, and accepts the contributions of others and offers warmth, solidarity, and recognition.
2. The ***harmonizer*** reconciles and mediates differences and reduces tension by giving members a chance to explore their disagreements.
3. The ***tension reliever*** jokes or in some other way reduces the formality of interaction and relaxes members. These duties need to be kept in perspective else they convert to individual roles [see below].
4. The ***compromiser*** offers to compromise when his or her own ideas are in conflict with those of others and admits errors so as to maintain cohesion among members.
5. The ***gatekeeper*** keeps communication channels open, facilitates interaction among some members, and blocks interaction among others.
6. The ***feeling expresser*** makes explicit the feelings, moods, and other relationships in the group/ organization and shares feelings with others.
7. The ***standard setter*** expresses standards in evaluating group/organizational processes and standards for the members to achieve.
8. The ***follower*** goes along with the movement of other members passively, accepting the ideas of others, and sometimes serving as an audience for interaction.

Individual or Blocking Roles

1. The **blocker** interferes with progress by rejecting ideas or taking a negative stand on all issues and refuses to cooperate.
2. The **aggressor** struggles for status by defining the status of others, boasts, and criticizes.
3. The **deserter** withdraws; remains indifferent and aloof; is sometimes formal; daydreams; wanders from the subject; and engages in irrelevant side conversations.
4. The **dominator** interrupts and embarks on long monologues, is authoritative, and tries to monopolize others' time.
5. The **recognition seeker** attempts to gain attention in an exaggerated manner, usually boasts about past accomplishments, and relates irrelevant personal experiences, usually in an attempt to gain sympathy.
6. The **confessor** engages in irrelevant personal catharsis and uses the group/organization to work out personal mistakes and feelings.
7. The **comedian** displays a lack of involvement in the group/organization through inappropriate humor, horseplay, or cynicism.
8. The **special-interest pleader** acts as the representative for another organization or specialized group and engages in advocacy for non-group causes.

What are some of the specific roles you've seen in effective meetings?

Specific roles in meetings

- **Facilitator**, leader, meeting caller
 - Conducts the meeting
 - Follows up
- **Scribe**, recorder
 - Records key ideas for all to see
- **Time-keeper**
 - Knows the time frames
 - Gives time warnings
- **Note-taker**
 - Records decisions, information, key ideas from meeting
 - Distributes notes after meeting
- **(Gate-keeper)**
 - ensures that each member gives input on an issue
- **Participants**

Participants can play many roles

- **Support** agreed-upon roles
- **Ask** for explanations, clarity
- **Summarize** lists of options, ideas, etc
- **Initiate** or suggest suggests new ideas
- **Contribute** information, history, data
- **Look** for potential **flaws** in an idea
- **Maintain** a **positive** frame of mind
- **Connect** and coalesce ideas, tasks, etc
- **Call** violations of ground rules, procedure

Your turn

- Break into new groups of four
- Discuss:
 - Which roles are key?
 - Which one do you tend to play?
 - What is **most important that you do** in that role?

Beyond roles

- Behaviors, practices, norms
 - Team ground rules
- Stage of your project
 - Consider how your meeting needs change as you move from exploration to implementation
- Design of meetings
 - Stable structures/plans that you use every week that ensure preparation and follow up

Another way to think about what must happen in a meeting

- Task
 - The *what* of the meeting; the focus, purpose of the meeting
- Procedure
 - The *how* of the meeting; the way it is conducted
- Relationships
 - The *who* of the group and *how they feel* working together; allows the group to maintain itself, get along

Team meeting practices

Be prepared for the meeting

Come to the meeting **on time**

Participate in the meeting

Start and **end meetings on time**

Be prepared to drop a topic

Keep records of your own work and the team's compiled work

Value the diversity of team members

Support the team concept and process. Maintain **positive group dynamics**

Decide by consensus or another **agreed-upon process**

Draw on all your data for analysis and decisions

Listen and have an open mind

Summarize decisions, deliverables/responsibilities, and future plans before you leave

Evaluate your meeting

A design for effective meetings

One Example

- Before the meeting circulate a document with updates from each team member
 - One-sentence report on each completed task
 - List of people each member has talked to or will talk with (or data gathered, or similar)
 - One-sentence on each key upcoming task, opportunity, commitment
- During the meeting:
 - Quick questions on the updates
 - 20-minute presentation, Q&A from someone elsewhere in the organization
- Several 5-minute “dig ins” for current problems, new opportunities, new ideas, etc. Only a subset of the team gets a dig-in at each meeting

Thank you!
and please evaluate this!