

The State of Visual Collaboration 2021

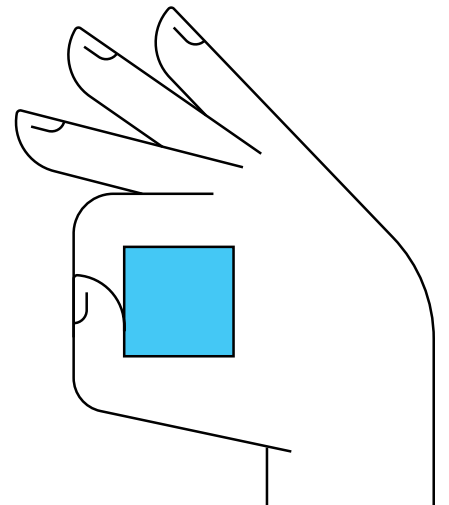
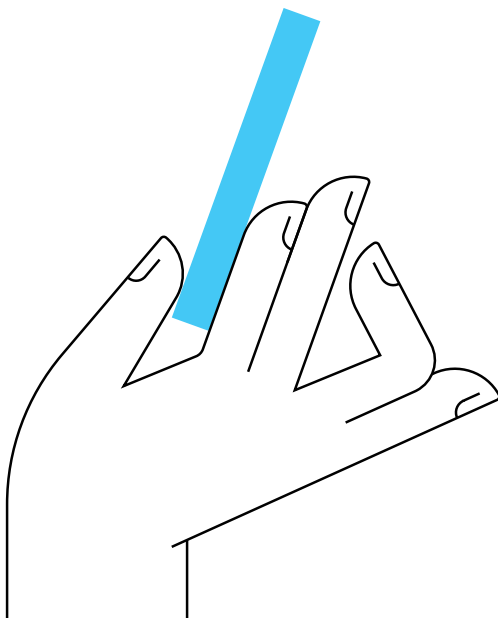
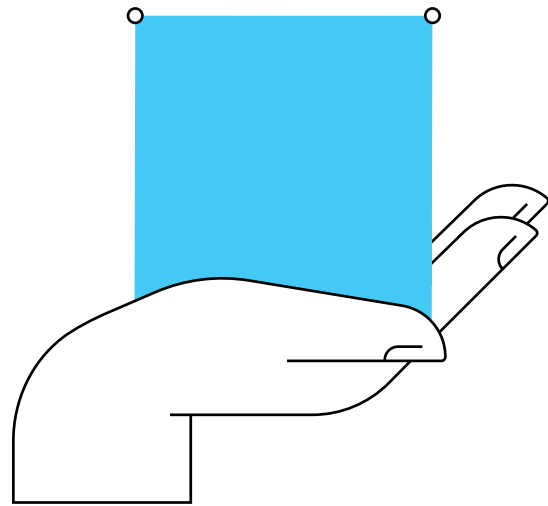
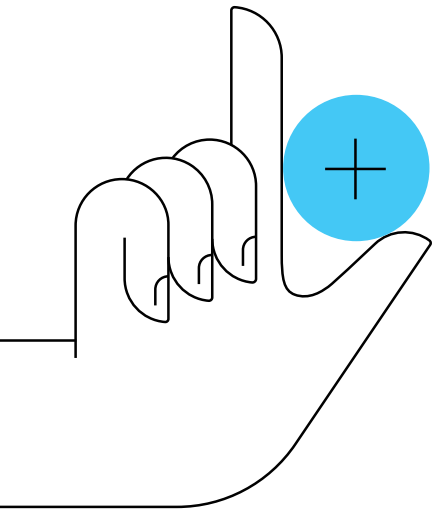
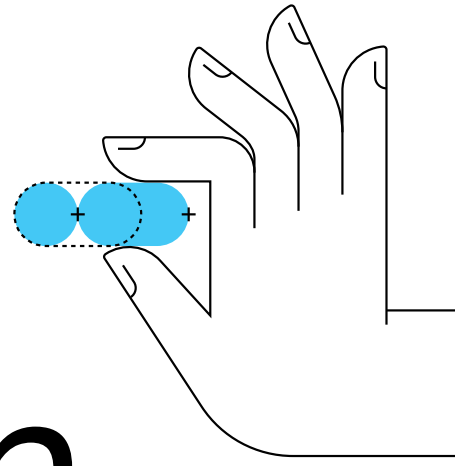


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Introduction

In the world of hybrid and remote work, visual collaboration is your key to engaging employees, increasing productivity, and uncovering innovative ideas. From problem-solving and team-building to brainstorming and workshops, teams that can easily collaborate across the miles will come out ahead.

