

### Telling Stories Around the Fire

Studying other cultures can help identify what people are actually doing in the office culture. In many cultures, much time is spent sitting around the fire telling stories instead of working. We see a similar action with many a corporate meeting. But, we can do better. Meetings need to do only those things that can't be done any other way. The best meetings are those where multiple minds see a better solution to the problem.

When anthropologists examine the life of the hunter gatherer society, they find that people don't regularly work 40 hour weeks. For example, the Australian Aboriginals prior to European contact were spending 4-5 hours a day on food gathering.

They would spend more time sitting around and telling stories. Similar figures come from studies of other groups in Africa. (To be fair, other studies include other work such as periodic moves and bring the total hours closer to 40 hours per week.)

Most humans are not well adapted to working many hours per week. We are better adapted to spending time chatting and sitting around telling stories. In many a corporate culture, we duplicate the same effect by having a lot of meetings where the wrong people are in the meeting, the wrong items are on the agenda, and little gets accomplished. In short, we sit around and tell each other "stories".

Status meetings are not an efficient way to communicate status or to coordinate efforts across a team. A good rule of

thumb is that if a group is holding a lot of status meetings, that means that the group has a major problem with communications. Other means including technology can be used to communicate status without needing such meetings

Meetings have 3 purposes: to introduce people, to give announcements or information, or to have and deal with conflict. You can find other lists of meeting purposes that have quite a

number. Yet, there are other and better ways to handle most of the other purposes for a meeting. For example, one list includes "to celebrate". That would be better done in an environment where people can relax and actually celebrate.

Successful meetings are where the power of

multiple minds on a problem produces results that are better than what one person can come up alone. Typically, this happens in small meetings where everyone considers themselves peers with the rest. Group dynamics change as more people are added to a meeting and different hierarchies are included.

It can also help to periodically review the purpose of each meeting. Many times, a meeting no longer needs to occur. Or, its purpose should be changed to better reflect the needs.

In the move from hunter gatherer to agricultural societies, we gained the ability to have a bunch of "warm bodies" in the battle. However, today, we need not just "warm bodies", we need people who can think. Let us use those that we have in order to outthink our opponents.

### Meetings Only For A Clear Purpose

### Pivot or Mutating?

We can learn a lot from some far-flung science. For example, in studying viruses, it turns out that the rapid mutation of a virus is an important factor in how lethal a virus is. The viruses that mutate faster are better at killing the host animal or human. This can be a metaphor for companies also. The companies that "mutate" faster are better able at "killing their targets" in the marketplace.

There are some particularly nasty diseases that mutate their outer shell just about at the same rate that our bodies can figure out how to identify the proteins on that outer shell and build the antibodies for it. In other words, when we get that infection, it is changing so fast that our bodies are never able to build an effective defense against it. These diseases are almost fatal. However, they can also mutate into a more benign version.

One can compare that situation to being in a world where knock-off copies can hit the market about as fast as your products can and where there isn't a customs department enforcing your property rights. In such an environment, those who develop new products don't get the benefits of their efforts. The effect on new product development is "fatal".

Mutating too fast is fatal to the disease. It can mutate away from being able to function. Likewise, in business, we can change things too fast for our team, our company, or even our market. Leading too far ahead of our customers is fatal to sales. Finding the balance between a change to keep one step ahead of the market, being behind the market, or being too far in advance of the market is a tough challenge.

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### Risky World

For a long time, people have worried about Artificial Intelligence systems / Robots taking over the world. The problem with this is that we are the ones training such systems and we unconsciously put in our own biases and preconceptions. Thus, AI systems learn how to swear and use racist judgement on people. We will need humans to keep the AI systems in line.

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