



# *Zoomed in, zoned out*

How the meeting-first approach is failing hybrid workers



# Executive summary

The aftershocks of the COVID-19 pandemic transformed the way we work. Physical offices gave way to remote working and, later, hybrid and distributed teams. This seismic shift accelerated the adoption of digital tools, with businesses of all sizes pivoting to virtual platforms for team collaboration and communication. And, while many businesses have reaped the rewards of this new way of working — improved productivity, global hiring pools, and reduced rent — they continue to grapple with how to adapt traditional workflows and processes to this new model, especially, the age-old institution of the ‘meeting’.

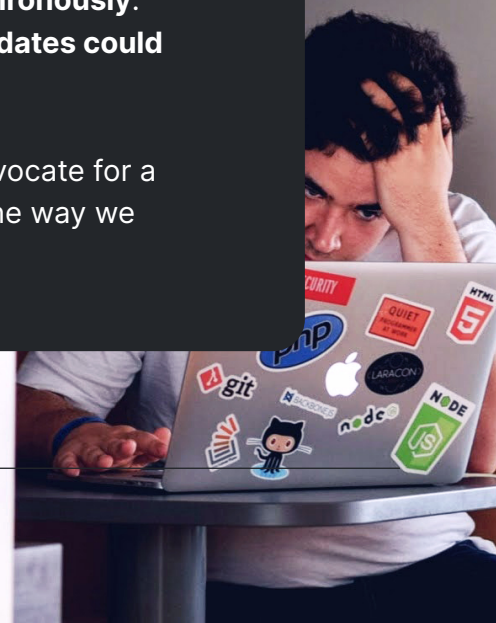
Meetings, once the cornerstone of corporate decision-making and team engagement, are being reevaluated. The landscape of back-to-back conference rooms and water cooler discussions has been replaced with Zoom calls and Slack messages. The transition, though swift, has not been without its challenges. While remote work democratized access and provided flexibility, it also amplified the inefficiencies and stressors inherent in our meeting-centered work culture.

## Our study — surveying 2000 hybrid workers in the US — paints a vivid picture: meetings aren’t working.

Almost **60% of respondents think the number of hours they spend each week in meetings could be reduced**. While workers spend **an average of four hours a week in meetings**, the return on this investment seems dismal. **Only 22% of workers say they always go to meetings feeling prepared**, and **more than a third say they didn’t receive value from their most recent meetings**.

But amidst these challenges lies an opportunity. The same digital tools that enabled our transition to remote work also offer a solution to the meeting conundrum: **asynchronous communication**. Sharing written updates with your colleagues — where team members don’t have to engage in real-time but can instead leave considered feedback on their own time — might be the silver bullet modern workplaces need. A compelling **70% of surveyed professionals think meeting time could be reduced by using collaboration tools to communicate asynchronously**. Moreover, almost **three-quarters asserted that pre-sharing written updates could make meetings shorter and more effective**.

In this report, we dive deep into the complexities of meeting culture, advocate for a more discerning, asynchronous approach, and chart a path to change the way we think about meetings in the age of the hybrid team.





## ○ Key findings

- **Workers think they spend too much time in meetings.** 59% of respondents think they could spend less time in meetings each week. And you can see why, with the average worker spending at least four hours a week in meetings. Meeting hours are higher for managers with 14% saying they have more than seven hours of meetings in an average work week.
- **The return on investment from meetings is poor.** Lack of preparation means meetings don't provide value for everyone in the team. Less than a quarter of workers say they always feel prepared for meetings so it's not surprising that 35% of respondents claim they didn't get any value from their latest meetings.
- **All these meetings are causing anxiety.** Of the 2000 US workers we surveyed, a staggering 80% of respondents say they feel anxious about attending work meetings. This is an alarming figure when you consider [the impact work anxiety can have on your team's wellbeing and your business.](#)
- **Workers think async, written updates could help reduce meeting hours.** 72% of workers say at least one recent meeting could have been communicated in writing, while almost three quarters think that sharing written status updates ahead of calls could decrease the time they spend in meetings. The majority of respondents say using collaboration tools to communicate asynchronously could also help.
- **Workers understand the value of alignment and visibility but teams are still siloed.** 70% of respondents agree that staying up-to-date with what other team members are working on improves collaboration but almost two thirds of workers agree that it's hard to know what other departments or teams are working on.



