

Conversation Analytics leads to Meeting Democratization and Operational Excellence in a Post-COVID World

Why it makes more sense than ever to leverage machine learning to foster team synergies in corporate operations and technology groups

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Broadly, the aspiration of achieving operational excellence in corporate operations and technology organizations has not been realized. Transparency of knowledge and frictionless, un-siloed flow of information continue to be a challenge.

The ability to digitize operational meetings has now opened exciting possibilities to bridge existing gaps in management practices.

Powow AI Conversation Analytics platform unlocks the traditional meeting paradigm for access and follow-on to all relevant parties regardless of their ability to participate in the actual live event.

Accelerated digital workplace transformation sets the stage for Conversation Analytics

Studies have found that as an executive or team member you are likely to spend 25% to 50% of your time in meetings every day. The total number of meetings in corporate America is humbling, with an estimated 5 billion meeting minutes per day in the US alone. (*VentureBeat April 2020 Chris O'Brien*)

Whether you view them as a necessary evil, or an important management tool – internal corporate meetings are here to stay, a fact emphasized during the recent COVID19 pandemic with remote collaboration tools like Microsoft Teams, Zoom and Slack capturing business news headlines.

As we'll show, this hyper-accelerated digitization of today's workplace (Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella is quoted as saying "we have seen two years of digital transformation in two months") has made the case for unlocking the intrinsic value locked away in meetings ever more compelling, leveraging the latest developments in Conversation Analytics (CA).

Potential value of meetings: organizational learning and operational excellence

So, what is the true business value of meetings? Intuitively, leaders since the dawn of time have understood the need for collaboration, inclusiveness and information sharing to motivate creativity and execution.

One could view meetings as a key means to coordinate and manage teams tasked with implementing transformation initiatives critical for ongoing operations and maintenance of a company's competitive advantage. Since meetings are critical to achieving initiative goals, and in turn to achieving corporate goals, their execution has direct impact on a company's top and bottom line. However, the enormous amount of energy invested in meetings combined with their ineffectiveness prompts us to consider alternative ways to improve meeting effectiveness, dialogue, and increase content visibility.

Looking back at the essence of some business management ideas over the past 30 years, especially in the area of whole system approaches, we can identify key themes which demonstrate the need for an open information exchange in meeting management. For example, one can look at how Edward Deming eventually reframed his seminal Total Quality Management (TQM) theory as 'the transformation of prevailing systems of management' (*The Fifth Discipline Revised and Updated Edition*, Peter M. Senge) to remove the dogma of a hierarchical tyranny and increase the focus on a team driven, systemic view of the corporation to achieve synergies benefitting from a team diversity of thinking.

Another exemplar taking this further is MIT's Peter Senge's mapping of teams' core learning capabilities into 5 Disciplines including: (*The Fifth Discipline Revised and Updated Edition*, Peter M. Senge)

- **Shared vision** – a historically persistent discipline that has been used for thousands of years is still critically important to organizations today. Continuous reiteration of the company vision enhances the ability of team members to better visualize and internalize the meaning of an organization's shared vision.
- **Personal mastery** a more spiritual part of the disciplines is intrinsic to creating a personal vision and the aspiration to reach that vision.
- **Dialogue** – is the starting point for team learning by thinking together about topics.
- **Mental models** – are common internal assumptions that team members share with others and converse around.
- **Understanding complexity** – every outcome is a result of many actions that impact each other. Understanding the system, not individual parts, is required for team learning to happen.

In theory, achieving operational excellence – optimizing cost, quality and cycle time, with direct impact to top and bottom lines – can be attained by focusing on these disciplines. *In practice however, this and other whole-system schools of thought make a core assumption that hasn't been realized: complete transparency of knowledge and frictionless, un-siloed flow of information within the organization. It is the digitization of internal group communications and the meeting domain that has now opened exciting possibilities to attain the goals as described by the Organizational Learning framework.*

Today's meetings destroy value through inefficiency

As mentioned earlier, the reality of today's business meetings is a far cry from "operational excellence". Employee participation in 'back to back' meetings during the day leaves little time for deep thought and creativity, promoting knowledge silos, redundancy, and lack of transparency across the organization. This deluge of meetings creates time constraints for "getting work done" and results in meeting participants using meeting time to respond to emails or do other work unrelated to the meeting at hand.

Historically, to share information and drive progress, the team had to come together for a meeting, pay attention, participate, and leave to perform takeaways. The follow-on depended critically on the active interpretation, digestion, and distribution of meeting content by the Project Manager (PM), an analyst, or another meeting facilitating designee. If you were not invited to the meeting, tough luck. Same if you did not pay attention or if your key point did not make the meeting minutes.