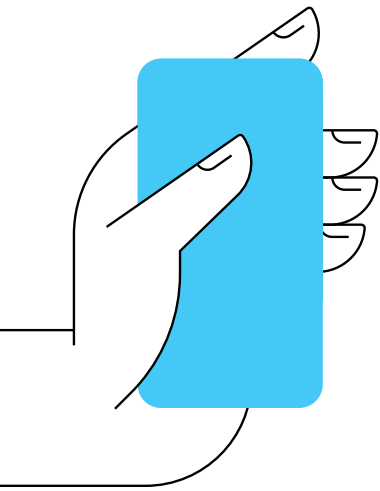
Yet most remote workers say their biggest challenge is being able to communicate as effectively in a virtual setting as they do in person. To learn more about the challenges of collaborating in a remote environment, we surveyed more than 600 IT, product manager, HR, and operations professionals. Here's what we found, along with our best recommendations for how remote teams can thrive with visual collaboration.



What is visual collaboration?

Effective visual collaboration allows teams to better see, communicate, and contribute to meetings, workshops, brainstorming, planning, and other creative group sessions in real time, or any time. Visual collaboration tools provide a virtual workspace to help remote and hybrid teams surface new ideas and build strong connections in an inclusive environment, no matter where or how they work.

The changing face of hybrid communication



Even before the shift to remote work, hybrid communication was lacking. When someone had to work from home to take care of a sick child or family member, they would be the lone person dialing into a conference room. Someone would draw something on the physical whiteboard and the remote worker would have to say, “Would you mind turning the webcam over towards the whiteboard?” Because the culture was biased toward in-person work, remote workers always felt left out.



“ Making sure that everyone has their voice heard and that they have a seat at the table is really important in a remote world.”

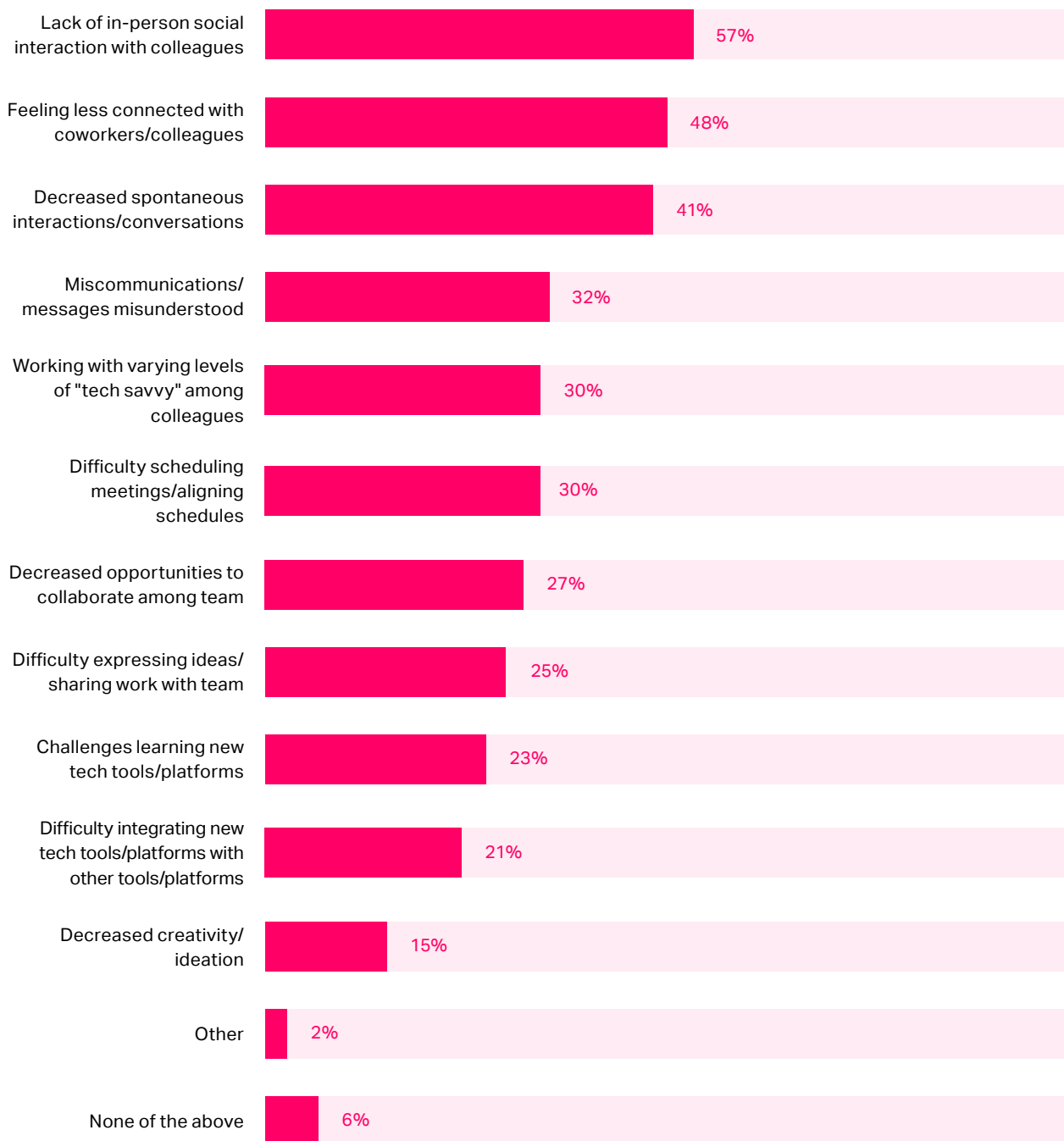
— Clint Williams, Principal Product Manager, Microsoft Teams