# The transition to hybrid working hasn't been as smooth as we think

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To understand the current issues surrounding work meetings, we need to look more closely at how we've ended up where we are today. The onset of the pandemic catapulted businesses into a rushed transition they weren't adequately prepared for.

While the swift pivot to remote work should be applauded, the subsequent shift back towards hybrid working has seen many organizations reverting to old habits and processes, that they're struggling to retroactively apply to the new way of working.

A [2022 Forrester report, commissioned by Airbnb](#), found that widespread and uncoordinated adoption of software tools across

teams has created glaring organizational silos and blindspots. This disjointed approach makes it impossible for teams to find information, leaving decision-makers without a clear view of what's happening inside their organizations.

## The shift towards hybrid working has seen many organizations reverting to old habits

And the backdrop to this transition makes it clear why issues are arising — according to [a recent study by AT&T](#), the vast majority of businesses are navigating this paradigm shift without a concrete hybrid work strategy in place. Yet, the same study underscores that the hybrid work model is here to stay, predicting it to be the standard by 2024 with more than half of work carried out offsite.

For many businesses, the solution to this lack of visibility and alignment seems to be adding more meetings to the calendar. But our data shows that meetings aren't the panacea some businesses think they are.



# Meeting fatigue is slowing hybrid businesses down

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As more and more companies transition to a hybrid work model without putting appropriate tools and process in place, meetings have become the default mode of communication for many businesses. But our study indicates that this over-reliance on meetings could be having detrimental effects on productivity.

**Time spent in meetings is time spent not executing:** Every hour spent in a meeting is an hour that team members aren't completing tasks, brainstorming ideas, or engaging in deep work. While collaboration is essential, it's crucial to strike a balance between coming together and individual productivity.

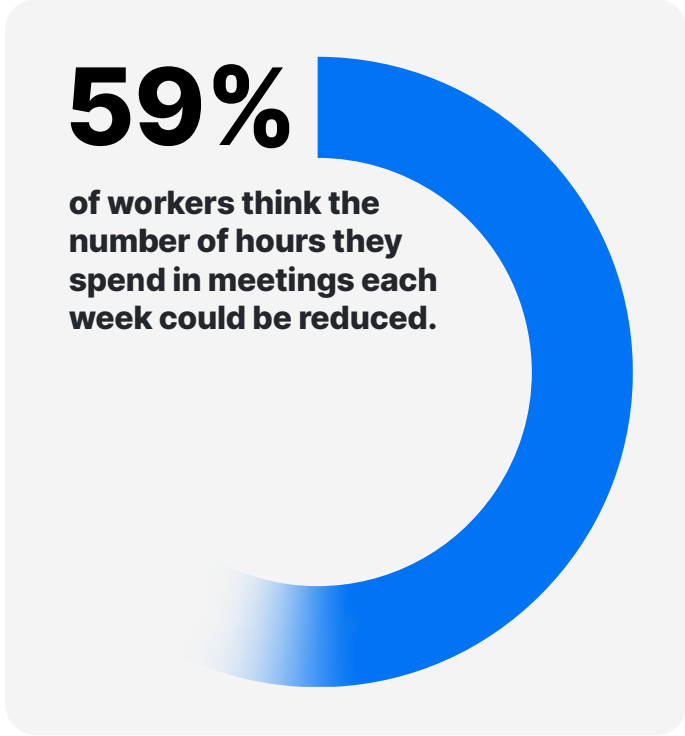
**It's crucial to strike a balance between coming together and individual productivity.**

With almost 60% of workers saying they could spend less time in meetings each week, and 72% saying at least one recent meeting could have been an email, there's still more work to be done to get this balance right.

