



## **MAKING MEETINGS MENTALLY MANAGEABLE**

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## Workplace Meeting Fatigue

Workplace meeting fatigue is almost an accepted unhealthy norm these days. Poor, unsustainable habits have formed and no one questions the patterns any more. We just run from meeting to meeting with a diary so full there's no room to breathe.

Do we really think individuals are effective in these environments?

How can you do the appropriate thinking and mental preparation for a meeting if there's no space to do that?

Do you think your mind can process and strategise and rationalise discussions within the meeting, and then define and plan the actions that arise, whilst feeling pressured about the next meeting you have to run to.

Of course not. We're creating a hamster wheel of inefficiencies and fueling mental loading and fatigue.

It's time to transform this unhealthy norm.

Let's do something revolutionary. What would happen if you made your workplace meetings 45 or 50 minutes long instead of a full hour? \*GASP\*

I'll tell you what would happen, there'd be white space in your diary... finally.

Staff would be fresher, more capable of absorbing discussions and preparing for next meetings and possibly even able to take a bathroom break without sprinting or having people follow them in! (True story... )

Let's be painfully clear. Back to back meetings are not a sign of importance, they are a sign of poor boundaries and unhealthy workplace norms. They're also a big contributor to the workplace burnout rates and work-related stress.

You can't just change years of bad habits overnight. **In this paper you'll find six tips that will help you Make Meetings Mentally Manageable along with explanatory notes that expand on each tip.**

**What will happen if you do make some changes?**

**What will happen if you don't?**



### **1. Promote a no back to back meeting ethos in your organisation.**

This one is super easy. Simply decide to change. Promote a message that gives people permission to say no to meetings that eradicate any breathing space in their day altogether.

Rewrite the norms and educate people and enable them to stop playing Tetris with their diary and filling all the white space.

Promote a culture where if you have to insert a priority meeting, staff are encouraged to remove something else. In other words, if you say Yes to this meeting, you can so No to that meeting.

This also means setting ground rules for those that have access to overwrite anyone's diary - usually the Executive. This is a big problem in many organisations. You'll need to train up staff who have access to diaries, and challenge any behaviours of simply popping in a meeting without negotiation, particularly if overwriting "break" space.

### **2. Put 15 minute 'wellbeing gaps' in your diary... and breathe.**

There are several causes of cognitive overload in workplaces. Constant interruptions, work overload and back to back meetings.

By placing 15 minute wellbeing gaps in your diary you create white space. Visually this will make you feel less overloaded. You'll have a moment to actually stop and catch your breath. Ideally you'll do some box breathing or mindfulness activity which is proven to help you relax, mentally reset and focus. You'll be sharper and more productive as a result. And overall avoid feeling so mentally drained at the end of the day.

This takes discipline. Yours and others who have access to diaries. But what will happen if you don't?

### **3. Put things out of scope in the 'parking lot' so they don't derail time.**

It's all good and well to say reduce meeting time (see point 4) but you'll need to do some things to keep your meetings on track to enable that to work.

When I'm facilitating sessions that need to keep on track with time I draw up a section on the white board, or on butcher's paper titled: The Parking Lot. There's also a super cute cartoon car drawing... just for fun. In this parking lot goes anything that comes up, which is important to capture and enables people to feel heard, but is not within the precise scope of the meeting and has potential to derail things completely.

At the end of the session the parking lot is typed up and circulated to all attendees. So there's oversight and transparency and nothing is forgotten. The team then take actions to further discuss or address the issues raised. Every single time this is used and people love the idea. Try it!





#### 4. Reduce all hour long meetings to 50 minutes. And hold firm to time.

Why do we always make meetings one hour long? Is it our propensity for neatness and structure. Calendar gaps are one hour portions, zoom meetings default to one hour settings. No one could even tell you why meetings started as one hour long to begin with. So let's change it. Make meetings 45 or 50 minutes long. In combination with the other tips in this paper you'll be able to achieve this because you will be: 1) clearer on what you need from the meeting, 2) focused only on what's in scope and 3) permitted to hold firm to 45-50 minute meetings. Create mutual accountability to keep to the 45-50 minutes and not be tempted to use the extra minutes to chat.

#### 5. Be clear on what you are trying to achieve/what you need from the meeting.

There's a wonderful little tool I discovered whilst completing my coaching qualifications which I've shared with many of my coaching clients called **WDEP**. It's a tool that helps us individually to take action and overcome procrastination, but it is also a valuable tool for getting clarity about meetings. The acronym (*I pronounce it WEEDEP*) stands for:

**W**hat are you trying to achieve?

What are you **D**oing about it?

**E**valuate your progress, how is what you are doing working for you?

**P**lan: What are your next steps to achieve your required outcomes?

How often do you walk from meeting to meeting, even as the Chair or Convenor without clarity on what you are trying to achieve in the meeting.