Getting meetings wrong is easy:

- **Hard to invite just the right participants:** Research shows that the more people you invite, the more productivity declines.
- **Weak agenda, purpose and goals:** Every meeting needs to have an agenda with a clear purpose and goals. Without an agenda, there's not much preventing the meeting from turning into a great social gathering.
- **Dogmatic time management:** a 30-minute meeting is often equally, or more, productive than an hour-long meeting if it is planned well.
- **Poor documentation of Actions, Issues and other Items like 'Parking Lot' entries:** Every meeting should have items of importance published to clearly outline what transpired and what needs to be accomplished and overcome as well as who is responsible for them.
- **Inconsistent follow up:** without follow up challenges are not overcome and agreed actions not completed.

The results are typical and value-destroying:

- Information in meetings is siloed and not transparent to other team members
- Gaps and inconsistencies in memory around what transpired during past meetings
- Meeting minutes take excessive time to prepare
- Lack of factual dialogue around key points in the meeting
- Lack of goal achievement

The stars align to unlock meetings' contribution to systemic and operational excellence

Today's mass-digitalization of the workplace and team collaboration, along with voice transcription and Natural Language Processing (NLP) advances, provide the final ingredient to redefining meetings as critical value drivers". These three advances complete the conversation analytics trinity of digitize, transcribe, and analyze, finally unlocking the democratization of meeting content, the last bastion of hidden information.

CA can now help organizations truly learn, break down knowledge siloes, and drive operational excellence in ways not possible before:

- **Shared vision** – with visibility into all meetings across the enterprise, a clearer picture of how efforts are aligned with the vision becomes evident to all.
- **Personal mastery** – exposure to the variety of problem solving approaches revealed in the myriad of unstructured conversations across different areas of the organization provides a learning opportunity

and allows employees to develop their personal vision by experiencing firsthand what others are aspiring to through their continuous communication.

- **Dialogue** – exposing the dialogue in meetings and enabling an enduring, broad dialogue after live meetings conclude is exponentially more inclusive.
- **Understanding complexity** – scanning the horizon across all meetings unlocks deeper understanding of the inter relationships between parts of the whole than ever before.

The ability of CA to convert unstructured communications into structured information allows for significant program management efficiencies. One example of this is the facilitation and automation of the process of meeting minutes. Another is the scaling of meetings an executive can now “attend” by consuming meeting digests and analytics in a non-serial, offline manner, rather than in-person. Follow-up with actual meeting attendees can take place post-fact with direct references to meeting content with the appropriate immediacy. Sentiment analytics are able to identify emotionally charged positive and negative moments in a meeting, allowing managers to focus on key highlights and lowlights that transpired.

Moreover, many of the meeting ills addressed earlier can be removed:

- *Actual, live meeting attendance can be limited to the critical core, allowing for much more effective communication and interaction. Others can virtually “attend” after the fact by consuming highly structured summaries in a very efficient manner.*
- *AI-gleaned key meeting items such as activities, issues, and questions are captured more comprehensively and clearer focus on follow-on actions.*
- *Semantic topical analyses can allow highlighting areas of the meeting that pertain to topics of interest to individual teams and members, again allowing the “attendee” to focus only on those parts of the meeting relevant to them (leveraging NLP algorithms to detect closeness in meaning rather than keyword search).*
- *Meeting minutes can be compiled without delay and distributed in a consistent format with unprecedented traceability to the original source, promoting transparency, establishing accountability, and allowing comprehensive tracking of key follow-on items.*

Some immediate ramifications:

- *Dialogue* – no longer is what occurred in the meeting going to the archives, rather, it becomes the basis for dialogue among team members
- *Collaboration* – being able to comment on key meeting ideas post meeting allows thoughts to be shared in a much broader way across the organization.
- *Insights* – ideas generated in meetings can be built upon by others in the organization and collaborated on. Less redundancy due to duplication and more synergy building on each other’s ideas.
- *Contribution* – the number of participants can be limited to attendees that have contributions while others are still able to engage in dialogue.
- *Focus* – participants that need to be in the meeting will be more focused, up to date on key topic, and generally ready to think creatively

Conclusion

Meetings make up a significant portion of employee and executive work time – this time can be transformed from value and culture-killers to core drivers of organizational learning and business competitiveness. CA unlocks the traditional meeting paradigm for access and follow-on to all relevant parties regardless of their ability to be participate in the actual live event.

Meeting democratization will change the way employees view the purpose of meetings. It will be used for greater meeting and organization objectives with greater reach and collaboration.

CA has already demonstrated commercial viability in the space of sales function effectiveness, driving billions of dollars of top line improvements in the US. With the latest push into mass digitization of workplace collaboration along with AI and voice transcription tech advances, the time is ripe to apply CA to operations and technology functionality and reap comparable excellence gains.

To learn more, please go to www.powow.ai; email Info@powow.ai.



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