



RingCentral



**CANCEL EVERY
MEETING**

Rethinking our oldest business process

INTRODUCTION

One winter morning, chemical engineer Finlay sat down at his desk and clicked into his calendar. His screen erupted into a multicolored mosaic of events—stakeholder reports, team updates, and compulsory training meetings.

After his morning coffee, Finlay walked to his first meeting of the day, a weekly progress update for senior stakeholders. He spent five minutes recapping his work from last week, then spent the next hour listening to different team leaders recount their accomplishments and setbacks. Like always, the meeting ran over, eating into Finlay’s workday.

After the meeting, Finlay stole a short 30-minute work sprint at his desk, powering through emails and administration. But before long, his phone beeped, alerting him to his second meeting of the day, a health and safety talk. The hour-long meeting covered office-based safety—how to sit, how to arrange your monitor, how to type—and like the first meeting, this one also ran long.

Finlay’s day continued like this all the way through to the late evening. Although he had four or five hours free throughout his day, the time was fragmented—ten minutes here to

update a spreadsheet, five minutes there to do some calculations, a surreptitious email during one meeting when the facilitator was still introducing everyone. “It’s hugely frustrating,” Finlay told RingCentral. “The meetings shredded my workday to pieces and I ended up working in snippets.”

Finlay is not alone. Meetings are a productivity black hole for many businesses, draining our time, resources, and energy. Many people resort to fitting their work around their meetings—and not the other way around.

It doesn’t have to be that way, however. Our calendars are filled to the brim with meetings and we keep clicking “accept” on invites, but if we chose instead to dismantle the existing meeting structure and rebuild it with intent, we could create a completely new meeting paradigm, purposefully designed for productivity.

In this eBook, you’ll learn why it’s necessary to tear down your existing meeting structures to create Calendar Zero. Then you’ll discover how to build it back up using research-backed meeting archetypes and new technologies that make your calendar significantly more efficient than it was before.

THE PROBLEM WITH MEETINGS

The cost of meetings is incredible. In the U.S. alone, businesses lose approximately **\$30 billion a year** in wasted time—to say nothing of additional losses in opportunity costs, decreased engagement, and falling productivity. Yet often companies have no rules or structures controlling them. This is unlike any other major investment. Consider a company that has a pool of cars for its employees to use. The company would, of course, design guidelines for booking the cars and restrictions on how you use them. But there is nothing like that for meetings. They inhabit a strange, privileged position beyond reproach or debate.

For decades, we have continued on blithely with meetings, without reassessing how—or even *if*—they work. This is particularly concerning as the rest of the business world has moved on. The open-plan offices of today, for example, look nothing like the cubical farms of the 1980s or regimented desks of the 1950s. Our benefits, culture, and career development have all changed, too—quite radically, in fact.

Then, there is technological change.

Technology as we know it today—smartphones, cloud computing, machine learning—has existed for one or two decades at the very most. And that new technology has driven seismic change in the business landscape. We can transfer files to the other side of the world with a single click, carry our entire worklife in our pockets, and work remotely from anywhere with an Internet connection. That would have sounded like science fiction just 20 years ago.

Against this backdrop of monumental transformation, meetings—by and large—haven’t changed. Instead, we have let them run wild, and they are eating into our productivity and profits.



Across the world, executives spend around **23 hours per week in meetings** — eight of which are unproductive.



And it’s not just the executives running the meetings who are missing out. **Around 90% of meeting attendants say they daydream in meetings.**



And, **73% admit they ignore the proceedings to complete other work.**

Ultimately, that ladders up into significant losses for businesses.

But that’s not to say the meeting is a vestigial organizational organ. They are valuable tools. Good meetings can help a group generate new ideas. They can facilitate coordination and cooperation among staff members. Perhaps most importantly, they can bring together a group of individuals and produce a common decision or viewpoint.

The wholesale abandonment of meetings would be a mistake. Instead, to save the meeting, we need to flatten our work calendars to zero and rebuild our meetings with intention, carefully selecting those meeting archetypes that work for us and abandoning the rest to history.

