E-book

THE MEETING COULD BE AN EMAIL, IS IT?

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Yeah, I know that in your innermost thought, or not that deep, you've thought exactly that: "this meeting could be an email" and, in fact, many of the meetings, especially at the moment we're living, could and should be an email.

And going against all the marketing and narrative logics, I'll give you some possible answers to why such encounters still exist: we stopped reading what we received. And when they do, a tripartite road opens ahead: the lack of interpretation; excessive interpretation; and the infamous lack of focus.

I hope you are still here with me, because possibly one of these points has already crossed your mind, but here I invite you to reflect on them, after all, you can be the person who is doing this, and if not, in the end from the archive you can find some practices, tools and tips on how to improve everyday meetings.

I want to propose a deal between us, okay? Let's be honest here with each other and without many turns, straight to the point, okay? 1, 2, 3. I assume you agreed with me, from here on we fulfill our contract.

That the world is globalized, connected and in accelerated technological development is nothing new, but the dependence on technology is already felt in ways never before.

From 2020, the world was forced to take a break and withdraw, and in this clause, caused by COVID-19, connecting with those who are with us at home was difficult, but in addition, finding oneself in the silence of your room and listening to their thoughts, that is, rediscovering themselves without the interference of the other, was the biggest challenge, however, many of us preferred to escape this provocation by doing dances, scripts and sharing their routines on social media, while others simply accelerated into workaholic mode and applied their rules on others, then put all this together and some more political, economic and social issues, we have the scenario to hold several meetings, or better, online meetings, or calls (to give a valued in the text and expose which I can also say 'difficult').

Online meetings took on new forms: shared happy hour, birthday parties, plays, music and dance concerts, and obviously work meetings, which were often no longer productive before, have gained their 2.0 version in online mode , and that's what I'll focus.

Microsoft in March 2020 indicated that it had a 500% growth in the number of meetings using Teams, the company's app for team management and corporate communications.

Not to mention other tools like Zoom, WhatsApp, Google Meet and others. The home office was already a practice for some, but its mass use was a new phenomenon, causing some questions as pointed out in the survey by the Brazilian Psychiatric Association - BPA, which exposed some of the harms of excessive virtual meetings.

According to the study, 54.8% of the interviewed psychiatrists noticed an increase in patients' complaints about excessive videoconferences in the last five months and 68.6% increased psychotherapy prescriptions to patients, who began to develop conditions of stress and anxiety, and look that the survey was carried out between August and October 2020, imagine with another year in the scenario we are in.

The first point that may have triggered so many questions is the lack of habit combined with sudden changes in a short period of time, we are not used to this, but I would like to highlight a factor that happened even before the pandemic, in 100% face-to-face models, which is to hold a meeting to validate what has already been written, because communication is always a challenge, and by the way, one of your greatest skills is reading, I think you've heard the phrase "those who read a lot write better" and consequently speak better too.

LACK OF READING

Since I was a child, my mother has always encouraged me to study, because that way 'I would be someone in life', and along with studies, the practice of reading, which was well reinforced at school by teachers, who even in the long-lived 2000s already they said that in the future people would be functionally illiterate, that is, they would be literate and able to read and write, but that they would not have a critical conscience to interpret and question what they had at hand, as well as organize their own ideas with coherence and cohesion for a solid argumentation.

And here we are, in 2021 with a whole group of people (yes, I won't limit the age group, as it's a behavior and pattern that transcends age barriers), who can't/want to read a WhatsApp conversation that has more than 4 lines, or a corporate e-mail that does not come with images, infographics and few texts piled up and that does not exceed 3 lines.

The habit of reading, here I am not limited to books only, is considered cringe (old-fashioned, outdated, from a previous generation), because why bother reading something if I can find someone's video explaining it on YouTube?

But the ideal is when the information that was previously apprehended through reading becomes a 30-second video on that platform you know, there you reach the ultimate summary, it is commendable, ingenious, worthy of a prize (contains irony).

