

GUIDE TO

AUTONOMY

*A catalyst for enthusiasm and
professional well-being*

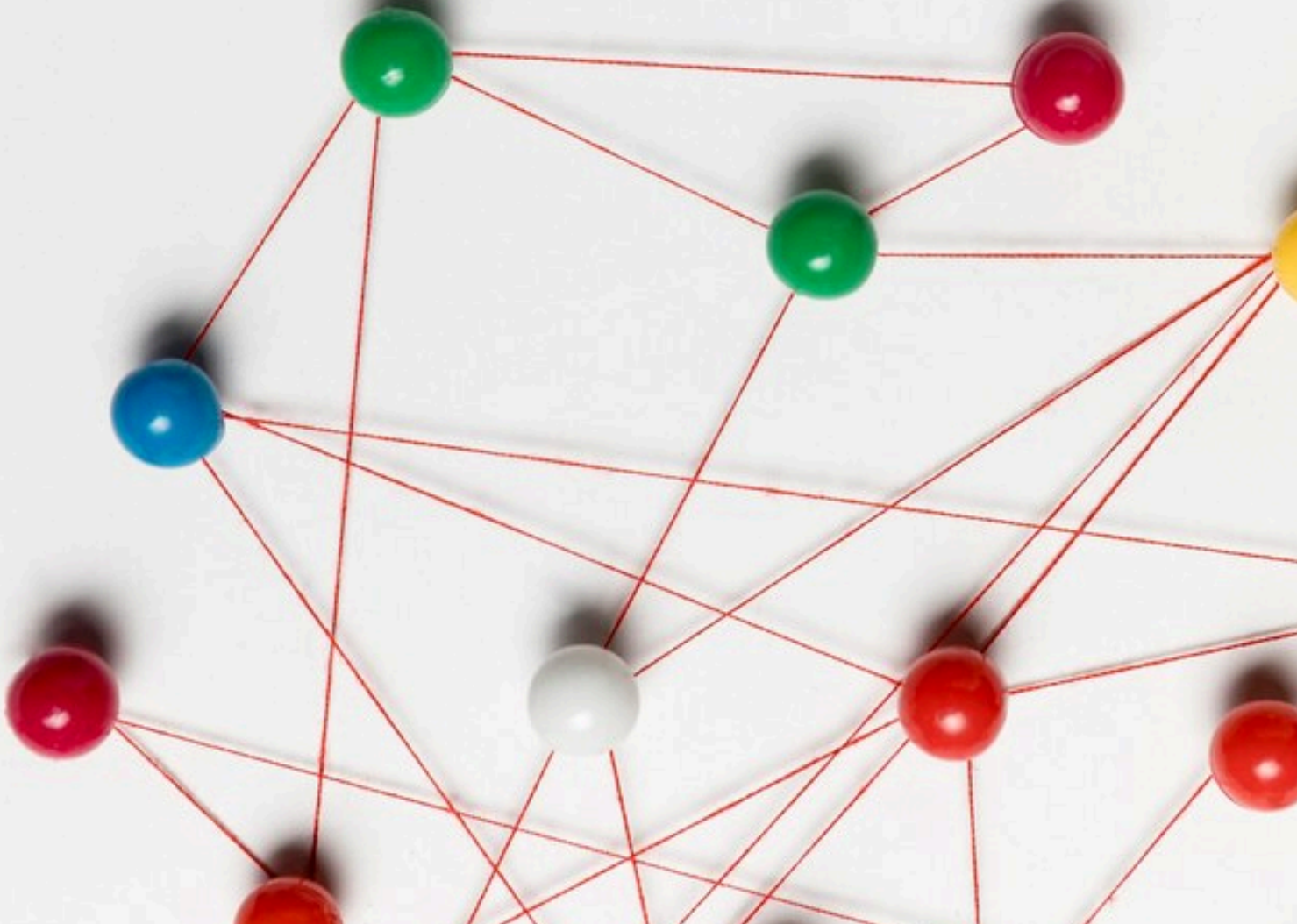


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INTRODUCTION

In today's constantly evolving work landscape, autonomy has emerged as a key element for organizational success.

Abandoning rigid hierarchical models in favor of a more autonomous approach allows individuals to act with *proactivity, responsibility, and creativity, generating a widespread positive impact.*

The need to provide autonomy to individuals arises from the necessity to:

- Adapt to a constantly evolving work environment;
- Attract and retain talent;
- Stimulate innovation and creativity;
- Promote employee well-being;
- Adopt more modern and effective leadership styles.