**Meetings don't provide value for everyone:** Only 65% of workers say they've received value from their most recent meetings. For the remaining one third of workers, the issue might not just be wasted time.

Those less productive meetings could be acting as roadblocks, slowing down individual momentum and having a knock-on effect on overall team productivity.

**Meetings are more disruptive than we think:** Meetings don't just impact focus and productivity during the hours they're scheduled for. Continuous partial attention (CPA), a term coined by Linda Stone, refers to the superficial level of attention we give to multiple tasks in today's digital work environment. This constant state of divided attention, coupled with back-to-back meetings, diminishes cognitive abilities by reducing focus, impairing memory, elevating stress levels, and hindering decision-making.



**59%**

**of workers think the number of hours they spend in meetings each week could be reduced.**

**Even at smaller scales, organizations are struggling with too many meetings:** Our data proves that size doesn't exempt businesses from the pitfalls of excessive meetings. The majority of respondents to our survey work in companies with less than 50 employees so even in relatively small organizations, the sheer volume of meetings is overwhelming.

For startups and SMEs, where agility and rapid execution are vital to survival, being bogged down by ineffective meetings is a luxury many can't afford.



# Meeting anxiety is affecting the wellbeing of workers

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**The alarming number of respondents who experience meeting anxiety is cause for concern.** Mental health is pivotal to overall well-being. Work-induced stress, especially from excessive meetings, has both immediate and long-term repercussions. This includes everything from decreased day-to-day productivity to potential long-term mental health issues, which can lead to increased sick leave, burnout, and higher turnover rates.

With 80% of workers saying that they get anxious before work calls, your busy calendar could be having profound effects on your business.

And the mental health impacts could be worse, depending on the format of your meetings. “Zoom fatigue” or “video conferencing fatigue” describes the tiredness, worry, or burnout associated with overusing virtual platforms for work-related calls. While meetings, in general, can contribute to weariness, video conferencing intensifies these feelings due to several unique factors:

- **Constant self-view:** Continuously seeing ourselves on video calls can be mentally taxing. Self-view can lead to heightened self-consciousness and increased cognitive load, as we’re constantly evaluating our own image. [One study even coined the term “Zoom dysmorphia”](#) to describe a rise in patients seeking cosmetic surgery or interventions due to the time they spent on video calls during the Covid-19 pandemic.

- **Non-verbal overload:** Video calls require [greater attention to sending and receiving non-verbal communication cues like facial expressions, gestures, and tonal variations](#). Decoding these cues over video where you might be looking at a small, low quality image or getting cues from multiple people at once is more challenging and draining than in face-to-face interactions.
- **Tech glitches:** Connectivity issues, lag, or software malfunctions can disrupt the flow of meetings, causing frustration and increasing the amount of time spent on calls.
- **Lack of mobility:** Unlike face-to-face meetings, video calls often demand people to stay in a fixed position to remain in the frame. Sitting still for extended periods during video calls limits physical movement, which can result in physical strain and discomfort.



80%

**of workers feel anxious or worried about attending day-to-day work meetings**

*Only 9% of respondents disagreed with the statement “I often feel anxious or worried about attending day-to-day work meetings” with 11% saying they neither agreed or disagreed.*

