KOMYU

5 hidden meanings

of "*I don't have time for the Community activities*" in the workplace

and how to deal with this answer

About the authors

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As a cross-functional leader or corporate community leader, you may ask members to get involved and to engage in activities.

To your requests, they may answer that *"They don't have time"...* leading the participation to your activities to drop, with the many risks it implies.

Here is a short guide on how to deal with the *"I don't have time"* answer, through the various hidden meanings that sentence can have.

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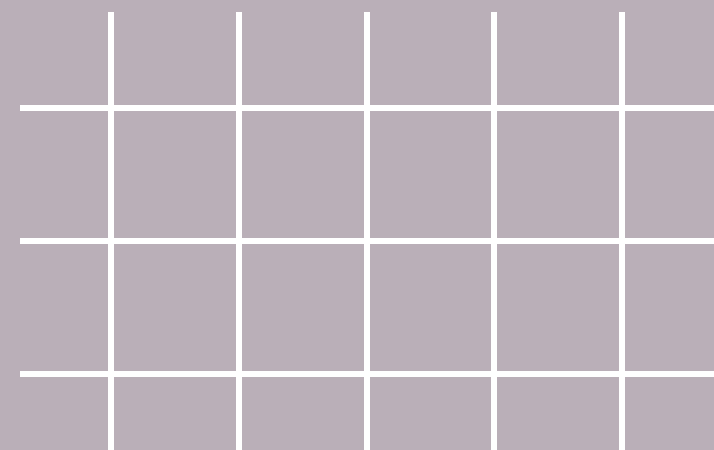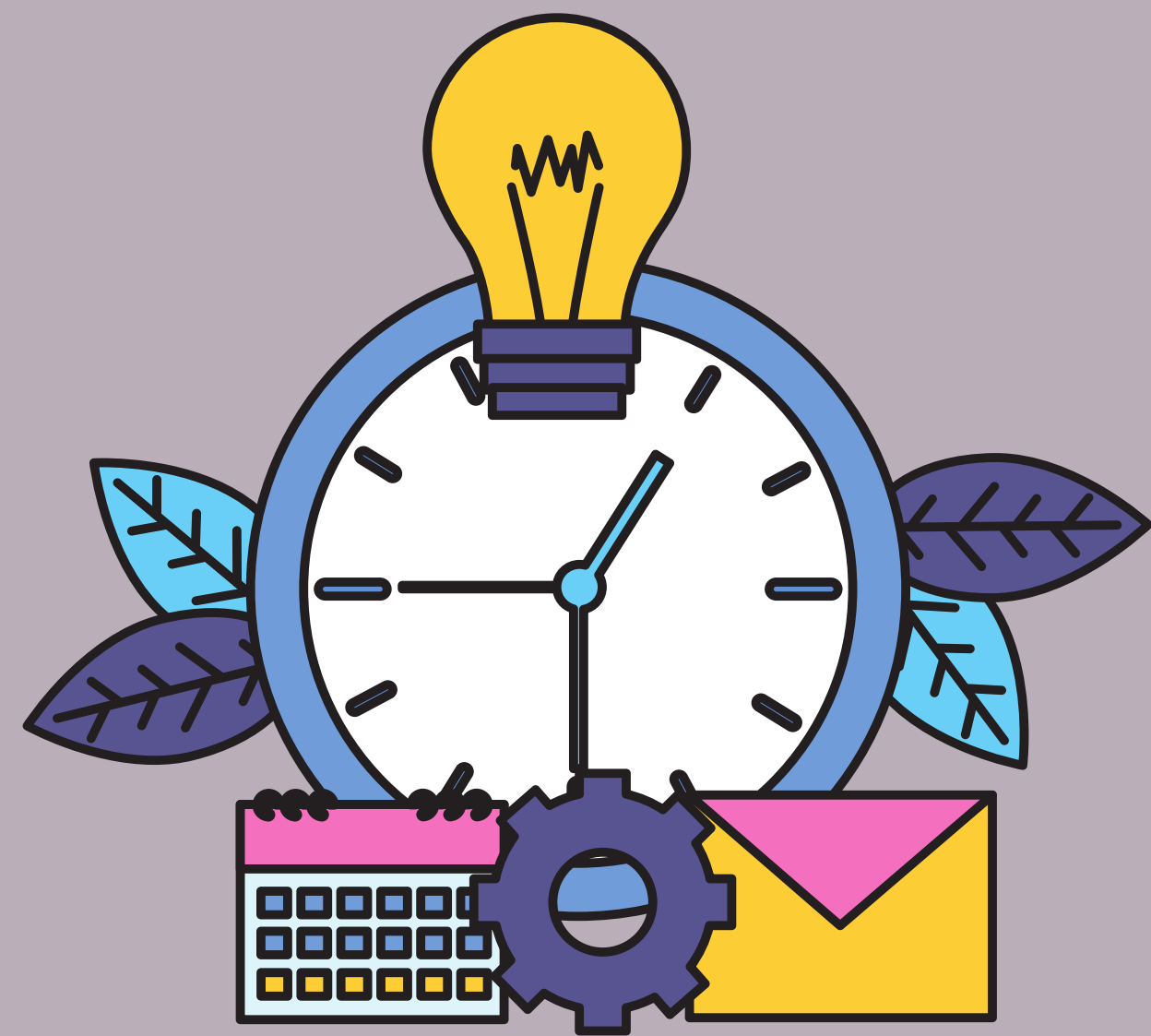
General guidelines about "I don't have time"

