



From Chaos to Clarity

How to Thrive in the Modern Workplace

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Overwhelmed at work? You're not alone.

Survey data reveals key communication challenges and opportunities in the next era of work.

Workplace communication has increasingly become more complex. The rise of remote and hybrid work arrangements, increasing use of digital tools across multiple platforms, and working across time zones and cultures add to already busy workloads.

Respondents to this 2023 survey from the U.S., U.K., Germany, and France were clear: They find themselves drowning in emails and meetings and have difficulty getting their work done. Half report that the amount of communication is hurting their productivity.

TechSmith wanted to find out: What contributes to the amount of workplace communication, why do people struggle to keep up with it, and what are some solutions?



HIGHLIGHTS

01

50% of the respondents feel the number of emails, meetings, and messages they receive during a typical workday negatively impacts their productivity.

02

Despite anecdotal data, it turns out everyone doesn't hate meetings! 60% of respondents said they spend "about the right amount of time" in meetings, but there's a catch: Those meetings must feel productive.

03

The majority of respondents felt only 3 of the last 5 meetings they attended had value.

04

Respondents reported that visual communication via video and images helped others retain information and made their communications more effective.

05

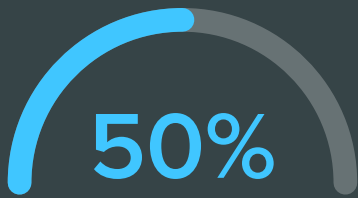
Asynchronous formats like video messages are emerging as welcome replacements for some types of meetings.

06

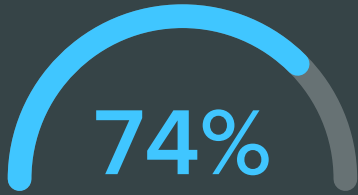
What is the biggest hindrance to workplace communication? Having the right people in the right place.

07

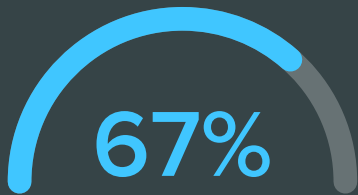
Quality as well as volume of workplace communication matter: Making changes to the way we use email and meetings can help.



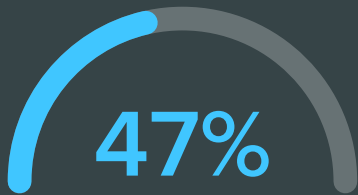
Of respondents say the amount of communication they receive during a typical workday negatively impacts their productivity



Have to repeat themselves or clarify information



Experience misunderstandings or confusion due to unclear communication



Experience communication breakdowns leading to missed deadlines or project delays

When asked what they felt was the major hindrance to effective workplace communication, many respondents said they received too much messaging that wasn't relevant to them.



Communication overload is hurting productivity

50% of respondents say the daily tsunami of workplace communications—emails, meetings, chat messages, phone calls, and more hinders their productivity. Worse, the sheer volume generates even more communication due to misunderstandings and the need for respondents to repeat themselves—spawning time-eating back-and-forth message volleys. These communication breakdowns can even result in project delays and missed deadlines.

- 74% of respondents say they have to repeat themselves or clarify information at least some of the time; nearly a quarter say this happens “often.”
- 67% of respondents experience misunderstandings or confusion at least some of the time.
- Nearly half experience missed deadlines or project delays due to miscommunication at least some of the time.

Respondents who said they often or always experience misunderstandings, communication breakdowns, and having to repeat themselves were more likely to report that the amount of communication they receive negatively impacts their productivity.

59%

Of respondents working in banking, finance, or insurance say they're feeling the negative impacts on productivity due to the volume of communication.

What do you feel is the biggest hurdle to effective communication at your organization?

“Too much information.”

“Connecting with the right people at the right time with the right information.”

“Unclear communication leading to lots of back and forth.”