Today, most employees expect the option to work remotely. Almost 98% of workers say they would like to work remotely at least some of the time for the rest of their careers, and 97% would recommend remote work to others, reports [Buffer](#). This makes effective hybrid communication even more critical—and more complex.

[Microsoft](#) found that colleagues feel less connected to each other since shifting to remote work, and InVision research corroborates that. We discovered that the challenges around remote work stem from not being able to communicate with colleagues face to face. The list is far longer than we could have imagined, propelled by the past two years of working from home.

From fewer spontaneous conversations and difficulty expressing ideas to decreased opportunities for collaboration and lower creativity, remote teams are struggling.

The challenges of working remotely



Root causes for remote work challenges

While remote work provides employees with the flexibility they crave, it can also be a huge source of stress and burnout. Email interruptions, calendars full of virtual meetings, and working until the wee hours of the morning have become a way of life for many people.

The Gartner logo, consisting of the word "Gartner" in white sans-serif font on a black rectangular background.

"To mitigate remote work fatigue, target three key stressors: digital distractions, virtual overload and difficulty disconnecting."

— Gartner®¹

¹Smarter with Gartner, "Watch Out for 3 Challenges Driving Remote Work Fatigue," April 26, 2021, <https://www.gartner.com/smarterwithgartner/hr-should-watch-out-for-3-challenges-driving-remote-work-fatigue/>

And if you're an IT professional, you also have to worry about infrastructure to support remote workers, as well as ensuring quality communication and collaboration experiences. According to our survey, there are four big reasons for these remote work challenges:

① Virtual can't compete with face to face

Many professionals say body language and in-person collaboration are important to fully understanding their colleagues, especially when completing difficult tasks or making important decisions.

② Technical issues slow things down

Not everyone has strong WiFi connections, so many teams waste valuable time when people have to walk around looking for a stronger signal, or disconnect and dial back in.

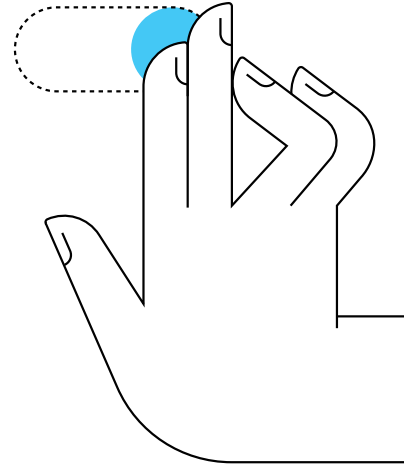
③ Scheduled meetings clutter calendars

Because remote workers can't conduct "drop-in" meetings in the hallway or by the coffee machine, video meetings take over our calendars, leaving little room for anything else.

④ Fewer personal connections hinder collaboration

When teams connect personally, they develop the camaraderie and enthusiasm to work toward a common goal. Without these connections, virtual collaboration can suffer.

Uncovering remote work priorities



We asked both business leaders and their teams about some of the biggest challenges they face with remote and hybrid work. While some priorities differed, everyone agreed that communication and collaboration are key to successful remote work.

