

## STRATEGY MEETINGS IN A VIRTUAL WORLD



### **A new kind of meeting that revolutionizes the way you manage global teams**

#### **The Issue**

Having undergone a significant organizational change, our customer, a global Information Technology company, was also in the process of reshaping its approach to the market. There had already been a large and very expensive international kick off event, but concern remained that more regular quarterly and even monthly regional meetings were needed to ensure effective execution and to stay on track. Budget restrictions meant that regular face-to-face meetings – involving travel and accommodation expenses – were out of the question. This was an issue that had concerned the company for some time: it was widely recognized, for example, that a recent product launch had not been as effective as it might have been because budgets were not available to enable regional sales and training meetings to support the campaign.

#### **The Challenge**

How could the company combine the cost and logistical benefits of virtual meetings with the impact and energy of a face-to-face event? Its experience of live virtual meetings was that they did not generate the excitement and inspiration that high production values and staging bring to typical face-to-face events. Its experience of the stereotypical ‘webinar’, at audience sizes of 40 – 60 people, was that they became one-way communication. There was none of the interactivity that would enable the participating managers to collaborate, solve problems and get real engagement. Breakout sessions during the meetings, for example, proved clumsy and unworkable in a webinar environment. Additionally, there was a need to occasionally involve the company’s senior subject matter experts and global

executives in these meetings; this has always proved to be very difficult.

### **The Solution**

Illustra is unique in the way that it brings together software engineers, instructional designers, expert coaches and high level production people to design new technologies, methodologies and approaches for live virtual training and coaching. It's an innovative technology company as well as a training company. Now the experience gained from designing and delivering many thousands of hours of highly innovative interactive training was been turned towards the development of a completely new form of live virtual meeting.

Illustra ran an initial "proof of concept" pilot for this customer with shared costs and risk. The event involved 56 people. It included 56 managers from all over the world, two senior executives, 3 internal subject matter experts and an Illustra expert coach. Key features of the pilot were:

- Participants were moved in and out of plenary and breakout sessions as they would be in traditional face-to-face events. This time, however, the switches took place in an instant, rather than taking from 5 to 15 minutes.
- During both plenary and breakout sessions participants engaged in a variety of different interactive individual and team activities.
- There were live video feeds from expert coaches, senior executives and senior subject matter experts from different parts of the world
- One senior executive and one representative from a major partner organization were unable to make a live contributions, so their inputs were made as recorded video
- Senior managers, coaches and subject matter experts were able to monitor participants inputs and activities in real time – so they could gauge levels of understanding, concerns and issues, responding with relevant feedback and inputs
- Results from individual and team activities were instantly collated to be shared and discussed in both plenary and breakout sessions throughout the meeting.
- All participating managers created individual action plans to address specific KPIs and objectives during the meeting. The plans would be reviewed and discussed with their own directors and with coaches and subject matter experts during subsequent virtual meetings
- The entire event, which included video clips and animation, was orchestrated and staged for maximum impact to generate inspiration and engagement, and a real feeling of excitement.
- The results and inputs from all of the activities were immediately available as a report that was distributed to all participants and senior management after the meeting.

### **The Result**

Senior executives were highly impressed by the level of engagement generated during the meeting. In particular they were impressed by the way that the entire

global management community was able to work together on key issues and share best practices regarding the execution of the company's new strategy. It was felt that the coaching provided during the meeting focused managers on the kind of leadership that was required from them if they were to succeed in enabling their teams to execute the strategy. Some important innovations and resolutions to key issues emerged from the work that managers did on their own action plans during the virtual meeting. It has already been decided that many of these innovations should be adopted across the organization. The company has decided to schedule quarterly meeting for this group of managers utilizing this new format across the rest of the year. It is also exploring doing this kind of meeting with other groups of its managers. Additionally, it is now adopting this new format for the design and delivery of one of its key management training programs

### **What Participants Say**

"I was really surprised how good it was – my congratulations to the whole team. We got so much input from all the participants. I never thought I would say it but it may have been better than the face-to-face meetings. Thank you."

"First experience of virtual meeting of this kind. I've been impressed by the technology."

"I learned a lot from the session, also learned a lot from my peers during group discussions. It is indeed great workshop, hope it can be implemented across the market."

"Great experience, very satisfied and looking forward to testing out what I learned in the field – Thank you."

"First time doing one of these courses and really like the idea of overcoming the location of everybody involved by splitting into teams and getting people engaged."