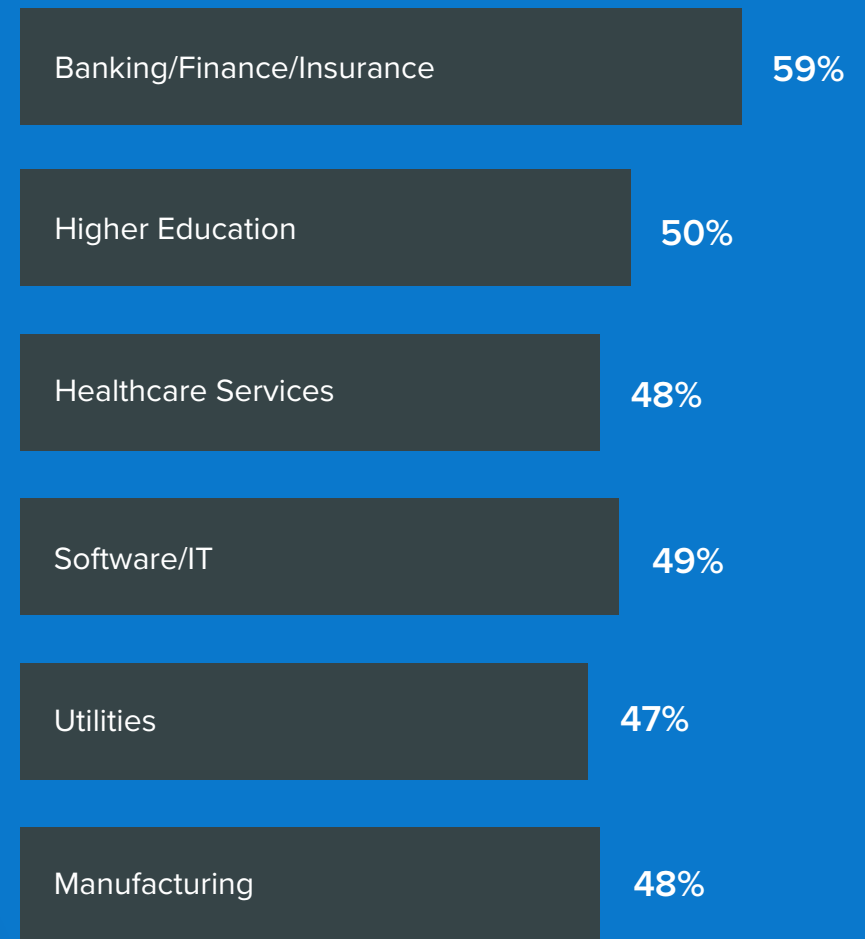
“Too many emails and meetings.”

“Getting people to pay attention.”

“Lack of clarity.”



Do you feel the number of communications (emails, meetings, chat messages) you receive during an average workday negatively impacts your productivity?



Email is here to stay

Despite predictions over the past decades, email still reigns as the primary workplace communication tool. While it allows for quick messaging, just the sight of an overflowing email inbox can derail one's productivity.

The challenges are familiar:

