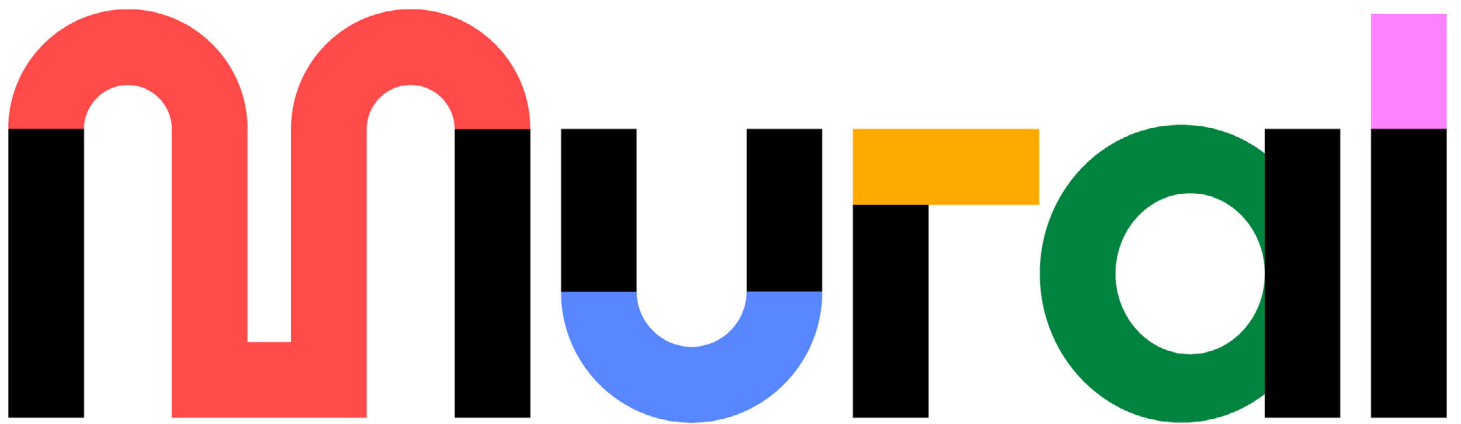


Meetings are broken. Async work can fix them.

Change the way your team
collaborates with async tools
and practices



Collaboration is about more than meetings.

Ah, the meeting — the cornerstone of corporate life.

Meetings are supposed to improve team relationships, encourage idea generation and discussion, and ensure transparency and accountability. Of course, most of us know that's not how they usually go.

The fact is, many meetings just aren't effective. One survey of senior managers found that [70% of meetings](#) are a waste of time. Another discovered that [67% of employees](#) think meetings keep them from completing important tasks.

And the pandemic made the “meeting problem” worse. In an attempt to make up for the lack of in-person contact, people started scheduling every moment a team spent together.

But more meetings didn't create more connections. A lot of employees (especially those [new to the workforce](#)) felt more isolated and disconnected than ever. To make matters worse, having more meetings didn't lead to better results.

That's because meeting culture, in its current form, is broken. The good news is that there are ways to collaborate that make teams happier, more effective, and even more productive — in and out of meetings.

And one of the most effective ways to collaborate is also one of the simplest. Asynchronous collaboration — teamwork that occurs at different times across different channels — allows you to create a supportive, flexible workflow that fits every team member's needs. And by making the bulk of your work async, you can save your “face time” for the stuff that matters.

Of course, changing something like meeting culture won't happen overnight. But, in this guide, we'll make a case for shifting toward async work, and we'll provide strategies and best practices to help get you and your team into a new, flexible workflow.

Let's dive in.

70%

of meetings are a waste of time

67%

of employees think meetings keep them from completing important tasks

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01

The problem with meetings

“Couldn’t this have been an email?”

Think about the last time you needed clarity on something — an upcoming project, a last minute assignment, etc. You ask your boss but they’re too busy to answer right away, so they suggest putting some time on their calendar, and you think nothing of it.

That’s because meetings are the “default” communication channel for many organizations. According to Reclaim AI, the average professional attends [5.1 meetings per day](#), each averaging 50 minutes in length.

This kind of meeting “overload” results from several factors, most of which stem from the same place: our minds.

