

2023 Collaboration Trends Report

Addressing the
Collaboration Skills Gap



in partnership with



The world of work has changed for good, and many would agree for the better.

During the pandemic, talent pools expanded, workplace flexibility became a real responsibility for individuals and organizations, and employees prioritized spending more time with their families.

However, change came with new challenges as people marched to their home offices, kitchen counters, and couches to work every day. While there was no more commute (or need to wear shoes), something seemed to be missing. People weren't connecting.

Video communication quickly became synonymous with connection as meetings flooded calendars to fill the void of human interaction. Teams quickly realized they needed something more than a video call to accomplish great things together. They needed to bring purpose and intention to the way they worked together. Great ideas and outcomes could no longer be left to chance.

With connection — and collaboration — fraying at the seams, many companies responded by mandating in-office days. Others responded by adopting more software to knit teams back together.

Fast forward to today, and we've now been doing this long enough to understand: Are these efforts actually working? What are the consequences of dysfunctional collaboration? And (most importantly) *how can we be happier at work?*

Our 2023 Collaboration Trends Report highlights the findings from a survey of 4,000 people working in remote, hybrid, and office environments, along with anonymized data from Mural and Microsoft Teams product usage.^A The report highlights the gap between how important collaboration is and how many teams fall short when it comes to intentional collaboration — and how pushing to go back into the office is only exacerbating the problem.

The collaboration skills gap is not only negatively impacting employees, but it is also having adverse effects on companies. Employees are tired, disconnecting, “quiet quitting,” and burning out. The results from our survey present an urgent call for managers to empower their teams to achieve extraordinary business outcomes, driven by happier work.



Trend 01

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It should come as no surprise that our [number one principle of collaborative intelligence](#) rings true: people are greater together than they are apart. And they know it. According to our survey, 81% of respondents say collaborating with others is either very or extremely important to the success of their role.¹

However, understanding that collaboration is necessary has led to an inflated demand to constantly communicate. Earlier in the pandemic, we witnessed a phenomenon known as “collaboration overload” as people adjusted to new ways of working in an effort to prove productivity to management — also known as “productivity theater.”

Productivity Theatre: Must the show go on?

Ways employees experienced collaboration overload in 2021, according to [Microsoft](#):

1. Time spent in Microsoft Teams meetings more than doubled globally and, aside from a holiday dip in December, continues to climb.
2. The average Teams user sent 45% more chats per week and 42% more chats per person after hours, with chats per week still on the rise.
3. 40.6 billion more emails were delivered in February 2021 than February 2020.

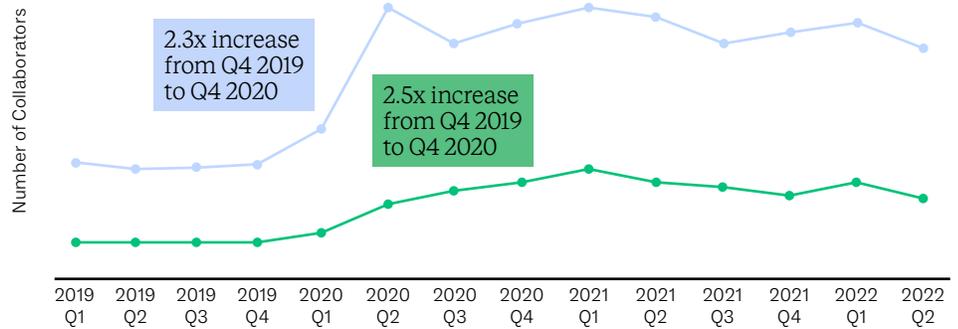


Collaboration overload is still a threat today. According to our survey, nearly half of respondents (43%) say they spend nine or more hours a week just collaborating.² Furthermore, 1 out of 2 people say they're only somewhat happy or not happy with how their team collaborates.³ This false sense of productivity from scheduling meeting after meeting is only resulting in dissatisfaction and burnout.

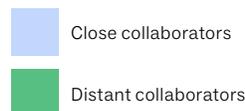
Cross-team collaboration has proven to be a struggle as well. In our survey, "no alignment across teams" was the second most significant obstacle to effective collaboration, behind "too many unproductive meetings."⁵

As jobs get increasingly complex and teams become more distributed, digital collaboration is only going to continue growing. For example, the average Mural member more than doubled the number of people they collaborated with in 2020 than in 2019, increasing both who they collaborated with frequently (close collaborators) and who they collaborated with on occasion (distant collaborators).^B

Average collaboration network size has grown since the pandemic started.



Data based on an anonymized and aggregated analysis of Mural members on enterprise plans.



Trend 02

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Collaboration tools and mandatory in-office days won't solve the collaboration problem.

Investment in collaboration tools has soared in the last few years, and [Gartner predicts](#) the social and collaboration software market will grow from \$3.5 billion in 2019 to \$6.9 billion by 2024.

