Systematic management meetings

The vast majority of management work takes place in meetings: team meetings, one-to-one meetings, project meetings, review meetings, problem-solving meetings, customer meetings, telephone meetings, virtual meetings, etc. Practically anything that a manager wants to do will involve communicating with somebody about something. It is in the nature of the manger's role. The manager effects his or her role through other people. His or her effectiveness is in the impact that he or she has on the behaviours, knowledge and attitudes of those people.

And yet, for many managers, meetings are seen to be the things that get in the way of them doing their work. Meetings clutter up their diaries, tie up their people, and stop them from doing their job. But if their job is 'meetings', then it is not meetings per se that are the problem. It is the design and purpose of the meetings that is the real issue.

Meetings are a crucial element in reinforcing the conclusions of your QFD, and in ensuring that it is pursued effectively. In this chapter we look at how this is to be achieved, by:

■ exploring the problems of typical meeting structures

■ reconsidering what managers need to achieve with their time, and the role of meetings therein

■ proposing a more effective structure for management meetings.

The problem of meetings

Consider for a moment, your own work. Is it that you have too many meetings, or is it that the meetings that you have are not

Chapter 21

In his office, early the following morning, Richard was clearly finding it extremely difficult to settle to anything. He would sit in his chair behind his desk barely long enough to rearrange his papers in front of him, before launching himself back into pacing the length of the room again.

Several times he had punched the first two or three digits of Daniel's internal telephone number, only to replace the receiver heavily, and slump back in his chair counselling himself to bide his time.

A very large part of Richard wanted to explode violently in front of Daniel, to scream at him, to strip him of his job, and in large part to smack him in the mouth.

But another, calmer, more rational part of Richard realised that this was exactly what Daniel wanted. Daniel wanted Richard to act while he was still in a position of weakness. He wanted Richard to cross the line, to cause his personal indiscretions to affect his business decisions, to act rashly, and to do it while Daniel still held the upper hand politically.

This calmer, more rational part, was encouraging Richard to see how he could hurt Daniel most by biding his time, appearing unaffected, and slowly inexorably ejecting him on the terms of Richard's choosing. And slowly, surely, gradually, it brought Richard to a point of calm, almost cold, determination.

By the time he reached the first item on his schedule, there was no indication that any inner turmoil had ever existed. In fact, Richard was beginning to feel quite positive about things.

Today was the day of the first management meeting to review process performance, and Richard could almost savour delivering Daniel a written warning as a result of a continued failure in performance. Yes, Daniel was going down, and Richard would not give him the satisfaction of knowing what hurt he had caused him and his family.

◆————⟨◆⟩————◆

Lucy was his first visitor for the day. As she had promised, she had mapped out a standard format for future management meetings. She had split the meeting into two halves: the first half mechanically reviewing

efficient in progressing what you need to progress?

Is too much of your time taken up in meetings per se, or is too much of your time taken up in discussions within those meetings where you cannot really offer or learn anything new?

Unfortunately, our experience of meetings is that they are inefficient and, as a result of handling this issue inappropriately, managers tend to make the situation worse not better.

The diagram below illustrates a common picture of the causality of inefficient meetings and the problems that arise in practice. We lose time because:

- we keep revisiting and going over old ground
- people have not prepared or done what they have promised
- some discussions are only relevant to one or two people
- people lose concentration and stop listening
- the process is not focused on clear goals
- we do not agree and confirm clear actions
- people are not realistic about commitments
- people cannot remember what was agreed.

progress and performance, and highlighting any issues; and the second half giving opportunity for more in-depth discussion on selected topics.

Richard was puzzled. "Why separate the review from the discussion?" he queried.

Lucy smiled. "It makes the meeting more efficient."

"What? Covering the same thing twice makes the meeting more efficient?" Richard sounded incredulous.

Lucy saw this was not going to be quick, so she sat down. She thought for a moment about the best way to begin.