In an article on the psychology of meetings, the [Harvard Business Review](#) talks about how the desire to be seen in meetings feels like a way to show competence and commitment, and is thus a powerful force behind “meeting addiction.”

In addition to this feeling of “meeting FOMO,” the *HBS* also calls out the [Mere Urgency Effect](#) (the desire to finish something quickly even if it’s not important), pluralistic ignorance (believing you are the only one who feels a certain way about the meeting), and meeting amnesia (not remembering what happened in the previous meeting) as underlying causes of our addiction to meetings.

Our overreliance on meetings can also stem from pressure from leadership or the fact that old habits die hard. Plus, a set meeting time can be a great motivator to hit a deadline or provide a significant update — a sort of accountability device.

It seems our psychology is working against us here, leading to an overabundance of meetings — both good and bad.

Drivers of “meeting addiction,” according to the *Harvard Business Review*

Mere Urgency Effect

MOTIVATION The desire to finish something quickly even if it’s not important.

“We need to figure this out ASAP.”

Pluralistic Ignorance

MOTIVATION Believing you are the only one who feels a certain way about the meeting.

“I can’t believe no one else sees how pointless this meeting is.”

Meeting Amnesia

MOTIVATION Not remembering what happened in the previous meeting.

“I know we talked about it but I don’t remember what we decided on.”

How many meetings are “bad meetings”?

According to [one survey](#) of senior managers, 71% of respondents considered meetings unproductive. [Another](#) found that 95% of meeting attendees “zone out” and miss parts of the content — 39% even start falling asleep.

Loom recently surveyed 500 software workers, and about half of respondents said 40% or more of time spent on video conference calls was “[unproductive and wasteful](#).”

That means about one out of every two meetings a waste of time.

The cost of bad meetings

The effect of a bad meeting can last long past its end time, weighing down your team’s budget, productivity, and morale.

Think about it this way: if an employee earns \$100,000 a year, they’d have an hourly rate of \$50. So if they attend the average of five hour-long meetings a day, they’re getting paid \$1,250 a week just to go to meetings. And they wouldn’t be alone — according to a [2019 study](#) by

Doodle, the total cost of pointless meetings was nearly \$542 billion globally.

You know how it’s hard to find your groove again after being interrupted by a meeting? There’s a word for that: [meeting recovery syndrome](#) (MRS). Research shows it takes around [23 minutes](#) to refocus after being distracted, so if someone was in a flow state before the meeting, they have little chance of getting back to it.

[Context switching](#), or jumping from one task to another, also contributes to productivity loss. Some [estimates](#) put the global cost of multitasking and context switching at a whopping \$450 billion annually.

Spending all day in meeting after meeting also means employees have no time for [deep work](#) — a state of focus, concentration, and productivity. They also lack the time to consider creative or “big picture” ideas — the things that make your organization stand out from the pack and help it prepare for the future.

And bad meetings might even lead to the [loss of good employees](#). While your high

performers probably won’t quit because of too many meetings, these kinds of annoyances can compound other problems. Over time, resentment builds, other jobs start looking better and better, and they hand in their resignation.

Quality over quantity

So if all of the evidence points to pointless and ineffective meetings being such a problem, what can teams do about it?

Getting rid of meetings entirely won’t work, either. After all, a good meeting can be a powerful tool for exploring ideas, planning key initiatives, and building camaraderie. What we want to do is reduce overall time spent in meetings, make the ones we have as efficient as possible, and move work that isn’t suited to live discussion to other channels.

That’s where asynchronous work comes in.

\$542 billion

Total global cost of pointless meetings

02

Embracing async

Meetings can't do it all

Meetings are tools. And, like actual tools, they're best suited to certain jobs.

The problem is, for many teams, meetings have become a "catch-all" solution for every problem, task, or project — everything from status updates to sprint planning to heavy-duty brainstorming exercises. Not only that, they have to balance different working styles and locations, drive inclusion and democratic decision-making, and build relationships and trust.

That's a lot for any tool to handle — no matter how powerful it is.

Before the Internet, email, Slack, Zoom, and all of those good things, this strategy made more sense. Meetings were the only way to work together. But that's not the case anymore. We've got more communication- and collaboration-focused solutions, platforms, and software at our fingertips than ever before.

That means it's time to improve our toolbox.

