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## Context to the nugget

Suresh speaks about how he used the crisis as an opportunity to ensure that people in the company spent time on the right things. He speaks about how he went on a war-footing to cut down meeting times in the company and got people to be more productive during office hours. He discusses his perspectives around the trade-off between efficiency and effectiveness.

## Transcription

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Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): And the other theme you talk about Suresh, is the notion of decomplexification of structure and cutting down meetings and interventions by half talk to us more because that's a, I could identify with that theme being reasonably universal across companies, so talk to us what do you have in mind?

Suresh Narayanan (SN): I think it came out of my earlier experience and in fact actually doing some time and motions study on for example our sales people and it was a horror to me when a statistic was shown that only third of the time of the salesman was actually being devoted to the customer and two thirds was going in internal alignment meetings and reporting meetings. So I just thought to myself, in fact the sales manager himself told me, sir this is the waste of my time. You are telling me one third of my time with the customer who matters who generates revenue and two thirds is going to go in aligning you aligning him aligning them, putting together formats, templates, reporting etc. so that set me off on a journey in all my subsequent stints. When I was here many years ago as a sales director, we used to generate number of reports each day. So I told my IT guy, I said from tomorrow stop sending 50% of the reports that you are sending, let's see if there is any reaction, Deepak nothing happened, nobody came back and then I said please track, what were done with the earlier messages. Deleted without being seen, now the man hours spent in generating this data for people who were not even interested in it. Isn't that a crime? So one of the things we said was and we said look that should be the outcome of this whole crises, we said the behaviours we need in this company is to *be fast focused and flexible* all of these need therefore the ability of the right allocation of time and meetings to the right purpose so we said let us go on across the board and I just set the company a target, cut meetings by 50%, the youngsters loved it, they said we had spent half of our time, and I found people, I used to find sometimes, I used to stay up late in the office because of this crises and walked on sometimes and see youngsters walking away at 7:30 and 8:00 in the night I said why you guys are walking so late? Sir we had a meeting and then I asked the HR guy, I said what's wrong with this company? Why people are having meetings at 7 o'clock in the evening? He said sir because doing the first couple of hours all of them are having review meetings and then therefore the real meeting is taking place in the evening. I said if guys are going to go back at 8 o'clock in the night what are they going to eat? What are they going to sleep? What are they going to spend time with their families? Is this what we are? Zombies? At least me as a leader then

should set the trend because this is the leadership we showed, I have worked in organizations and I have been the victim of bosses who loved 24 hours meetings I said at least when I am the boss I don't want that to happen and I think it is been salutary, there are still pockets where it hasn't happened but it's a journey.

## Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: Couple of thoughts here. First is the simple management philosophy that what you measure gets managed. It was fascinating to hear Suresh talk about how he went after meeting times and drove up productivity.

The other thought is around the trade-off between productivity and efficiency and sometimes the costs here are hidden. I am reminded of the Harvard Business Review Article by Edward Hallowell in January 2005 edition. The article is titled – Overloaded Circuits – Why smart people underperform. The crux of what he says is that when we fill our plates too much, then cerebral cortex (the part of the brain responsible for nuanced functioning and things like prioritization, executive judgment, reflection etc) gets overloaded and signals start going into the inner core of the brain which has more of a fight or a flight reaction to situations. It's a fine line between effectiveness and efficiency often and I have seen several professions that are intense by design (Consulting, Banking, Law etc), people are pushed to the edge in terms of their productivity and that definitely take a toll on their thoughtfulness in dealing with situations. They look for the quickest way to get the problem through the door and run the risk of not evaluating a problem adequately from multiple angles and considering other perspectives before taking a decision. So, that is something you might want to watch out for.

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## End of nugget transcription

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## Suresh Narayanan - Nuggets

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- 24.02 Suresh Narayanan - Career - getting off to a good start
- 24.03 Suresh Narayanan - Transitioning effectively to a new context
- 24.04 Suresh Narayanan - Maggi crisis and decoding resilience
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## About Deepak Jayaraman

Deepak seeks to unlock human potential of senior executive's / leadership teams by working with them as an Executive Coach / Sounding Board / Transition Advisor. You can know more about his work [here](#).

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Podcast Transcript [24.07 Suresh Narayanan - Increasing productivity](#)

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