"You know those Cylek Performance Review meetings you attend in Houston?" Lucy paused and waited for Richard to nod acknowledgement, then continued: "They start off reviewing performance, and then an issue comes up. What happens?"

"Well, we debate it until we've got some clear actions, I guess!"

"And what process do you use?" queried Lucy.

Richard shrugged. "I'm not sure really, we just work it through until someone's appointed to take it away."

"And how long do you allow for that discussion?" continued Lucy.

Richard shrugged again. "As long as it takes I guess."

"Think back, Richard," challenged Lucy, "exactly how useful is that debate?"

Richard thought for a while, and then smiled. "Well, it gives me a chance for a snooze," he replied.

Lucy smiled back. "And then you return to the review, until the next issue?" she queried.

"Yes, that's about it," Richard agreed.

"And how do the debates at the end of the meeting compare with the ones at the start?" asked Lucy, already knowing the answer.

"Well, we're often rushed toward the end, so they either tend to be delegated out, or we just agree something quickly," Richard answered.

Meetings are often inefficient. And here is the paradox - we make them more inefficient because we seek to have fewer of them. Because they are fewer, they become longer and more general. Because they are longer and cover more points they have greater membership. And because of all of this they become less specifically relevant to what you need addressed, and thus more inefficient.

Added to which, knowing that the meeting is likely to be of little value to us, we fail to do what is necessary to ensure that it is more efficient. We resent preparation time, and we also tend to see meetings as an opportunity to complete our actions and get other bits of work done with the people who are there. This saves us time but introduces inefficiency for some others, so they start doing the same thing. Very soon it becomes institutionalised and nobody even realises it is happening - they just complain about meetings.

Meetings are 'good'. They are a vehicle for management effecting its role more efficiently. It is their poor design and subversion that proves 'bad'. And by seeing meetings as 'bad' we tend to adopt and introduce the very behaviours that make them so.

Meetings as a vehicle for management

The efficiency of meetings is directly related to the efficiency of the management time spent within them. So let us start our consideration of how meetings can be better designed, by considering the efficiency of management time.

Essentially a manager's time can be invested in a number of places as can be seen in the diagram on the next page.

Ideally management time is invested in enabling the skills and processes of the

The tragedy of the commons

A story is told of a piece of common land allotted to villagers for grazing their livestock. The land could support two animals per household, but after a little time some people started grazing a third animal. Seeing that some people were benefiting in this way others followed suit, even though it was against the rules. After a while those grazing two animals began to notice that their animals carried less meat, because grazing was harder, and so they introduced a third animal, simply to maintain their due. Before long the common land became overgrazed, and most of the animals died.

"And are the issues at the end less important than the ones at the start?" queried Lucy.

"Sometimes," Richard replied. "But not usually. I guess it depends on whose perspective you're seeing. Often it is the UK issues that get left to the end of the day."

Lucy paused, and then said: "A meeting to review performance has a different dynamic and uses a different process to that needed to effectively understand and resolve issues. The review is objective, clinical. It should briefly and appropriately observe all areas of performance, and list and prioritise the issues that arise from them. It should be comprehensive and balanced." Richard nodded and waited for Lucy to continue, which she did.

"Resolving the issues, however, is something that is most efficiently achieved with a process that is specially designed to do exactly that. The amount of time each issue gets should not be dependant on when it occurs in the meeting. And how can you prioritise where you will spend the time, until you know what all the issues are. Added to which, it may be that not all members of the group need to be involved in all the discussions."

Lucy noted that Richard was not trying to argue, so she continued. "If in our meeting, we swiftly and clinically run through the review, we can then work out the best approach, and use of our time, in addressing the issues that have arisen. That is what I'm proposing with this meeting format."

