

Leadership Skills Series: 2 - Developing Commercially Viable Solutions

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Now That's Viable!

This is the second in my series to help leaders assess their interactive skills. In my last blog I introduced the research based model that led to many useful insights into what the more effective communicators do in different settings and focused on what happens when meetings become

imbalanced by getting stuck in too much Initiating, Reacting or Clarifying.

In this blog I want to get readers thinking about getting more productive meetings; i.e. generating more commercially viable ideas to compete and improve.

What type of research was involved to develop these models?

I want to focus on two key Initiating Behaviors and their relationship to meeting success, namely

- **Proposing** – putting forward ideas, suggestions courses of action
- **Building** – sounds like a proposal, which extends or develops another person's proposal

The difference between them is the **Proposing** is an independent idea and **Building** must be dependent on another person's idea.

What I want readers to think about is the proportion of these two behaviors in their meetings at work, church etc. and how it influences meeting outcome.

So, I am assuming that you would need to consider both the quantity and quality of ideas put forward?

That's an excellent point. The research looked at the sort of Initiating going on and could it be more effective.

The research was based on 23 working teams to see if there was a connection between effective performance and Initiating Behavior. The teams were mostly research and project teams. We established their levels of effectiveness against three criteria:

1. The number of ideas brought to management's attention
2. The number of ideas accepted for implementation
3. The estimated commercial payoff

The results clearly showed that these three criteria were significantly related to the **ratio of proposing and building behavior**. The more building, the better the performance

Sounds like "Building is a good thing!"

Unfortunately, like so many simple conclusions it is only partly true. Studies of other groups that were efficient and effective used no building at all.

Why should it prove to be a strong predictor in some situations and not others?

It puzzled us until we started to look at how a group deals with ideas. Groups seemed to take two very different approaches by either focusing on Proposing or Building.

We first looked at groups that were very much higher in Proposing Behavior and used little if any Building. Here's a typical sequence

1. First person puts forward the first idea (P1)
2. Others don't like it and it gets rejected (DS)
3. On the next agenda item another idea is put forward and then countered by another person. (P2/P3)
4. The second and third ideas are considered and the group likes the third idea. (P3 +SP)
5. A change of topic and another idea is not fully accepted e.g. buy five machines gets reduced to 3 machines. (P4 > p4)

So, what's happening to how this group handles ideas?

It sounds like ideas would not be fully considered before being either accepted or rejected?

That could be true if the ideas were complex and impactful. But your description is accurate; this group either filters or reduces the number of proposals – **FILTER MEETING**



Because of the low level of building, proposals are not developed by others. They are either accepted, rejected or reduced.

Too many people think that all meetings should focus on building on each others' ideas. However, Filter meetings can be incredibly efficient and effective where management has too many ideas already and needs to pare down and get focus on doing something.

So, how do you judge when a filter meeting is not the right way to go in handling ideas?

Essentially it comes down to four negative impacts:

1. Ownership and the Win-Lose Problem: Defensive – clinging to own ideas and not listening with politicking occurring before, during and after the meeting.
2. Lack of Integration
3. Lack of Commitment and Motivation
4. Problem of Self-Reinforcement – filtering gets ingrained into regular meetings.

In fact in one case study a group was observed over six meetings. In meeting 1, there were 24 Proposals (PR's) to 20 Building (BU's) but by meeting 6, Proposals were up to 39 with no Building!

It illustrated for us why there are so many Filter meetings in commercial life and so few meetings with High Building Behaviors. Such meetings which are high on Building and low on Proposing deal with Initiating very differently. The Key is that several people contributed to the final idea by Building on one another's proposal – so an idea was **AMPLIFIED** – Thus we use the term **Amplifier Meeting**



I think I would rather be in that sort of meeting, what did participants say differently from those in the Filter Meetings?

Well, the impact on participants is very different.

1. There's a sense of excitement. In a Filter Meeting the range of possibilities is known before the

meeting and the outcome is often predictable; whereas in an Amplifier Meeting outcome are frequently unexpected and ideas are developed dynamically.

2. There is increased commitment to action. ***"It's our idea!"***

3. There is increased quality as ideas are more full bodied and thought through as they harness all the group's resources.

How did they judge quality of ideas?

There was a panel of independent judge's assessed the commercial viability of ideas. ***They found that in Amplifier Groups there were over twice as many high quality ideas as in the Filter Group.***

Of course Amplifier meeting do take more time and a lack of structure

How do you get out of the Filter Rut and get an Amplifier Meeting going?

Well, what I do, which seems to work most of the time:

1. Choose an issue where nobody has fixed preconceptions
2. Give no advanced warning or agenda of the issue
3. Stop the Meeting after the first proposal
4. Encourage Building
5. Dealing with Criticism
6. Not moving on too soon

How do you know when you have a Filter vs. Amplifier Meeting?

It turns out that comes down to ratios of Proposing to Building Behaviors. When you find there are two proposals for each Build (2:1+ PR:BU) it identifies an Amplifier Meeting; whereas when Proposals to Building Ratio is (4+:1 PR:BU) you have a Filter Meeting.

In their research how frequently do the different meetings occur?

Out of 312 meetings observed:

- 78% Filter
- 4% Amplifier
- 18% Neither one or the other

Overall, we questioned the need for more Amplifier meetings. At a perceptual level, post meeting questionnaires revealed that:

Filter meetings were perceived as:

- Efficient
- Competitive
- Organized

Amplifier Meetings were perceived as:

- Creative
- Exciting
- Participative
- Useful
- Committed to meeting outcome
- Better Quality of Decisions

So, how do you decide when to have a Filter or Amplifier Meeting?

A Filter Meeting is needed when you:

1. Need to reduce the many choices for action available
2. Have to work to tight time constraints
3. Do not need individual commitment for successful implementation

An Amplifier Meeting is needed when you:

1. Need to create solutions where no predetermined alternatives exist
2. Need individual Commitment for success
3. Need high quality solutions