ACCEPT THE FACT AS IT IS FOR THE MOMENT...
If someone tells you "I do not have time", do not take it personnally yet and react too harshly. Accept the answer as it is for the moment, at least as "the first answer that came to mind of your interlocutor".

...BUT DO NOT ABANDON RIGHT AWAY..
Accepting the answer as it is does not mean abandon all your efforts to persuade, to convince, or just to increase the chances for people to attend.

AND LISTEN WHAT IS HIDING BEHIND "I DON'T HAVE TIME."
Not having time is one way to express a refusal. If you figure out the underlying reasons, you may find solutions to make people change their decisions. This guide is made to help you do so.

DECIDE WHEN YOU WILL ADAPT...
Knowing what hides behind "I don't have time", you can choose to modulate the activity you propose, change it, repeat it or be accomodating.

... AND WHEN YOU WILL NOT
But not all people are always worth big changes to your activity for them to attend. It will be up to you to decide what is best between "getting someone to attend at all cost" and "focus on the others".

1. "This is not my current priority"

"I can't figure out if your activity is worth my time or not, and when in doubt : it is no !"

"I understand the value of your activity, and it is lower than my other activities."

*"I don't feel that your proposition is worth it"*
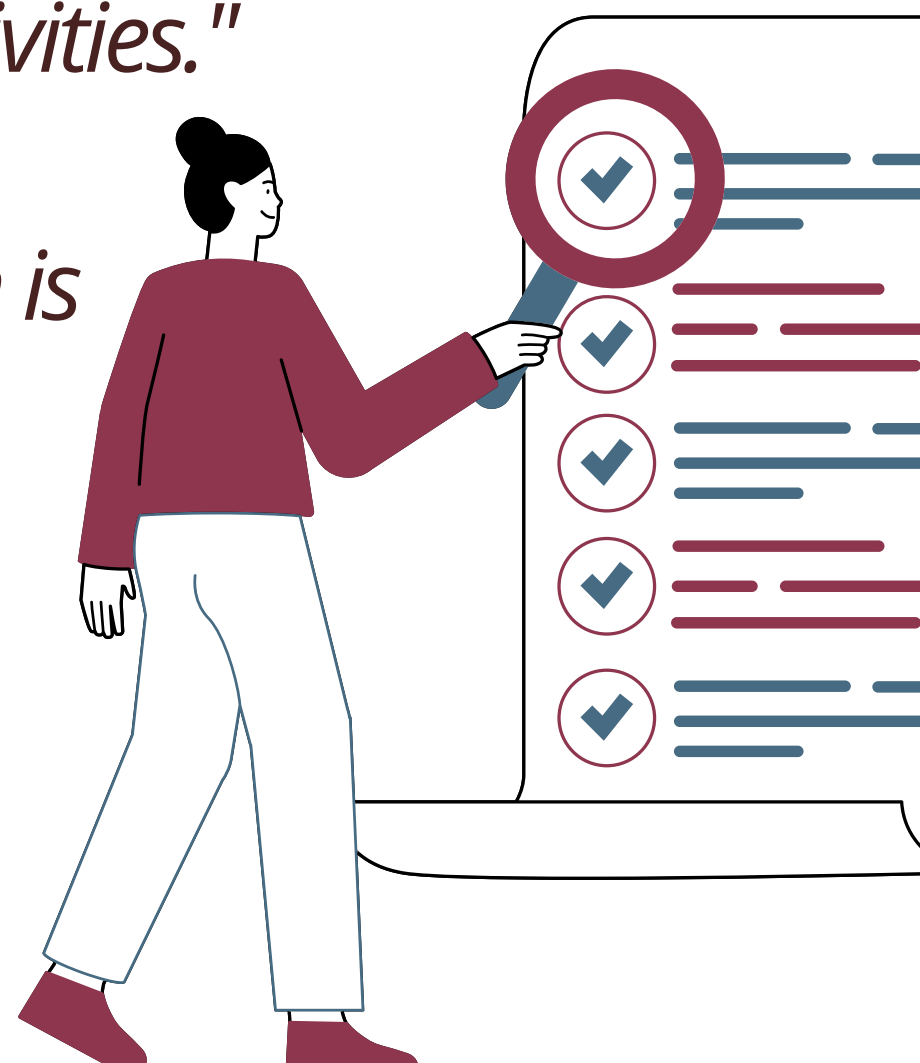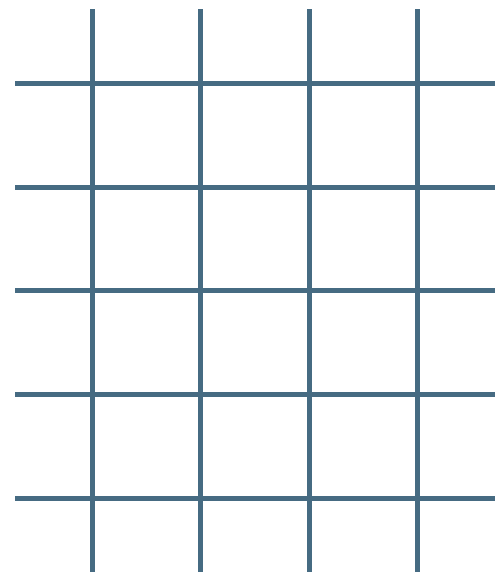
1."This is not my current priority"

Tips and ways to answer to this situation

The value of the activity you propose might be unclear to your interlocutor (who then refuses it), or it might be considered not important enough.