Richard thought for a moment. Lucy was often right about these sorts of things, as bizarre as they seemed at the time. He sighed: "Well, I have to admit it sounds good in theory. Let's try it out and see how it works in practice!"
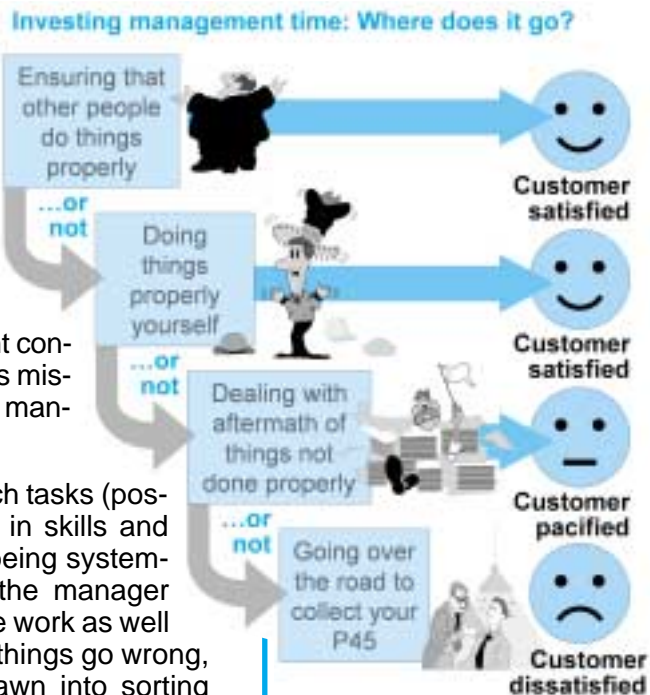
◆────────◁◆▷────────◆

Richard had fully expected a showdown with Daniel, but he was disappointed. Daniel was the model of propriety. His plan listed all the relevant activities for the implementation, with scheduled dates for completion all within the next two months. True, none of his tasks were complete yet, but the first three activities were all scheduled within the deadline Richard had given him. Richard could not find fault with him anywhere. Daniel was clearly keeping his nose clean on the work front, and biding his time. Richard could see that Daniel wanted to provoke him

organisation to ensure that everything can be handled efficiently to the customer's satisfaction. Of course, if this is not possible, then the manager may get drawn into specific tasks - tasks that the process does not allow others to do with sufficient confidence. Some managers mistakenly believe this is the management role.

If there are too many such tasks (possibly because of issues in skills and processes that are not being systemically addressed) then the manager may not be able to do the work as well as he or she would like, things go wrong, and the manager is drawn into sorting them out. This is often a major source of overload, and can be so severe that the manager no longer has time to move back into the first box to sort things out systemically.

If the workload is too great, the problems continue until things fall apart in crisis. At this point everything becomes urgent and critical, and the manager has no time to think of longer term strategies such as inspiring, equipping and developing his or her people and processes.

But the problem of time is not solved by avoiding these 'management' tasks. These 'management' tasks are the only things that have the potential to solve the problem of time.[1] The further the manager moves down and to the right of the diagram at the top of this page, the less

---

1 This is not technically true. Failing to resolve issues through management can ultimately solve the time problem. But then you might find you end up with all too much time on your hands!

Investing management time: Where does it go?

> Whoever admits that he is too busy to improve his methods has acknowledged himself to be at the end of his rope.
>
> J Ogden Armour
> President, Armour Meat Packing Co.

> Problems cannot be solved at the same level at which they were created.
>
> Albert Einstein
> Nobel Laureate in Physics

---

to unreasonable behaviour, while giving no legitimate excuse for it in terms of his work. But he was convinced that Daniel could not keep this up. He just needed to wait a little longer to nail him. Still, Richard could wait.

Lucy's format for the meeting worked well. With some forceful facilitation, she had ensured all the issues were written in the 'Car Park', and the review section had passed by quickly and efficiently. Within half an hour, the whole team had got a comprehensive and accurate picture of the progress and issues.

"Okay," said Lucy, "we now have a list of the issues we need to address if we are to make progress according to plan. Some of them seem to be quite similar, so perhaps we can group these and address them together. Any suggestions?"