# Key recommendations

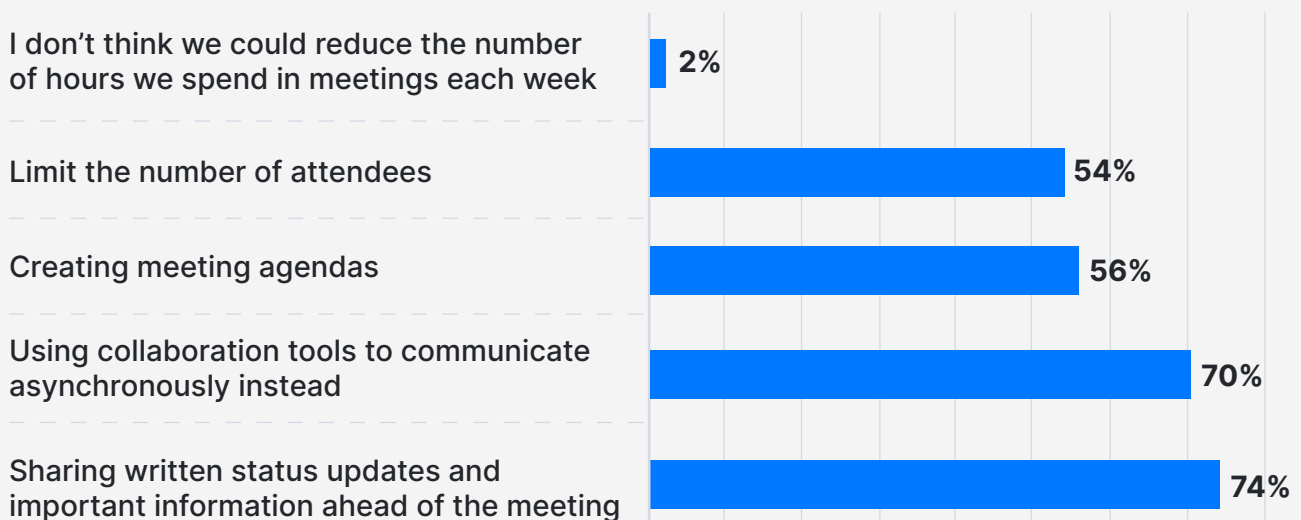
The findings in this study coupled with global trends highlight the urgency for businesses to start taking action to combat the challenges associated with meeting fatigue. To do so, businesses must be proactive in their approach to meetings and communication. Based on the insights gathered from our study, improved communication, better preparation, and proper tooling are the key. Here are some actionable recommendations:

## Embrace async communication

The vast majority of respondents to our survey said that meeting time could be reduced by adopting processes like sharing written status updates ahead of meetings (74%) or using collaboration tools to communicate asynchronously instead (70%). Here's why written, async communication could help your team move faster.

- **Provide flexibility with written updates:** Async, written communication empowers team members to consume and respond to information at their own pace. This flexibility ensures that everyone can provide thoughtful feedback without the pressure of real-time discussions.
- **Create visibility without volume:** Instead of bloating calls with cross-functional colleagues for the sake of visibility, written updates allow team members to stay informed without sitting in on long meetings. With 54% of workers advocating for limited attendees, it's clear that there's a desire is for more efficient, focused discussions.

### How do you think your team could reduce the number of hours you spend in meetings each week?



- **Remove silos with radical transparency:** Moving to async, written communication involves a lot of transparency and trust. To help make information more visible across the business, teams have to start sharing more in public spaces — this vulnerability can be hard at first but the benefits are huge. Teams will get more visibility of other department's work and decision-makers can get a clear picture of progress and blockers across the company. This would be good news for the 64% of workers who agree that it's hard to know what other teams are working on.

## Build it into your culture

According to [AT&T's Future of Work study in 2022](#), 58% of workers don't think they have the culture to sustain a hybrid work model. A successful culture shift is to async working is the key to unlocking productive hybrid work in any organization but you have to be prepared to make a big investment.

- **Do away with meeting-first thinking:** the proliferation of real-time communication tools has conditioned teams to think that instant messaging and meetings are the quickest solution to any problem. But the disruption caused by this way of working is laid bare in our report. Moving to asynchronous working requires a total mindset change — meetings don't have to be the default.
- **Intentionality is key:** Shifting towards asynchronous communication isn't just about adopting new tools; it's about a change in mindset. Teams need to understand the value and be provided with training and support around effective asynchronous communication practices.
- **Champion the benefits:** Highlight the advantages of asynchronous communication for your team and your business, like improved work-life balance, reduced stress, and the ability to get more done during the most productive hours of the day.
- **Consult your team and check-in:** To make an organization-wide change like this, it's important to bring your team along with you. Getting input from teams and employees about new work processes will help them to feel ownership and improve adoption and engagement.