It is on this premise that reading is no longer important, the acquittal based on the understanding of a third party is what is in force, because you save time, resources, use of the brain and it is easier to get chewed up with someone explaining and picking up on the your hand, than doing everything yourself, isn't it?
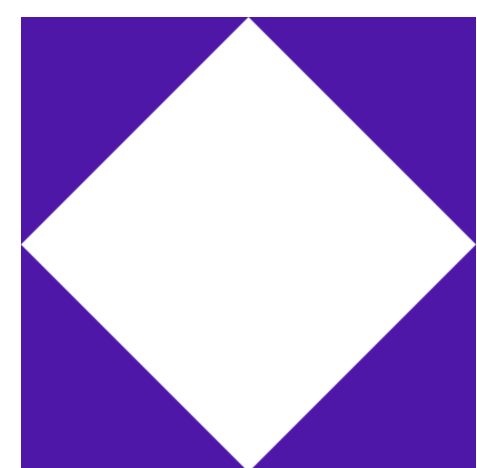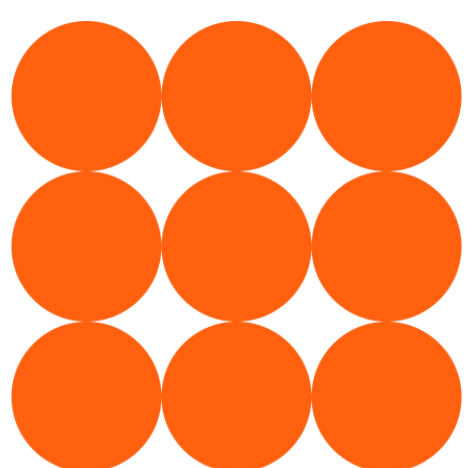
It is, in the great book 'Thinking, Fast and Slow', the economist Daniel Kahneman introduces us to the scientific phenomena that make up this fact, however, what I emphasize is that this entire economy is leaving us increasingly shallow and without the habit of reading, which brings us to our second point.

LACK OF INTERPRETATION

There is a maxim premise that I carry in my heart, which is: if there is a plaque, there is a story. Take a look at the image on the right (pause for verification), what do you think has happened to exist for a card like this? (The plaque say "PULL: Pull is the act of bringing the object towards you")

There are multiple possibilities that led the owner of the establishment to provide an explanation about the act of pulling, but I would bet on three: lack of reading, lack of interpretation and inattention (we will talk about it below).
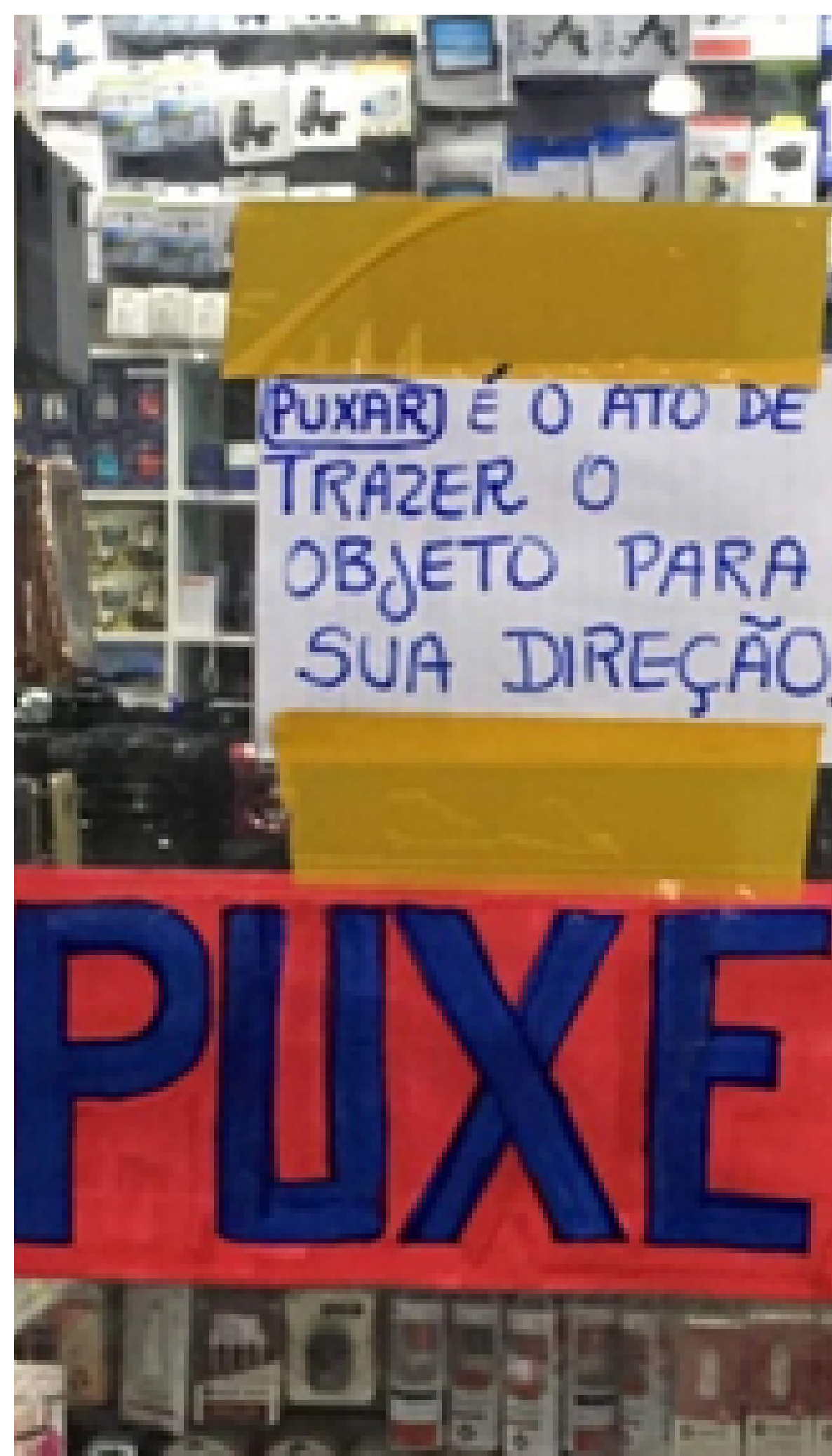
Triggered by the first point presented, lack of reading, lack of interpretation is one of the main points that generate meetings, because when we send an email and signal the following sentence: "We must structure ourselves better as a team, in this way from the next month, we will use financial management tools in the project, and that is why we ask for your support in indicating such tools" the chaos is initiate - "What do you have to do?", "Indicate which tools?", "Why improve the team ?", "They will cut people off the team!" "Are we going to use an ERP (Integrated Business Management System) in this project?