- Showcase the value of your activity with examples of other people ("*John participated last session and he was quite happy because...*")
- Help your interlocutor imagine his/her own benefits ("*If you participate, you will get...*")
- Inquire about current priorities and
  - Explain / show alignement or your activity with it ("*This {activity} is definitely aligned with your current priority, because it can help you...*")
  - or even promote your activity as more interesting or important ("*You may find {activity} more useful at this time because...*")
- In some situations, the decision of your interlocutor can also depend on the emotional tone of your invitation. It is up to you to make it happier, more emotionnally urgent, or exciting.
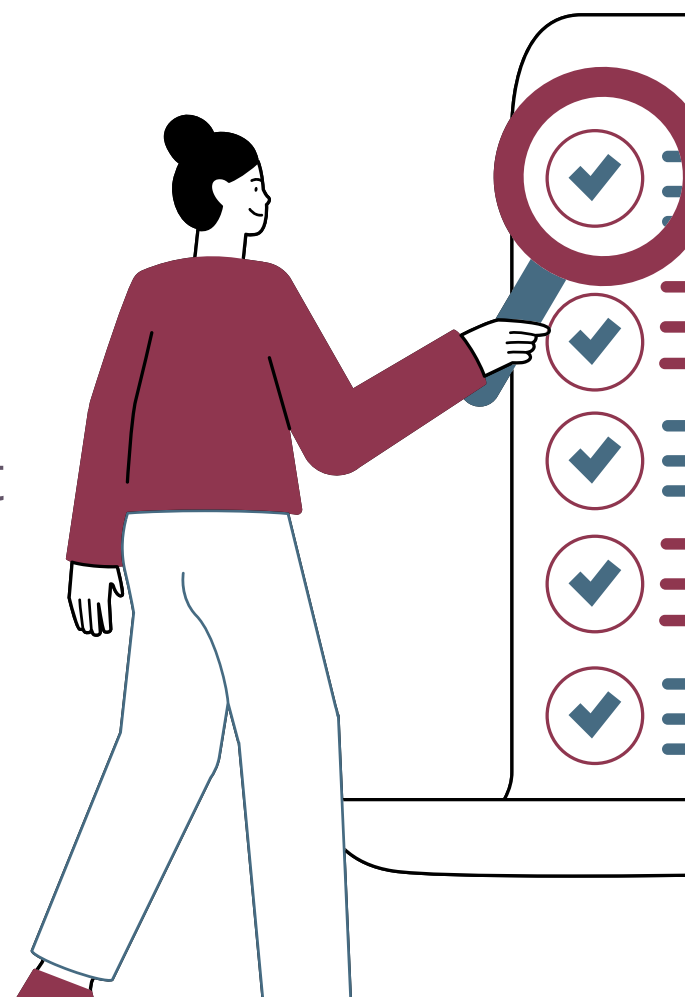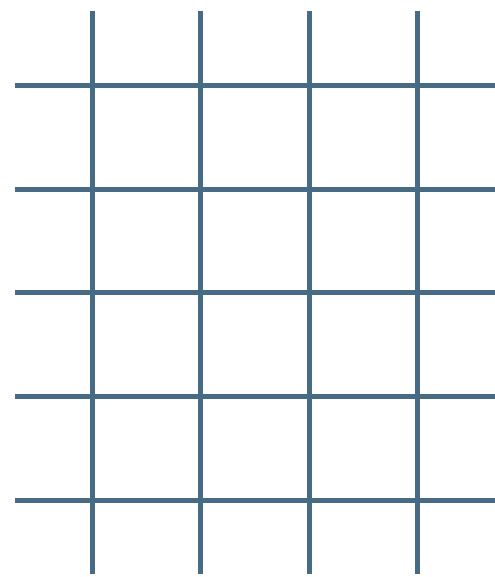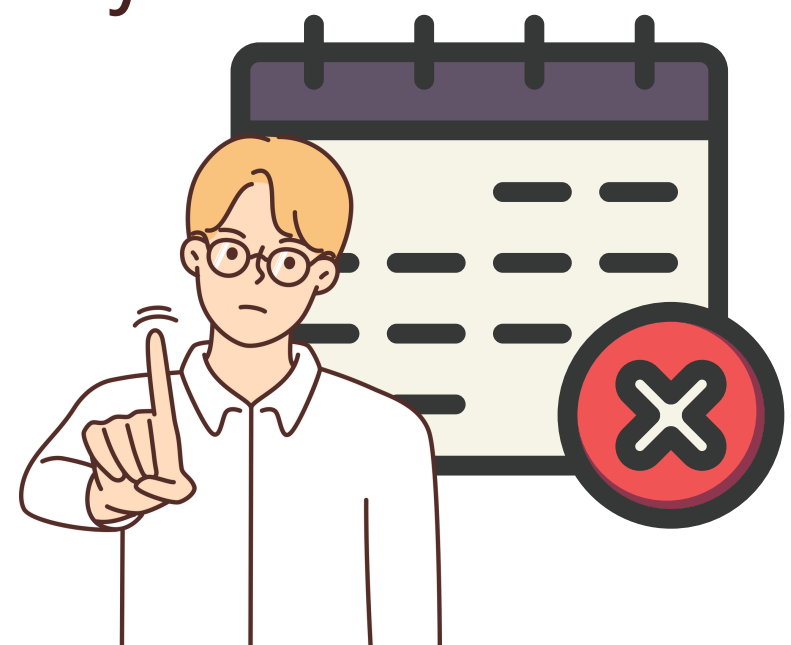
2. "Overall I have time, but not at the moment you ask for"

"I may find some time in my agenda for your activity, but not on the day and hour you are proposing. Other timeslots could be possible."