However, more collaboration tools don't make it easier to collaborate effectively. According to our survey, nearly half (47%) of people who have five or more collaboration tools say they still run into obstacles to effective collaboration.⁴

While returning to the office might solve a social need to meet face-to-face, it's not a one-size-fits-all solution to collaboration. In fact, 43% of people who work in the office full-time say they still face obstacles to effective collaboration at work.⁶ And 42% of that same group say they are only somewhat or not happy with how their team collaborates.⁷



Trend 03

Almost half of employees leave their jobs due to poor collaboration.

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You could argue that as long as you're meeting your goals, it doesn't matter how you get there. But that philosophy is not sustainable for your team or your budget.

Let's break it down in dollars. If you have a team of five employees with a salary of \$100,000 a year who spend nine hours a week collaborating, you're spending \$117,000 a year just on that team collaborating. That's not even taking into account the time they spend collaborating with other teams.

An over-indulgent meeting culture is not only costing companies more, but it's also the number one reason why teams struggle with collaboration.

The top three obstacles to effective collaboration:⁸

1. Too many unproductive meetings
2. No alignment across teams
3. Unclear priorities and expectations

Team confidence and morale are also taking a hit from a cyclical pattern of poor collaboration. In fact, 51% of respondents say they're only somewhat happy or not happy with how their team collaborates.⁹ According to a [2022 survey by Corel](#), 41% of enterprise employees have left or are considering leaving their jobs due to poor collaboration tools.

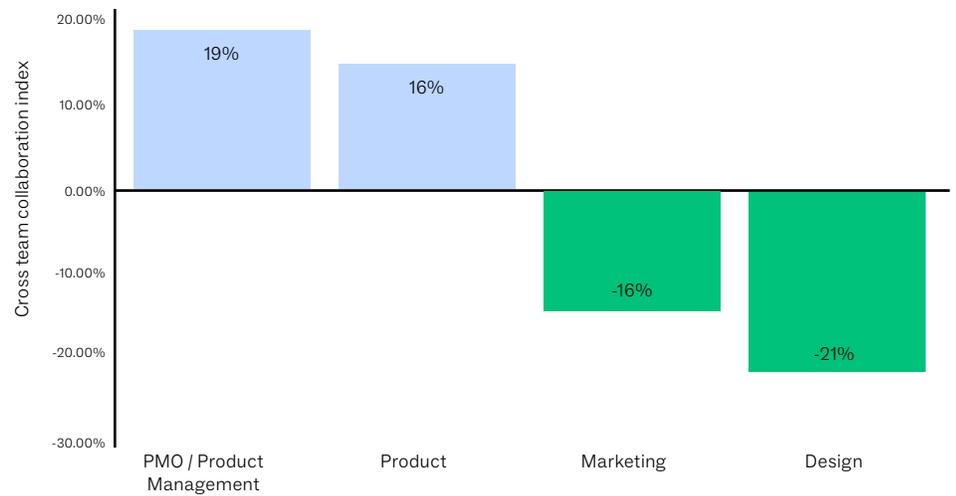


Which teams are the most siloed?

Too many meetings might lead to burnout, but working in silos isn't much better. Silos often create friction and misalignment — leading to isolated teams and ideas. For each Mural member, we calculated the share of their overall collaboration time spent with members from other teams to create a cross-team collaboration index.

We found that members of design teams and marketing teams tend to be a bit more siloed. By contrast, members of program management teams and product teams tend to be less siloed.^c

Which teams tend to collaborate more with people outside of their own team?



Data based on an anonymized and aggregated analysis of Mural members on enterprise plans.



Trend 04

Building strong collaboration skills is more valuable than having more collaboration tools.

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Workers are not lost when it comes to improving collaboration — they seem to know what to do, just not how to do it. According to our survey, people believe the top three solutions to better collaboration are:¹⁰

1. A clear process for collaborating
2. Learning collaboration skills
3. Better leadership

Although many knowledge workers have been practicing collaboration for years, very few of them have actually learned formal collaboration skills. In fact, 62% of individual contributors have not learned any formal collaboration skills, according to our survey.¹¹

It's critical to note that there is a clear demand for more structured collaboration — with clear goals, roles, and outcomes. In order for people to build and implement structure, they need to learn and understand very basic collaboration skills.

Learning collaboration skills — that is, learning *how to collaborate* — goes beyond hosting a productive meeting. Knowing how to collaborate means knowing how to bring intention and purpose to teamwork, meetings, and every single collaborative experience.



Better collaboration goes hand-in-hand with boosting morale and retention. According to [Microsoft's 2022 WTI Pulse Report](#), 76% of employees say they'd stay at their company longer if they could benefit more from learning and development support. Additionally, 52% of our survey respondents who design intentional collaboration at work say they "rarely" or "never" feel checked out or disengaged.¹²

People who design collaboration are not only engaged with their work, but they're also happier! Respondents who always design collaboration experiences are almost twice as likely to say they're happy with how their team collaborates as those who never design collaboration experiences.¹³

So, now that we know learning collaboration skills is important, who's on the hook for teaching these skills? According to our survey, 63% of individual contributors believe managers should help their teams learn collaboration skills.¹⁴

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Bridging the skills gap

Extraordinary teamwork isn't going to come with the latest and greatest collaboration tool or keeping attendance at the office.