It's like using a cannon to kill an ant", and so on, through phrases like these you can illustrate my point, because I know you've been through something like this, and after so many comments and possible questions to the manager of the project, guess what will happen? That is right! An alignment meeting on the implementation of a financial management tool.

See how a communiqué that could be easily resolved in the context of the email response ends up being turned into a meeting?

Well, there are several moments when the management and planning of actions is thought of as making the project's communications, and during these discussions, even if unintentionally, most managers prefer to sin by excess, that is, to hold a meeting precisely because of the lack of interpretation that has affected professionals in the current market, but it's not just a matter of missing that there's a meeting, as I have already mentioned, there are excesses too, and in the next point we will talk more about this.

EXCESSIVE INTERPRETATION
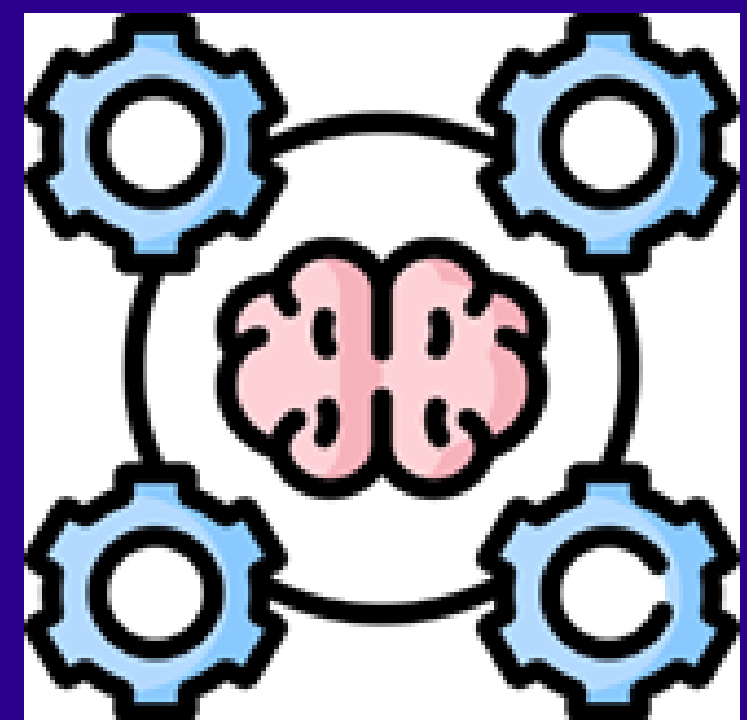
About excessive interpretation, I want to invite you, who like me, have a restless mind, think about many possibilities, scenarios, what has already happened, is going through and what could possibly happen, to take a deep breath and organize your ideas to the present and what's in front of you, just that, and that's all.