Lucy linked together those issues that the group felt could be considered as a unit, and then asked for nominations for those things best tackled outside the meeting. Several items were suggested, but when it came to assigning responsibilities for taking them forward, there appeared to be a marked reluctance from 'some quarters'. However, Richard quickly appointed people if they proved too bashful.

"That leaves us these three items," summarised Lucy, "and I propose we use the remainder of the meeting to make some headway on these. Are there any proposals on which order we should tackle them in?"

◆————◁◆▷————◆

"'*Lack of time*' seems to be the one that is the biggest issue for us," suggested Andrew, "and the least easy for us to resolve individually. I would certainly value us spending time on resolving that one." The room seemed to nod in unison, but Richard groaned inwardly. He was just about to challenge the proposal, and expound that it was largely a matter of individual priorities, when Lucy asked the group if anybody could suggest a process for tackling the issue. Richard held his peace, he was intrigued as to what possible process could be used, and waited to see what transpired.

Clearly the group were equally intrigued, because they all went silent. Lucy looked around the group eagerly, and Richard was beginning to think that he would have to pipe up after all, if only to help Lucy out of an obvious hole, when Lucy spoke out again.

influence he or she has per unit of time that he or she spends.

Similarly, if management meetings are drawn down and to the right of that same diagram, managers have to invest more and more hours in each and every one of them, to have anything like the effect needed to keep their business on the rails. But that is exactly where most managers tend to draw those meetings if left unchecked. The pressure on their own time, of having to resolve the details because they have not developed the system, will cause them to take every opportunity to draw the meeting into isolated short-term specifics, and to progress their detailed agenda at the expense of other's more strategic thinking. And this side-lining of strategic thinking will happen because their short term issues are inevitably more urgent.

This in itself is a vicious circle, inasmuch as it often precludes items from the agenda until they become crises in their own right. And so, poor meeting design can allow a handful of 'reactive' managers to pull the whole organisation down into the same boat.

The design of effective management meetings

The key to solving the issue of time is to get managers to see that the time problem exists **because** they have not been fulfilling their 'management' role, which manages time efficiently. And that this 'management' role is not an extra burden; it is the solution.

Selling people this view of management is perhaps the most difficult part of the whole implementation of systematic approaches. And even when people accept it logically, there still remains a

Whoever would change men must change the conditions of their lives.

Theodor Herzl
Austrian journalist and Zionist leader

"Normally, for this sort of issue, a company would use a standard 'Problem-solving process', but I know we don't actually have one here."

"That's because we never have problems, only disasters in the making," quipped John.

"Yes, like getting our air conditioning serviced by 'The hole in the wall gang'," retorted Abs, alluding to the recent problems with temperature control that had seen him handing out ice creams on the shop floor.

"Thank you, Mister Softee!" John retaliated.

"I don't want to get drawn into introducing a whole new process this afternoon, you'll be relieved to hear," continued Lucy, "but can I propose that we perhaps do the following." She moved to the flipchart, skipped a page, and proceeded to write in her large neat capitals.

"Firstly, let's get a complete quantified understanding of the issue. Secondly, we will identify what the main causes of 'lack of time' are for us. And thirdly, we will try and identify some potential solutions to those causes."

Richard was beginning to feel a bit uncomfortable. This seemed like the long way round. The answer to him was devastatingly clear: people had to get their priorities right. He wondered whether to interject at this point. In the end he decided not to. Lucy had rarely let him down so far, he needed to have more confidence in what she was doing. He let it go.

"I don't imagine that we will fully solve this issue within this meeting," Lucy continued. She had spoken seriously, but drew a few sniggers at what people thought was clearly a ludicrous alternative.

"No! But …," she paused, clearly serious, and waited for the group to settle down and recognise that maybe she intended to go further than they clearly felt possible. "I do intend that we deliver a clear brief to whoever takes this forward outside of the meeting."

Some of the group were clearly confused by this woman who appeared to be seriously suggesting the resolution of an insoluble problem. Lucy waited for them to make up their minds, and was rewarded with a slightly subdued, but clearly attentive, audience.