Leaders need to empower teams by helping them learn how to collaborate effectively. That starts with recognizing that you can collaborate better ... if you know how. Investing in training, learning, and developing collaboration skills across your organization is the first step to a future where extraordinary teamwork isn't some accident — it happens by design.

We can help get you started. Our collaboration experts have done the legwork to understand how teams — regardless of location — can come together to deliver impact and drive outcomes. From collective brainstorming to effective cross-functional alignment, we'll equip your team with the skills and confidence to do their best, happiest work ever, together.

[Start learning collaboration skills](#)



Appendix

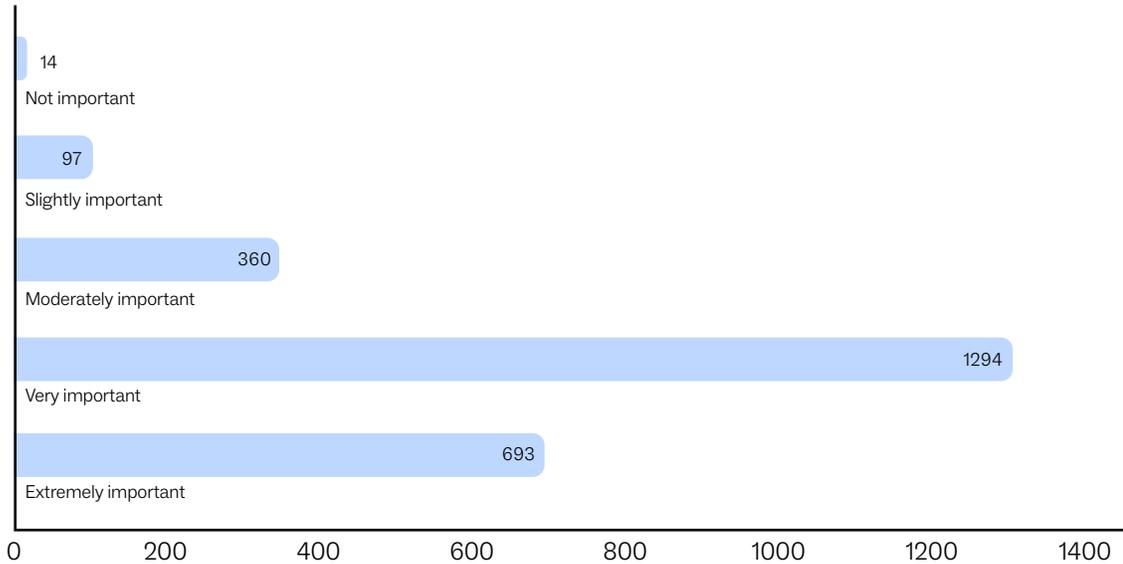
Methodology

A. Qualtrics survey data was collected anonymously from August 19 - September 5, 2022, with a total of 3939 respondents.

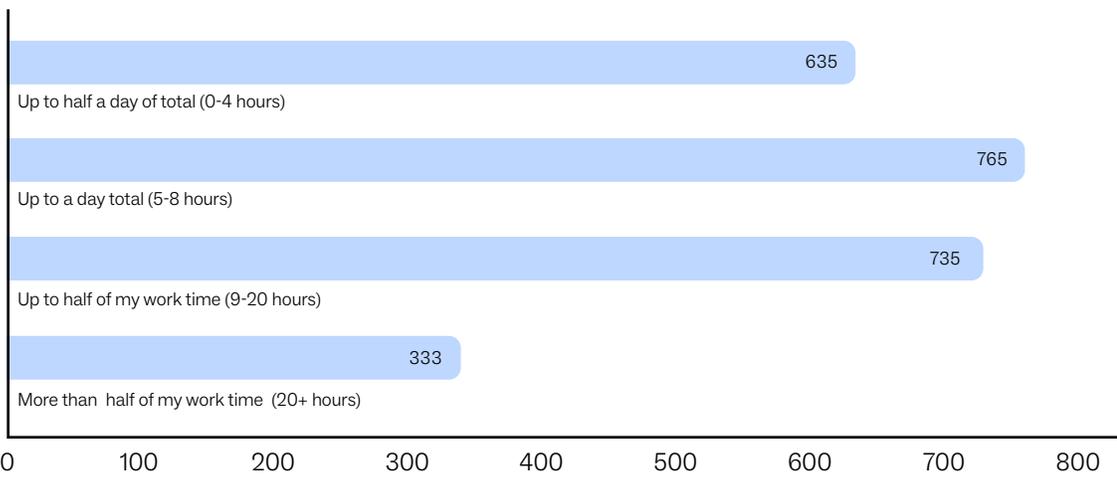
B. Data based on an anonymized and aggregated analysis of Enterprise network Mural members.

C. Data based on an anonymized and aggregated analysis during a 6-month time period (January 1, 2022, to July 1, 2022) to understand how members spend their time collaborating with members from their own team and from other teams in Mural.

