



Extending Your Global Grasp

So has anybody got any ideas then?" Your question uttered into your headset microphone disappears into silence, as did your explanation of the 12 slides you presented to the meeting.

You pause, and gaze into the webcam, and consider how long to wait before you say something else. You try to picture their faces; are they thinking? Or puzzled? Or doing their emails? Do they agree with what you have presented? Are they happy? Or upset?

The pause lengthens.

How you long for meetings where everybody sat round a table in one room, where you could see what they were thinking, where you could draw them in with a 'quizzical' expression.

But business is different now. Global opportunities, and global pressures, mean that you have to engage with different people over five continents. You ponder the phrase 'engage with' – it doesn't feel very 'engaged' at the moment.

Eventually a response "We seem to be okay with it here in Manila", and then - whether emboldened, released or shamed by the first response, you are unsure - a mumbling echo from around the globe: "Yeah, fine"; "No problems here!"

Is that engagement? It isn't what you were looking for but experience indicates it will have to do. "Great, good job guys!" you say, hoping that you are the only one aware of the faint trace of sarcasm in the tone.

And you close the meeting.

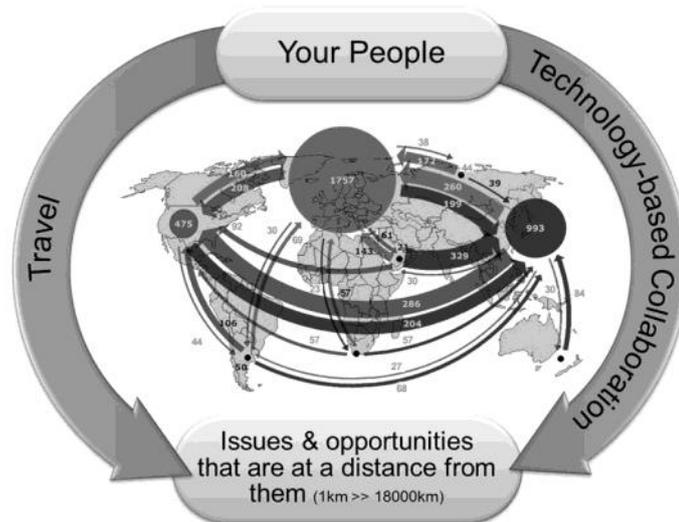
You wonder, not for the first time whether to conduct these meetings by teleconference, but you know that even when you can see their faces the outcome is not actually that different. You sigh and move onto the next thing.

So what generates engagement? What inspires ideas and energy? What builds a sense of teamwork and belonging? What gives ownership and responsibility?

Whether at 12,000 miles or 6 metres, it is very rarely simply listening to a presentation and a few people arguing over a couple of points. It requires involvement, contribution of ideas, participation in the development of the outcomes and the opportunity to shape. And traditional meetings, whether over the web, through telepresence, or around a meeting table, have tended to be poor at all of those things.

But unless we get better at generating real engagement at a fundamental level, our global reach will be barely more than the weakest of wet-fish handshakes. We need to engage and inspire the passions of our long distance colleagues, and our current process for meetings frankly doesn't cut it.

Any why should it? Do you know when it was designed? Do you know the state of technology that existed at that time? Have you considered what the prevailing culture was back then?



In 2011, an estimated \$12 Trillion dollars of international trade concerned *intermediate* products and services - items which organisations source globally and are dependent on for their own product/service outputs - and this figure is currently doubling every five years (*the numbers on the map are 2006 figures in \$Bn*). This growing long distance dependency means that people are increasingly required to engage with issues or opportunities that require travel or technology to address.

The truth is, our meeting processes were designed for a different age, with different values, pursuing different purposes in a different forum. And it is far from effective in achieving what we want it to do currently.

So what meeting process should we use?

Well the good news is that the processes we need already exist – you can see them listed across the columns on the top of the diagram in the middle of the page, together with a map of where they best contribute to what you are seeking to do within your meeting (rows of the diagram).