## Use the right tools

- **Equip your teams:** Invest in collaboration tools that support asynchronous communication. Look for features that allow for easy status updates, threaded discussions, and ways to integrate with the other tools you use.
- **Choose tools that will get adopted:** Lots of collaboration and communication tools can feel overwhelming or complex. Tools only work if they get used so make sure you choose software that's flexible enough for your whole team to use and that workers actually enjoy using.
- **Provide training to increase retention:** It's not enough to just have the tools; teams need to know how to use them effectively. Regular training sessions can ensure everyone is getting the most out of the platforms and using them in a way that aligns with the company's goals.



- **Create a feedback loop:** Continuously gather feedback on the tools and practices in place. This feedback will ensure that the systems evolve as the team's needs change or your business grows, ensuring long-term success and adaptability.

## You don't have to say goodbye to meetings completely

The time saved from removing unproductive meetings from your calendar can be redirected towards more meaningful and collaborative tasks, such as deep work sessions, complex problem-solving, or creative brainstorming. By prioritizing meetings that truly require collaboration and face-to-face interaction, teams can focus their energies on initiatives that drive growth and innovation.

Furthermore, our survey highlighted the importance of in-person interactions at work. 72% of workers we surveyed agree that being able to physically see and interact with team members helps improve their productivity and learning. This indicates that onsite meetings, when used strategically, can help to foster a sense of connection and alignment within teams, enhancing collaboration and efficiency.

By embracing a balanced approach that combines asynchronous communication with well-planned and purposeful meetings, organizations can build a work culture and environment that emphasizes efficiency without sacrificing the vital human connections that fuel innovation and achievement.

## Making meetings matter

Key strategies to make sure your meetings are intentional, meaningful, and drive results.

### Does this need to be a meeting?

Before scheduling, consider whether the topic can be addressed through written, async communication.

### Set a shared agenda:

Collaboratively define the meeting's purpose and goals in advance, ensuring alignment and clear expectations among attendees.

### Make sure everyone does a pre-read:

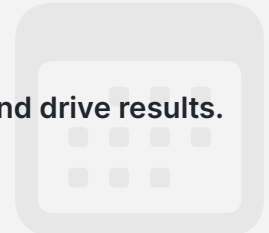
Encourage participants to share thoughts, talking points or blockers before meetings and ask everyone to review materials and come prepared, facilitating a more focused and productive discussion.

### Assess and improve your meetings:

Regularly assess the effectiveness of meetings by gathering feedback, allowing continuous refinement of process and content.

### When you can, meet in person:

Face-to-face interactions can foster deeper connections and collaboration. They also avoid some of the more negative impacts of video calls like technical issues or zoom fatigue.



# Appendix

## Methodology

In this study, OnePoll conducted an online survey of 2000 hybrid workers in the US on behalf of Craft. Questions provided to the participants asked about the quantity and quality of meetings they attend and how aligned respondents felt with their team. The study began on 5th July 2023 and ended on the 31st July 2023.

## References

1. Mental Health UK. "Anxiety in the workplace: The impact on the nation's workforce." [Link](#).
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3. AT&T The State of the Industry: Future of Work report. (2022) [Link](#).
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## About Craft

[Craft](#) is building the future of documents. Simple, yet powerful, Craft is a significant evolution in how we capture, write and share information and ideas.

Craft won a Mac App of the Year Award in 2021 and is available for iOS, Mac, Windows and Web. Craft offers real-time syncing from any device, an exceptionally beautiful UX, and unique deep-linking functionality.

Founded by Balint Orosz, a product design expert and UX specialist, Craft is headquartered in Budapest, Hungary, with hubs in the UK.