This point is closely linked to anxiety, because when reading a sentence such as: "We are conducting an organizational climate survey, just click on the link below and participate to help" the mind steps on the accelerator and goes with everything towards the multiple possibilities, and, with this, questions, many questions, because for those who have this profile, a longer text that provides more information than a line or two is much better.

The main point of difference between the item discussed above and this one is that in excess information is needed and, when it does not come by message, a meeting will be necessary, as it is necessary to align the scope of actions and/or project very well and , mainly, the non-scope, and information is rarely transmitted by message.

So, here comes a group of collaborators who have this profile, fast-paced thinking and who end up being the cause of more meetings, so you must be asking yourself that because of this profile, meetings should take place?

Partly, but not necessarily, with a large group of people, let alone prolonged, but with enough space to align the main expected delivery points, and here it is extremely important to have a list of questions and/or topics of what will be discussed at the meeting, in order to optimize it, we will talk more about it in the last chapter of this e-book.

The main message about excessive interpretation is that most of the time things are as they are and are written, and it turns out to be more the restless mind at work rather than the facts necessarily.
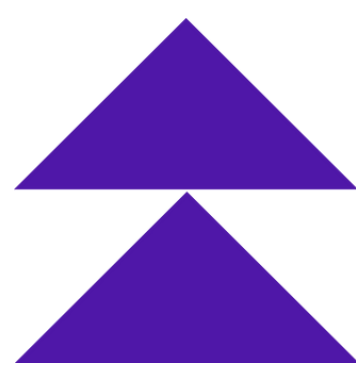
For those who experience this problem, I recommend writing down the main doubts that arise when reading a message, and then deciding whether a meeting is necessary or not, as it can be verified or applicable, what did the interlocutor forget and what is only in the field of imagination. And in addition to the points listed so far, there is one more enemy to be discussed, which can be seen below.

LACK OF FOCUS
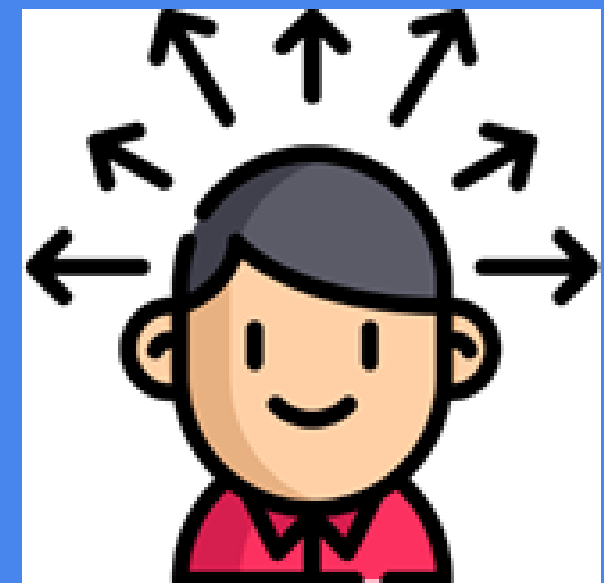
If you've come this far, or you're bravely resisting notifications from your cell phone and notebook, or took a few breaks to answer someone in your home or office, or even had to reread the same sentences a few times because while reading your mind it went far and he didn't understand what was written, so he had to reread it. (Be honest, remember our agreement?).

Well, there are multiple stimuli around us when we talk about now, music playing, video, cell phone, notebook, cars passing by, among others, but as mentioned by Williams and Penman, in the excellent book 'Mindfulness: An Eight-Week Plan for Finding Peace in a Frantic World' (2015, p. 31) "our mind unearths memories of past occasions when we felt threatened and then creates scenarios of what could happen in the future if we don't make it now.