Lucy flipped over to the next clear sheet of flipchart paper, and posed the first question: "So, how much time are we actually short?"

large lag before they take it on in their hearts and behaviours.

But 'excellence is a game of inches', and each manager has at least the opportunity to establish new norms and effectively prove the point. To do this two things need to be considered.

Firstly, to make meetings more efficient we need more of them; but shorter, more focused, with less people. The end result will be more meetings - but individuals will actually spend less time in meetings.[1]

Secondly, we also make meetings more efficient by having different types of meetings.

The systematic model reflects six different types of meetings, each of which have different formats and membership, and some do not even feel like meetings at all.

1. There are review meetings, which are simply to ensure complete understanding of progress/ performance, and to identify the issues involved. They are quick, clinical and objective to the point of being almost 'cold'. Most of the work and communication is done and circulated before the meeting.

2. There are planning and goal setting meetings, such as developing the QFD and cascading it. These are strategic and seek to draw out and align people's aspirations with the needs of the business (see Section B).

3. There are problem-solving and change-making meetings where small groups meet to resolve issues and

(2) Planning and goal setting
(5) Team development
(1) Review
(3) Change
(6) Operational
(4) Customer and contracts

---

[1] Actually, this is not true. Managers will spend less time in those meetings, and then put this time into yet more focused brief meetings to progress the other parts of their role that they do not currently have time for.

Richard challenged: "I don't think we are tackling the right question. I have one hundred and ninety-six hours in my week, and frankly I don't want any more. I just want to use them differently."

There was a pause while people worked out the sense of this. Lucy was concerned that Richard might have just thrown in a huge red herring, but then, on a hunch, decided to go with the flow.

"Say some more, Richard," she encouraged.

"Well," mused Richard, "what I mean is that, one way or another, too much tries to fit into my week. That is what I see as the problem. There is too much for me to do!"

"I think Richard has a point," supported Peter. "I certainly don't want to have any more time to spend here. I spend more than enough time here already."

"Perhaps the problem is that our jobs are too big?" posed Susan hesitantly. Her face almost showed a cringe, as she waited for people to react to what she had said.

"Or that we're trying to do too many jobs," chipped in John, keen that Susan should not lack support.

Daniel saw an opportunity. He took it. "No! I don't think that is the case. My job was manageable until I got all this QFD stuff dumped on top of it."

He purposefully avoided Richard's eyes, and looked to Peter and Abs for support. Abs obliged. "I must admit the QFD has created a whole extra workload." Daniel nodded sagely in response, and then looked to Peter for a follow-up. Peter merely nodded non-commitally.

Richard felt his anger rise. But Deborah stepped in first. "Wait a minute," she challenged. "All this 'QFD stuff' as you call it: the target setting; process management; setting up measures; process meetings; coaching etc. That is our job! It is probably most of the other things that we do, that should be seen as the extra workload. Planning and controlling the performance of our processes IS the manager's role. All of the other stuff we do isn't really management stuff at all!"

Daniel looked at her darkly. "So top-level customer meetings, saving crucial contracts, attending Cylek worldwide sales meetings, ensuring we have money coming in to pay our salary. That is not management?"

effect changes in the organisation's processes.

4. There are customer/partner meetings to explore the needs of the relationship and to seek new ways to provide a better service.

5. There are team and individual development meetings, which explore group and personal issues, and seek to develop relevant attitudes and skills in people. These include training sessions.

6. There are also 'meetings' where people engage simply with the operational process and progress work as their job defines. Picking up the 'input' from one person and providing 'output' to another.

Each of these meetings is quite different, and has different objectives, membership, process, formats and environments. Although each takes place at all levels of the business.

Our problems often begin when we try to combine these into a single 'one-size-fits-all' meeting, in order to 'save time'. Unfortunately the lack of clarity and focus on what process and approach to use at any point leads to confusion, disengagement, misunderstanding, and many of the problems that many of us are all too aware of. Separating out the meetings (even as different sections within one larger meeting) and designing them appropriately, is key to resolving these problems.

