

THE ₹1 CRORE BOARDROOM THAT NOBODY WANTS TO BOOK

Every executive has lived through some version of this moment. A new boardroom just commissioned. The table is exotic veneer. The 110-inch LED wall is brilliant. The chairs are German, the lighting is scene-programmed, the room is — by any visual measure — an arrival statement. The CEO walks in for the first all-hands hybrid call, presses join, and within forty seconds someone in Singapore says, “Sorry, we can’t hear you.”

The CEO leans toward the table mic. “Can you hear me now?”

“Still not really. Could you try moving closer?”

This is the moment where the room — the entire ₹1 crore investment — fails at its single most important job. And it is, almost without exception, not a technology problem. The technology to make this room outstanding exists. Often, it’s already installed. This is, as it usually is, a procurement problem.

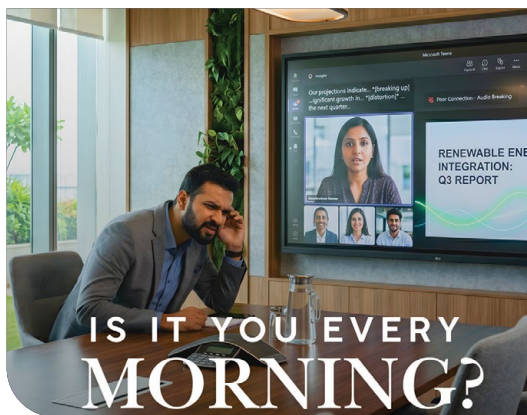
HOW A GOOD PROCESS PRODUCES A BAD OUTCOME

Somewhere between the AV consultant’s design and the room being commissioned, a project management consultant, cost consultant, or facilities-preferred vendor was brought in to do exactly what they were asked to do: protect the budget. They ran a clean process. Three brands. Comparative quotes. Best price wins. Approved.

It is hard to do any of this on its own terms. Procurement discipline is not the enemy — budget control, vendor accountability, and delivery timelines are real and necessary protections on any corporate fit-out of meaningful scale.

The problem is that a meeting room is not a procurement category in the way that workstations, partitions, or HVAC fittings are. It is a system. The microphones, DSP, codec, loudspeak-

Why “three brands, best price” is quietly compromising the meeting rooms your organisation just spent a fortune building — and how to fix it without making enemies of the procurement team.



ers, camera, room geometry, acoustic treatment, and commissioning are not interchangeable parts on a BOQ. They are a single engineered outcome — and the moment one piece is swapped for a cheaper “equivalent,” the engineering breaks.

You don’t save money. You move the failure point. And the failure shows up, predictably, the next time the CEO is on a call with a client.

TWO FAMILIAR STORIES

The details change from project to project. The shape of the mistake doesn’t.

The DSP and mic system that “did the same thing.” A premium 30-seater was designed around a proper enterprise audio architecture — a beam-forming ceiling array feeding a configurable DSP, with acoustic echo cancellation, gain sharing, and noise reduction tuned to the specific room. During procurement, a soundbar-

and-USB-mic combo from a consumer-grade conferencing brand was put forward as “comparable” at a fraction of the price. The spec sheet supports the claim. The physics doesn’t. In a long room with a four-metre ceiling, the soundbar serves the people closest to it and nobody else. The “intelligent” mic picks up a chair scraping near the executive speaking from the head of the table. Every important call now needs someone in the room to relay what was just said to the people on the screen.

The commissioning that was in scope, but not in anyone’s accountability. The BOQ for an executive floor stated, “commissioning included.” It didn’t say by whom, against what targets, or with what end-to-end ownership. The integrator who won

the job — on price — leaned on the OEMs of the individual products to come in and “calibrate.” OEMs do help. But their accountability ends at the edge of their own box. The mic vendor tunes the mic array. The DSP vendor validates the DSP. The codec vendor signs off the codec. Nobody is accountable for the system: zoning of microphones to listening areas, gain structure across the full audio chain, PAG/NAG margins, wiring topology and earthing, mic heights relative to seated ear level, speaker coverage patterns and how they interact with the mic pickup zones.

A third-party programmer, brought in later to “fix it up,” fares no better. They can configure what they’ve been given. They cannot retroactively engineer a system that wasn’t engineered. And for audio to perform, every detail in that chain has to be at 100%. There is no version of this work where 80% of the calculations done correctly produces 80% of the audio quality. It

produces a room that doesn't work.

Neither failure involved a bad consultant or a careless client. Every party did their job competently. The system simply wasn't being treated as a system.

A Quiet Fix That Doesn't Require a Fight

The instinct, when you've seen this enough times, is to argue for keeping procurement out of the AV scope altogether. That argument is wrong, and it doesn't work anyway.

The better fix is sequencing.

When a PMC or cost consultant is brought in after the AV design is finalised, their natural and correct instinct is to compress cost. When the same consultant is brought in during the design phase, they become an ally — someone who can help find the budget to protect the design, rather than dismantle it to fit a number that was never tested against the brief.

For this to work, one principle has to be agreed in writing at the start, by everyone:

The design intent is non-negotiable. The procurement process exists to deliver it, not to replace it.

In practice, that means three things.

First, **specify by performance, not by brand**. A BOQ that lists "Brand X, Model Y" invites a comparative quote against a product engineered for a different room. A BOQ that specifies acoustic, microphone coverage, AEC behaviour, and speech intelligibility targets invites quotes against the actual requirement.

Second, **require any substitution to meet or exceed the original design parameters**, verified in writing by the AV consultant or system designer — not by the alternate vendor's marketing sheet.

Third, **make a single integrator accountable for the system, not just for delivery of the parts**. A signed-off commissioning report against measurable, end-to-end targets — speech intelligibility, far-end audio quality, gain structure, system stability under live load — is the difference

between a room that was installed and a room that works.

THE REAL STAKES

The post-2020 organisation runs on its meeting rooms in a way no organisation before it ever did. Hybrid is not a phase; it is the operating model. Every important conversation — the board update, the customer pitch, the leadership review, the candidate interview — is happening in a room that is half-physical and half-remote. When that room doesn't work, people don't blame the AV. They blame the meeting.

A room that frustrates its users every time it is used is not a saving. It is a slow, compounding tax on every conversation that happens inside it.

The most-used room in a modern workplace should not be the one where procurement had the final word — and with a small change in sequence and brief, it doesn't have to be.