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Our team is so under the gun, we barely have time for a meeting. How can I make sure they're worth the trouble?

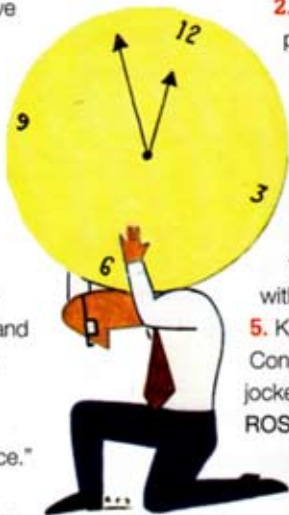
HOW OFTEN do you find yourself lamenting "if only I had more time to think, to act, to do..." This is what the author of *The Idea Accelerator*, Ken Hudson, calls "the hope strategy". He says we should just give up and accept the reality of a fast-paced work environment, and make it work in our favour. When researching his PhD in organisational creativity, Hudson's main insight was "this great paradox that the less time people have, the more productive and energised they felt ... People do their best thinking under some sort of time pressure."

So when the pressure is on, instead of yielding to the temptation to cancel the weekly staff meeting that inevitably drones on and on, change it so it becomes more productive, Hudson says. He advocates a "speed-thinking perspective" and outlines a few steps to bring some zest back into a meeting:

1. Halve the meeting time. "It's Parkinson's Law that work expands to fill the time available," Hudson says. "The more people get comfortable, the more they operate at a slow pace." By halving the meeting duration, people will have to think faster – they filter their own ideas and are more likely to throw

things out there without worrying about their "internal critic". Also, setting short deadlines for tasks within the meeting can work.

- 2.** Agenda. Send out an agenda a couple of days beforehand. Ask people to bring along three ideas the meeting will tackle. Suggest that if they have nothing to contribute, they shouldn't bother coming. That'll stir things up, Hudson suggests.
 - 3.** Strategic versus operational. Get day-to-day decisions out of the way first, then participants will feel freer to spend more time on the strategic issues.
 - 4.** Gut feel. Hudson suggests allowing time for people to express their gut feelings, even if they feel a particular decision is disastrous without being able to fully articulate why.
 - 5.** Keep it moving – literally. People can get bored after about 10 minutes. Consider doing quick daily updates standing up. It also avoids the jockeying for position around the table where status and power is in play.
- ROSE-ANNE MANN



Are you facing a tricky situation at work?
Send your questions to rmanns@afrc.com.au