"I don't have enough time at the exact timeslot you propose, but I can attend if you make your activity shorter."

# 2. "Overall I have time, but not at the moment you ask for"

Tips and ways to answer to this situation

Your activity proposal might not fit your interlocutor's agenda. There are several ways you can adapt to this situation :

- Shorten the activity
- Split the activity into smaller bits so that people can partially attend
- Split the activity into smaller bits and make them happen on different timeslots
- Change the schedule of the activity
- Add several repetitions for the activity to increase the chances to find a timeslot that fits (good for groups in different time zones)
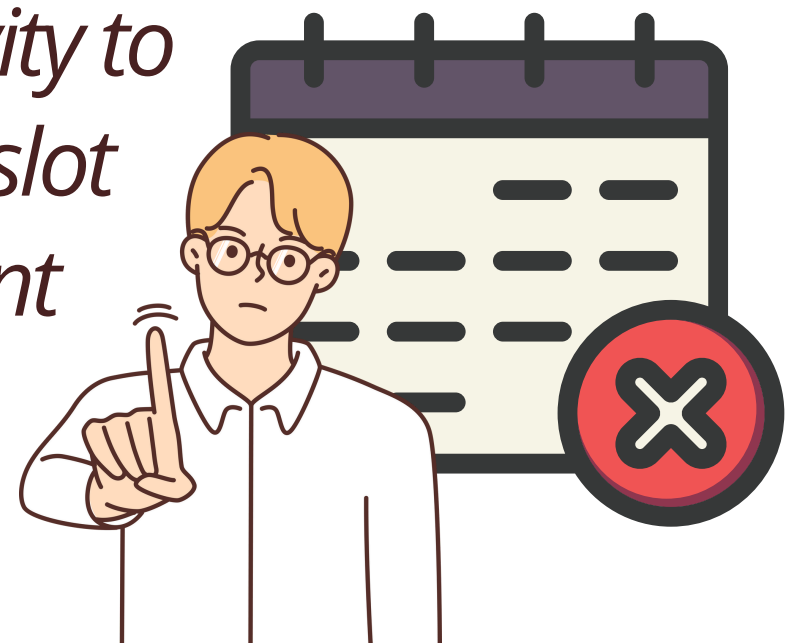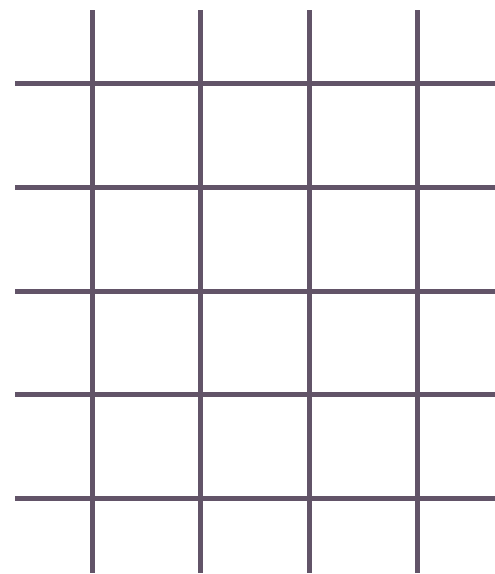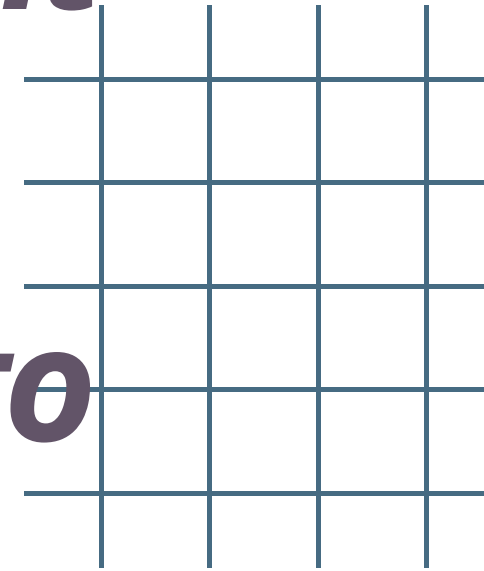
3. I am not able to commit yet
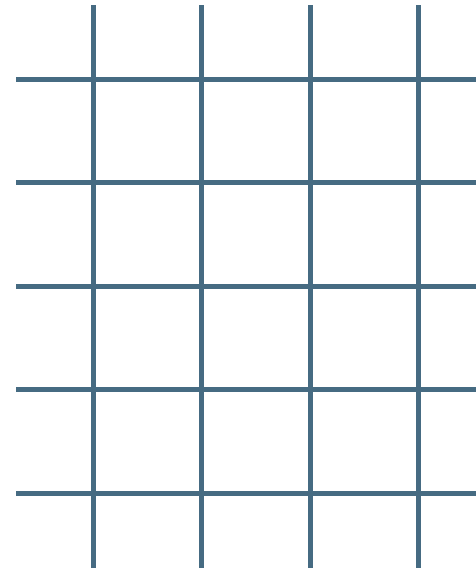
"I do not even know when and how much time you ask me for, therefore I am unable to commit."