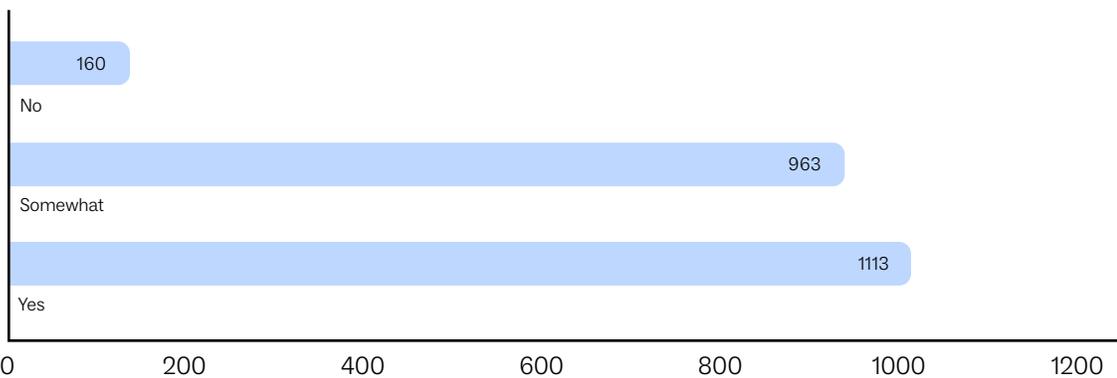
¹Q4 - How important is collaboration to the success of your role?



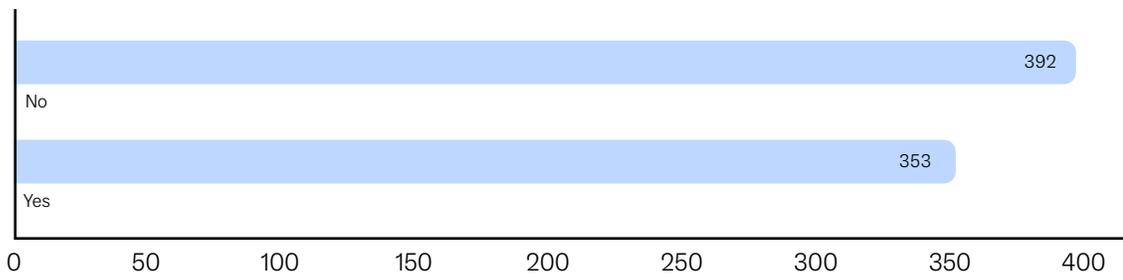
²Q3 - On a typical week, how much time do you spend collaborating at work?



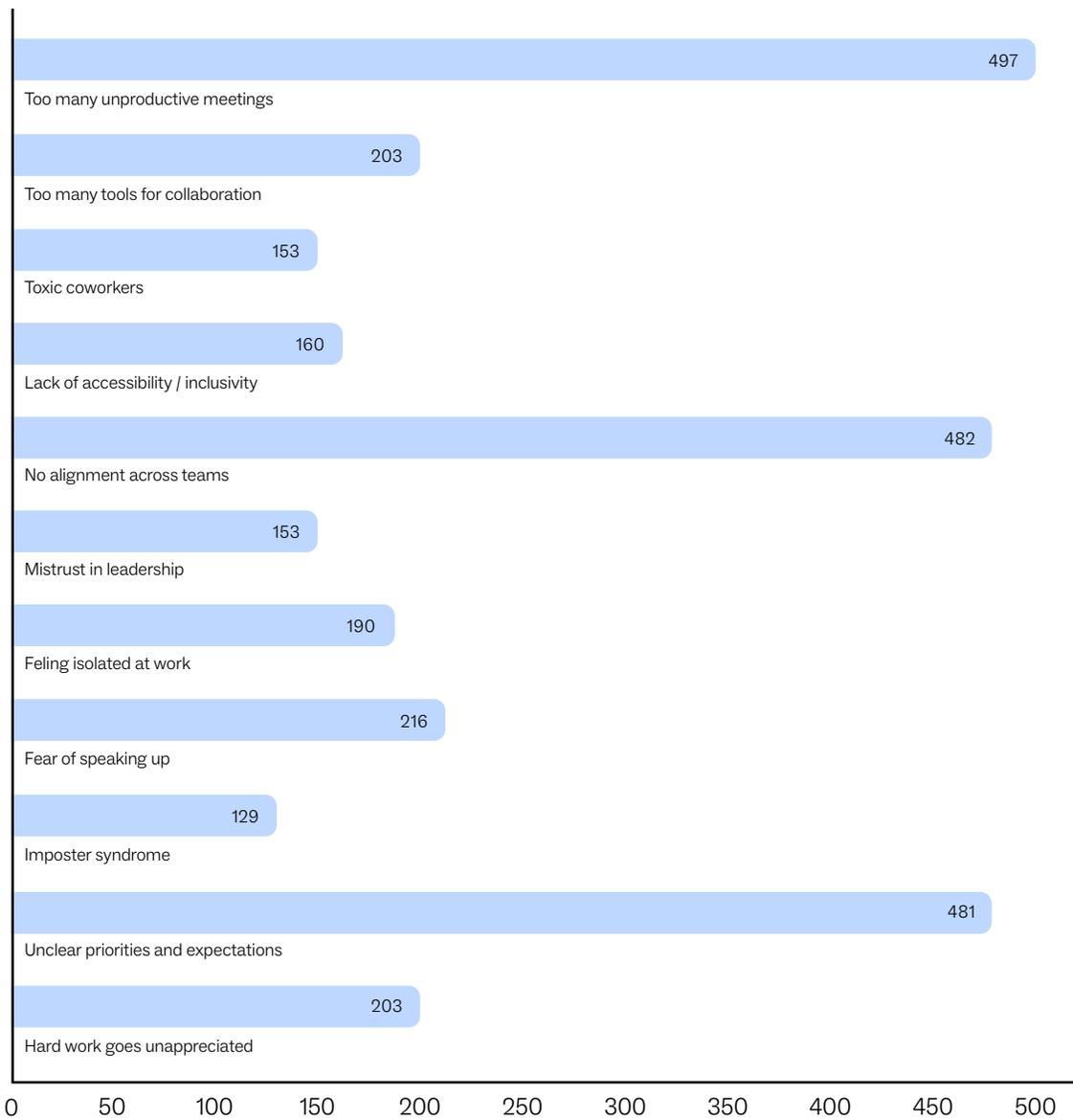
³Q17 - In general, are you happy with how your team collaborates?



