Microspeak: Placemat review

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A term that is gaining currency at Microsoft is *placemat review*. I was unfamiliar with this term, so I asked around.

A *placemat review* is a meeting which gives upper management detailed status on a feature that is of critical importance. The meeting covers topics such as what progress has been made since the last review, what obstacles are preventing progress from taking place, what teams have been involved in resolving those obstacles, and how the feature is proceeding against its schedule.

There's also a somewhat more cynical definition of a placemat review: A *placemat review* is a way for upper management to manage a feature that is in trouble. The threat of a periodic review forces the team to be more explicit in monitoring its progress, identifying obstacles, and engaging other teams to help clear those obstacles.

Without this threat of review, the feature team may simply declare, "Oh, we can't make progress until team Y gives us the ability to do Z." But the reality of the obstacle may be that nobody on team Y has been informed of this need. Or that team Y has already provided the ability to do Z, but the feature team didn't realize it.

I have yet to find anyone who can provide an etymology for the term *placemat review*.

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