The result is that the brain's warning signals are triggered not just by current danger, but also by past threats and future concerns. This process takes place instantly, without us noticing".

That is, we have to fight against external stimuli, but also against ourselves, who are oscillating between the past (lessons learned, fears, experiences) and the future (concerns, anxieties, ideas, planning, immediate demands and many emails and data everywhere), it's for these reasons that we end up hearing the following phrases: "I saw your email, but I haven't read it" or "it just went unnoticed in the middle of so much email", and the classic "I haven't seen it yet, but I'll see" (and ends up without an answer).

We are more and more caught up in future and past thoughts, consequently not living in the now, and this is one of the factors that makes **that email turns into a meeting.**

The lack of attention of several people to previously passed information, now adds this element to the lack and excess of interpretation and lack of reading, as a result **we will have a meeting that was once an email**, that possibly some people have read, but as we are talking about a group, everyone is summoned.

So far we have explored the reasons why meetings arise that could be avoided, and that you might not have noticed yet, and it is worth thinking about.

So far we have explored the reasons why meetings arise that could be avoided, and that you might not have noticed yet, and it is worth thinking about. Now, we need to look at how to resolve the situation, so in the next point I will present some possibilities that should help to have meetings that are more productive.
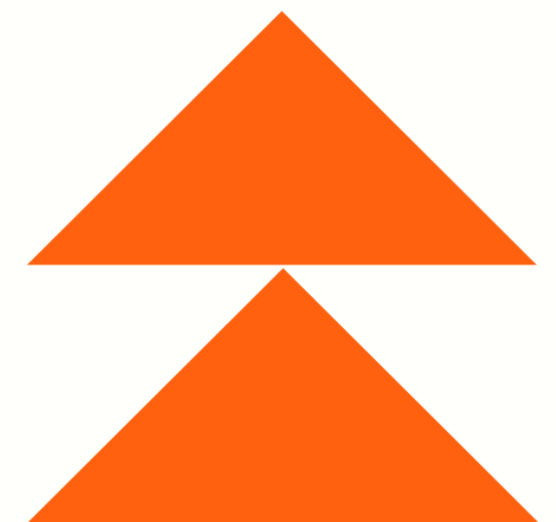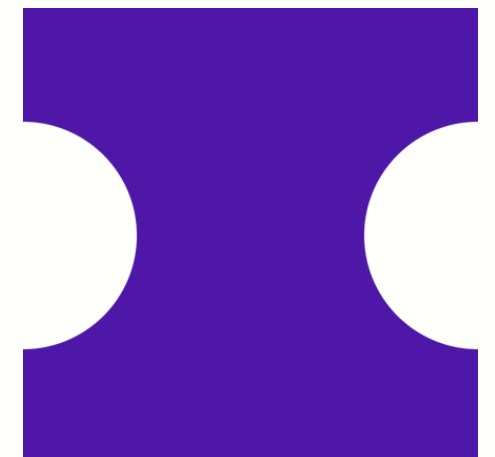
POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

 I wanted to be like those people who promise the miracle of your life in five steps, but we have an agreement here to be honest with each other and, respecting them, I bring some practices, tools and ways to make our meetings more productive or , at the very least, less boring, because as we have seen along these lines, they could often have been avoided, so let's see some activities that can help in this mission, starting with those of individual initiative and then those dependent on interpersonal development, and then arrive at the practices to be employed during the meetings themselves.

Reading habit: as I mentioned earlier in the text, here you are not limited to reading books. Don't like books? Read manga, magazines, articles, gossip articles on sites you might like. The important thing is that you develop this habit and do not give up or get discouraged when you receive a message with more than three lines, over time you will see that your communication skills and vocabulary will expand as a result of this practice.

Mindfulness: In order to help the restlessness of the mind that travels between the past and the future, often ignoring the present and its activities ahead, mindfulness practices have helped a lot in this aspect. I mentioned an excellent book that helps in this point, but do not limit yourself to it, explore more books and videos (which are longer than 1 minute, ok?!), there are apps that create calendar and schedule that can be useful for you in this work. The coolest thing about mindfulness practices is that they can be done while we eat, run, go to sleep, anyway, I highly recommend it.

