Developing Givens for Meetings

Defining the Expectation Zone

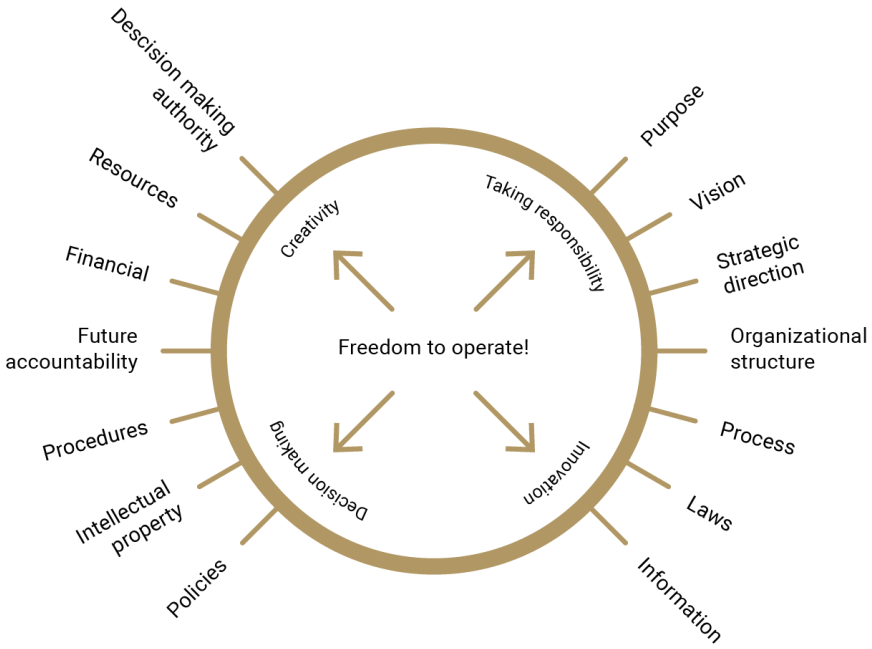
During the readiness stage of organizational development processes, we recommend that formal leaders need to define the expectation zone within which the work of the organization occurs. This expectation zone is defined by developing clarity about the givens, about what is not negotiable in the organization.

- People do amazing work within this expectation zone when it is made clear to them
- They come to an understanding of the space that is created, the space for creative thinking, innovation, solutions, collaborations
- The defined non-negotiables simultaneously define the space that is open
- Sometimes the space is very small, sometimes it is quite big, and of course everything in between
- This gives definition to the expectation zone. What is vital and non-negotiable.

Clarifying the givens clarifies the expectation zone. Within this expectation zone, the participants in a process have the experience of maximum choice, maximum freedom

- Maximum choice, maximum freedom is a principle of the Genuine Contact Way of working. What this means to us is that we work to clarify the givens, to clarify the expectation zone to open up as much space as possible in the process for people to do their best with what they bring of themselves, their knowledge, their creativity, their innovative approaches, their best contributions
- With the givens noted explicitly, people no longer restricted their contributions due to assumptions that the contributions weren't wanted
- With the givens noted explicitly, people no longer waste energy developing solutions for what was non-negotiable, what was fixed and could use their energy within the zone created for their contributions

When working with this tool, start with the center, with recognition of the freedom to operate, the freedom to get the job done and done well. When the freedom to operate is sufficient, people are creative, innovative, take responsibility and engage in decision making.



Your task in preparing for the meeting is to clarify the givens, thereby clarifying the amount of space at the meeting for creativity, innovation, the taking of responsibility and any decision making.

We will be using highly participatory facilitation methods at the meeting, designed to stimulate creativity, innovation, calling on responsibility, and figuring out the best path forward. What we need to know from you is how much space you are actually opening up:

- for people to converse about anything to do with the organization that leads to fulfilling the purpose of the meeting
- for moving recommendations into action post-meeting

This meeting has been requested to make a difference, to bring about change. Doing this activity of establishing the givens for the meeting, and for what people can expect to result from the meeting is really hard yet necessary thinking for the leader to do. When the givens are clear and can be communicated well, an enormous difference is made in the positive impact of investing in a highly participatory meeting in which you are tapping into the best wisdom of everyone present.