Text-heavy messages with important information buried in the content

Poorly written messages

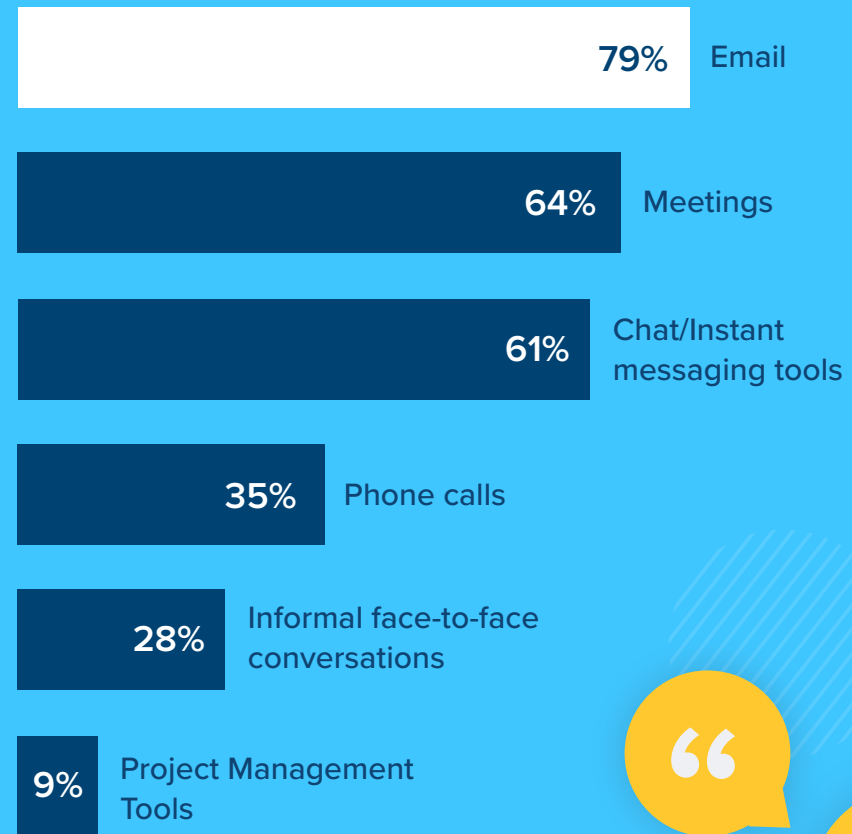
Unclear subject lines

Too many people copied in

These common and other challenges with email—the most-used form of workplace communication—contribute to the issues affecting productivity: email begets more email. While email as a channel for communication doesn't appear to be going anywhere, that doesn't mean we have to keep using it in ways that aren't working for us.



Where does most of your communication happen at work?



What do you feel is the biggest hurdle to effective communication at your organization?

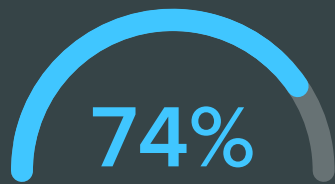
“Too many emails received daily. We don't necessarily have time to read everything.”

“Back and forth email is very inefficient and can lead to missed deadlines.”

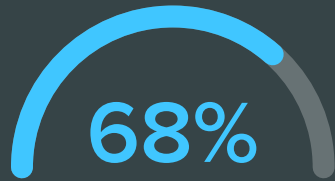
“People haven't read their emails.”



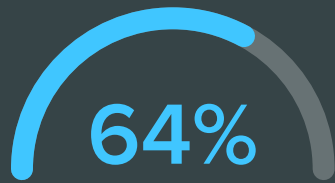
Respondents say images like screenshots, infographics, and charts impact the effectiveness of their message:



reduces misunderstandings



saves time



increases engagement and attention



Images add clarity to emails

One way to keep emails clear and concise is to incorporate images.

A whopping 97% of those who create images like screenshots, infographics, and charts to support communication say it makes their messages more effective. They report that adding images to messaging can reduce misunderstandings by providing clarity and save time by reducing the need for back-and-forth conversations.

Easy ways to use images in your emails:

- ✓ Use screenshots to show exactly what you're referring to when describing a process.
- ✓ Use annotated screenshots to provide feedback on a project.
- ✓ Explaining data? Use screenshots to highlight the exact data points you're referring to.

96% Of respondents either use images to communicate at work or would like to try

Three ways to save time with images in emails

SHOW A PROCESS

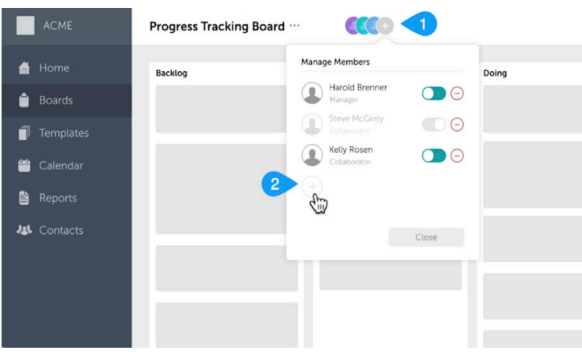
Send

To: jake@acme.co

Re: Add someone to progress board?