Business leaders: Increased efficiency and closer communication

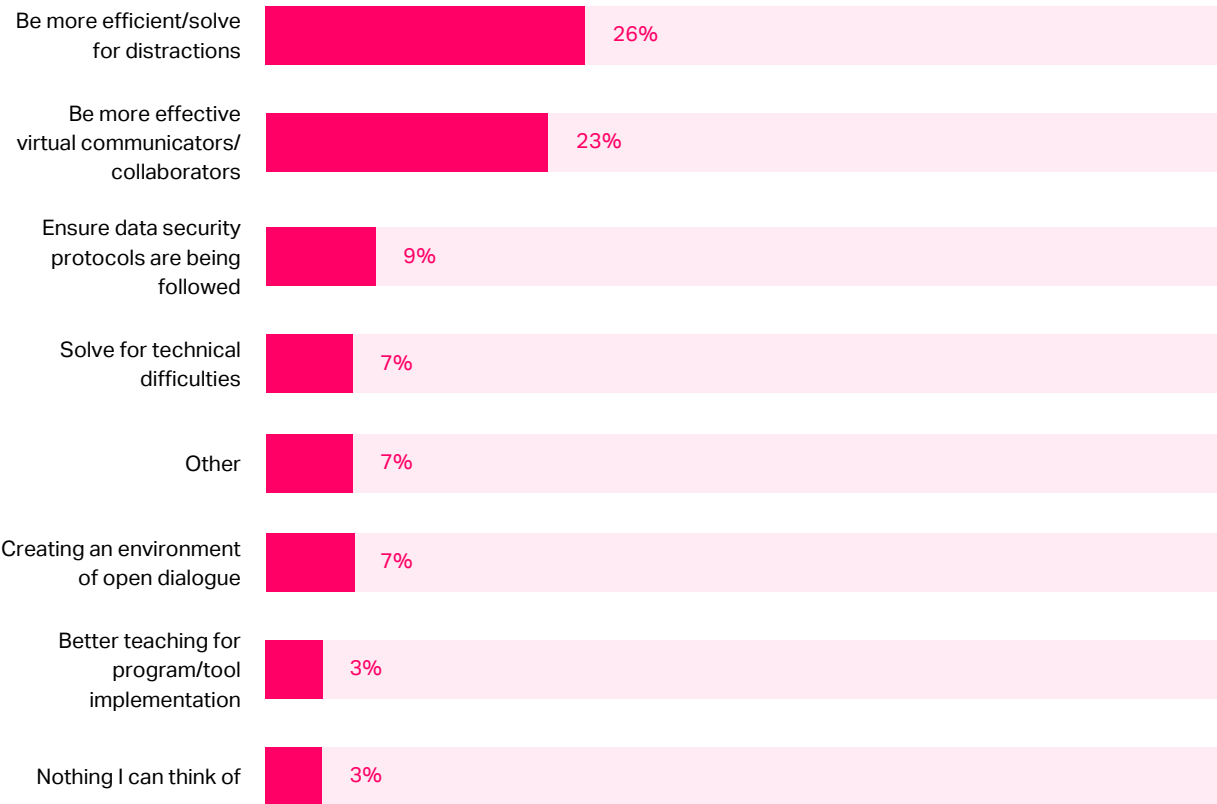
Our study found that the top challenges business leaders want to solve for their remote workers include:

- ✗ More efficiency when working with colleagues
- ✗ Better communication and collaboration with co-workers

“The top challenge is keeping everyone motivated and finding ways to collaborate that fit with everyone's schedule. Being home and having kids and families can sometimes be difficult for the employee.”