Think of the givens as defining the space to make a difference, without closing it. For the success of the meeting, it doesn't matter how big or small a circle around the space is created. What matters is that it is truthful and clear. Some leaders that we have worked with say that getting to the clarity needed is the hardest work they have ever done, and they also say that

thinking in this way is something they wished they had done earlier in their careers as they experienced a lot of benefit from this in leading their organizations.

Think of the givens for the meeting as defining the expectation zone so that people can move forward together through the meeting, knowing the parameters that their leaders have set. Keep in mind that in a highly participative meeting, ‘layers of the onion’ will be explored as there are different layers to both opportunities and to challenges.

To assist you in coming up with the givens, we have provided common categories for givens and some hints, considerations, and questions are offered for guidance.

Purpose

(is the purpose of the organization a given or is it open for change?)

Vision

(is the vision of the organization a given or is it open to change?)

Strategic Direction

(is the existing strategic direction of the organization a given or is it open for change?)

In a larger organization, consider the levels of leadership that offer strategic direction. For example, an organization might offer strategic direction and then each business unit develops strategies for how they will achieve their part of the objectives. There could be one given for all of theses levels of strategic direction or there could be multiple givens if the expectation zone is different from one level to another.

Structure including policies and procedures of the organization

(is the existing structure a given or is the structure open for change?)

Please note when answering that structure includes the hierarchical structure which is often the reporting structure, the functional structure which may be different from the reporting structure in

organizations that need cross-cutting work to be accomplished, policies, procedures and job descriptions so the answer of what is given here may differ based on which component of the structure.

Process

(this refers to the process anticipated after the meeting as a result of having had the meeting) This isn't a meeting just for the sake of having had a meeting. It is intended to bring about a change to a culture of development and a culture of wellbeing).

Laws and regulations that apply to the organization.

The answer may be that it is a given that the organization must abide within the laws of the country within which the organization operates. It could also recognize that the organization will invest in lobbying for changes to laws and regulations. When an organization operates in multiple countries, how is this addressed? Is the organization responsible to any regulatory bodies?

Information

(what will happen to the information from the meeting?)

The given about information is usually that it will be read by others who are not at the meeting. In many cases, the given is that the meeting report will be published internally and included in the knowledge management portal. It cannot be a "given" that the reports will be held in confidence unless the place of employment has a confidentiality clause for intellectual property within its terms of employment.

Decision making

(is this a meeting that is for information only, is it to develop action plans, and what is the process for enabling the actions to move forward when the meeting is finished?)

Does there need to be agreement from those at the meeting about actions that will go forward? Is consensus required, can a majority approve, or does approval come through a hierarchy at the end of the meeting or after the meeting? Can items move forward without any further

approval? Can some items move forward without further approval and if so, what are the parameters for this? Must all items for action go forward as recommendations to the leader , or anyone else before they can move forward into action? If this latter is the case, how quickly will the leader or others give feedback –get clarity on the timing for feedback and create this as a “given”. Will actions get assigned to existing work teams or will new cross-functional action teams move actions forward? The answer is probably that action cannot just happen as a result of conversations at the meeting but need to be developed as a proposal for leadershipo to consider. Key here is the commitment of a response time to the proposals e.g.: within two weeks of the meeting.

Resources

(what is the given pertaining to additional resources to support actions proposed during the meeting?)

The answer can be that there are additional resources to support any approved proposals but are limited to… Or the answer could be that there are no additional resources to support the approved proposals and thus it is necessary to figure out how to support these proposals within existing resources.

Financial considerations

(what is the given regarding financial considerations that the people at the meeting must be aware of?)

Must any approved proposed actions from the meeting occur only if they fit within the existing budget, is there extra money available for moving them forward, or are they approved for action only if there is a plan to raise the required resources?

Intellectual property

(what is the given regarding intellectual property?)

If there are conditions of employment dealing with intellectual property, there is a given for these companies that the information from the meeting is considered intellectual property and is not to go to anyone outside of the meeting.

Future accountability

What is the process for follow up to the meeting to ensure that the actions were followed up?

There needs to be a given whereby everyone involved in the meeting receives information about which proposals for action are approved and which are not, as well as next steps.