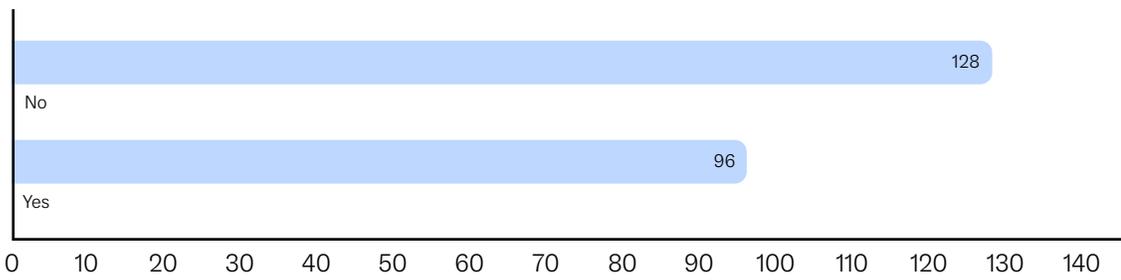
⁴Q20 - Do you have obstacles to effective collaboration at work?



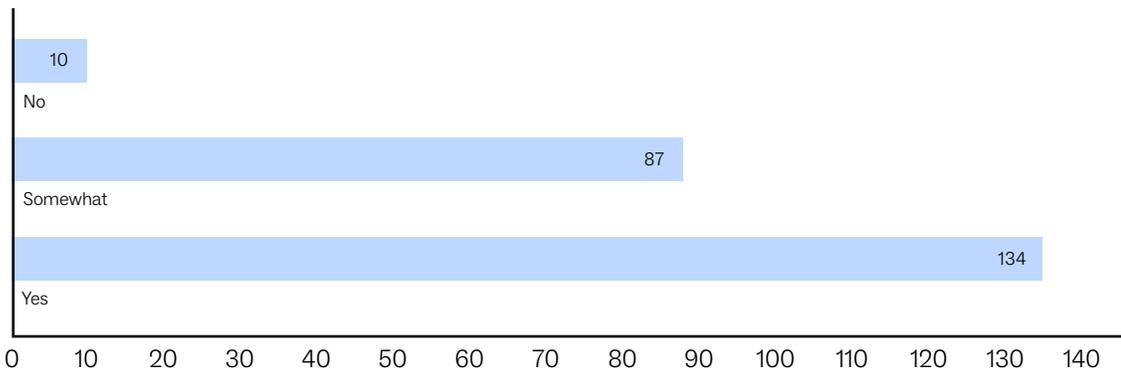
⁵Q21 - What are your main obstacles for collaborating at work? Select up to 3.