— Operations Leader, InVision Visual Collaboration Survey

Top challenges c-suite wants to solve for their employees when working remotely



Teams: Better communication and more reliable tech

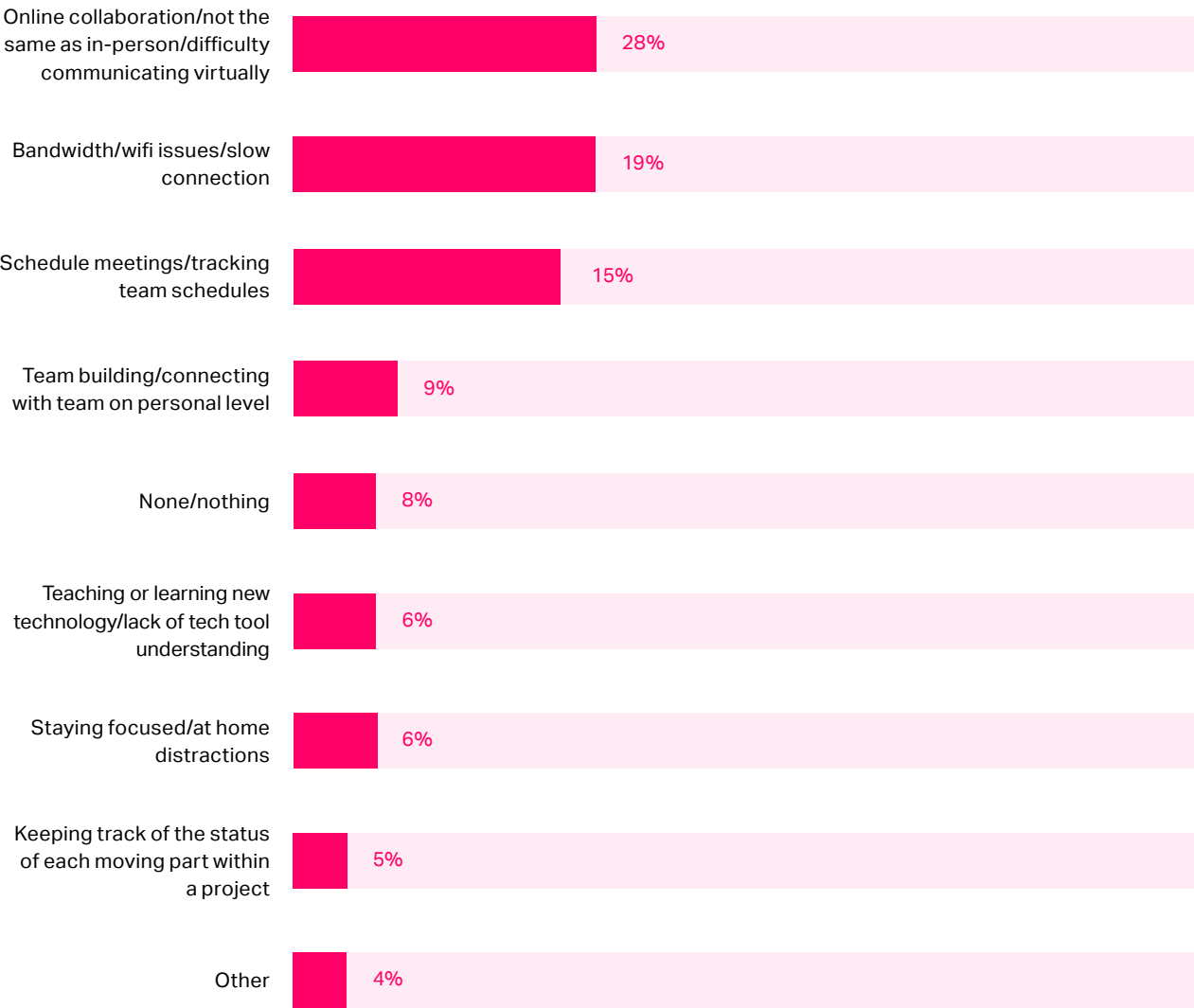
Improving online communication is a priority for team members, too, but is complicated by technical difficulties. Workers identified their top remote work priorities as:

- ✗ Difficulty replicating in-person collaboration online (28%)
- ✗ Slow connections, bandwidth, and WiFi issues (19%)
- ✗ Tracking meetings and team schedules (15%)

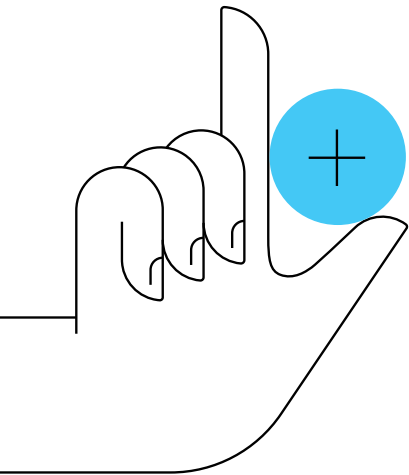
“The lack of in-person collaboration negatively affects the synergy and effectiveness of our collaboration efforts.”

— Product Manager, InVision Visual Collaboration Survey

The challenges of working remotely



Meeting the need with visual collaboration tools



Remote work has forced companies to rethink where they focus their resources. According to a [PwC study](#), 72% of US executives plan to invest in virtual collaboration tools to support hybrid work

Simple and approachable, virtual whiteboards are a type of visual collaboration tool that can help teams visually represent and collaborate on ideas and plans with drawings, charts, diagrams, sticky notes, and other engaging capabilities. And they're expected to be a key tool for remote working teams.



"Gartner expects the visual collaboration tools market to expand and solidify a foundational role in the continuing global shift to remote work."

— Gartner²

Our research shows that teams who use visual collaboration tools value ease of use, integrations, and real-time collaboration most. IT professionals also value tools that are flexible and scalable, and can accommodate growing teams.

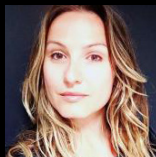
²Gartner, "Hype Cycle™ for the Digital Workplace, 2021," Matt Cain, Michael Woodbridge, Brent Stewart, July 12, 2021



Scaling creativity at WPP

WPP is a creative transformation company that works with agencies around the world, including Wunderman Thompson (WT). As part of a rebrand for Aquafresh toothpaste, WT set up a series of in-person meetings to collaborate with their client. But when COVID hit, they had to find a way to do the same work virtually.