Active Listening: This element may come as a consequence of the practices employed in mindfulness, but it can also be practiced always, without spending anything. First thing to do is shut up, instead of interrupting the person who is talking, and/or thinking about 10,000 other things while the other person explains something. A very obvious sign that your hearing is poor is noticing if you tend to respond with "yeah... I know... Truth..." while someone talks to you because your mind was in another world. Let the person speak, give at least 3 seconds to organize the thought and then respond, preferably with questions that help seal what was said, and/or offer a complementary perspective to what is being said.

 Ask yourself first: Here I bring the obvious, but what needs to be said, before looking for another person and/or answering a message ask yourself first before asking another person, this simple act will make your brain go out of automatic mode, running away from the lack of interpretation and creating the possible answers that are already in front of you, so if the answers are still not satisfactory, it is worth consulting the interlocutor. I complement that it would be an interesting practice to always start by contextualizing and explaining your point of view and how you arrived at such ideas or doubts, this demonstrates that you have analyzed the situation on different aspects that even the person has not considered and will make the contact more productive.
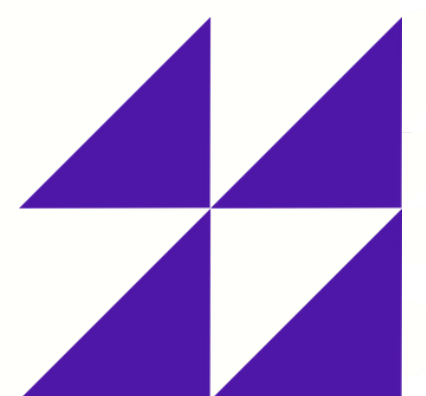
T Have an agenda: We all know this one implicitly, but many, many times we don't apply and end up generating anxiety triggers in the teams, because in the long term this will become exhausting and harmful to the professionals' climate and health. I am very serious about this point, because in addition to having an agenda, it is necessary to communicate to the meeting participants about what will be discussed, this will help in planning, preparation and will reduce the concern about what can be discussed, and will give a dimension of the amount of time to be used in this meeting, so please always have your agenda defined and communicated to the participants.

Definition of roles and responsibility: As a complementary element to the agenda, it is necessary to have defined roles and responsibilities among the organizers and much of this is preached by the PMBOK, SCRUM, SPRINT, facilitation techniques, among others. It is more than important to have someone managing the time and someone leading the discussions in order not to deviate from the topic at hand (see why it is worth having her and the teams know?!), I strongly recommend having these two roles, which can be cumulative , but will require experience. When these actions are defined, it becomes easier and agreed, even if implicitly that these aspects and people must be respected. And speaking of agreed, we have the next item.

Agreements: The practice of establishing agreements for meetings is relatively new, as it is widely used in contexts of facilitating courses, workshops and events, but it is very welcome in the meeting environment.

And how it works? Basically after the initial screen of the event or close to that, put the agreements that must be respected by everyone, EVERYONE, during the meeting, can be behavioral and practical in nature. Examples: To speak you have to raise your hand (in person and virtual); not using the phone during activities; actively participate in the moments of activities; meet the times for each activity; get straight to the point without too much context.

These are some proposals, but it is up to reflection on what makes sense in each meeting, but the biggest point of attention and that must be taken into account is <u>the fulfillment and respect for them.</u>

Set Breaks: One last important tip, when scheduling your meeting, define strategic breaks, InfoMoney did a study pointing out that the ideal duration of meetings is ideally 45 minutes, but let's be practical and realistic, there are few meetings that are objective and effective, and this time would be too little for what is discussed.

I recommend that if the meeting is direct and only with discussions without activities, have at most an hour and a half, going beyond the limits of patience and spine. However, if you have activities and are more practical, I recommend that it be 2 hours, but with at least a 5-minute break. I suggest this, because usually someone slips away during activities, he observes.

And so we ended with some indications of what to do to improve our meetings, because as we have seen, it is not always possible to complain just saying: "this meeting should be an email", because many times it was, and someone did not fulfill their part by transforming the message on a meeting, so whenever you see someone saying it or you are going to do it yourself, ask yourself: "Did I read everything I needed to?

Did I understand what I read? If this turns into a meeting, what can I do to add?" it is simple, but it does not mean it will be easy.

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VERSÃO EM OUTRO IDIOMA

Português: A reunião poderia ser um e-mail, será?

Projeto desenvolvido por meio da parceria dos capítulos: