MYTHOS GROUP

INCREASING MEETING AND TEAM EFFECTIVENESS

BY VICTOR ROCINE AND AMIT PATEL

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By Vic Rocine, and Amit Patel

Abstract

Are you looking to improve the effectiveness of your meetings and your teams? This article presents ways to engage, enroll, enable and empower team members to be more responsible for meeting and team effectiveness.

> *"We must become the change we want to see."*
>
> *Mahatma Gandhi*

Inviting Change

As seasoned management consultants, during the course of our numerous client engagements, we are often asked by executives on how they could improve the effectiveness of their management meetings. After conducting a preliminary inquiry on how the meetings are currently run, and listening to their responses, the first thing we offered was: "Perhaps you are trying too hard *[pause]* – too hard to be all things to your team." We suggested: "Try getting your colleagues more involved in supporting meeting and team effectiveness." Each gave me a dazed and confused look.

We explained that a powerful way to empower teams and improve productivity is for the leader to share the responsibility for team and meeting effectiveness with its members. To do this you need to first *engage*, then *enroll*, then *enable* and finally *empower* them.

Engage, Enroll, Enable, Empower

We offered them a simple model of change that I call the **4Es**. When working to change an individual or group of people, we need to take them through a four step process.

1. **Engage** – Engage them in a conversation. In short, get their attention.

2. **Enroll** – Enroll them by stating the need, offering a picture or some kind of hope of a better tomorrow and inviting their input and involvement.

3. **Enable** – Enable them by providing information, knowledge, training or skills.

4. **Empower** – Finally empower them. Give them permission; permission to explore, discover, learn, experiment. Give them permission to take risks and make mistakes.

To Start – Create A Safe Environment

We suggested that they engage and enroll their teams in an open-ended conversation around: What's working and what's <u>not</u> in their meetings. To have useful dialogues they need to create a safe environment. Not easy for the leader to do under any circumstance, especially if there is low trust.

We recommended that they first establish some ground rules (a 'code of conduct') and invite team members to participate in creating these. Use a whiteboard or flip chart to facilitate the discussion. Write on the board: "Open and Honest". Say something like: "I want us to feel comfortable to say what is true for each of us; there is no right, or wrong; there just 'is'." Ask others to add their ground rules.

To further facilitate the conversation and ensure that everyone participates, we proposed using an easy, proven technique – 'round robin'. That is, you go around the room and request each person to offer a ground rule. If they don't have one, they can say "Pass". Keep writing the ground rules on the board. Do your best to be non-judgmental. Watch your body language in particular. It says volumes. It will make or break your effort to form a new way of working together with your team.

What's Working And What's NOT

With the team's ground rules in place invite everyone to participate in a discussion of what is working and not in meetings. Use your board again. Write "What's Working" and "What is NOT Working". Encourage people to participate. Follow the 'round robin' procedure. This technique ensures that no one person dominates the conversation and that everyone is heard from. Keep going round the room, until the energy and ideas dissipate.

If no one else (other than you) finds the current meeting situation wanting, go back to the above steps. Assuming "stuff" comes up, try to see what can be done immediately to improve meeting effectiveness. Create a little action plan. Get people to volunteer to do or champion the suggested changes.

Start With YOU

Assuming you have engaged and enrolled them now you have to enable and empower them. You can only go as fast as the group you are leading wants to go. Keep looking for ways for you to change 'you'. This is your chance to start modeling new behavior. A noticeable shift in you will create an opening for others to follow. Don't expect instant results.

Enable Your Team Members

Expose your followers to team effectiveness technologies such as team effectiveness roles. The concept of team effectiveness roles says that group effectiveness is dependent upon the presence of and the balance among specific types of roles. Four of these roles are task-oriented – with a focus on the team's purpose and work assignments. Another four roles are process-oriented – with a focus on group dynamics and on the manner of proceeding.

Task-Oriented Roles

Shaper – The 'shaper' (or influencer) helps get the group going. The shaper, interested in influencing the team's objectives, asks: *What are we going to do?* and helps the team keep on track and moving toward its goal.

Innovator – The 'innovator', while task- and future-oriented, is most interested in ideas. The innovator is the team's problem solver, creates many alternatives, and is up-beat and enthusiastic. The innovator asks: *What if we tried this?* and *What if we try that?*

Analyzer – The 'analyzer' (evaluator) is interested in data and asks: *Does that idea hold water?* The analyzer is useful in testing ideas, making sure they are workable and sound. The analyzer insists on rigor and accuracy.

Implementer – The 'implementer' focuses on doing and on the how. The implementer insists on sticking to schedules and deadlines, suggests process, techniques and methods. The implementer asks: *What are our resources?* and *What are our limits?* The implementer is an enthusiastic doer and sometimes gets so caught up in carrying out tasks she/he may loose sight of the goal.

Process-Oriented Roles

Coordinator – The 'coordinator' is concerned with alignment, consensus and how people fit together. The coordinator is a good listener and negotiator who tests for satisfaction, asking: *How do you feel about that?* The coordinator helps keep the team organized and develops a workable team structure.

Networker – The 'networker' conveys ideas and resources from and to the team. The networker knows the right people and is sensitive to connections between people on the team as well as connections between the team and the outside world.

Harmonizer – The 'harmonizer' is concerned with feelings and relationships, and is easily silenced by others. The harmonizer frequently uses humor to smooth over a tense situation and is particularly sensitive to the concerns and feelings of team members.