Of course I can help! Here's the steps for adding a new member:

1. Click on the "+" near the top
2. Click on the other "+" sign under existing members.



PROVIDE FEEDBACK

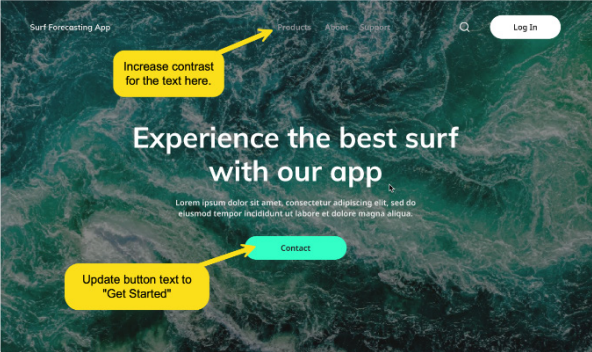
Send

To: gretchen@acme.co

Re: website mockup

Hi Gretchen,

The new site design is looking great! Just a couple notes:



SHARE DATA

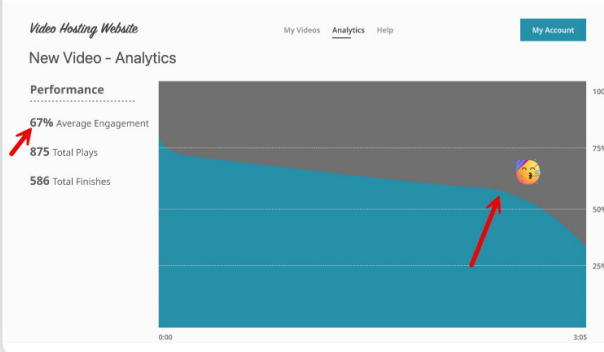
Send

To: raven@acme.co

New Video Analytics

Hi Team!

Happy to report we're seeing record engagement on our latest video. Great work everyone!



The meeting dilemma

Respondents are spending a lot of time in meetings—and they don't find all of them worthwhile. As the second most frequently cited form of workplace communication, so much time spent in meetings with low value can have serious impacts on getting work done.

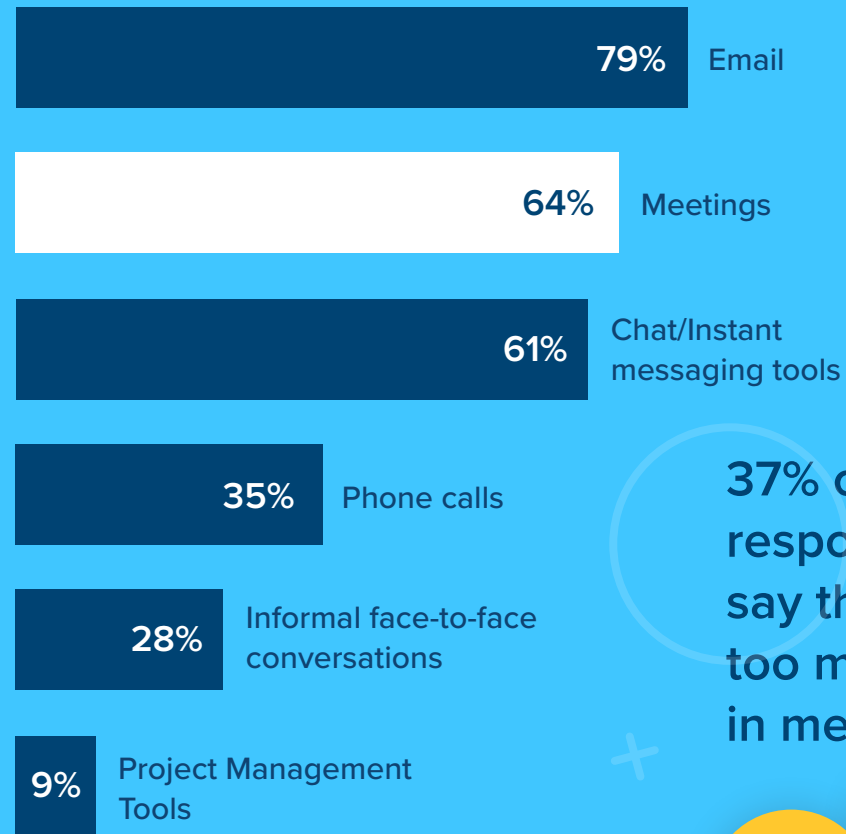
On average, respondents find only 3 out of 5 meetings are valuable or productive.

