

NANO TOOLS FOR LEADERS®

THE 25-MINUTE MEETING

Nano Tools for Leaders® are fast, effective leadership tools that you can learn and start using in less than 15 minutes—with the potential to significantly impact your success as a leader and the engagement and productivity of the people you lead.

THE GOAL

Halve the time and double the impact of your meetings.

NANO TOOL

The world of work will always revolve around people working with people, and meeting together is an important way to get things done, which is why meetings will always be a part of organizational life. But they're also hated by most people—not because they get things done (which they do), but because they typically waste so much time. Since we can't get rid of them, the answer is to get better at them by making them more efficient, more valuable, and more concise.

Take a look at your calendar. How many of your meetings are 60 minutes or more? Imagine how much time you would have to get your work done (or even just have space to think) if they were 25-minute meetings. And imagine how appreciative your team members and colleagues will be for that time when they attend your meetings.

Twenty-five minutes is not an arbitrary number: there is both art and science involved. Put simply, 25 minutes is practical, easy, and achievable—and it has the smarts to back it up.ⁱ

ACTION STEPS

There are three steps to the 25-minute meeting roadmap:

1. Set up

Purpose. Before you invite people to a meeting, think about why you are having the meeting in the first place. While there are hundreds of reasons people meet, they commonly fall into one of three categories: Inform, Align, or Resolve. For every meeting you organize, finish this sentence: "At the end of this meeting, it would be great if..." Put the result into the meeting invitation. For every meeting you are invited to, ask the organizer (politely) to finish the same sentence.

People. A 25-minute meeting works best for groups of no more than five people. Consider why each person is needed by asking yourself two questions: what role will they play in this meeting? How will they give, or get, value from their time in this meeting?



ⁱ McGeorge, D. (2019) *The 25 Minute Meeting*, John Wiley & Sons; Francesco Cirillo, (2013) *The Pomodoro Technique*, 3rd edition, FC Garage GmbH; Stijn, (2017). 'How to get things done in meetings', *Rocket Meetings* blog.

Process. How will we achieve the meeting's stated purpose? Having a process and a structure to facilitate the discussion means that everyone can contribute evenly, and a free-flowing conversation is effective. A good meeting process follows your agenda, facilitates participation, and serves the outcome of the meeting.

2. Show up

Preparedness. Lack of planning and preparation is one of the biggest causes of ineffective meetings. Put the purpose of the meeting in the invite, send out agendas in advance, and make sure people have ample time to review any pre-reading.

Punctuality. No matter who is in the room, the meeting will start and end on time. There is no repetition for latecomers. By respecting each other's time and the issue or topic at hand, we create positive feelings toward our teammates. This leads to more open, honest, and candid discussions, which in turn lead to meeting outcomes achieved.

Presence. Unless you need to show slides or demonstrate something on a computer, meetings should be unplugged: no phones, laptops, or tablets allowed.

3. Speak Up

Participate. Let people know in the meeting invite that they will be called upon for updates, opinions, thoughts, or questions. To help them feel comfortable and engage quickly, consider using a short check-in question or activity (for example, on a scale of 1–10, how are you feeling today?).

Produce. Use the meeting to enhance work, not prevent anyone from doing "real work," by following a tight meeting structure. The Scan Focus Act framework (first formulated by Jim Channon, Frank Burns, and Linda Nelson in 1983) keeps meetings on track:

- *Scan.* What are we here for? What is the context surrounding the meeting? What do people have to contribute to the discussion? 12 minutes max.
- *Focus.* What are the two or three things that require our attention, or are driving our decision making or problem solving? Eight minutes max.
- *Act.* What else do we need to do? What actions are required? What will happen next? Five minutes max.

Proceed. People should leave the meeting feeling energized and willing to move forward, take next steps, and be clear on what they need to do. That happens with follow-up correspondence.

According to Rocket Meetings, an organization that specializes in productivity, more than 40 percent of meeting attendees don't recall what was decided or who should do what after a meeting. In addition, 20 percent of participants have a different view on what was decided.

HOW ONE LEADER USES IT

Like many managers, Sandra, a senior design engineer in the automotive manufacturing industry, has most days filled with back-to-back meetings. Most she classifies as formal and not flexible enough to change. But she also has many random meetings that are usually scheduled for 60 minutes, which she decided to change to the 25-minute model.

She facilitates the meetings by asking open-ended questions and waiting for people to answer. Although it's hard to do, she finds silence very powerful, as everyone looks to see who will speak first. The change created a clear improvement in the way the discussions flowed, how people interacted, and even how they committed to the tasks they were given.

Other concepts she has adopted and now regularly uses include:

- sending a short agenda ahead of the event, so participants feel informed and not ambushed, and then keeping to the agenda and only introducing new topics if warranted
- arriving early (for both physical and online meetings), looking professional, and not wasting time
- taking notes live on the screen or on paper so that everyone has input and agrees on next steps
- sending minutes within 24 hours so everyone is informed about agreed deliverables
- rescheduling if key people are late or cannot attend; there's no point wasting people's time by having the meeting anyway

CONTRIBUTOR TO THIS NANO TOOL

Donna McGeorge, global authority on productivity and best-selling author of *The 25-Minute Meeting* (Wiley, 2019) and *The 1-Day Refund* (Wiley, 2021).

KNOWLEDGE IN ACTION: RELATED EXECUTIVE EDUCATION PROGRAMS

[Business Essentials for Executives](#), [High-Potential Leaders: Accelerating Your Impact](#), [Women's Executive Leadership: Business Strategies for Success](#)

ABOUT NANO TOOLS

Nano Tools for Leaders® was conceived and developed by Deb Giffen, MCC, director of Custom Programs at Wharton Executive Education. *Nano Tools for Leaders®* is a collaboration between joint sponsors Wharton Executive Education and Wharton's Center for Leadership and Change Management. This collaboration is led by Professors Michael Useem and John Paul MacDuffie.