3 Ways Employers Can Use Technology to Overcome Barriers at Remote, Hybrid, or Asynchronous Workplaces

An excerpt from *Building Resilient Workspaces: Steps to Futureproof Your Organization*

#1: Support scalable knowledge-sharing.

In the past, in most organizations, knowledge was shared mainly in face-to-face conversations — during planning meetings, watercooler chats, one-on-one training sessions, and many other types of formal and informal meetups. In remote, hybrid, and/or asynchronous organizations, the emphasis needs to shift to sharing knowledge through writing and other forms of documentation.

"Content scales, time does not. A majority of knowledge work today still happens in unstructured thoughts and meetings. Organizations must provide their employees a better way to document and scale knowledge across the organization rather than defaulting to inefficient meetings. Investing in an intelligent system of record allows teams to not repeat themselves over and over again in many meetings and reserve precious sync time for critical discussion and decisions."

—Joe Thomas, CEO and co-founder of Loom

There needs to be a standardized, systematic way of recording and sharing ideas, thoughts, operational processes, and procedures and instructions for how to do things. When using this model all company information, the company's intellectual property, becomes accessible to *all* employees, not something nebulous that resides only in certain employees' memories.

"Memos over meetings is the new mantra. Documentation has to be the default for how knowledge is scaled, instead of meetings," said Darren Murph, Head of Remote at GitLab. "You have to document all the knowledge that's implicit or implied within the organization because remote workers don't learn by osmosis in the same way that in-office workers did."
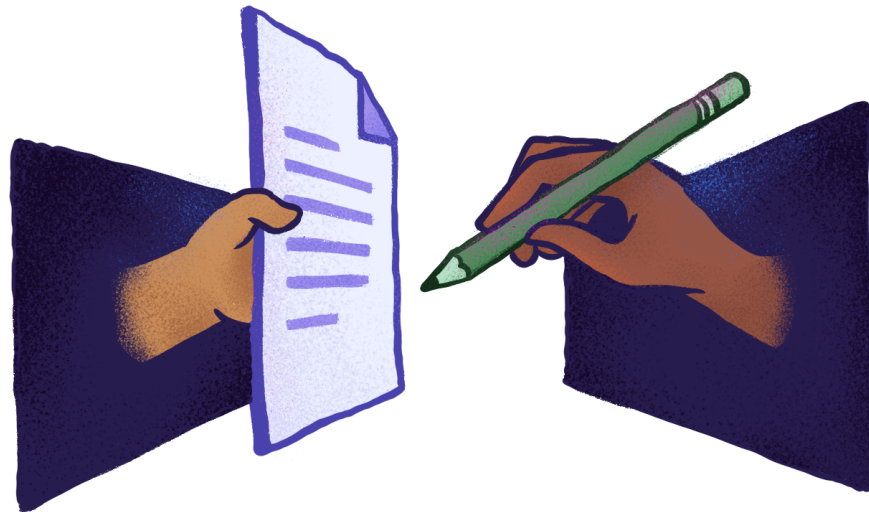
It is critical to build systems and infrastructure that facilitate the sharing and retrieval of knowledge. These can include the obvious tools of choice, such as Zoom and Slack, as well as technologies that enable personalized communication, such as asynchronous video. But it can also include customized tools or in-house repositories that work well within an individual company's unique culture.

"Most organizations prioritize knowledge transfer," Murph explained. "How fast can person A tap person B on the shoulder and export what's in their brain? That model doesn't scale with asynchronous and remote teams. Instead, the right question to ask is, 'how can we build systems and infrastructure so that anyone can find the information?' Such systems make time and place independence possible."

It's also important to avoid unintentional secrets. What percentage of Slack messages in your organization are sent in public channels? What percentage are sent on private channels? The more a company's communications are public to its employees, the more potential for success is created because as much organizational knowledge as possible is available for sharing.

"Communication is the mother of all skills. It is the root of human experience and cooperation; all learning, relationship building, and progress. Intentional investment to improve communication skills and practices will pay compounding dividends to organizations."

—Joe Thomas, CEO of Loom

#2: Be intentional about why you're together — both in space and time.

Every meeting should have an agenda. Make it normal for people to decline meeting invites without one.

This idea complements and builds on the concept that knowledge should be documented so it can be shared. It extends to documenting the purpose and reasons for spending time together — whether in a physical or virtual conference room.
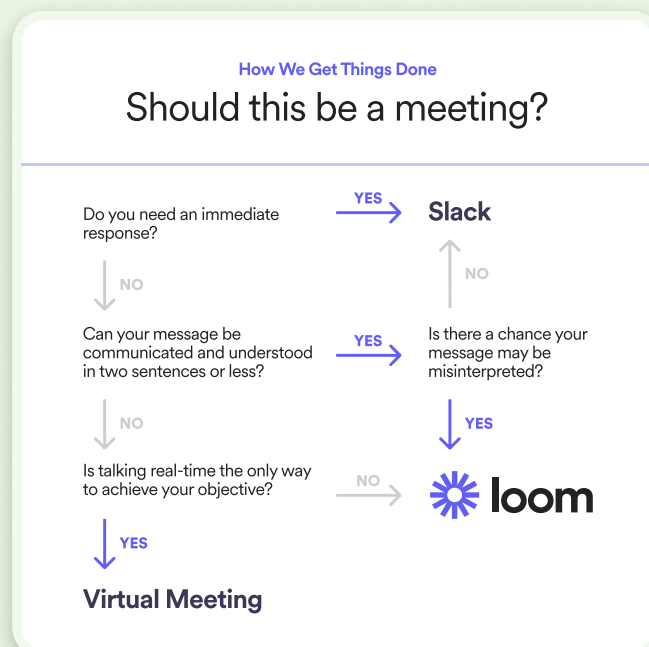
Maintaining the world's largest streaming anime content library, Crunchyroll shares this form of art and culture with audiences outside Japan. Because the company employs voice actors and other performers who need to work in-studio, it's not possible for them to operate as a fully remote organization.