The importance of “right people/right place” was an issue throughout comments describing hindrances to effective communication. The challenges of juggling schedules to get everyone together add to communication problems, especially as 73% of respondents work either entirely remotely or in a hybrid environment.

41% of respondents feel the amount of time spent in meetings—too much or not enough—is problematic. This is especially true for Gen X respondents, at 47%.



Where does most of your communication happen at work?



37% of respondents say they spend too much time in meetings

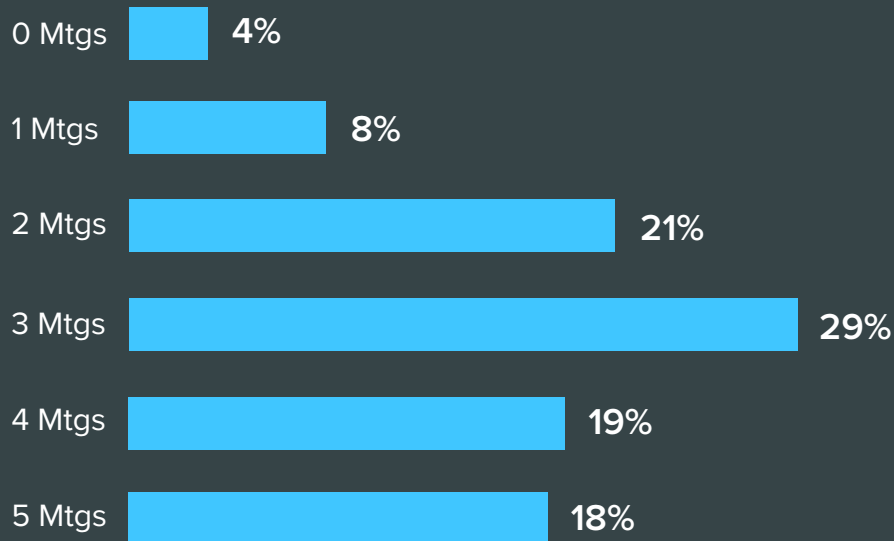
What do you feel is the biggest hurdle to effective communication at your organization?

“Too many pointless meetings, and too little time to get actual work done.”

“Lack of clarity and purpose in the meeting.”

“Scheduling conflicts preventing all needed parties from meeting when necessary.”

Consider the last five meetings you attended. How many of them did you find to be productive or valuable?



Which types of meetings would you be open to watching a pre-recorded video message instead of attending in real time?



That meeting could have been a video

Videos, like still images, can improve workplace communication. 98% of respondents who use video at work say it impacts the effectiveness of their message in various ways, among them by reducing misunderstandings, increasing engagement, and saving time.

Workers recognize the value of video. Respondents say they are open to watching prerecorded video messages instead of attending meetings that don't require real-time conversation, such as status updates, training, and the like.

Additionally, videos can help solve the "right people/right place" challenge by providing meeting content to the necessary people across time zones and flexible work arrangements. Videos give them the option of choosing when to access information—with less disruption to the day and productivity—and the ability to review information such as new processes or project feedback more than once.

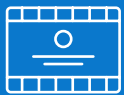
And finally: Using asynchronous video means work doesn't get delayed while trying to get everyone together.



Three simple ways to keep extra meetings off your calendar



Record a video tutorial for common processes instead of scheduling meetings every time you onboard a new team member.