With InVision Freehand already in place, teams were able to collaborate in real time across locations and time zones with no training required. More than 24 specialists from WT and Aquafresh brainstormed 112 creative concepts in just two days—half the time it would have taken than in person. And they saved a bundle on travel expenses.



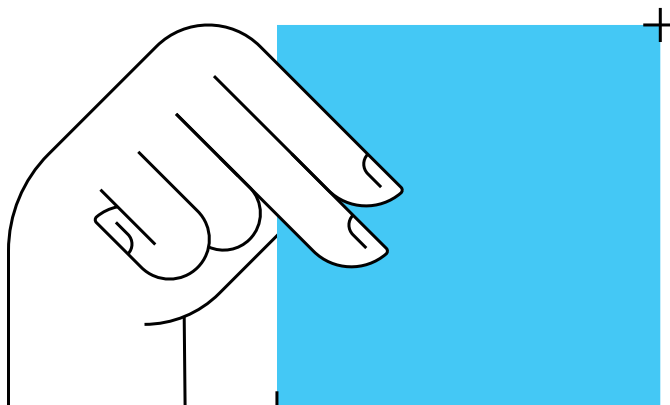
“There are other companies that enable the creation of digital products but not as elegantly with collaboration. Enabling collaboration is the magic.”

—Sanja Partalo, Executive Vice President, WPP

How teams use visual collaboration tools

From IT and operations leaders to product management and HR professionals, teams across organizations use visual collaboration tools to meet their biggest remote work challenges. This includes:

- ✕ Problem-solving and team-building
- ✕ Collecting feedback
- ✕ Creating organizational charts
- ✕ Conducting agile retrospectives





How Accenture Federal transformed PI planning for remote teams

At Accenture Federal, PI planning for the VA military health systems sector typically meant flying in teams of hundreds of people, packing meeting rooms, and keeping track of an endless trail of Post-it Notes. Even before the pandemic, they quickly realized that their teams were outgrowing this process—in both office space and costs—so they began looking at online collaboration tools.

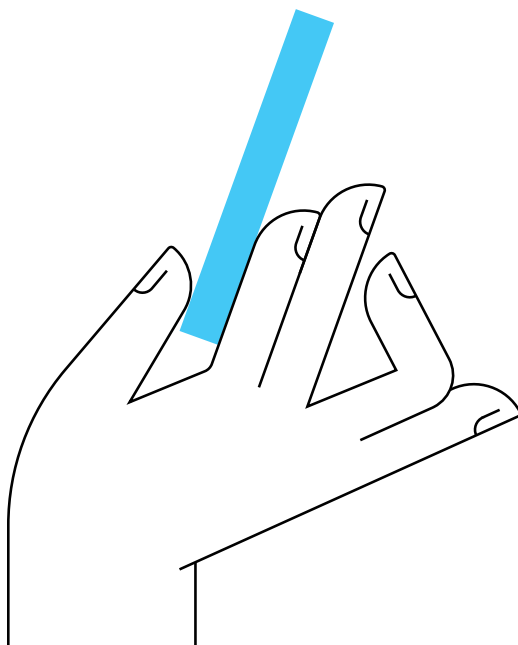
Using InVision Freehand, teams of more than 100 were able to come together remotely to develop their own schedules in just three days. The schedules were also translated simultaneously to their application lifecycle management (ALM) tool.



“We’ve brought in-person results to a remote atmosphere. That’s powerful because the amount of information you capture by allowing more development, architecture, and design teams to actually create the schedule for you is incremental.”

—Brent Swartz, Business Agility Senior Manager, Accenture Federal

Across the board, we've seen collaboration, iteration, and innovation are mainstays of successful companies, but recreating the energy and productivity of live sessions is hard to recreate from a distance. According to our research, visual collaboration tools can help product managers support their remote teams by facilitating everything from product roadmapping and brainstorming to problem-solving and flowcharts.





Keeping teams connected across time zones and functions

Inspiring creativity in cross-functional teams starts with smoother workflows. But while keeping teams aligned is hard enough when everyone is in the same office, Asana found that it's even more complex when people are scattered across time zones.

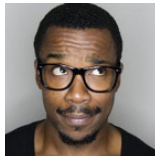
With the help of InVision Freehand, seamlessly integrated with their own work management tool, Asana was able to create an environment that supports autonomy while helping teams work more efficiently together. For example, by pasting a link into a project brief in Asana, team members can open a Freehand within their Asana board, making their ideas actionable. The result is less switching between tools, and more productive work.