In some cases this is fairly easy: meetings of type 4, 5 and 6 are often the best defined and least overlapping meetings within an organisation, and many other texts concern themselves with these areas.

Meetings of type 2 have already been covered in the earlier chapters of this

The length of a meeting increases in direct proportion to the square of the number of people present and awake.

Anonymous

It would have been difficult for Daniel to get any more derision into his voice if he had been playing Voldemort, but Deborah stood her ground. "No! Frankly no!" she said. "They need doing. They often need doing by someone senior; sometimes even someone as senior as us. But when we do them we're not 'managing' the process, we are simply 'operating' it. And if after doing our proper job of 'managing' we find we simply don't have time to do that 'other stuff', we had better make sure we develop and manage the process to make sure it gets done in some other way!"

Her eyes fixed on Daniel all through her delivery. She matched his tone with hers, and Richard felt an insane urge to cheer her on. His spirits continued to rise as Andrew joined in.

"Deborah's right." Andrew looked around the group, determined not to focus on Daniel. "All too often we fail to place enough emphasis on developing our people to do these things, because it is somehow easier to do them ourselves. But that does not make it our job to do them."

Deborah, grateful for Andrew's support, continued: "I would go further. I would say that doing those non-management tasks should be seen as a failure. A failure of our management process. A failure to develop the systems and people to ensure they are done effectively within the process."

This last comment was too much for Peter. "Excuse me," he interjected, "that may be fine for those of us with the luxury of 35 minions to do M'lady's bidding, but I have a department of three people. Are you seriously proposing that I should dump all the work on them, and go and play golf for six hours a day?"

Deborah coloured slightly. She felt she had overstated things a bit in retrospect, but she could still make the point. "No I don't," she replied, "but in your case, you really are fulfilling two roles, and while the one that is purely 'management' as opposed to 'specialist' may only be part time, it is still vital that it does not allow the process to dump more work on you than is absolutely necessary or efficient."

Peter appeared mollified, and Lucy saw an opportunity to move on. "Okay, so how would we state the problem?" But Daniel, sensing the tide turning against him, made a concentrated push.

"This is rubbish! Are you seriously proposing that I should abandon high-level skills and responsibilities such as negotiation, selling and execu-

book,[1] and we will move on to meetings of type 3 in the next chapter.

Our concern in this chapter is meetings of type 1; meetings that are intended to review progress/performance and identify issues therein.

The model for undertaking these meetings is illustrated in the diagram on the right.[2]

The primary objective of the process management meeting is simply to ensure that performance is improving to plan, by monitoring performance against that plan, and setting new plans in place to address any shortfall.

- Current overall performance of the process is briefly reviewed against forecast.[3]
- Shortfalls against forecast are highlighted without discussion.[4]
- Progress on actions is reviewed, and where delays in completion explain the current shortfall, this is marked up against the highlight.
- Sub-process management reports are very briefly reviewed, and where sub-process performance issues explain the process performance shortfall, this is marked up against the highlight.
- Shortfalls without explanation are then addressed, and actions set to investigate and address them within the sub-processes.
- Issues of performance, either on completing actions, or in terms of the quality of sub-process management,

---
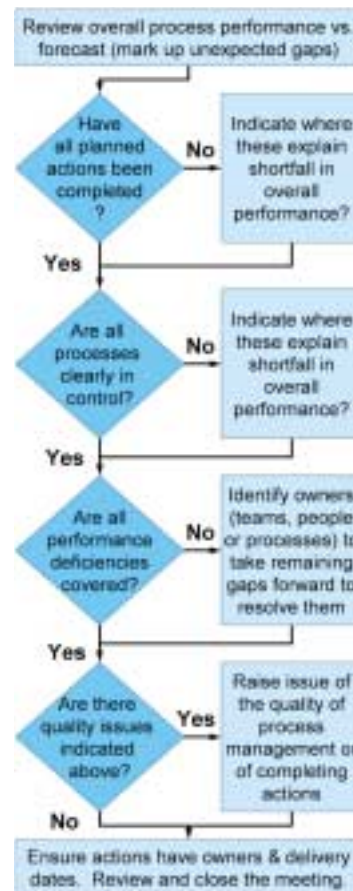
1   See Section B.