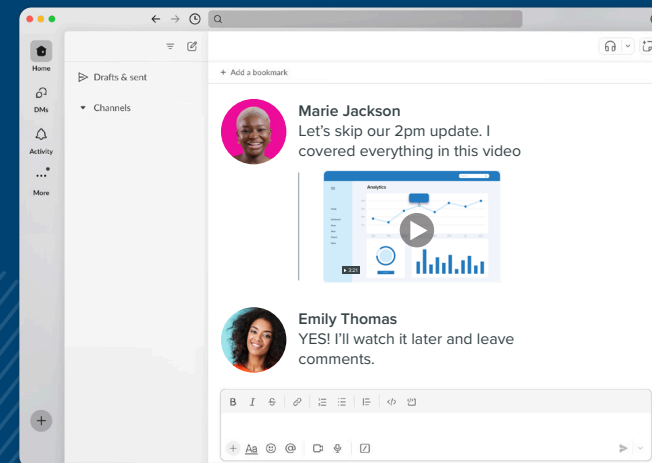
Got an update for your team? Record a quick video message so the details don't get lost in the shuffle of your next meeting.



Record a video of your presentation that can be watched on-demand instead of adding another meeting to everyone's calendar.

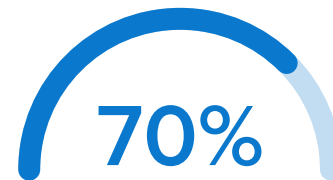
Tips for succeeding with asynchronous video

- 1 **Grab attention** in the first few seconds with a lively greeting or intriguing question.
- 2 **Think “short and sweet.”** Keep your videos under 5 minutes to respect busy schedules.
- 3 **Keep it simple.** Just share your screen. “See what I see” is powerful. Add basic annotations or even emojis to illustrate key points.
- 4 **End with a call to action.** End with a clear ask or a question to prompt interaction, like feedback or a quick response.
- 5 **Be yourself.** Don't try to overproduce, overpolish, or overact. Speak in your regular voice and offer natural messages.

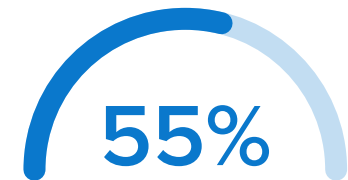


When meetings are most crucial

In a surprise finding, many respondents felt the number of and time spent in meetings were not in themselves problems; rather, it was the quality of meetings that affected their perception of value. That perception of quality, in turn, is tied to the type of meeting:



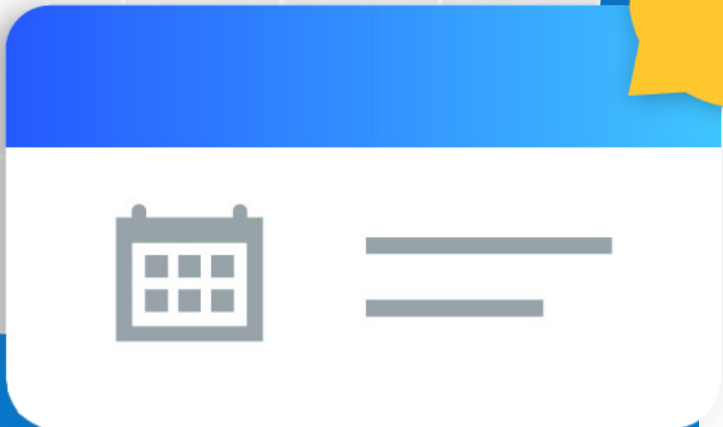
Say they find it valuable to have decision-making meetings in real-time



Say they find brainstorming sessions valuable in real-time

As for other types of meetings, like status updates, project feedback, onboarding, and training? Respondents are open to watching prerecorded video messages, which are excellent vehicles for communicating information that doesn't need real-time conversation.

The more valuable and productive people find their meetings, the more likely they are to say they spend the right amount of time in them. Using synchronous time together for discussions like decision-making and brainstorming is valuable.



The future of work is flexible

The idea that work can be accomplished outside of a typical office environment has accelerated over recent years and looks to continue on that path. Cost savings, employee satisfaction, improved ability to attract and retain talent, and changing worker expectations all contribute to less constrained work environments.

But a number of factors, including digital tools that make global anywhere-anytime work easier to accomplish, introduce new challenges. Nearly $\frac{3}{4}$ of survey respondents work in a hybrid or entirely remote arrangement, both of which require flexibility. Hybrid workers say they feel the negative effects of communication overload even more strongly than others: 58% say their productivity is affected by communications, and 44% say they spend too much time in meetings.