Autonomy in the workplace is not just a matter of freedom of choice. It is a matter of *trust and empowerment.*

When people feel they have control over their work, they are more likely to take initiative, innovate, and feel more engaged in their roles.

The consequence?



Greater job satisfaction and increased productivity for the company.

By embracing autonomy, companies can unlock the potential of their team members, fostering growth, innovation, and long-term success.

A significant example comes from a study by *Harvard Business Review*, which shows that **people with greater autonomy** at work not only report higher levels of job satisfaction but also show improvement of **20%** in their performances.

In addition, research by the *American Psychological Association* also indicates that companies that promote autonomy among their employees see an increase in overall job performance and employee well-being.

+15% in engagement

-20% in turnover rates

But how exactly do you grant autonomy to a team, and why is it so important?



Clear Definition of Goals

Establishing clear and shared goals allows people to understand what is expected of them and gives them the freedom to decide how to achieve these goals.



Flexibility in Work Methods

Providing individuals with the flexibility to choose where and when to work, as well as whom to collaborate with, helps create a more adaptable and motivating work environment.



Adequate Support and Resources

Ensure that all team members have access to the necessary resources and receive adequate support to carry out their tasks. In the current context, characterized by rapid technological changes and increasing market complexity, work autonomy is more essential than ever.



Continuous Feedback

A regular feedback system helps everyone stay aligned with business goals and encourages continuous improvement.

In the current context, characterized by rapid technological changes and increasing market complexity, work autonomy is more essential than ever.

Bringing autonomy into companies, therefore, represents a **fundamental paradigm shift** in the current work landscape.

Autonomy does not just mean granting more freedom.

It also means **building a company culture based on trust, support, and mutual commitment**.

And it is no longer just a simple benefit; it is a fundamental component for a productive and satisfying work environment.

This approach allows organizations to tackle future challenges with greater agility and resilience, preparing them to thrive in an increasingly dynamic work ecosystem.

TRAFFIC LIGHT VS ROUNDABOUT: DRIVING WITH CONTEXT

Providing autonomy to people is not just a progressive practice but a strategic necessity that leads to greater:

- *Motivation*
- *Innovation*
- *Productivity*
- *Well-being*

But how can we nurture this autonomy?

The answer lies in creating a context that facilitates self-direction rather than imposing rigid and static guidelines.

Imagine for a moment that you are driving in an unfamiliar city. In front of you are two traffic control systems: *the traffic light* and *the roundabout*.



The **traffic light**, with its directive commands — red, yellow, green — tells us exactly when to stop and when to go. It is a system based on **content**, where the rules are predetermined and do not require interpretation by the driver.

The **roundabout**, on the other hand, is based on **context**. There are no light signals commanding us directly, but we have to interpret the situation ourselves: observe the traffic flow, evaluate the right moment to enter and exit, and cooperate with other drivers.

In this scenario, each driver becomes an active participant in the decision-making process, exercising autonomy within a defined framework.



Translating this parallel into the business world, we can see how creating a favorable context can nurture employee autonomy.

Instead of providing detailed instructions for every possible scenario (an impractical approach in a *dynamic and rapidly evolving work environment*), companies can outline guiding principles and core values that act as "roundabouts" for decision-making.

In other words, in a business environment that prioritizes autonomy, employees are encouraged to navigate daily challenges by relying on their judgment rather than strictly adhering to fixed protocols.

Recent studies highlight the effectiveness of this approach.

Research conducted by *Gallup* revealed that companies with a high degree of team autonomy report **21%** higher productivity compared to those with more rigid management models.

Driving with CONTEXT in Practice

Here are some practical tips:



Define Clearly the Company Vision and Values

These should be effectively communicated at all levels of the organization, becoming the reference point for every decision. This may seem complicated in practice, but by introducing 3-4 key behavioral competencies evaluated during performance reviews, this abstract concept can become a concrete reality for the entire organization.



Foster a Culture of Trust

Encourage employees to take initiatives, experiment, and, yes, even fail. Deep learning often stems from mistakes.



Invest in Training

Equip teams with the tools and skills to interpret the context and act accordingly.



Promote Cross-Communication

Create spaces and opportunities where information flows freely, fostering collaboration and the sharing of ideas.