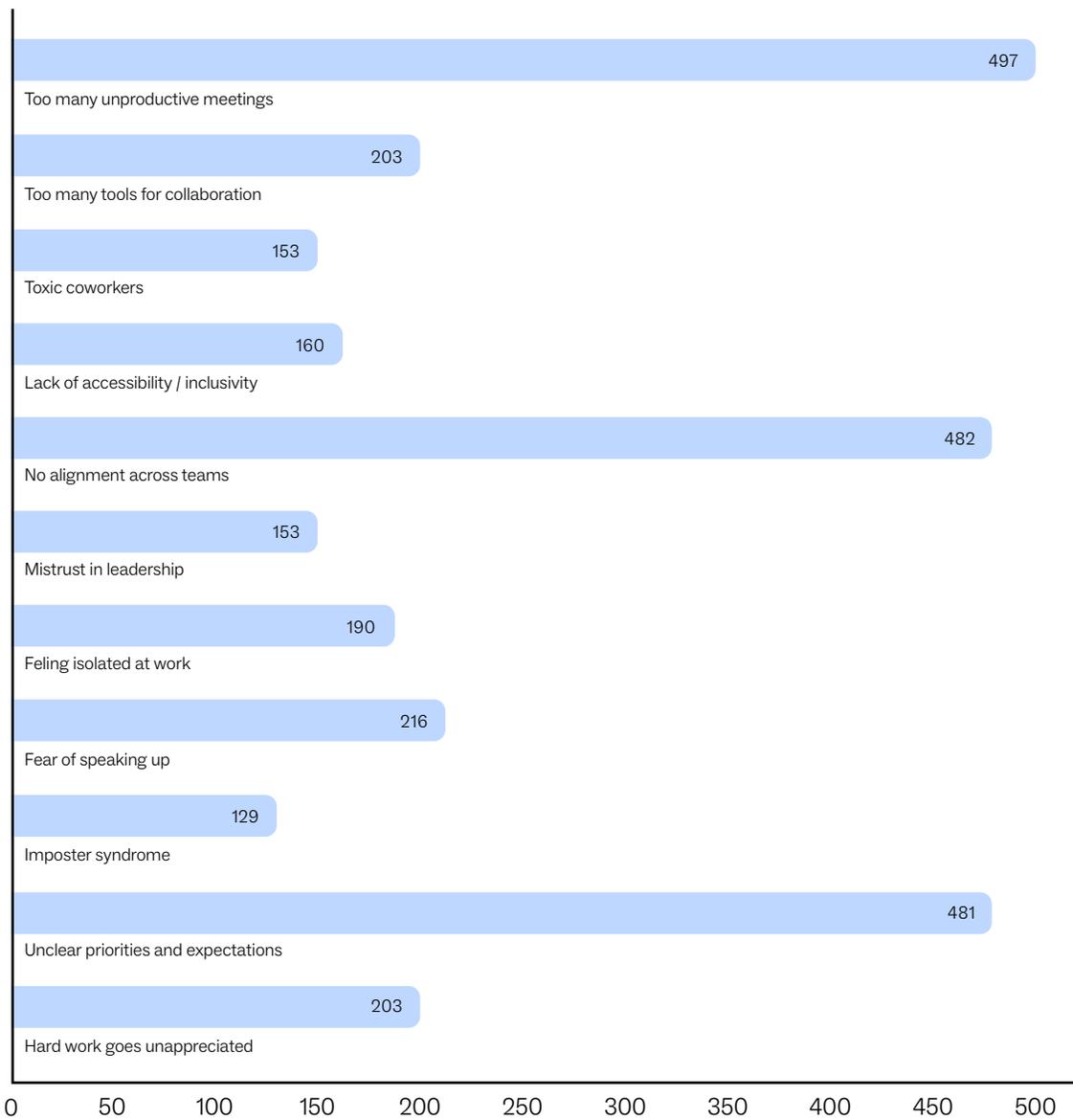
⁶Q20 - Do you have obstacles to effective collaboration at work?



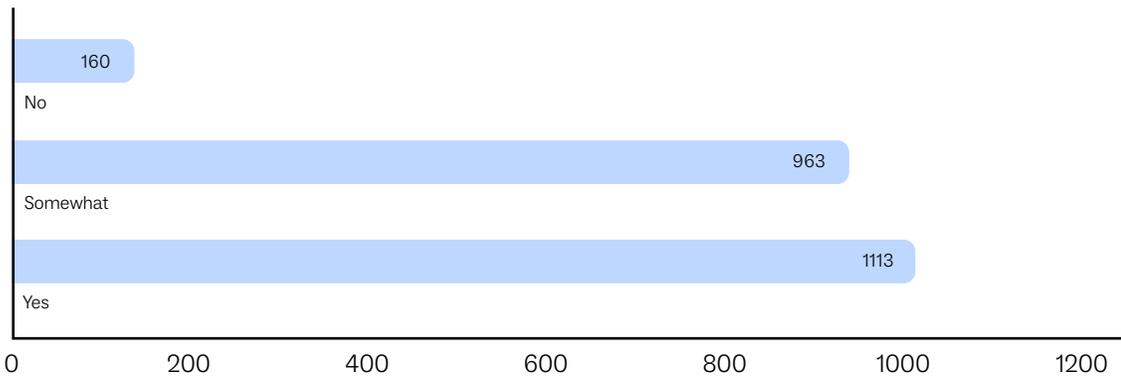
⁷Q17 - In general, are you happy with how your team collaborates?