BETTER, SMARTER, AND STRONGER.

We need to think critically about what meetings we're creating and why we're creating them. Often, we associate a meeting with its themes or content. For example, you might attend a meeting about expanding into China or a meeting about picking employee benefits. But experts suggest this is the wrong way to frame your thinking.

Consider two meetings about expanding into China. In the first, you weigh the pros and cons of the Chinese market and decide whether or not to expand your business into the country. In the second, you come up with marketing strategies to promote your business within the Chinese market. Both meetings are about Chinese expansion but they have radically different goals.

Researchers at [McKinsey](#) strongly recommend we stop thinking about meetings in terms of their content and start looking at their goals or outcomes. When we shift our thinking, meetings start to fall into one of several foundational archetypes based on their outcomes. Then we can cherry-pick the most effective and start rebuilding our calendars in a way that enhances our workplace productivity.

1 2 3 4 5

DECISION MEETING

Participants:
<8

Goal:
Decision

Facilitated by:
Leader

Perhaps the most basic function of a meeting is to gather a group of individuals together and produce a common decision or viewpoint. For example, think about a hiring panel. Each member of a hiring panel has his own individual opinion of each candidate but will have to come to a consensus with the group on who to hire. While that sounds simple, decision meetings are tricky to implement effectively.

Robert Sutton, professor of management science at Stanford University, analyzed the effect of group size on decision making. He discovered that the most effective groups had five to eight participants. If a meeting had fewer than five people, it lacked enough varied ideas or viewpoints to adequately consider all the options. But if a meeting had more than eight people, the quality of conversation started to erode as people talked over one another and branched off into splinter groups.

Decision meetings also require strong facilitation. Although the goal of these meetings is to arrive at a decision, conversations will often drift away from the main subject and into adjacent topics.

Action item: A facilitator must keep control of the discussion, guiding participants through whatever decision-making framework they have selected and, ultimately, on to a final decision.

1 2 3 4 5

DISCUSSION MEETING

Participants:
<18

Goal:
Discussion

Active dialogue by:
Attendees

Discussion meetings are used when you don't have a discrete problem to solve or decision to make. In fact, they're almost the exact opposite of decision meetings as they're designed to be free-flowing and explore a range of ideas within a topic.

There are two main types of discussion meeting: ideation and debate. To explore the difference, consider the following two meetings. First, imagine a branding brainstorming session. The goal of this meeting is to find new ideas, angles, and inspiration. While the participants can debate the strengths and weaknesses of each idea, they don't have to select any one idea to run with. Second, consider a project retrospective, which is simply a review of a team's performance during a project. In this meeting, participants are encouraged to dig into the project, discussing what went right or wrong. The end goal of a debate-style meeting is to explore and evaluate individual ideas in more detail.

Since you can't predict the direction of discussion meetings before they start, it doesn't make sense to have an active facilitator guiding the conversation. Instead, the meeting's participants should lead the dialogue and the conversation should evolve naturally. That said, it can be helpful to appoint a passive facilitator who is there to gently direct or frame the discussion should it drift from the original theme or topic.

1 2 3 4 5

As with decision meetings, discussion meetings have upper and lower attendance limits.

Action item: Aim for more than eight attendees and fewer than 18. When you have fewer than eight participants, you will likely struggle for unique perspectives and ideas during the discussion. And if you have more than 18, you will struggle to keep everyone engaged in one large conversation.

1 2 3 4 5

INFORMATION-SHARING MEETING

Participants:
2 to 1,800+

Goal:
Awareness

One-way communication from:
Speaker

So far, we've discussed group meetings where everyone plays a more or less equal role. But with information-sharing meetings, it's typically a one-way dialogue between a speaker and a large group.

Information-sharing meetings are commonly group briefings, town hall meetings, or all-hands updates. Unlike decision and discussion meetings, there is technically no upper limit to meeting participants as the dialogue is purely one-way.