This way of working promotes internal entrepreneurship. Employees are encouraged to explore new solutions and approaches, enhancing the company's ability to adapt and innovate. No one within an organization is better equipped to make decisions on a subject than those who deal with the situation daily.

THE STRATEGY: WHERE WE WANT TO GO

Imagine 2 types of companies:



Those that *define the strategy accurately and in detail through pages and pages of documents* (which then sit on shelves or in drawers gathering dust).



Those very focused on *execution* where the only imperative is “to do,” and the strategy is a vague element to be set aside.

Despite their differences, both types have in common the fact that:

they want their teams and people within the organization to be autonomous in carrying out their work.

Similarly, both (again) fail to achieve this goal for a common reason:

people and teams struggle to understand which decisions to make.

To ensure that **people and teams are autonomous**, it is necessary for everyone in the organization to be able to make decisions quickly and based on clear directions when faced with a decision.

In neither case, however, is this possible.



In the first case, the definition of the strategy is so complex that it cannot be assimilated and made their own by the people.



In the second case, since it is not clear and defined, people struggle or never fully understand it.

Let's invert this perspective for a moment.

Imagine a company with a strategy so intuitive that it can be understood by everyone at every level of the organization.

This fosters team autonomy because it becomes the guiding light that directs every decision towards common goals.

By the way, some studies show that organizations with clear and simple strategies enjoy **greater efficiency and employee engagement**.

According to a survey by *Bain & Company*, among others, companies that apply principles of strategic simplification achieve:

+35% in employee satisfaction;

+30% in decision-making speed.

To counteract the tendency towards complexity, innovative methods like the “*Even Over*” approach and “*Strategic Statements*” are emerging.

These tools transform strategy into clear and practical guiding principles, **enabling everyone to interpret and act autonomously** while remaining aligned with the company's goals.

| *Even Over*: this formula places two elements in a priority relationship.

For example: “*Innovation even over operational efficiency.*”

Both elements are desirable and positive, and framing the strategy with even over statements makes it clear to everyone within the organization which element to prioritize when making a decision of that type.

| *Strategic Statements*: concise phrases that outline the company's priorities and core values.

Examples might include:

- “*Our priority is customer satisfaction through continuous innovation.*”
- “*We value collaboration over internal competition.*”

How can you implement this in your Organization?



Decide How Your Strategy Is Defined

Create a template for defining the strategy both in terms of process and output. Decide on the process you want to use, how it is written, and how it is communicated.



Alignment Workshop

Organize dedicated workshops to translate the strategy into “Even Over” principles or “Strategic Statements” or other simple ways of communicating it, involving representatives from every level of the organization. This ensures that everyone understands what has been decided and the direction to follow.



The 3 Cs: Communicate, Communicate, Communicate

Use infographics and diagrams to visually represent the strategy, making it accessible and understandable to everyone. Include the statements or strategy in the company's shared tools so that they are always accessible to everyone.



Be OK When It's Not OK

Decisions don't always produce the desired results. In these cases, reinforce the process you have put in place: through well-structured feedback (which we will discuss in more detail later), understand which decision did not work and why, transfer the learnings to the entire organization, and condense them.



Constantly Review Your Strategy

Another problematic idea about strategy is that once defined, it remains unchanged. It is absolutely necessary to review, validate, and update it constantly, both in its main part and in the communication we use. Schedule regular reviews of your strategy and its communication, and repeat alignment workshops after these reviews if necessary.

FROM STRATEGY TO ACTION

After outlining the importance of a clear and understandable strategy, we have only laid the foundation. Now it's time to build the house: **transforming the strategy into concrete operational actions.**

According to a study by Strategy& conducted on over 6,000 companies, **74%** of top managers interviewed believe that their company has not converted the strategy into concrete actions.

According to the same study, another **74%** believe that their strategy requires them to work on too many priorities at the same time.

How to Address These Issues?



The key lies in providing teams and individuals with a compass that guides their daily decisions and keeps them always oriented towards achieving strategic objectives.

There are many structured approaches for strategy execution; among them are **OKRs** (Objectives and Key Results). This framework is very useful due to its effectiveness in linking vision and action.

This method, adopted by more and more companies across various sectors and sizes, allows for the establishment of clear objectives (Objectives) and the measurement of results (Key Results) in a quantifiable way.

OKRs serve as a bridge between high-level strategic vision and daily actions.