"We're excited to make the connection between ideation and creation—between capturing your thoughts and ideas, and putting those in action."

—Paige Costello, Product Lead, Asana

Visual collaboration also gives companies a stronger platform for inclusion in the workplace. Brainstorming, for instance, gives team members the chance to participate by speaking up, drawing, typing, or even contributing ideas on their own time, offering everyone a voice.



“ There is an ease of Freehand where people from different identities and different backgrounds—whether a product manager, designer, engineer, English, or non-English speaking—can easily get up to speed and collaborate across cultures, boundaries, and differences in service of creating a product together.”

—Benjamin Evans, Director of Product Inclusion, Paypal



From physical whiteboards to digital collaboration

At IBM, whiteboards play a major role in their design culture. Mounted on walls or wheeled between rooms, whiteboards allow their teams to come together to surface and visualize new ideas. But when IBM made the shift to remote work due to the pandemic, they needed a digital alternative.

With Freehand, InVision's digital whiteboard, they've been able to easily bring other functions like architecture and engineering into product planning and workshop sessions, as well as better collaborate with developers across the world. To guide their sessions, they've created templates for everything from product launches and sprint planning to journey mapping and wireframing. People can also contribute to the discussion asynchronously, both before and after sessions.



"We adapted our normal in-studio world into a digital world, and that opened some cool opportunities because it got the whiteboards out of the design studio."

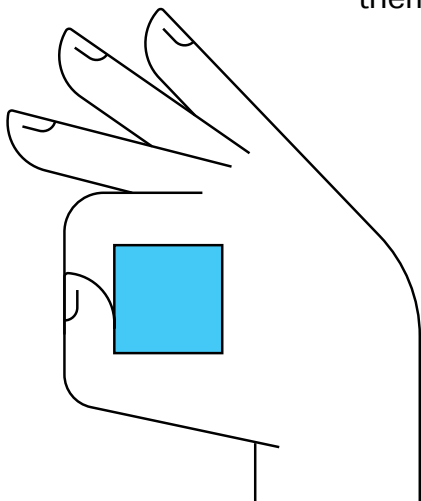
—Josef Bodine, UX Design Lead, IBM

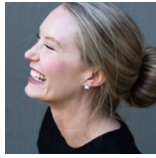
Rise above remote work barriers with visual collaboration

While our research shows that remote teams are still trying to find their way when it comes to communicating across the miles, visual collaboration tools can show them the way. Here are our top recommendations for how you can use visual collaboration tools to make remote work more productive, collaborative, and fun.

① Make it easy to collaborate:

Building connections with your team is the first step to better collaboration, but you'll never get there with complicated tools that require prior expertise or lots of training. Help teams start collaborating right away with easy-to-use tools that empower them to make their ideas heard in a way that works best for them.





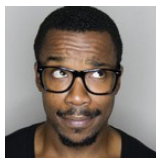
"To get your team successful with a tool, you want to start with something that has a really low learning curve and helps your team get to that 'aha moment' of 'Wow, this is really helping me connect better with my colleagues and do better work.'"

— Paige Costello, Product Lead, Asana

② Ensure equity and inclusivity

In a hybrid environment, you can't hold a meeting down the hall and leave key team members out because they work remotely. Nor can you continue holding meetings where one person takes over the discussion, leaving out those who don't feel comfortable speaking up, or who need more time to process their thoughts.

Get everyone involved by giving them the opportunity to contribute when they feel most comfortable, whether that's synchronously or asynchronously. Inclusion helps build great teams and great collaboration.



"Make it easy for people to connect, collaborate, to understand and celebrate their differences. Those are all things that are really foundational to a tool that encourages a more inclusive way of working."

— Benjamin Evans, Director of Product Inclusion, Paypal

③ Collaborate in real time

When it comes to virtual meetings, most people end up staring at a screen while someone else presents, and they're not really part of the conversation. But when you're collaborating in real time, you can see cursors flying, people building off each other's ideas, and get close to the kind of energy you feel when working in the same room.



"The real-time collaborative nature of visual collaboration is super helpful to make people feel engaged and that they're part of something."

— Jeff Chow, SVP Product, InVision

④ Add some structure

One of the hardest things about launching a collaborative session like brainstorming is starting with a blank canvas. Having access to pre-made templates for your most common whiteboarding activities from journey mapping and operations planning to workshops and sprint planning solves this issue. When you add a little structure to your sessions, you can get a jumpstart on creating new ideas, improve your productivity, and inspire greater creativity.