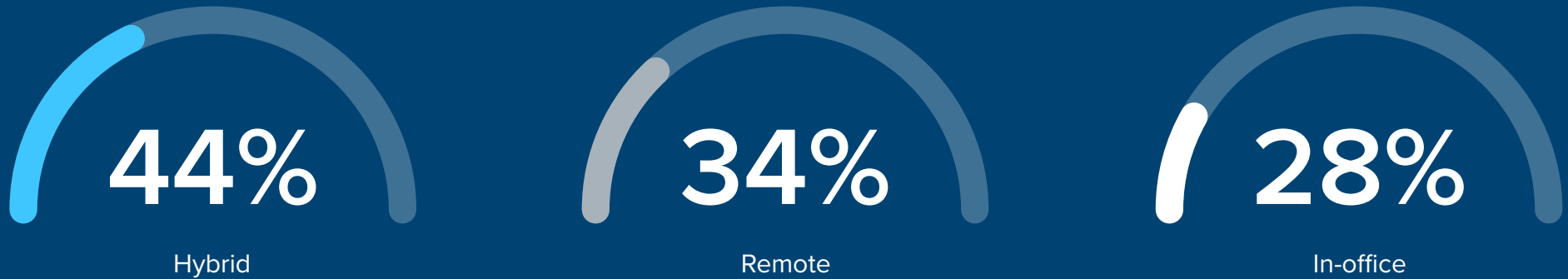
In looking toward this more flexible future—in which remote and hybrid work are likely to increase—it is critical that we find ways of improving workplace communication.



Some respondents have looked to visual communication to ease the challenges of communication overload and lack of clarity. Respondents who work remotely are twice as likely as respondents who work entirely in an office to frequently create images to communicate information at work (66% vs. 33%).



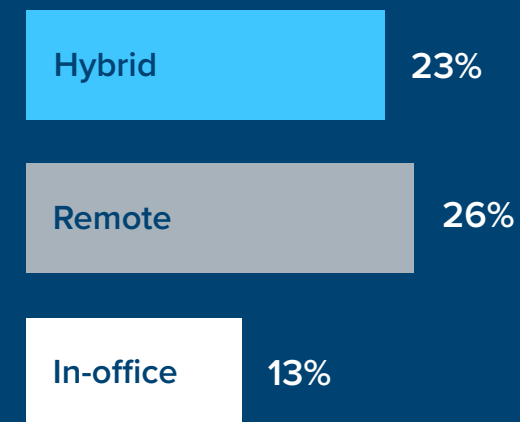
Report spending too much time in meetings



Report the amount of communication they receive negatively impacts productivity



Report spending more than half their workweek in meetings



Tips for Leaders

In choosing the most appropriate means of communication across your workplace, consider the following:

- 1 Use alternate approaches to replace meetings not focused on decision-making or brainstorming.
- 2 Respondents reported project overload as a hurdle to effective communication; keep an eye on workload and time demands being made by meetings and other messaging.
- 3 Those working remotely or in hybrid situations expressed a preference for visual information.
- 4 The later cohorts—those born after 1980—are more likely to work entirely in an office or in a hybrid arrangement, and they have a slight preference for visual communication over other types.
- 5 Visual communication reduces misunderstandings and saves time. Provide staff with help and training in creating and leveraging more effective images and videos. Note that this might be of extra value to those in the most recent age cohorts: As they prefer visual information but find they experience more problems with unclear communication, they may prove to be exceptionally receptive learners.
- 6 Supporting quality communication practices shores up trust: It sends the message that you value a worker's time and want to ensure it is well spent.