Synchronous vs. asynchronous collaboration

Meetings are just one form of synchronous collaboration. Any work that happens in real time is synchronous — whether that's via video chat, phone, or being in the same room.

The opposite of synchronous collaboration is asynchronous (or async) collaboration. While the word “asynchronous” or “async” might sound kind of intimidating, all it means is that you can work on it “at your convenience” — participation isn't tied to a specific time.

Honestly, you've probably been “asynging” for years. The most used async communication channel is one you're most likely all too familiar with: email. Have you ever answered your boss's email hours later while lying in bed? Congrats — you've communicated asynchronously!

Synchronous collaboration

WHEN Teamwork that occurs at the same time, at the same place (either digital or physical).

WHAT Meetings; Sending instant messages at the same time; Phone calls; Impromptu hallway or watercooler chats; murals

Asynchronous (async) collaboration:

WHEN Teamwork that occurs at different times and often across multiple channels (although not always).

WHAT Email; Shared online docs; Messaging threads/channels; Updates/comments in shared tools; Looms; murals

Have you ever answered your boss's email hours later while lying in bed? Congrats — you've communicated asynchronously!

TIP Looking for more information on common barriers to workplace inclusivity? You can find it [here](#), along with some practical tips for overcoming them.

The benefits of async

Async work can also help team members feel more secure. It can be intimidating to speak up in a meeting dominated by senior leadership, which can often leave team members feeling a lack of [psychological safety](#). Async is a more inclusive approach for people to share their thoughts, suggestions, and ideas in a way that plays to their strengths.

It's also a great option for employees who need flexibility in their schedule. These may be parents, caregivers, or just people who prefer to think on something before giving a response. Are you one of those people who has amazing ideas in the middle of the

night or in the shower? Async means you can capture inspiration whenever it strikes.

All in all, async is conducive to a variety of working styles, schedules, and locations, allowing employees to be at their most productive and comfortable when adding to the conversation.

Making the most of your time together — and your time apart

Perhaps the biggest benefit of async work is that it can also make synchronous work more efficient. That's right: async is the secret sauce for synchronous productivity.

Consider your last not-so-great meeting. How much time did you spend giving status updates, crossing off housekeeping items, and/or reviewing materials? Imagine if some of that work had been taken care of beforehand. What could you have done with that time?

Meetings are a big investment — you want to make the most of them. Taking the async-suited tasks out of the meeting frees your team up to do just that.

Async work has been a part of knowledge work for years and, thanks to an influx of new technology and the rise of remote work, it's not going anywhere:

73%

of all departments will have at least some remote workers by [2028](#)

85%

of [managers](#) think remote and hybrid work will be the “new normal”

94%

of people would [choose](#) to work remotely indefinitely, even if just part-time

To async or not to async?

On that note, let's go through when you should work async and when scheduling that meeting makes more sense.

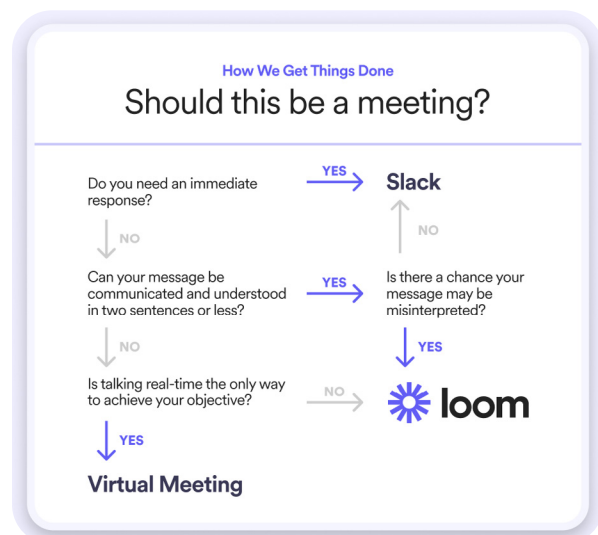
You might choose to work async if your task:

- Has very clear expectations
- Has an easy to explain problem
- Doesn't require an immediate response
- Is more administrative

You might choose synchronous collaboration if your task:

- Requires a lot of discussion
- Is highly complex or needs explanation
- Is extremely urgent
- Involves unclear expectations or an uncertain outcome
- Involves co-creation, problem solving, and/or team building

TIP Not sure whether a particular meeting should be moved to async? This [calculator](#) and this [Loom](#) can help you decide. Plus, you can always go back to sync if async doesn't work out. It doesn't hurt to try, right?