2   A session plan for the meeting is included on the associated web-site (see Appendix 7).

3   'Forecast' should represent the estimated improvements in performance, period by period, which will ensure the targets are achieved within the agreed timescales.

4   This is simply achieved by identifying them, and writing them up on a flipchart, with space in between or to the right to capture further commentary and proposed actions.

tive judgement, for the mechanical dreariness of simple clerical activities such as measurement and record keeping? You have to be out of your tiny tree!"

Despite the rudeness of Daniel's tone, Richard could see that his point had found a sympathetic ear with a number of people in the room. In fact, even he had been affected by it. Was he really condemning his management team to a life of drudgery? He was sure he was not, but he was temporarily lost for a response.

The room was silent, and Daniel sensing he had won the initiative plunged on. "Fair enough, if you are so sure that this bookkeeping overhead is so necessary, and I have to admit I remain unconvinced, then give us each a team of clerks to do it, and let us get on with the real business of leadership!"

This brought a couple of nods, and some rueful glances. Deborah just looked angry. Richard wondered if he could be so wrong; he felt a sense of disquiet rise up in him. But Lucy remained calm, her face a picture of serenity and confidence. Richard felt a bit better when he saw this, and the momentary nervousness was replaced by anticipation of how Lucy would deftly turn this whole thing round.

Daniel was now clearly looking at Richard to respond, as were most of the rest of the group. Richard felt uncomfortable again, and hoped Lucy would cut in, which, after just a few moments, she did.

"You raise two very good issues there, Daniel. Do you mind if I take them in turn?" Lucy paused briefly, but continued quickly. "Let us leave to one side, just for the moment, the question of how boring the proposed management role might be, and focus first of all on the question of who does it. Suppose, for the moment, Deborah was to delegate all of this Process Management activity to Malcolm Carter, while she invested her experience and skill into the next generation of web-based modem development. I'm sure that our future range of web-modems would be commercial winners. But whom would we best invite to the meeting that managed the performance of Cylek UK? Who then could provide the best insight into how our approach to product development should evolve? Who would be best placed to talk about how the business should transform itself? Should it be Deborah, with her head stuffed full of technical profiles and protocol analysis? Or should it be Malcolm? After all, it would be Malcolm who had the firm grasp of the implications of any Cylek policies on the potential of the development process to outpace

are addressed. (These may need to be dealt with outside the meeting if there are specific issues with individual performance.)

The meeting can be very brief if everything is clearly under control, and information is circulated in advance. The key to the success of these meetings lies in people doing what they should do, and communicating their progress on it, before the meeting.

If all actions are completed, all issues can be related to processes, and all process owners are doing what they should do, the active meeting can be over in 15 minutes. If everything is happening as it should be happening, the meeting does not interfere. Why should it?

But if performance on completing actions is poor, or process ownership is weak, or the logic of the QFD is flawed, the structure of the meeting ensures that something is done about it. What the meeting is essentially reviewing is the quality of the management process. And it is the management process that controls the performance of the organisation, not this meeting.

The design of the meeting is intentionally spartan. There is no place in it to do anything apart from understand the factors affecting performance, and to assign responsibility for addressing them.

This does not preclude scheduling a more discursive meeting to directly follow the management meeting and pick up the issues, but it does require that the whole picture is objectively and completely understood prior to delving into specific areas.

It also provides the opportunity for more appropriate people to be involved in addressing the issues. In many cases this

Once somebody asked me to identify the single most useful management technique that I learned through my years of managing. My answer was: the practice of regularly scheduled one-to-one meetings.

