

Team Pulse by CoastZone — The Deep Dive

Tuesday 30 June 2026 — a single-topic masterclass

Meeting culture: the most expensive habit we never questioned

Companion read to the podcast. Written for consultants working in a Danish/Nordic context. This is an evergreen deep dive — not breaking news — but every claim links to a real source so you can dig in.

The big picture

We have spent recent episodes on recognition, delegation and feedback — the small leadership acts that compound. This one zooms in on the single most universal team ritual, and the one we are least likely to interrogate: **the meeting**.

Meetings are not the enemy. They are where, in the words of Denmark's public-sector leadership body, "leadership in practice unfolds" — where priorities are negotiated, decisions made and relationships formed. The problem is not that we meet; it is that we meet by default, at length, with the wrong people, about topics rather than decisions — and in doing so we quietly drain the one resource a knowledge team cannot manufacture more of: uninterrupted attention. This is a masterclass on how to win that attention back.

Facet 1 — The infinite workday: attention is the scarce resource

Start with the scale of the problem, because it is larger than most leaders think.

The evidence. Microsoft's special report *Breaking Down the Infinite Workday* (17 June 2025) draws on aggregated Microsoft 365 telemetry plus a Work Trend Index survey of **31,000 knowledge workers across 31 markets** (fielded by Edelman Data x Intelligence, Feb–Mar 2025). The numbers are sobering. The average worker receives **117 emails and 153 Teams messages every day**, and is **interrupted every two minutes** during core hours — about **275 times a day** — by a meeting, email or ping. **Half of all meetings (50%)** land between 9–11 a.m. and 1–3 p.m., precisely the windows when, by their circadian rhythms, most people are at their sharpest. Tuesdays now carry the heaviest meeting load (23%); around **six in ten meetings are ad hoc**, booked with no calendar invite; and PowerPoint edits spike **122%** in the final ten minutes before a meeting — the digital equivalent of cramming before an exam.

The human cost. Nearly half of employees (**48%**) and more than half of leaders (**52%**) say their work feels chaotic and fragmented, and **one in three** say the pace of the past five years makes it impossible to keep up. Meetings after 8 p.m. are up **16%** year over year as global teams stretch across time zones. The lesson is not "ban meetings"; it is that a meeting culture which devours deep focus has a real, compounding price.

The way out. Microsoft's own prescription is an 80/20 discipline: deploy your attention on the **20% of work that produces 80% of the value**, and ruthlessly strip back status meetings and routine reporting that exist only out of habit.

Facet 2 — What actually makes a meeting worth holding

Overload is not new, and neither is the science of fixing it.

The long-standing diagnosis. Back in *Stop the Meeting Madness* (HBR, July–Aug 2017), Leslie A. Perlow, Constance Noonan Hadley and Eunice Eun surveyed **182 senior managers: 71% said meetings were unproductive and inefficient, 65% said meetings kept them from completing their own work, and 64% said meetings came at the expense of deep thinking.** Nearly a decade on, the Microsoft data shows the diagnosis has only hardened.

The science of the fix. **Steven G. Rogelberg** — Chancellor's Professor at UNC Charlotte, winner of the Humboldt Award, and author of *The Surprising Science of Meetings* (Oxford University Press), built on research and survey data from more than 5,000 employees — estimates that simply trimming unnecessary meetings and over-long invite lists could save a large organization up to **\$100 million a year.** His most counter-intuitive finding concerns the sacred agenda: **an agenda by itself does little to improve a meeting.** A bare list of topics is, in his phrase, a "hollow crutch." What works is to (1) phrase each agenda item as a **question the meeting must answer**, and (2) assign each item a clear owner — the practice Apple formalizes as a **DRI, a Directly Responsible Individual.** Add Parkinson's Law — work expands to fill the time allotted — and the simplest lever of all appears: **book 30 minutes instead of 60**, and you will usually reach the same conclusion.

What to do Monday. Rewrite your next agenda so every line is a question with one name beside it. If an item can't be framed as a question, it probably doesn't belong in the meeting at all.

Facet 3 — The Danish angle: meet to *do* something, not "about" something

The Danish flat, consensus-oriented culture has a beautiful instinct to gather — and it carries a hidden tax.

The evidence. A study cited by **Væksthus for Ledelse / Lederweb** found that **four out of five Danish leaders** have sat in meetings they personally judged a waste of time. Lederweb's memorable rule of thumb cuts to the core: you should never meet "about" something — you meet to *do something with it*. You don't meet "about the strategy"; you meet to **correct it, develop it, or scrap it.** Naming the action in the invitation ("Choose the IT system," not "Meeting about the IT system") is itself a filter against empty talk. Lederweb's companion piece reframes the upside: **meetings are not breaks from the work — they are important leadership spaces**, so the goal is to use them well, not merely to have fewer.

A fresh Danish voice. **Pernille Garde Abildgaard**, founder of *Take Back Time*, has helped more than **100 Danish SMEs** overhaul their meeting and email culture and what she calls the "absurd availability culture." Her thesis is that teams should work **better, not more**: fewer, shorter, sharply focused meetings and protected focus time free up enough capacity that some of her client companies move to a four-day week with no cut in pay. The point for consultants is not the four-day week itself — it is the underlying claim that a meeting culture is something you **design on purpose**, not a habit you let grow wild.

What to do Monday. Ask the leader you're coaching to rename their next meeting invitation from "Meeting about X" to a concrete action — "Decide X." The language instantly reveals whether the meeting has a purpose worth defending.

Books & tools to watch

- **Steven Rogelberg** — *The Surprising Science of Meetings* (OUP). The single best evidence-based handbook on meetings; the chapters on agendas-as-questions and "the leader as steward of others' time" are the most immediately usable.
 - **Microsoft Work Trend Index** — *Breaking Down the Infinite Workday* (report). A free, citable 2025 benchmark for client conversations about attention and focus.
 - **HBR** — *Stop the Meeting Madness* (article). The classic that still frames the problem cleanly — pair it with the Microsoft data to show the trend line.
 - **Pernille Garde Abildgaard** — *Take Back Time* (pernillegarde.com). The Danish-language entry point to redesigning meeting and availability culture in practice.
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The three things to remember

1. **Attention is the account meetings draw on.** The infinite workday fragments focus every two minutes — so fewer, shorter meetings aren't stinginess; they're protection of the deep work that actually creates value.
2. **A good meeting has a purpose, the right (few) people, and an agenda of questions.** Give each item an owner, halve the duration (Parkinson's Law), and finish on time.
3. **Meeting culture is designed, not inherited.** "Meet to do something," not "about" something; clear out the availability culture; and guard the morning energy peak from calendar noise.

If every agenda item had to be a question with one name beside it, how many of your meetings would survive?

Sources & dig deeper

International research & media - Microsoft Work Trend Index — *Breaking Down the Infinite Workday* (June 2025; M365 telemetry + 31,000-worker survey across 31 markets) - Harvard Business Review — Perlow, Hadley & Eun, *Stop the Meeting Madness* (July–Aug 2017) - Steven G. Rogelberg — *The Surprising Science of Meetings*; book via Oxford University Press

Danish sources & voices - Væksthus for Ledelse / lederweb.dk — *Dræb de værdiløse møder; Møder er ikke pauser i arbejdet – de er vigtige ledelsesrum* - Pernille Garde Abildgaard — *Take Back Time*