03

Making async part of your collaboration culture

Changing your meeting culture takes a lot of work

There's a reason the "meeting addiction" mindset is so deeply ingrained in most companies. Breaking these bad meeting habits takes planning, organizational buy-in, and a willingness to try new things.

For example, many well-known companies are running a few async experiments of their own. Salesforce gave up meetings for [an entire week](#), Loom has implemented "quiet hours" to encourage deep work, and other companies have implemented "Slack off" days or no-meeting Fridays.

Your own mileage may vary, but these kinds of async experiments may lead to a significant reduction in meeting overload — and demonstrate the very real benefits of this type of work to your entire organization, top brass included.

Start from the top

Speaking of the top brass: For async to be a powerful part of a team's culture, leadership has to take it seriously. If employees don't see their leaders embracing async, any effort to transform your collaboration culture will end up dead in the water.

So, how can leaders show their support? The most effective way is to lead by example. Say "no" to meetings when async would work better. Ask your team to give project updates in a mural or share feedback on projects with a Loom. And perhaps most importantly, hold other leaders accountable to asynchronous workflows and processes.

(Re)writing the rules of engagement

Once you have executive buy-in, you'll need to make sure your team knows where, when, and how their async work will happen.

Here's a quick hypothetical: It's your first week on the job, and you need your new boss to give you feedback on a project. Do you email them? Send them a message in Teams? Stop by their desk?

And how do they actually give feedback? Comments in the document? Instant message? Email?

Making async work means setting parameters and norms for how this type of communication and collaboration takes place. Without these, your team will feel stuck and unsure how to proceed.

The solution? Formal rules of engagement around asynchronous work.

Now, what form these rules take — shared document, [team agreement](#), message in a bottle — is up to you. But they should answer the following questions:

1. What types of communication should occur asynchronously?
2. [How do we give async feedback?](#)
3. What type(s) of feedback should be given synchronously?
4. Are there "core hours" or general deadlines for adding feedback/comments/ideas, etc.?
5. What are the criteria for scheduling a meeting?

In addition, these rules should lay out the tools your team uses for each aspect of their async workflow.

Building out tech and skill sets

To work well asynchronously, teams need to develop a [collaboration stack](#)—the right balance of interpersonal skills, technical tools, and software they'll need to work together.

On the interpersonal side, it's all about communication and collaboration. Make sure your team [facilitators](#) are equipped with the skills and knowledge they need to drive participation, organize contributions, and keep the project moving during async activities.

This might involve specific training sessions, additional dry-run sessions, and hands-on practice with platforms like Mural and Loom. It probably wouldn't hurt for the entire organization to go through some training on async best practices, too.

On the other side are the technical tools and software that make async possible. We've mentioned a few already: Mural, Loom, Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Slack, Webex, G Suite, email, etc. However, the possibilities are really endless here. What's important is designating one or more of these solutions for each work area and filling out any gaps in your async [tech stack](#).

What might your async tech stack look like, you ask?

Here's one example:

Long-form messaging	Email; SharePoint; Google Docs; Confluence
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Short-form messaging	Microsoft Teams; Slack; Gchat
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Audio + visuals	Loom
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Visual collaboration	Mural; Loom
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Knowledge sharing	Intranet; Knowledge base; Loom
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Project management	Asana; Monday.com; Basecamp; Wrike
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Feedback	Mural; Loom; SharePoint; Google Docs
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Team Building	Mural; Loom; Slack; Intranet
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04

Async in action

What does async look like in the real world?

Let's take a look at some common project scenarios (kickoff, brainstorming, and retrospective) and identifying which aspects can be done asynchronously and where sync time is the better way to go. Plus, we'll give you some handy templates to work with.

As you review these examples, keep in mind that your team's style may vary. The "ideal" balance of async and sync is different for every team, and will probably evolve over time. Be flexible, open-minded, and ready to learn as you go.