"I am not sure now if I will have enough time or not for your activity. Emergencies can happen and I want to keep free time to react to it. Therefore I am not able to commit"

3. "I am not able to commit yet"

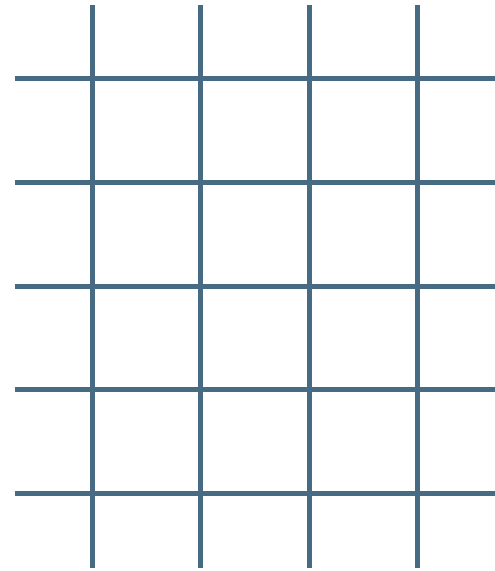# Tips and ways to answer to this situation

It might be difficult for people to commit now to your activity, often because of some uncertainty on various factors. To deal with this situation, here are several possibilities :

- Ask if there are any information the person would need to make the choice (to participate or not) easier.
- Clarify date, time, duration, and all other necessary details for commitment
- Propose to ask again later (maybe by then your interlocutor will have more visibility on his/her availability)
- Ask for a tentative commitment (tentative yes, tentative no) if you need this information (to estimate size of the audience for example), and plan a confirmation later.

4. "I do not have enough energy"

"I may have time, but I am too tired to start a new activity and to scatter my attention."

"I may have time but it takes too much energy to switch from my current activity to yours."

"I may have time, but I am too tired to check and arrange my schedule for the activity you propose."

4. "I do not have enough energy"

Tips and ways to answer to this situation

It is not always about time only : to attend your activities, someone must both have time and sufficient energy to really make the most of the moment. Also, if someone is too tired to take a decision, they may consider "not even having the time to check their availability".