Are you merely informing attendees about progress? A project meeting perhaps where you report on progress against the project plan.

Is it a governance/accountability meeting? Are you going through the motions because you are tabling reports and telling everyone what you've been doing so they can fulfill their oversight duties.

Or do you need peoples ideas and input. Are you co-creating ideas/solutions/actions. Are you tabling a problem and looking for collective discussion and solutions?

What is the purpose of your meeting in the first place? Mostly it will be a combination of these factors but be really clear on what you need from attendees. If you have a reporting function AND need their collaboration to solve a challenge, then send an activity report ahead of time so the 45-50 minutes can be focused solely on problem solving.

Help others be clear on why they are there too. Framing the start of the meeting through the WDEP lens will help everyone focus in on what they need to provide during the timeframe. Try it. I guarantee it will help you be clearer in your mind and you'll get much better buy in from your attendees. **Just WDEP it.**



## **6. Lead by example (and from the top) to model this.**

Leadership behaviour is contagious.

If Leaders in your organisation - from CEO down - model these new ways of working you automatically create permission for others to do so.

Creating awareness of new healthier ways of working that will maximise the productivity and wellbeing of your people is a truly inspiring act of leadership.

Under the OHS Act, Leaders have an obligation to protect their staff from physical AND psychological harm.

Back to back meetings are a recipe for mental overload which if left unmanaged can lead to mental exhaustion.

Create a safe work place for people to do things differently.

Challenge unhealthy workplace norms and create permission for people to say no to meetings that take up their breathing space in the day; and encourage people to take breaks in their day.

Ask yourself:

What will happen if you do?

What will happen if you don't?

### **Transform the norms**

If you need help educating teams on these new ways of working get in touch, I've been helping public sector leaders do just that for years and know I can add value to your workplace too.

Tan x



# Workplace Training Programs

- **Psychological Safety Masterclass**  
3 Hour Masterclass for your workplace leaders.
- **The Five Signs of A Mentally Healthy Workplace Masterclass Series**  
*Hold individual masterclass programs or the entire series.*  
5 x 3 Hour Masterclasses - Virtual or F2F

Masterclass 1 - Psychological Safety for Inclusion & Learning

Masterclass 2 - Common Psychological Hazards in the Workplace

Masterclass 3 - Effective Leadership in a Mentally Healthy Workplace

Masterclass 4 - Leading Change for a Mentally Healthy Workplace

Masterclass 5 - Building a Mentally Healthy Workplace Culture

- **Fostering Fun & Laughter in the Workplace**  
90 minute engaging and interactive session.  
Evidence based content. Graphic illustration of the session included.
- **Running on Empty - 90 minutes**  
How to help your teams when they're running on empty. Explore the common workplace factors that contribute to individual and team fatigue and discover the practical solutions to address these.
- **60 Minute In-Service Modules - Virtual or F2F**
  - Leading Successful Workplace Change
  - Coaching Others Through Change
  - Psychological Safety 101

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## What's It Like To Work With Me

Whether I'm consulting with your organisation, training or providing 1:1 coaching or mentoring you'll find me outcomes focused and determined to ensure you achieve your goals. You'll get clarity on complex issues and dedicated support. Did I mention support? I'm very big on support!

I also love to laugh, tend towards the glass half full view of life (with a healthy dose of pragmatism) and adore working with people who are trying to make positive change in their workplace! Here's what others have to say:

- Participating in the Cracking the Change Code program has greatly helped to put structure and definition into the [culture] change we have been trying to introduce. Tanya has been so supportive throughout the program and has the ability to problem solve any situation that she is presented with. Thank you for your ongoing support and encouragement.
- Tanya has been fantastic in supporting and educating us as change agents. She has been generous with her time and resources and adjusts when required. She is easy to deal with, nothing is too much trouble.
- Tanya completely walks her talk and is a pleasure to work with and learn from.
- Tanya delivers her expertise in change management in a way that is positive and aspirational - embracing change as something to look forward to. Her coaching and guidance is invaluable.
- Great session thanks Tanya - love your genuine enthusiasm and knowledge and very well presented (with energy).
- I have really enjoyed this program in particular the way Tanya delivers the content. It makes the information easy to relate to and digest. I have already used the tools I have learnt so far from Tanya and it has made a difference even the subtle changes.
- Tanya completely walks her talk and is a pleasure to work with and learn from.
- Excellent informative session, well presented and explained. Thanks Tanya!
- Your sessions really help me reframe my thoughts and give me clearer direction. I look forward to catching up with you each month.
- I asked Tan to run the Fun and Laughter in the Workplace session with my staff. We are a research organisation and as such we all need to know the evidence base underpinning the activities. We got that and then proceeded to have fun.





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