OKRs have the ability (if managed well) to provide clear and measurable direction while leaving room for flexibility in the approach to achieving the objectives.

In short, they are capable of showing the "what" and the "why" while allowing ample space for a flexible approach to the "how."

In Practice:



From the strategic priorities, we derive organizational OKRs - also known as strategic OKRs.



Strategic OKRs are a question that organizational leadership poses to its teams: *"This is what we want to achieve in the next period, how do you intend to contribute?"*



At this point, teams respond to the question by creating their own OKRs (team, department, function) based on the Strategic OKRs, known as tactical OKRs.



The two sets of OKRs are then aligned (no cascading, no impositions) through various methods and techniques depending on the organizational context.



Once all OKRs have been defined, the implementation begins by defining initiatives and adopting rituals that allow for constant monitoring and rapid adaptation.

Working in this way allows:

- Teams to always have a clear understanding of the direction in which they are heading and how they are contributing to the company's success.
- Each person to understand how their work contributes to the team's and the organization's goals.
- Everyone within the organization to evaluate the actions to be taken based on how they contribute to achieving the objective, both through the progress they make and the learnings they provide (this is **autonomy**).

Teams adopt OKRs that allow them to be autonomous while remaining aligned with the company's goals and defined execution.

Each team member, knowing the direction and success parameters, can make informed and aligned decisions with the overall strategy, working with greater independence and confidence.



However, let us not forget that transforming strategy into action is not a linear path but requires a holistic approach that integrates vision, clear and measurable objectives, and a deep sense of purpose.

OKRs represent a powerful tool in this process, but their effectiveness depends on the ability to communicate and share the vision that guides every action.

[Download Our
OKR White Paper](#)

FEEDBACK

One thing is certain!

If we don't communicate what we are doing well and what we are doing poorly, it will be impossible to improve. This simple concept underscores the necessity and power of *feedback*.

Without an effective feedback mechanism, the risk is navigating without the ability to constantly adapt.

Continuous feedback serves as a guide, ensuring that every team member not only understands the direction but also has a precise understanding of how they are contributing and what they can improve on.

Everything revolves around a fundamental concept: **psychological safety**.

When people feel safe sharing ideas and concerns, feedback becomes a bridge for learning and innovation.

Moreover, in this environment, feedback is not seen as criticism but as opportunities for growth.

Relating to the OKR framework discussed earlier, feedback plays a crucial role in refining and adjusting objectives and targets.

Continuous retrospectives enable dynamic alignment with the business strategy, ensuring that OKRs remain relevant and challenging.

Feedback is not a tool for correction but a guide towards:

- Autonomy
- Innovation
- Sustainable growth.

By creating an environment where feedback is valued and practiced regularly, companies can unlock the hidden potential within their teams, promoting a culture of continuous improvement, shared responsibility, and the acceptance and sharing of failure as a growth tool.

Implementing a feedback system, however, can be challenging, especially in business contexts where this practice is not part of the corporate reality.

It is no coincidence, in fact, that the fundamental point to understand is that **the feedback space belongs to the receiver.**

Some practices that can guide us:



360-Degree Feedback

Encourage feedback from multiple sources—peer-to-peer, bottom-up, and top-down—for a holistic view of performance and behavior. Establishing a feedback process requires commitment at all organizational levels. Involving leadership to set an example and promote an environment where feedback is celebrated as an opportunity leads to an agile and proactive corporate culture.

Sessions must be organized around this core concept, and people's approach to these sessions should be calibrated accordingly.



Regular Retrospective Sessions

Establish fixed times for feedback, integrating them into the company routine, to ensure they become part of the culture rather than exceptions.



Digital Tools and Platforms

Using platforms dedicated to feedback can facilitate collection and analysis, making the process more accessible and less intimidating.



Feedback Training

Investing in training people on how to give and receive constructive feedback can significantly improve the quality of interactions.

Feedback and its proper management are not just tools for improving individual performance but also powerful levers for enhancing people's autonomy.

By creating a positive work environment based on trust, transparency, and mutual respect, companies can encourage their employees to:

- Develop their potential
- Make autonomous decisions
- Actively contribute to the company's success.

The connection between feedback and autonomy is a two-way process.



On one hand, well-managed feedback provides people with the tools and support necessary to develop their autonomy.



On the other hand, people who work autonomously are more willing to seek out and accept feedback, creating a virtuous cycle of continuous growth and improvement.