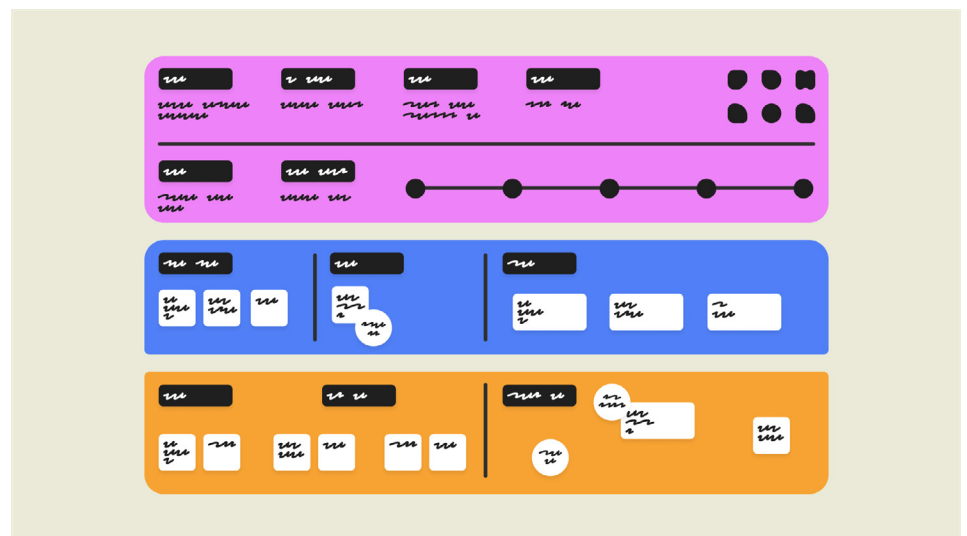
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Kicking things off

Say goodbye to kickoff meetings! Use this template to relay all the information you would share in lieu of a big kickoff meeting.

Async Project Kickoff

- PURPOSE** To clearly outline the responsibilities, deliverables, and timeline for all collaborators on an upcoming project.
- OVERVIEW** To begin, the project driver should fill out the "Project Brief" section (or record a loom) to give collaborators any necessary background and set expectations and timelines. Then, all participants should fill out sections 2-6 asynchronously by a clearly-stated deadline.
- KEY TASKS**
 - Communicate any "hopes and fears" around the project
 - Define the impact of the project based on the who, what, why, and where of the anticipated audience
 - Define what success looks like for each project participant
 - Outline each team member's strengths and skills as they relate to the project
 - Capture any questions the team has surrounding the project or how it relates to them



Getting the creative juices flowing

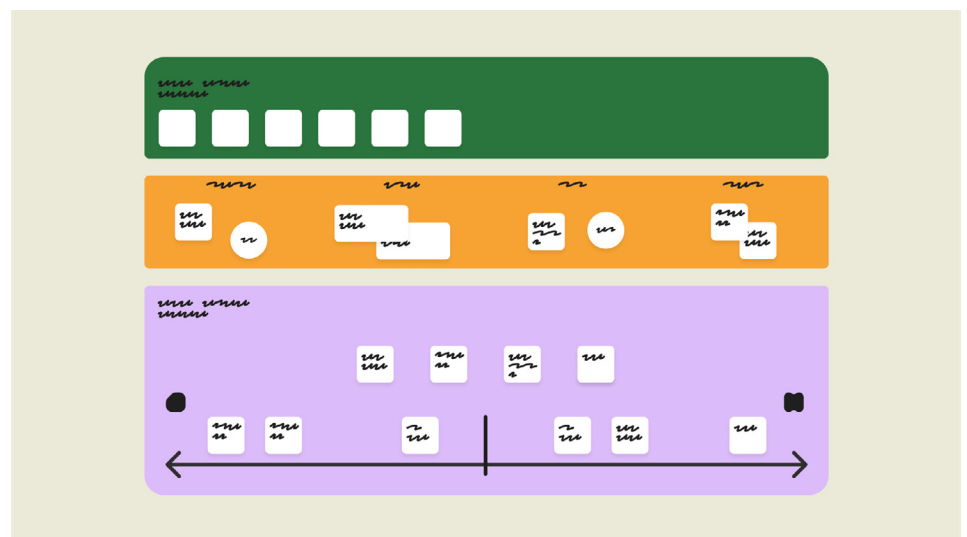
Now that your project is planned out, it's time to come up with some creative ideas. Use this template to generate and capture all of your team's innovative thoughts in one place.

