

The unmet, meta-need of organisations



Dr Nick Udall



‘Catalysing
the hum is
a high art of
leadership.’

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by Dr Nick Udall, CEO nowhere

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In an organisational context, meetings are a critical way in which work gets done. They create structure and ideally bring order from chaos. They are the engine room of organisational life, and the human operating system that, for good or ill, runs the show. And yet, many people frequently voice frustration and despair about how ineffective and unproductive their meeting culture is.

From our experience, this view and sentiment is shared all over the world, not only in large corporations, but also in the public sector, NGOs and even SMEs.

So, why is this?

Because it's true.

We see organisations obsessively have back-to-back meetings, sometimes in windowless rooms, sitting at long tables, with laptops out and phones buzzing away, following a death by PowerPoint agenda. Some people are listening, others are not. A few people dominate,

loving the sound of their own voice, and some are not even sure why they are there. A lot of time is spent presenting preconceptions, listening to the regurgitation of old thoughts, and arguing for our own, and each other's, limitations. This keeps everybody stuck and unable to really do anything new. This way of meeting is not only a highly inefficient and unsatisfactory way of working, it is an outdated and totally inadequate way of traversing the volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) world in which we now live and work.

So why do we still tolerate this way of meeting – where people are not fully present, drive their own agendas, don't listen to one another or know how to get the best out of each other? It never evokes the level of creativity, agility and movement that we really want or desire, yet we keep persisting with it.

Whatever the reason, if we want to shift our organisations, the fundamental challenge is to learn how to 'meet' differently.

Meetings are the DNA of organisational life. At their best they catalyse new patterns of thought and action. At their

Meetings are the only stage on which leaders perform.

worst they are gladiatorial forums, exercises in covering our backsides (governance), and ways of controlling and monitoring progress regardless of whether we are going in the right direction. Often, they are tired, agenda-driven rituals, rather than skilful human interactions full of new thought, new conversation and new movement.

Let's face it, we have collectively become stuck in a big rut, where our approach to meetings is taken for granted as a default, rather than seen as a leadership muscle to continually build and strengthen and an organisational capacity to expand.

As with all cultural habits and patterns, many become oblivious to the problem – attending meeting after meeting, blissfully wasting enormous amounts of time, energy and money, in the mistaken belief they are busy achieving things. Or, if they do see the problem, they are as frustrated as hell because they don't know what else to do.

This is happening at all levels in most organisations around the world. Think of the scale of this – the waste of talent, resource and potential. And the literal cost must be vast.

This issue, which starts in the moment, and in every moment that two or more people meet, is a problem of global proportion. It is why transforming 'the way we meet' is arguably the single biggest unmet, meta-need that organisations don't know they need.

What if there was a fundamentally different way?

What if you could save ten percent of your time because you've learned to meet more effectively? What if that number was more like 40 percent? And yet, reclaiming and using time more effectively is just one dimension of this challenge. What if meeting differently also unlocked a whole new level of creativity, and facilitated cleaner, sharper and more joined-up decision making that unleashed greater movement and more innovation? What would that be worth?

Whether they are informal meetings, spontaneous meetings, team meetings, preparation meetings, town hall meetings or conferences; or whether they are creative meetings, strategic meetings or operational meetings ... let's be clear, meetings are the ONLY stage upon which leaders perform their art.

And yet, most leaders have never been taught the basics of meeting craft, let alone any of the higher forms and practices of how people meet. For example, how to open new spaces of possibility, build energetic, relational and strategic containers, tap into a wider collective intelligence, hold creative tension, or surprise people with what they can achieve and co-create, together.

We have all experienced the “hum” at different stages in our lives and work.

A new & next generation of meetings

The enquiry into ‘how people meet’ has been at the heart of **nowhere**’s quest, practice, experiment and community for over twenty years.

Reflecting upon all the amazing leaders, teams and organisations we have had the privilege of working with, and the unbelievably exciting work we have been invited to be a part of all over the world, the one thing that binds them all, and lies at the heart of our practice is ... a fundamentally different way of thinking about, designing and catalysing the way people meet.

By this we don’t mean the plethora of meeting skills, tools and techniques on the market, which all collude with the existing, flawed paradigm. Rather, we mean a new and next generation approach to how we meet that fundamentally shifts how we think about meetings, and the skills we bring to them.

Getting this right tunes the frequency at which teams and organisations operate, creating that amazing ‘hum’ when people feel on purpose and in creative and productive flow.

We have all experienced this ‘hum’ at different points in our lives and work.

In these moments and periods of hum or peak experience:

- our physical, mental, psychological, social, creative and decision-making capacities become magnified
- our creativity, productivity, innovation, collaboration and communication skills go through the roof
- a whole new world of conscious, creative and commercial possibilities opens up
- we are literally able to lean into and co-create the emerging future
- we evoke the best possible version of ourselves and others
- and we become 5x more productive

Catalysing this hum is a high art of leadership.

The challenge is for leaders to learn how to evoke this hum, rather than just stumble upon it.

Catalysing this hum is the high art of leadership.

Summary

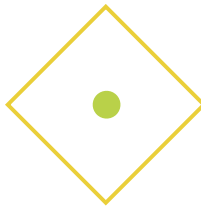
Organisations need to learn 'how to meet' differently – to learn new ways of working, relating, learning and organising.

This is a movement towards a deeper sense of collaboration, purpose, presence; a greater level of creativity and productivity; and the development of a set of liberating-disciplines and skills that can make it so.

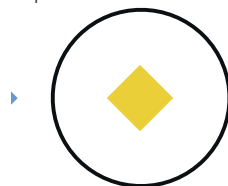
And, it is also about a few simple things (four to be precise) that help create this 'hum'. I will expand on these more fully later in the series, but for now in brief...



The first is **how leaders learn to hold space**, as opposed to take it up.



Second, is how we learn and embed **new ways of working in the moment**, as opposed to being victims of habit and preconception.



Third, is **how senior teams become greater than the sum of their parts** and not less, which is still the norm.



And last, but by no means least, is **how we change the way we think about the humble, everyday 'meeting'**. Change this last one and together we will literally change the world.

This is the first of the hidden series of **nowhere** articles by Dr Nick Udall.

About nowhere

Since the mid nineties, **nowhere** has been working behind the scenes and at the highest levels, with multi-national companies all over the world, tuning the creative frequency at which their cultures operate.

Our 'practice' is born from a unique blend of insight traditions, creative and organisational disciplines and doctoral research, and has over twenty years of development and refinement with some of the biggest brands and inspiring leaders.

It enables us to work in creative partnership with our clients & partners to:

1. **design, catalyse and choreograph breakthroughs** – including breakthrough teams & meetings, strategies & innovations, cultures & journeys.
2. **transform the way they work** so they can breakthrough the cultural ceiling that many organisations all over the world are hitting up against ie. thinking that doing more of the same, but a little bit better, is good enough (it's not), or thinking you can work harder and longer hours (you can't). The challenge is to think, relate, learn and organise differently.

About Dr Nick Udall

Dr Nick Udall is a co-founder and the CEO of **nowhere**, and was a co-founder and the former Chair of the World Economic Forum's Global Agenda Council on New Models of Leadership.

Since the age of 23 Nick has been working with executive leaders of global corporations, choreographing transformation journeys, and designing and catalysing breakthrough strategies and innovations. He also gives evocative talks at different events around the world.