Here are some tips to deal with these situations :
- Make your activity less energy-consuming :
  - Integrate break time within your activity, add food and beverage.
  - Make your activity shorter, simpler
  - Plan moments in your activity for low attention / concentration attendees (full audio moments, top down, ...)
- Try to find synergies with other activities of your interlocutor and focus on it to avoid him/her feeling scattered in many topics
- Make planning simpler
- Offer to help in checking
- Change the timeslot to adjust to availability of your interlocutor (without him/her having to check his/her agenda him/herself)
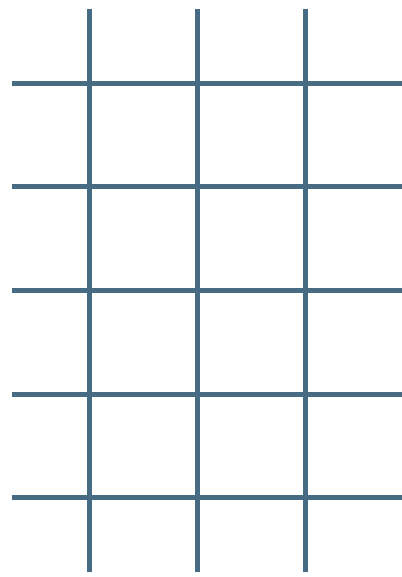
# 5. I do not feel safe to share the true reasons with you

"You might take it wrong"

"Someone else might take it wrong if I attend"

"Someone else might take it wrong if my real source of demotivation is known"

5. I do not feel safe to share the true reasons with you

People may not feel safe with sharing the real reason of their refusal with you. Mentioning time and external constraints (hierarchy, etc.) can be a way to politely refuse without taking full responsibility for it, and therefore to avoid risks on the relationship.
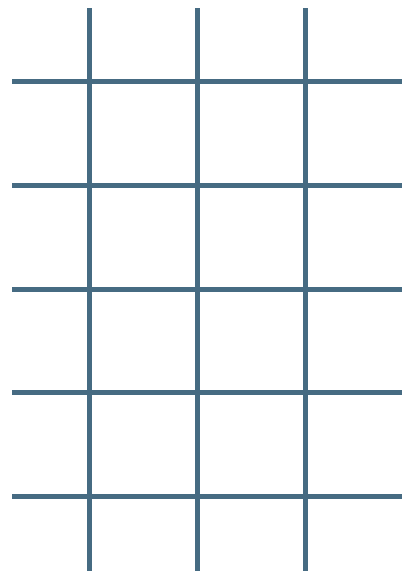
Here are some tips to deal with this situation :

- (Verbally or with written commitment) Guarantee confidentiality of inquiry results
- Use anonymous polls, idea boxes, etc. or make the names optional when you need to inquire about refusals
- Do not ask for personal information about respondents, and clearly indicate that answers will not be enough to trace back to them
- Ask questions about refusals in more private contexts (not in group or in front of key people)
- Inquire about what would ma ke people feel safer to share reasons of refulsal with you

Open questions for exploration

Identifying in which case of "*I don't have time*" you fall may not be easy. Here are some open questions to help you better understand the situation. You can use it in discussions, polls, feedback walls, in formal or informal situations.

How do you feel overall about this activity proposal ?

What information could be useful for you to confirm or change your decision ?

What currently prevents you from participating ?

What could make it (this activity) easier for you to participate ?

Closed questions to confirm inquiry

To make sure you pinpoint the reasons of "I don't have time" well, you can use the following closed questions. You can use it in discussions, polls, feedback walls, in formal or informal situations.

Would you say it is rather a matter of priorities than a problem of having time ?

Would adjusting agenda details (time, duration, ...) increase the chances that you attend ?

Are you in difficult position to commit to attend right now ?

Would you consider to attend if you only had more energy at the moment or at the activity time ?

Do you feel safe in sharing details of your decision with me ?

Remember the solutions with this memory trick

Here is a way to remember the 5 big categories of hidden meanings behind "I don't have time". Call it the **PACES** method.

1. Thumb - **P**RIORITY
2. Index finger - **A**GENDA
3. Middle finger - **C**OMMITMENT
4. Ring finger - **E**NERGY
5. Little finger - **S**AFETY

Commitment

Agenda

Energy

Safety

Priority

Practice makes perfect

Now it is your turn to apply these tips, invent new ones, and share wisdom with your colleagues, friends, and community members !

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