Async Brainstorming

PURPOSE To generate, capture, categorize, and prioritize ideas that relate to the target project.

OVERVIEW To begin, the project driver/facilitator should create the overarching problem statement and add it to the template. All participants should then brainstorm any ideas that relate to the problem statement and capture them in the template by a set date. The facilitator will group these ideas into categories, then set a 24-hour voting period for prioritization.

KEY TASKS Generate as many ideas as possible that address the problem statement
Sort the ideas into clear categories for easier consideration
Vote on the most promising and relevant ideas for further discussion



Looking back

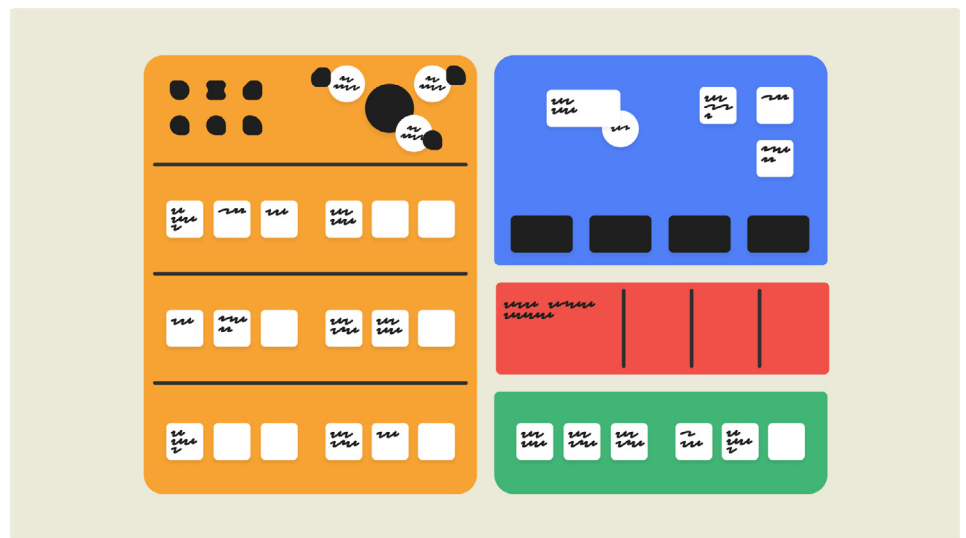
You've put your ideas into action and executed on your plans — now it's time to review what went well and what didn't.

Async Retrospective

PURPOSE To reflect on the success of a recent project and identify any learnings and/or follow-up actions.

OVERVIEW Prior to a predetermined deadline, all participants should enter their thoughts on the good and the bad of the recent project. Then, the project driver/facilitator will categorize the feedback into general themes and create a summary of kudos, learnings, and follow-up tasks.

KEY TASKS Communicate what went well and what didn't go well about the project
Share learnings from the process
Capture follow-up action items and prioritize them
(Do now, do next, do later)



Striking the right balance.

To make the most out of your team's creativity, problem-solving skills, and technical talents, incorporate both sync and async methods into your workflow. The trick is finding the right ratio between the two, then being thoughtful about using both.

As you continue your async journey, expect some setbacks and trial-and-error. Remember, you don't have to reinvent the wheel — look to other teams that are doing async right and learn from their experience. Before long, you'll be async experts yourselves.

On the road to async success,
keep the following takeaways in mind:

Bad meetings are more than just annoying

They're costly, both in terms of time and resources.
When it comes to meetings, quality is better than quantity.

Use sync time and async time wisely

Asynchronous collaboration is often more useful than
synchronous time, but sync time can also be critical
to success — the key is using them in ways that
complement each other.

Async comes with a whole bunch of benefits

Increased productivity, happier employees, faster
turnarounds, more efficient meetings — the list goes on.

Making async part of your culture is worth the effort

Be sure to create clear rules of (async) engagement
and provide your team with the right tools and training.

Ready to take things async?



Mural connects teams in real time or asynchronously with a digital whiteboard and collaboration features designed to inspire innovation.

[Start a whiteboard.](#)



Loom is video messaging for work. [Book time with Loom](#) to learn how Loom Enterprise can reduce meetings, improve collaboration, and accelerate knowledge sharing.