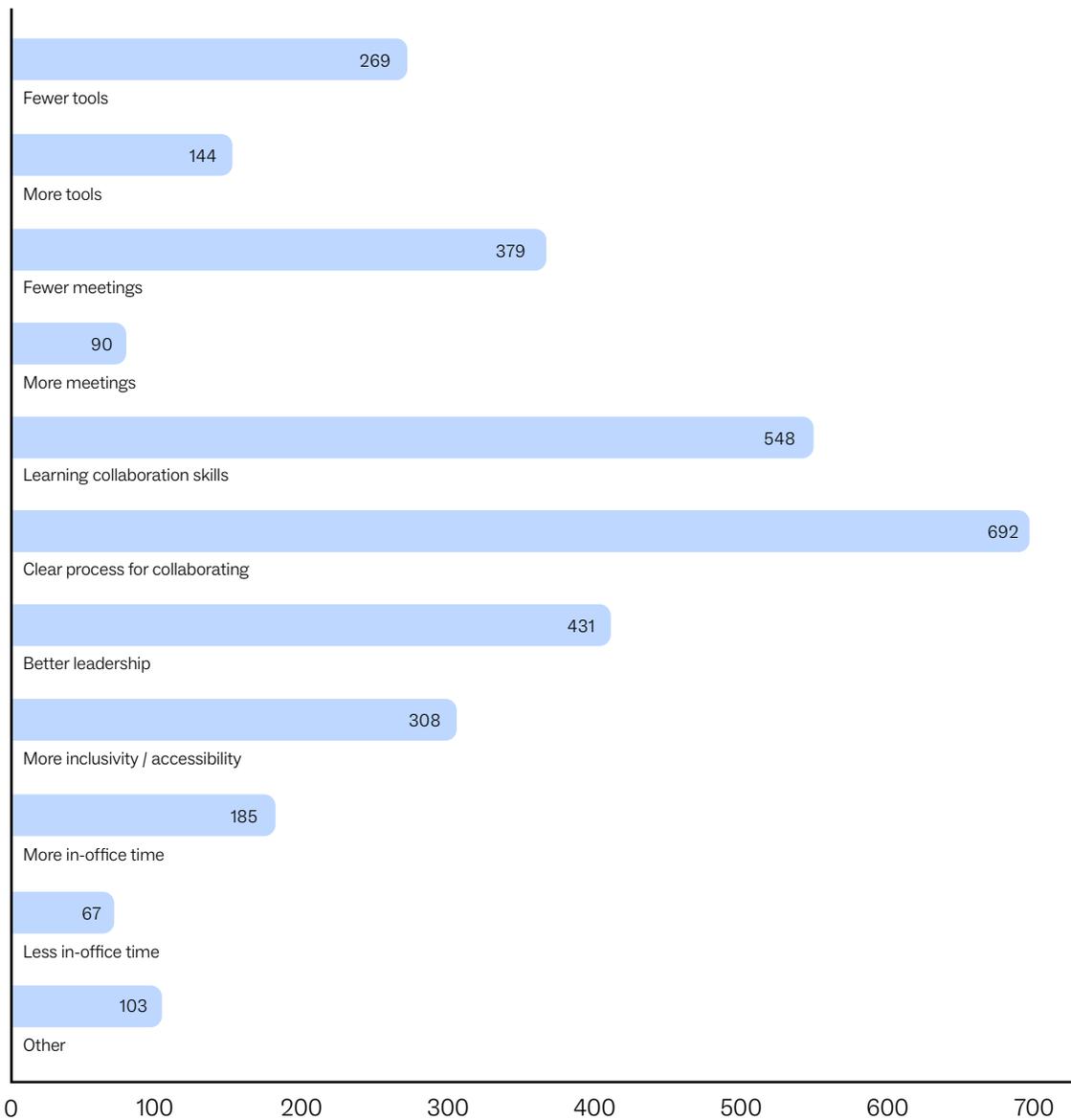
⁸Q21 - What are your main obstacles for collaborating at work? Select up to 3.



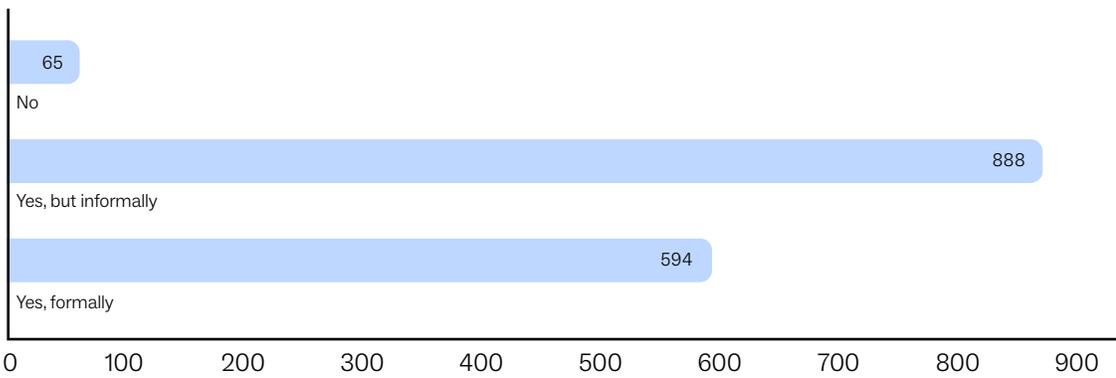
9Q17 - In general, are you happy with how your team collaborates?