Before arranging information-sharing meetings, remember that large meetings are disruptive and pull everyone off their work. Also, consider that people read faster than they listen so large-scale meetings may not be the most effective means of communication. If a meeting is purely for information-sharing, you are likely better off using an alternative communication channel like email or intranet.

But where these meetings come into their own is when you combine information-sharing with culture or team building. An email might convey information faster than a company-wide meeting—but it rarely engenders the same emotional connection.

Action item: If it's important for your senior executives to speak to their employees directly and cultivate personal interactions, an information-sharing meeting is the way to go. Just don't overuse them.

1 2 3 4 5

IN-THE-MOMENT MEETING

Participants:
<8

Goal:
Decision or
Discussion

Active dialogue by:
Attendees

Impromptu meetings are typically disruptive as they rarely have a set agenda and can quickly spiral out of control. But, if implemented carefully, you can transform impromptu meetings from a distraction into an effective productivity tool.

These meetings are best used by remote teams when text-based chat has become disorganized or multithreaded. They allow the team to switch over to a clearer communication channel, unjam the conversation, and get back to work.

To see how in-the-moment meetings work, imagine a small engineering team discussing a new project via work chat. They're working on a complicated design and the team lead is struggling to explain exactly what she means via text. So she invites everyone to a quick in-the-moment meeting. With unstructured impromptu meetings, this meeting could quickly veer off course—but not if you add some structure. The team leader is wary of impromptu meetings so time-boxes the meeting to 10 minutes and limits discussion to a single thread of discussion. If the discussion looks like it's splintering, the attendees must spin out the thread into an additional meeting.

1 2 3 4 5

With the structure in place, the team leader and her team switch over from text-based chat to in-the-moment meeting, clarify the complicated points in their discussion, and close the meeting before it curves off into an adjacent topic.

Action item: In-the-moment meetings only work if you have the correct technology behind them. Employees need to be able to slip in and out of voice and video calls with a couple of clicks. If each meeting requires 20 minutes of careful setup, they simply don't make sense. Ideally, that means implementing a collaboration platform that unifies voice, video, and team messaging so everything is in one place and employees can move between each channel effortlessly.

1 2 3 4 5

CHECK-IN MEETING

Participants:
<15

Goal:
Awareness

Active dialogue by:
Attendees

Organization and management expert, Verne Harnish, suggests a short time-boxed check-in meeting, covering tactical issues and updates. “The daily huddle,” wrote Harnish on the [Growth Institute](#), “tracks progress and brings out sticking points that are blocking your execution.” They allow your entire team to get informed and aligned on the work that needs to be done, cutting down on coordination work later in the day.

Action item: In practice, a check-in meeting usually takes place at the start of the day and runs through a tightly controlled agenda. Each participant is afforded just one or two minutes to provide specific updates on what they’re working on and any challenges they’re facing. Attendees must be careful to avoid rabbit holes and must take any detailed topics or follow-ups offline.

Since the daily huddle is time-boxed to 15 minutes, there’s a practical upper limit of attendees—usually around 15.

POISONED APPLES

With your empty calendar starting to fill up with new meeting archetypes, it can feel tempting to throw in a few of your older meetings. But this is a slippery slope as one disruptive meeting often leads to the next. If you make exceptions, your calendar will quickly revert back to a multicolored mosaic, fracturing your working day into a hundred unproductive work moments.

While it's helpful to promote good meeting archetypes, it's equally important to highlight the bad ones. By shining a spotlight on disruptive meeting archetypes, you will know what sorts of meetings to ban from your calendar, which helps keep your schedule a place of serene productivity.



1. AGENDALESS MEETING

A common feature for underperforming teams is a repeating weekly or monthly meeting without an agenda or purpose. These meetings often feel productive to attendees as they cover a lot of ground—but they rarely are. Agendaless meetings will meander in and out of topics, rarely staying in one place long enough to produce any actionable follow-ups or decisions.

To make matters worse, these meetings are also huge time sinks. Since they don't have a predefined start and endpoint, it's natural for them to roll on past their initial time allowance. In an average company, agendaless meetings can easily take up 20 hours per employee per week, while generating little—if any—output.