ROLE CLARITY

For autonomy to be truly effective and not lead to confusion or task overlap, it is essential to have a **clear definition of roles** within the organization.

Within an organization, precisely establishing responsibilities and expectations for each position not only facilitates operational efficiency but also lays the foundation for a harmonious and productive work environment.

When every team member knows exactly their contribution and how it fits into the company's broader vision, it creates a synergy that accelerates the achievement of shared goals.

SKnowing precisely "who does what" and "what can I expect from whom" is the first step towards creating a work environment where autonomy can yield great results.

This clarity helps to:

- Define responsibilities
- Avoid misunderstandings
- Ensure that every team member knows their tasks and those of others.

In this way, delegating tasks and responsibilities becomes easier, allowing people to feel more involved and accountable in their work.

When each individual knows their boundaries and those of others, it fosters a climate of mutual trust, essential for harmonious and productive teamwork.

This **trust**, in turn, promotes a sense of security that encourages taking initiative and exercising autonomy without fear of overstepping limits or conflicting with colleagues.

Moreover, the clear definition of roles facilitates communication within the organization.

Knowing whom to approach for specific issues or whom to involve in particular projects simplifies decision-making processes and speeds up the implementation of business strategies.

This aspect is particularly relevant in an increasingly agile and dynamic work environment, where speed and efficiency in communication are essential.

For autonomy and clear role definition to be truly beneficial for the organization, an approach that does not rely on control is necessary.

Several studies have highlighted the positive connection between role clarity, autonomy, and various metrics of business performance.

Among these:

53% The *Effectory* research has shown that people with a clear understanding of their roles are 53% more efficient and 27% more effective compared to those experiencing role ambiguity. Furthermore, overall job performance improves by 25% when there is clarity in roles. This clarity not only enhances efficiency but also improves trust among colleagues and job satisfaction, making people more passionate about their work.

79% A study by *BetterUp* found that individuals who enjoy autonomy tend to be more motivated and productive. Autonomy at work is associated with greater job satisfaction, problem-solving abilities, and skill development. Specifically, 79% of autonomous individuals report feeling more valued and having greater opportunities for growth and leadership development.

But how are roles clearly defined in companies?



Role Description Definition

Start by creating or updating role descriptions based on the activities performed within the organization. It usually works best to begin with operational tasks rather than filling in boxes on an organizational chart. Ensure each description is clear, concise, and realistic.



Workflow and Interdependence Mapping

Develop a visual map that illustrates how various roles within the organization intersect and collaborate to achieve business objectives. This helps clearly identify where each person's responsibilities begin and end, and how different roles contribute to the overall workflow.



Orientation and Training Session Implementation

Organize regular orientation sessions for new hires and training sessions for all employees, focusing on understanding roles and responsibilities. These sessions may also include simulation exercises or role-playing to help individuals better understand their own tasks and those of their colleagues.



Establish Clear Goals and Evaluation Metrics

Ensure there are clear metrics to assess success in fulfilling role responsibilities. This not only provides clear guidance for the individual but also helps objectively monitor and evaluate performance.



Dynamic Role Review Based on Business or Market Changes

Role definition is a continuous and dynamic process that should begin with an understanding of what we do today and yet be flexible enough to adapt to future changes. There is no need to define roles in a detailed and engineering-like manner from the outset, focusing on the smallest task details. The dynamic nature of our work environments will soon render this type of exercise obsolete. Therefore, it's essential to be prepared to regularly review and update roles to ensure they remain aligned with the evolving needs of the team and organization. This approach ensures the clarity needed to avoid friction and waste of time and resources.



Open Communication and Continuous Feedback

Promote a culture of open communication where individuals feel free to ask questions about their roles and responsibilities. Implement a continuous feedback system through which everyone can regularly receive and provide feedback on performance, roles, and expectations. As mentioned earlier, this helps clarify any ambiguities and adjust expectations based on the evolving needs of the organization.

A clear definition of roles within an organization is like the code that keeps a complex system well-oiled and functioning at its best.

This clarity transforms potential chaos into dynamic order, allowing each individual to navigate their growth path confidently and contribute consciously and effectively to the organization's future.

Role clarity, therefore, is not just a matter of internal organization; it is the engine that drives a vibrant and resilient corporate ecosystem, where collective success is built on individual excellence and team synergy.

It appears clear at this point that role clarity is a critical factor that can determine the success or failure of a project.