These simple but powerful tools have evolved out of the quality revolution in Japan, and have been refined and adapted over recent decades by meeting facilitators whose success depends on ensuring that they work toward the best answer with the greatest commitment.

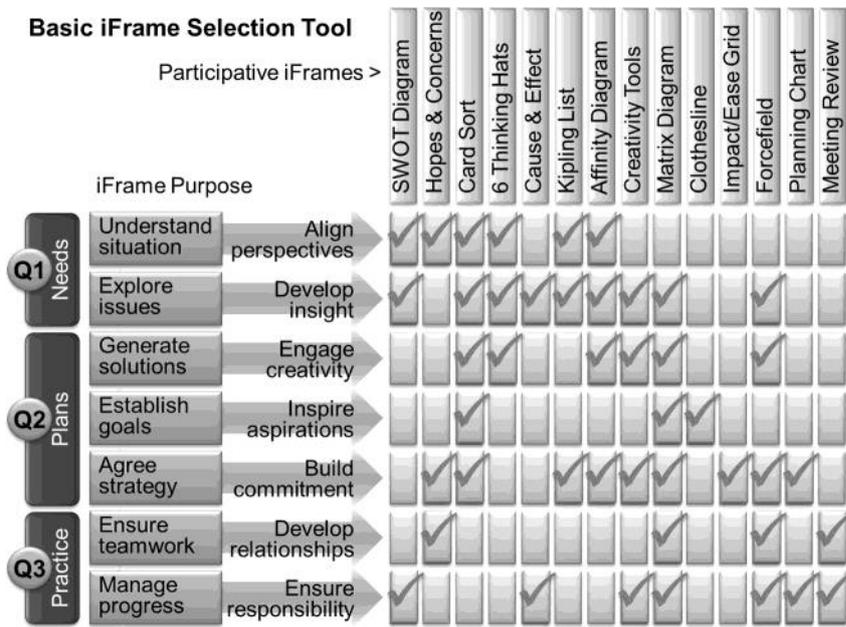
And yet it is entirely possible that you may not have heard of all of them, or that you have not seen them used, despite their power. There are four main reasons for this. The first is because we do not tend to see meetings as a process and therefore do not think too deeply into the sorts of process

elements which best support what we are trying to do; the second is because the people who ran meetings in the past did not see the need to 'complicate things' and were optimistic about what they could achieve in a 'straightforward' meeting; the third is that because of their lack of use, people who ran the meetings you attended were either unaware of these tools or not confident in using them; and fourth is that each of these tools involves a degree of effort in setting them up, running them, and documenting them afterwards. In short, you may not be familiar with them because your past colleagues and bosses felt they were too much trouble.

But engaging people at a distance using web-based meetings has reversed each of these arguments:

1. Simply logging onto a web-based meeting makes us more aware of process,

2. Our lack of ability to hold people by glance alone in web-based meetings means that we are more aware of shortcomings in our current "process" and more open to finding different ways to do things
3. Everything is new in the web-based environment, and so established processes have no real intrinsic advantage over any other process - whatever we choose to do, there is some learning and confidence building involved in making it work well
4. These tools are amazingly easy to set up in a web-based environment and to run and document at the end. In fact free templates for each of them are freely available to download and use from the MeetingByDesign.org web pages (*where you can also read more about what each one of them does*).



While we would argue that you will be best served by training in how to use them effectively in a web-based meeting, if that is strictly 'off your agenda' they still represent a valid and excellent way of better engaging your people, even at a distance. You may suffer one or two false starts but, if you are will-

ing to persevere, the tools are so simple and powerful that someone with an open mind cannot fail to get considerable advantage out of them, and we have provided a lot of free information and resources to give you a flying start.

So what do you think?

Feedback in one click:

For background on the research quoted in this article, or to understand more about the opportunities of web-based meetings and further develop your thinking in this area we would recommend the book: **Meeting by Design** ISBN: 978 0954 302146. www.MeetingByDesign.org

Tools to measure and manage meeting effectiveness can be found at Inspirometer.com