Nonetheless, Crunchyroll has chosen to implement similar principles to encourage inclusiveness and maintain high productivity levels across its diverse company.

"We champion intentional connection," said Barb Bidan, Chief People Officer at Crunchyroll. "One way we do this is by making sure we provide sets of tools to leaders and managers that help them plan in-person days very purposefully so as to create value for their teams. I'm always saying things like, 'Don't create an on-site work policy that doesn't have a strong why.' We want to intentionally focus in-office time around creating connections."

Murph recommends using tools such as flowcharts and decision algorithms to create cultural change. "I like to think about putting guardrails in place," he said. "It could be as simple as a 'does this need to be a meeting?' flowchart. Yes, this adds friction for people who want to default to meetings, but that's exactly what you want to be doing. You want people to question whether something needs a synchronous interaction, an asynchronous interaction or whether it should instead be documented in a tool. Over time, this becomes second nature. It's a way of allocating care and attention to the use of your own — and others' — precious time."

How We Get Things Done

Should this be a meeting?

Do you need an immediate response? — **YES** → **Slack**

NO ↓

Can your message be communicated and understood in two sentences or less? — **YES** → Is there a chance your message may be misinterpreted? ↑ **NO**

NO ↓

Is talking real-time the only way to achieve your objective? — **NO** → **loom**

Is there a chance your message may be misinterpreted? **YES** ↓ **loom**

YES ↓

Virtual Meeting

We also recommend establishing a formal strategy for using in-person time. You might follow the 80/20 rule. This way, 80% of your in-person time should be spent doing things that cannot be done remotely, such as building rapport, and only 20% should be dedicated to collaborative work.

"As humans, we are and always will be social and relational beings," said Murph. "There's no exact substitute for having a meal together."

#3: Hire and train for emotional and relational intelligence.

In all-remote or primarily remote organizations, there are fewer opportunities to correct mistakes or miscommunications. And there are no watercooler moments. If you're grumpy because you're tired and speak sharply to your report, they won't run into you in the hallway later and notice the dark circles under your eyes or your frequent yawns.

"In a physical environment, it's much easier to find and read those additional signals," said Mark Frein, Chief Workplace Officer at Oyster. "They tell you that something's not about you. In digital communications, misunderstandings can persist."

It's always important to demonstrate empathy and sensitivity during difficult moments in the workplace (such as when terminating an employee). This is true regardless of the medium you're using. What's important is how the message is conveyed. Consider the fact that, according to Loom survey data, 62% of office workers said miscommunication and/or misinterpretation of digital messages at work affected their mental health. Additionally, 97% of workers felt the need to add something extra in digital communication to clarify their tone.

Plus, in mostly remote or all-remote environments, managers need to be more skillful. They'll have to be better at delegating, coordinating handoffs and helping others manage relationships. Focused training in emotional and relational skills can help here.

Anti-bias training can be valuable as well. The more diverse an organization is, the more important it is to teach employees to collaborate effectively with others who think differently, avoiding conformity and/or proximity bias.

Frein explained, "If my company is based in Austin, Texas, and I staff it here in Austin, I know what I will get in terms of what people will look like and how they will dress, think and speak. If I am also hiring in Argentina, Nigeria and Serbia, the people I recruit will break my assumptions about how employees "should" act, talk and think. That will open doors for them and for me, but only if my organization has done the requisite work to deal with and try to eliminate bias."
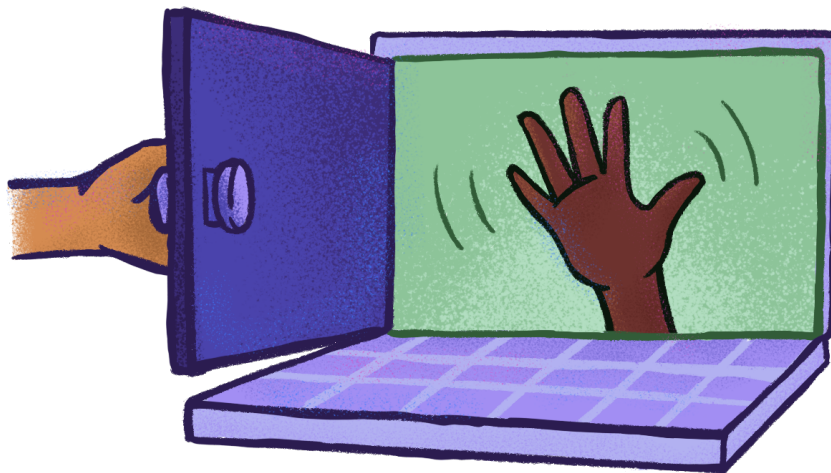
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