But let's delve even further into the benefits of this clarity.

According to research conducted by *Gallup*, teams that have a **clear understanding of roles and expectations are 2.8 times more likely to perform well.**

This demonstrates how vital it is for everyone to know exactly what is expected of them and how their work contributes to the overall goals of the organization and the team.

Furthermore, having well-defined roles not only improves efficiency and productivity but can also lead to greater *job satisfaction* and *commitment*.

A study conducted by the *American Psychological Association* found that **workers who clearly understand their roles and responsibilities report significantly lower levels of stress and are 23% more likely to remain in the organization.**

Therefore, by promoting autonomy and independence among team members through transparent roles with well-defined authority and responsibilities, every work context will naturally experience an immediate increase in motivation, engagement, and performance, while simultaneously reducing absenteeism.

With operational team members empowered to make decisions, the group navigates bureaucratic obstacles more agilely, becoming more responsive to sudden changes and customer needs. It becomes a place where each member knows exactly what to do and how their contribution fits into the larger corporate mosaic.

MEETINGS THAT WORK

Last but certainly not least, meetings: the key to autonomy and concrete results.

Despite the (sometimes excessive) number of meetings we attend, we still approach them with a certain casualness. In the workplace, they are often perceived as necessary but tedious, more of an obligation than an opportunity.

Let's see what people are saying:

71% of executives say that meetings are generally unproductive.
(*Harvard Business Report*)

399 billion per year.
Is the cost of ineffective meetings, considering only the USA.
(*Otter*)

Some people would rather go to the dentist than attend a meetings (*Better Meetings*).

Yet:

Meetings are one of the fundamental elements for promoting autonomy and effective decision-making within organizations.

These moments should be designed with the purpose of:

- Facilitating the flow of information;
- Sharing ideas;
- Making quick and efficient decisions.

To achieve this, **every meeting should have:**



A clear objective;



Carefully selected participants;



A structure that promotes interaction and collaboration.

A change in perspective can make all the difference!

Instead of compiling an agenda of topics to discuss, start with defining the strategic objectives of the meeting.

Ask yourself:

"What specific results do we want to achieve by the end of this session?"

This approach helps maintain focus on business outcomes, ensuring that each meeting contributes tangibly to the organization's overall goals.

Meetings can become more efficient when participants have the authority to make decisions without waiting for approval from higher levels. This accelerates decision-making processes and enables issues to be addressed and resolved swiftly.

Let's now delve into the details and explore how to transform ineffective meetings into ones that truly serve a purpose.

1

Create a catalog of meeting **types**.

What types of meetings to hold (e.g., operational, governance, 1-to-1, retrospectives, etc.)?

2

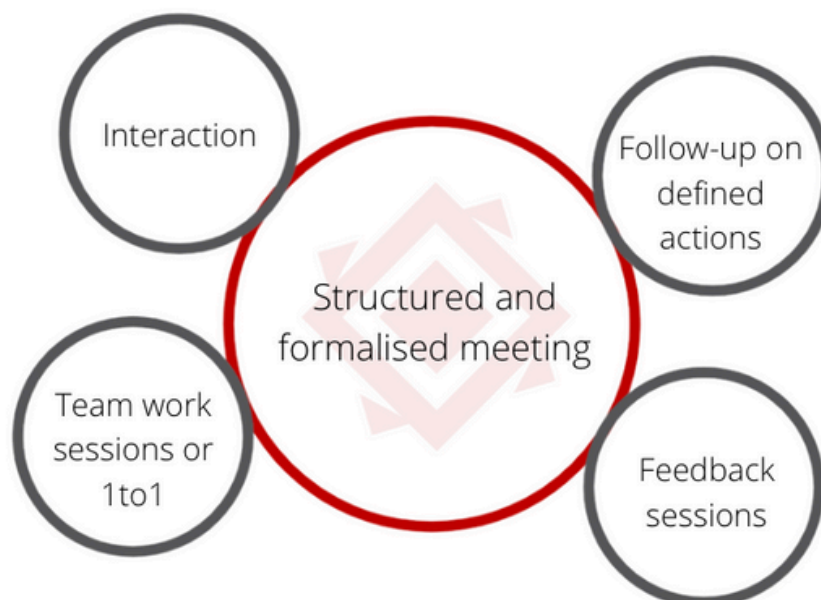
For each identified meeting type, establish the decisions to be made and the **deliverables** to be produced. At this stage, it's useful to do this in a general rather than specific manner.