The survey data show some differences among respondents across generations:

35%

Of Gen Z and Millennial respondents report having to repeat themselves or clarify information often or always

57%

Of Gen X respondents say the amount of communication they receive during a workday negatively impacts their productivity





30%

Of Millennial respondents report spending more than half of their workweek in meetings







Across geographic locations





Volume of communication negatively impacts productivity

-  50% United States
-  45% United Kingdom
-  50% Germany
-  56% France





Work in a hybrid or remote environment

-  80% United States
-  69% United Kingdom
-  70% Germany
-  61% France





Spend too much time in meetings

-  38% United States
-  38% United Kingdom
-  31% Germany
-  40% France

Use videos in their communication

-  69% United States
-  46% United Kingdom
-  54% Germany
-  54% France

Use images in their communication

-  95% United States
-  80% United Kingdom
-  85% Germany
-  88% France



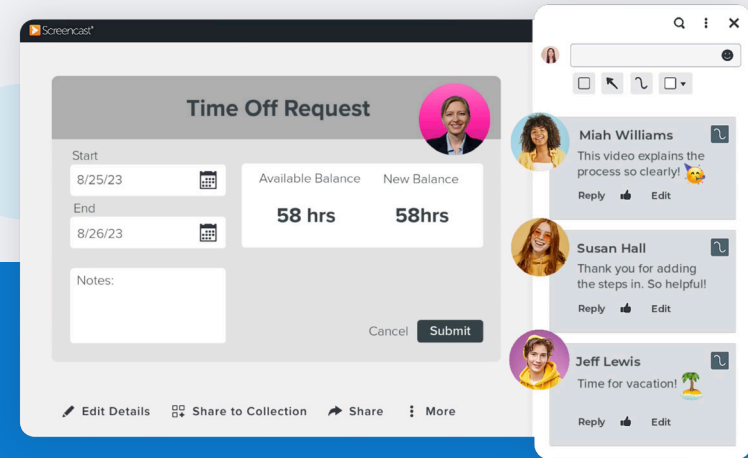
Conclusion

The story this workplace communication survey data tells is clear: Respondents are drowning in emails, chat messages, and low-value meetings that interfere with their daily work.



Problems with misunderstandings, time spent clarifying information, and breakdowns leading to missed deadlines or project delays compound the impact on productivity.

Working to improve the clarity and quality of communication can help. Replacing often-confusing, time-eating text with more understandable images can reduce misunderstandings and rounds of clarification. Eliminating low-value, real-time meetings and instead offering on-demand video messages can lessen the impact on productivity and keep work moving.



Screen capture tools like Snagit give you the ability to capture and share knowledge, insight, and information in a way that's easy to understand. Add the power of asynchronous collaboration with Screencast, and you'll move work forward faster than ever.

Learn more about creating and sharing video messages with Snagit and Screencast.

ABOUT TECHSMITH

TechSmith is the market leader in screen capture software and productivity solutions for daily in-person, remote, or hybrid workplace communication and customer-facing image and video content. The company's award-winning flagship products, **Snagit** and **Camtasia**, empower anyone to create remarkable videos and images that share knowledge for better training, tutorials, and everyday communication.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

To learn more about workplace communication, TechSmith surveyed 969 people in the US, the UK, France, and Germany, including both Snagit customers and non-customers. Participants were engaged in full-time employment in a work role that required digital communication and collaboration. They represented software/IT, healthcare services, retail, manufacturing, and finance and fell into 4 age cohorts* ranging from 1946 to 2012.

The recruitment and delivery of the survey were conducted in July-August 2023 by independent research partner Qualtrics. Respondents were offered multiple-choice and open-ended questions about their preferred methods of workplace communication, the number and quality of meetings, and the use of visuals and video in their own communications. Note that due to rounding, some figures do not add up to 100%.

*For the sake of reporting data, age cohorts are described in categories likely familiar to readers as “generations.” Those born between 1946 and 1964 are described as “Baby Boomers,” between 1965 and 1980 as “Gen X,” between 1980 and 1996 as “Millennials,” and between 1997 and 2012 as “Gen Z.”



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Dr. Jane Bozarth, director of research for The Learning Guild, is a veteran classroom trainer who transitioned to eLearning in the late 1990s and never looked back. In her previous job as leader of the State of North Carolina’s award-winning eLearning program, Jane specialized in finding low-cost ways of providing online training solutions. She is the author of several books, including eLearning Solutions on a Shoestring, Social Media for Trainers, and Show Your Work: The Payoffs and How-To’s of Working Out Loud. Jane holds a master’s degree in technology-based training and a doctorate in training and development.

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