

The No Windows Principle

VP Meeting Operating Guide

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01

Overview

Put your VPs in a room with no windows.

Not literally (I mean... unless they deserve it). But structurally. Design a space where no one is worried about optics or busy rehearsing the message they're "cascading" down.

Because the reality is this: the moment people can see how a conversation will be interpreted outside the room, the conversation changes. It gets safer, more "aligned." More yes's... and a lot less truth.

This is the No Windows Principle. It applies to every executive meeting where real decisions need to happen.

The Read

Executive meetings should be environments for disagreement... and long enough for people to get comfortable telling the truth. Most leaders are trained to reduce conflict. They rush to agreement. A quick "disagree and commit." The result? Faster agreement on weaker truth, disguised as decisions.

Most organizations have a truth infrastructure problem. The rooms where senior leaders convene are built for alignment and speed. Honest conversations need something different.

The cost shows up three months later. A strategy no one actually believed in. A hire everyone knew was wrong. A reorganization that solved the wrong problem. By then, nobody connects it back to that Thursday morning meeting where everyone nodded instead of naming what they saw.

Who This Is For

Senior leaders and Heads of HR who want to turn leadership gatherings into productive meetings.

02

The Framework & Operating Rules

FOR THE FACILITATOR Designing the Room

Four design choices the person running the room makes *before* anyone walks in.

1

Remove the Audience

No live notes outside the room. No cascade drafting in real time. When leaders feel watched, they perform.

2

Extend the Clock

You need more time than you think. If you schedule 45 minutes, you'll finally get into the groove at minute 30. Block 90.

3

Separate Decision from Discussion

If people know a decision is being made in the same meeting, they position and they hedge. Surface what's true. Decide separately.

4

Make Dissent Structural, Not Personal

Assign someone to argue the opposite position so disagreement doesn't depend on one brave person.

FOR THE PARTICIPANTS Operating Norms

Four norms the room agrees to *before* opening the agenda. Plus the three roles people play once they're in it.

NORM 01

Most Senior Speaks Last

The highest-ranking person speaks after everyone else has weighed in. Senior voices anchor too quickly.

NORM 02

Silence Is Not Agreement

If someone hasn't spoken, they haven't agreed. Verbal confirmation required from every voice.

NORM 03

Name What's Uncomfortable

If you can feel the tension, the room can too. Naming defuses. Ignoring metastasizes.

NORM 04

The 10-Minute Rule

Last 10 minutes are reserved for one question: "What did we not say?" Don't let it get cut.

Facilitator

Protects the process. Creates the conditions to surface unspoken tension.

Decision Owner

Listens and absorbs the full picture. Makes the call after the room has spoken.

Dissent Lead

Assigned to argue the strongest case against the prevailing direction.

A Note on "Disagree and Commit"

A shortcut to end conversations that haven't actually been had. Real disagree-and-commit requires that the disagreement was fully surfaced, genuinely heard, and acknowledged before the commit happens. If it takes 90 seconds, it wasn't real disagreement.

03

The Meeting Checklist

BEFORE THE MEETING

- Distribute the pre-read**
Live time shouldn't be spent in read-outs. It should be spent in discussion, debate, and disagreement.
- Assign the three roles**
Facilitator, Decision Owner, Dissent Lead. Named before the meeting starts.
- Block 90 minutes minimum**
If the meeting is under an hour, you've designed for the polished version. Give truth time to show up.
- No live notes outside the room**
Confirm up front. Synthesis and cascade (if needed) happen after, not during.

DURING THE MEETING

- Open with the central question, not a recommendation**
Frame what you're trying to figure out, not what you've already decided. Recommendations anchor the room before it can think.
- Facilitator names the tension and creates conditions to surface it**
"I'm hearing two different reads. Let's stay in the gap before we close it."
- Dissent Lead presents the case against**
Mid-meeting, not an afterthought.
- Protect the last 10 minutes: "What did we not say?"**
The highest-value moment of the meeting. Don't let it get squeezed by agenda overruns.

AFTER THE MEETING

- Decision Owner synthesizes and communicates separately**
The cascade is crafted after the thinking is done.
- Name what was disagreed on and how it was resolved**
Acknowledge the tension, the tradeoffs, and what led to the final call.
- Check for commitment, not just compliance**
Ask each leader privately: "Do you believe in this direction, or are you going along with it?"
- Retro the meeting itself quarterly**
Is the room getting more honest over time? Are people bringing harder problems?

04 · A CLOSING NOTE

"The leader's job is not to reduce conflict. It's to increase the amount of disagreement that can safely exist in the room."

wrkhappy builds Leadership & Performance Infrastructure for scaling companies. If your exec room is producing alignment without conviction, that's where we start: ash@wrkhappy.co