3

Define **guidelines** (possibly divided by meeting type), such as:

- *Check-in at the beginning of the meeting*: each participant shares an opening reflection and their expectations. This promotes engagement and ensures everyone's voice is heard.
- *Agenda-setting methods*: either beforehand (useful for strategic or retrospective meetings) or during the meeting (effective for operational or 1-to-1 meetings).
- Selection and presence of a *facilitator* (highly recommended if there are more than 5 participants), chosen from among the attendees and different from the manager/leader.
- Use of techniques to ensure everyone is *heard*.
- Allocation of *specific time* for each phase.
- Definition of criteria for *selecting participants* and setting a maximum number of participants for each type of meeting (if necessary).

- 4** **Pre-work actions** definition that the meeting convener and facilitator must manage to ensure all participants arrive prepared for the meeting.
- 5** **Follow-up** definition: identifying the documents, actions, and methods used to monitor decisions after the meeting.
How do we ensure that what we decided gets done?
- 6** In **1-to-1 feedback sessions**, considering that the meeting belongs to the receiver. Designing the space with this in mind.
- 7** **Evaluation** of meetings within the entire operational framework of the company they serve.



The art of designing strategic meetings is a fundamental piece in building a dynamic, innovative, and autonomous work environment.

The journey towards a more autonomous work environment, therefore, requires a conscious commitment to adopting:


- Modern **leadership** practices;
- Clear and accessible **business strategies**;
- Effective **feedback** systems;
- **Transparent communication** regarding roles and expectations.

At the same time, it's crucial to redefine the **culture of meetings**, transforming them from blocks on our calendar into value-added activities.

It's not easy and requires some effort, but it's an activity that generates a very positive return on investment both in purely economic terms and in terms of motivation and reducing stress levels for people.

By adopting these principles, organizations can create a work ecosystem where autonomy is the element that fuels sustainable growth and long-term success.

In this context, each individual is valued not only for their work but also for the unique contribution they can offer to the collective vision. This helps make the organization a place where talent, innovation, and satisfaction intersect to generate value and achieve goals, no matter how ambitious they may be.



Autonomy is an essential requirement for companies aspiring to success in today's work environment. Providing autonomy means empowering individuals to operate independently, to have control over areas where they are most competent, and to be more aware of their contribution to achieving company objectives. This results in improved efficiency and effectiveness of business activities, along with a significant increase in motivation and job satisfaction.

RESULTS

In summary, companies that promote autonomy within their teams often benefit from increased innovation and creativity.

Individuals with autonomy in their work tend to be more satisfied, leading to lower turnover and greater loyalty to the company.

Furthermore, autonomy can lead to greater personal responsibility and commitment towards company goals.

Here are some of the key benefits:



Increase in motivation and commitment

When individuals are given the freedom to manage their tasks, their intrinsic motivation increases. Feeling responsible for their work, they are more likely to fully engage, leading to increased productivity and work quality.



Enhancement of innovation and creativity

Autonomy fosters creativity, as teams have the space to explore new ideas and approaches. This can lead to innovative solutions to business problems and new products or services that can provide a competitive advantage to the company.



Reduction of stress and improvement of well-being

Having control over their work reduces stress levels and enhances the overall well-being of the organization. This not only improves the quality of work life but can also reduce absenteeism and turnover, positively impacting business continuity and stability.



Attraction and retention of talent

A work environment that values autonomy is attractive to talent, especially younger generations seeking flexibility and meaning in their work. Companies that promote autonomy therefore tend to retain top talent, which is crucial for long-term growth and success.



Increase in collaboration and teamwork

Autonomy fosters a collaborative work environment. When individuals have the freedom to make decisions and manage their projects, they are more inclined to work together and share ideas. This approach stimulates teamwork, as team members support each other to achieve common goals. Moreover, mutual trust increases, creating an environment where people are more willing to collaborate and communicate openly, thus improving team cohesion and overall efficiency.

In an increasingly dynamic and competitive workplace, empowering teams with autonomy is a winning strategy to build a solid and prosperous corporate future.

Investing in people's autonomy means believing in their potential and creating an environment where they can truly shine and contribute to the best of their abilities.

Don't let the fear of change hinder innovation: embrace autonomy and let your organization flourish.

And now? If you think we can help empower autonomy within your team, contact us!