Andrew S Grove
CEO, Intel Corp.

our competitors. And it would be Malcolm who fully understood the scope for improving the quality of information supplied to production. Frankly, it makes little sense to separate management decision making from management information."

Daniel could sense the point slipping away from him, and quickly countered: "I don't agree. Malcolm could keep Deborah informed so that she could fulfil her executive role. We'd then use our best people more efficiently!" Some more nods greeted this.

Lucy continued her challenge: "Then, are you suggesting that Deborah is so sharp, that she can provide a higher quality of input based solely on an occasional update, than Malcolm could based on extensive experience of the detailed planning and analysis of the department's operations?" Here Lucy turned to Deborah and asked: "What do you think Deborah? Could you?"

Deborah smiled. "Not a snowball's chance in hell!" she said.

Before Daniel could interject again, Lucy continued deftly: "But that still leaves us with the issue of boredom."

Here she paused, leaving Daniel to wonder whether to go back over the last battle, or fix his sights on this new one. Before he had made up his mind, she continued: "If you think that this systematic approach to management is going to be anything less than intensely stimulating, challenging, and at times frightening, then you still have a very impoverished view of the role. But that is hardly surprising, because we're only just getting started, and all you've managed to focus on so far are mechanical things like measures, but there is much more, so much more." Here her eyes assumed an almost mystical, far-away quality, and she proceeded to explain.

"Do you know the implications of letting your customers flag up incorrect items on invoices and not pay for them? One quarry company did this, and transformed their business, dramatically improving both sales and profit. Does that surprise you?" She had the group's attention. "Or can you anticipate what impact it would have if you allowed your people to select which manager they wanted to work for?" She heard a noticeable intake of breath from the group and continued: "One big fabric manufacturer in the States does this very successfully.

"Could you improve your overall performance by 50% in 12 months? Would you even know how to start? Soon, every ounce of your expert-

will be the team looking after the process[1] that is giving problems.

It is important to note that, within the process management cycle, there is no room for isolated initiatives and improvement projects; there is no place to simply measure project progress! This is not an oversight. All too often, when improvement projects are established outside of a targeted performance gain, they fail to achieve their full potential. The principle that underpins the management cycle is that projects only exist in relation to a measured shortfall in performance, and that progress only exists in relation to a forecast improvement in performance. Within this, projects can be controlled as normal, but they are managed on their impact, not their completion.

If a thing is worth doing ... it will have an impact on your performance.

Source unknown

ise and intellect and experience will be harnessed in using a complex set of information to make lasting, irreversible and radical changes to this business, and frankly you had better be up to the task! Because I am here to tell you, that I could never see it entrusted to some boring pedestrian cleric. And if you're not able to anticipate your customers' thinking, to inspire your people to previously unthinkable heights, to draw out abilities that they never thought they had, and to efficiently harness that into a radical and earth shattering strategy, then you are not going to make it!"

She finished to silence, and looked round the group. Richard and Deborah looked as if they wanted to applaud, but most looked a little shell-shocked. Except Daniel: he looked incredulous, and increasingly angry.

"Drivel!" he exclaimed. "Unadulterated Yankee bullshit!"

Everybody looked shocked now.

Richard was the first to break the silence. "Daniel, I think you owe Lucy an apology. I suggest, that if you can't keep a civil tongue in your head, you leave the meeting".

"That suits me fine. I can't listen to any more of this," said Daniel. He swiftly picked up his pile of papers and left.

The room seemed stunned.

Richard stood up. "Sorry you all had to witness that. I will pick up with Daniel after the meeting, but for now, if there are no further objections, I suggest we continue with our problem-solving - after a short ten minute break to catch our breath."

Coffee was a fairly muted affair. People sensed a wind of change, that things would not, could not, remain the same, but appeared unsure of where their colleagues stood on this. The incident with Daniel seemed to cast a cloud of uncertainty over the whole proceedings. But for reasons only he himself understood, Richard felt distinctly up-beat.

[1] 'Process' here refers to a whole process or any part of a process.