2. LEADERLESS MEETING

While leaderless meetings clearly sound like a bad idea, they are surprisingly commonplace. The problem with these meetings is that there's no one directing the conversation. So while a team may recognize that they need to work together, they will often struggle to coordinate their actions as no one person has the authority to make decisions.

Without any leadership, the focus of the leaderless meetings regularly shifts as attendees' attention flits from one new topic of discussion to the next. Just as with agendaless meetings, it's very difficult for leaderless meetings to stay on track and achieve anything substantive.

CONTROLLING YOUR CALENDAR

It's easy to create a few new meeting archetypes and single out a few poisoned apples. What's difficult is building systems in your business to actually implement them. Without structure, it's easy for teams to use meetings in the wrong way, which causes their calendar to slip back into chaos.

The first step to securing your calendar is setting public guidelines on what meetings can be used and when. Your employees must understand that decision meetings require a predefined decision and that in-the-moment meetings are just for immediate clarifications. It helps to demonstrate each meeting beforehand so your employees understand how they work and feel. Once you set the basic ground rules, you can empower your staff to make their own informed meeting decisions and take charge of their calendar.

The second step is to support your meetings with the correct technology. Since our workforces are increasingly remote, that means ensuring your employees have access to team messaging, voice, and video within their collaboration platform. Perhaps more importantly, it's essential that your employees can access these services effortlessly. Take in-the-moment meetings. Your employees must be able to transition from team messaging into a video call seamlessly so all the context is fresh in their minds. If it takes 10 minutes to set up the call, that undermines the effectiveness of the new meeting archetype.

If you set the ground rules and provide the tools your employees need, their schedules will reap the benefits. By building meeting archetypes around functions, you ensure that each meeting has a goal and, therefore, is productive.

REBUILDING FROM GROUND ZERO

Meetings haven't evolved for the best part of a century. That may be because people don't feel there is a problem. [Research](#) shows that facilitators consistently rate their own meetings very favorably. In a survey of more than 1,300 managers, nearly 80% said their own meetings were extremely or very productive. Yet, we intuitively know that figure isn't accurate. We know that meetings are an insidious drain on our time, energy, and resources, which if left unchecked, will

undermine our productivity. But as we have discovered, there is a solution.

By tearing down the centuries-old meeting status quo, we can achieve Calendar Zero. With a fresh start, we can rebuild our meetings with intent, using new structures and frameworks, selecting the archetypes that work while discarding the rest. And when we do that, we can create a meeting culture that promotes productivity and helps us achieve our goals.

HELP FROM RINGCENTRAL

We work with our customers to reimagine the world of business communications and collaboration. RingCentral unites the pillars of your communication ecosystem—team messaging, voice, video, and call center—into one seamlessly integrated platform. Users can switch seamlessly between each channel without losing context or flow.

You can speak to colleagues via team messaging then switch to a phone call, then video for an ad hoc in-the-moment meeting—all with a single click. With RingCentral, as you escalate your conversations, content and context automatically follow, so all team

members understand the discussion and your ideas flow uninterrupted. RingCentral also integrates with Outlook and Google calendars, so you can use our app to see upcoming meetings, easily join a meeting, and schedule new ones. With RingCentral's open platform, you can integrate your communication channels with your critical business apps or build your own custom integrations. With RingCentral, you can build the most effortless communication space possible.

Click [here](#) to learn more about [RingCentral Video](#), our browser-based, effortless video solution.

RingCentral

RingCentral, Inc. (NYSE: RNG) is a leading provider of global enterprise cloud communications, collaboration, and contact center solutions. More flexible and cost-effective than legacy on-premises systems, the RingCentral platform empowers employees to work better together from any location, on any device, and via any mode to serve customers, improving business efficiency and customer satisfaction.

The company provides unified voice, video meetings, team messaging, digital customer engagement, and integrated contact center solutions for enterprises globally. RingCentral's open platform integrates with leading business apps and enables customers to easily customize business workflows. RingCentral is headquartered in Belmont, California, and has offices around the world.

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