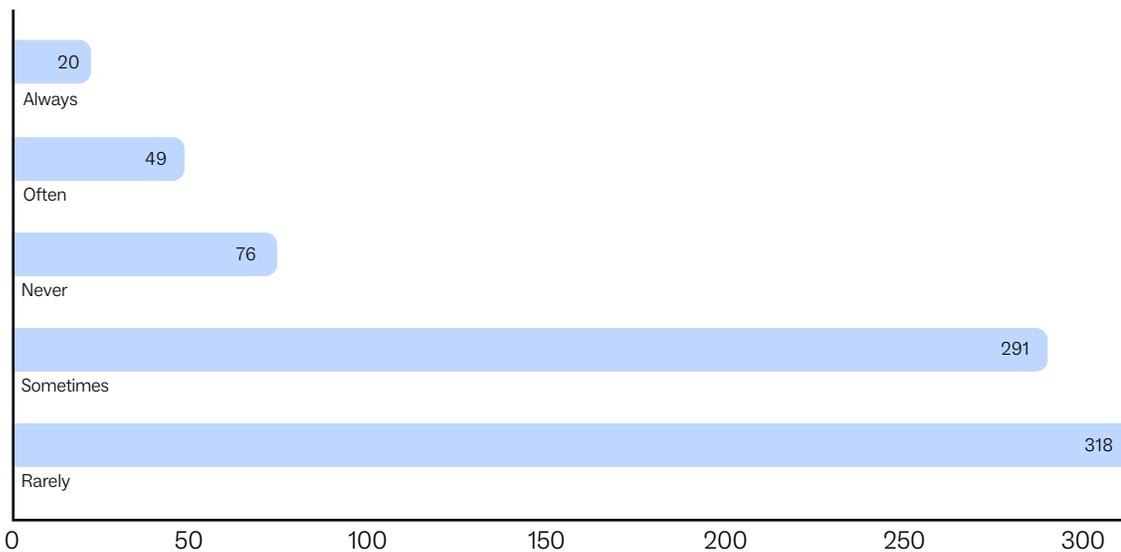
¹⁰Q18 - What would help improve how your team collaborates? Select all that apply.



¹¹Q5 - In your career, have you learned skills that help you collaborate better with others?

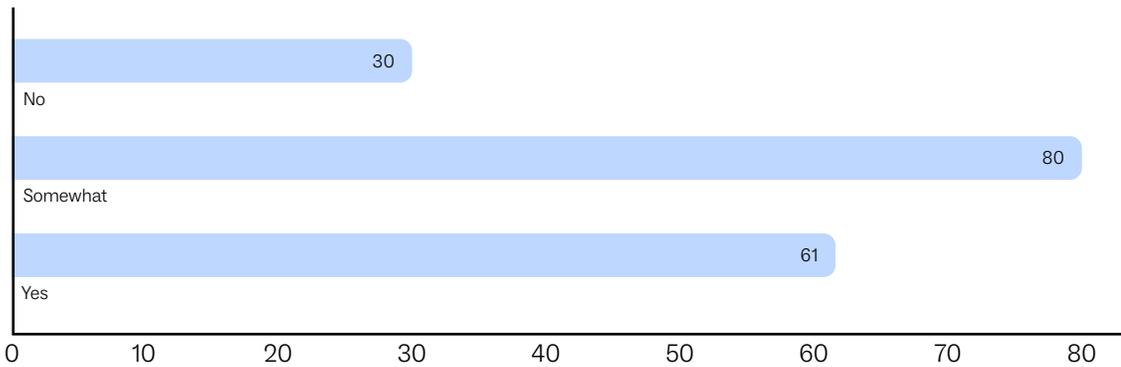


¹²Q14 - How often do you feel “checked out” or disengaged when collaborating at work?

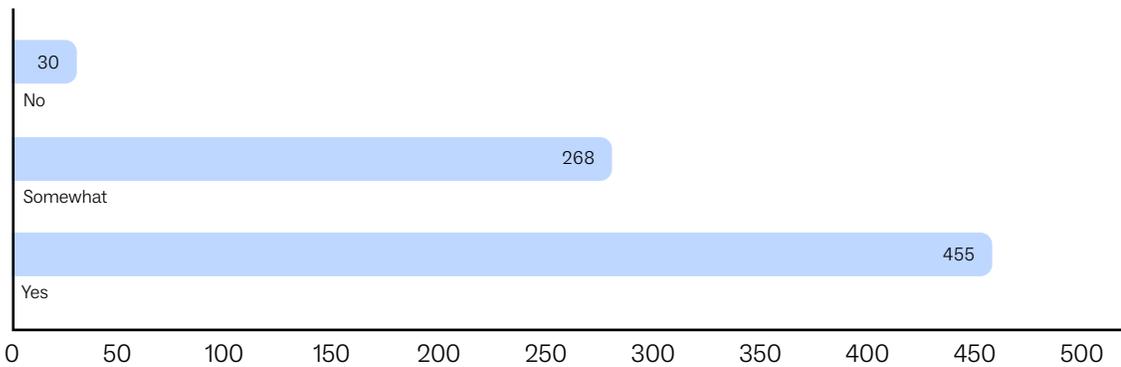


¹³Q17 - In general, are you happy with how your team collaborates?

“Never”



“Always”



¹⁴Q19 - How should people learn collaboration skills at work?

