

Changing the meeting culture of DNP

"We've learned more than just meeting facilitation techniques - we have gained an insight that we use widely in the organization."

Lars Hamann, project manager.

Meaningful meetings

'Parking lot', 'facilitator', 'active participation', 'co-pilot', 'meeting schedule'.

dnp denmark is speaking a new language - a language which is about meetings, facilitation and active participation. A language which demonstrates that meeting culture is now something that concerns employees as well as managers at dnp.

15 managers and employees have been trained in meeting facilitation as part of an in-house training programme. They share tools and experiences in small network groups, and are now the prime change agents in embedding a new meeting culture and new techniques in the organization.

'dnp's meeting wheel' now hangs on the walls of all their meeting rooms. The wheel was developed as part of their change process. The meeting wheel is based on dnp's own values and articulates dnp's attitude to meetings.

Too many meetings?

In recent years there has been an ongoing debate about the meeting culture at dnp. 'We simply have too many meetings' was heard again and again. Meeting procedures and techniques were introduced, but never really caught on.

In the spring of 2010, factory director Carsten Marcussen and communication manager Lars Hamann decided to do something about it.

A snapshot of the meeting culture

In collaboration with Kristina Malthier from Malthier Consulting, dnp designed a change process, which in its first phase would analyse and create a snapshot of the meeting culture at dnp.

The analysis included:

- Observations of a series of meetings across the organization
- Focus group interviews with both meeting facilitators and attendees from all professional groups
- Interviews with managers and employees at dnp
- A tracking of meeting activity in one week

It quickly became clear that the problem at dnp was not necessarily the quantity of meetings, but the quality of the meetings.

The meeting culture in dnp reflects the corporate culture. Strong values of equality and quality meant that meetings often had too many participants, were not actually led by the meeting leader and could end up in lengthy technical discussions.

“The snapshot report and the subsequent presentation to all dnp's employees opened up a much needed debate and reflection on our meeting culture”, explains Lars Hamann

Training

Based on recommendations from the analysis/snapshot phase, dnp and Malthier Consulting jointly developed a training course to suit the needs of dnp.

The training phase included:

- Training of 15 selected employees and managers in facilitation techniques
- A toolbox of facilitation tools
- Developing a common base / code of good meetings (dnp's 'meeting wheel')

The goal was to kick-start a process of change from within by training a group of facilitators who can act as ambassadors and change agents from within. The newly trained facilitators were organized in small network groups to support exchange of knowledge, experience and a common approach to the challenge.

Malthier's approach

We all know the basic principles of good meetings ... so why don't we do it? Dnp already had several meeting procedures and tools, but they were never used.

Malthier's approach to meeting management and meeting culture distinguishes itself from typical approaches, because we do not believe that meeting culture can be changed by sending employees on external courses or introducing new procedures for meetings. We believe that meeting culture and corporate culture are closely linked - and only by articulating and challenging these links can we do something about the culture of meetings. Otherwise we will quickly fall back to business as usual.

In dnp's case, a significant part of the corporate culture was characterized by a strong democratic tradition, based on principles of equality and inspired by the Japanese conflict-avoiding corporate culture. The corporate culture laid the foundation for a meeting culture where leading a meeting or excluding participants was avoided. There was a tendency to invite as many people as possible to the meetings to 'avoid anyone feeling neglected' and to avoid leading a meeting to not 'limit' anyone.

Another part of the corporate culture was a technically driven perfectionist culture closely linked to dnp's production of high quality products. This contributed to a tendency to let technical discussions at meetings take the upper hand because all aspects had to be discussed again and again.

The snapshot analysis revealed these traits and made it possible for both employees and management to challenge them.

The training process itself represented a break with the corporate culture in that the participants were carefully selected based on criteria such as relevance, motivation, and experience, rather than based on organizational roles.

"We've learned more than just meeting facilitation techniques - we have gained an insight that we use widely in the organization. We have already used this insight directly in our job satisfaction surveys. The process has made us aware of the fact that meetings and meeting management

reflects our attitude to leadership roles and the way we manage our business. "

Facts:

The full process included:

- A snapshot analysis of the meeting culture
- A training programme
- Development of the meeting wheel
- A facilitation tool kit

Training programme content:

- Facilitation techniques and tools
- New meeting formats
- Techniques for improving energy and atmosphere
- Exercises
- Reflection

About dnp

dnp denmark is the world's leading supplier of optical projection screens for conference rooms, surveillance, airports and TV studios. dnp denmark exports 99% of its output, employs 92 people and has been based in Karlslunde, Denmark for 20 years.

dnp denmark is part of the Japanese firm Dai Nippon Printing Co.. Ltd. With its 35 factories, 21 divisions, 48,000 employees and revenues exceeding 16 billion U.S. dollars, they are one of the world's largest printing and media companies.