⑤ Integrate with your existing toolset

Team collaboration shouldn't stop the minute your meeting or problem-solving session ends. That's why your visual collaboration tool needs to integrate seamlessly into your existing tech. For example, your team should be able to drop and rank development task cards from your agile planning software directly on your whiteboard, pin a digital whiteboard into your communication platform, or pop up a whiteboard canvas in your work management application.



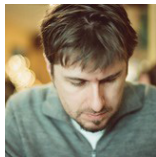
Gartner

"Visual collaboration tools need to enable deeper integration with design, product management and development tools to become a permanent part of the digital product design toolset."

— Gartner^{®3}

⑥ Don't forget the fun

Everyone can use a little more fun at work, especially if they're remote. Animated gifs like party poppers and hearts dropped next to a colleague's virtual comments can brighten someone's day, even when they're hard at work. Or take a vote on your favorite ideas, right on your whiteboard canvas. By letting people show their personalities, you can lighten the mood and create a positive energy that helps creativity flow.



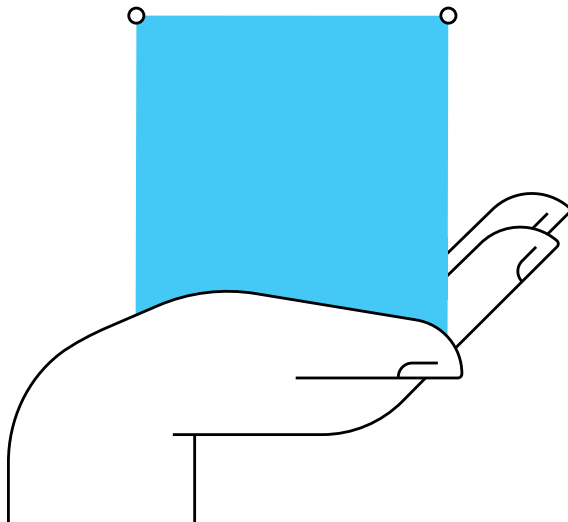
"I wanted a way to make great product design feel more like play. I consider it a rich and untapped resource."

— Mike Kuechenmeister, Design Lead, ACS Technologies

Try InVision Freehand

Discover how visual collaboration can bring your in-house and remote teams together and drive more business.

Go to invisionapp.com/freehand to try a digital whiteboard free today.

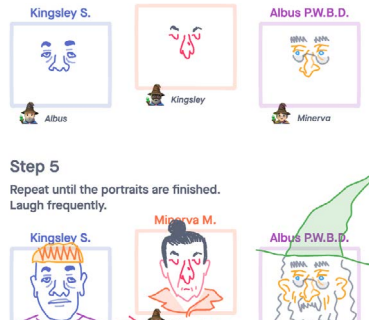


Freehand Templates

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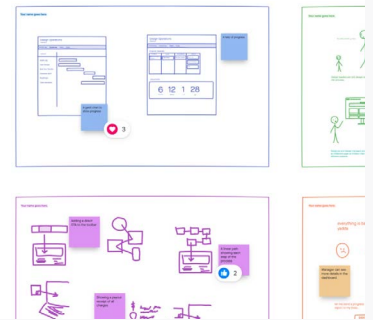
Ice breakers Template

[Preview template](#)



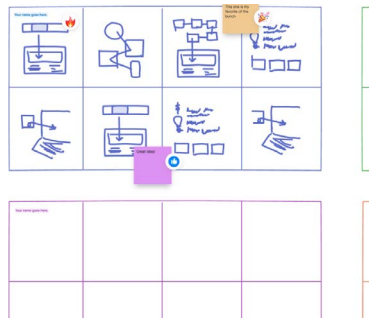
Brainstorming Template

[Preview template](#)



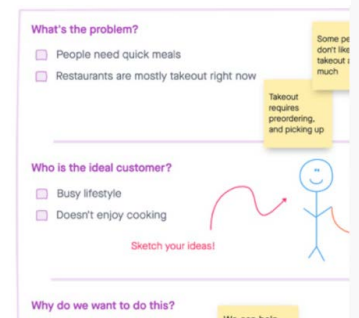
Crazy 8's Template

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Product Planning Template

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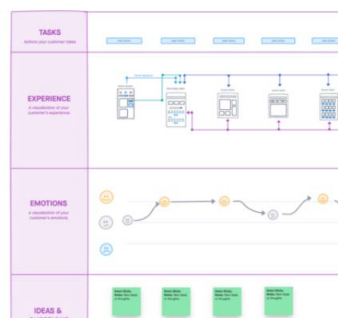
Design Sprint Template

[Preview template](#)



Customer Journey Map Template

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Flowchart Template

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