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A MONTH WITH NO MEETINGS

An Experiment to Build an Async-First Culture
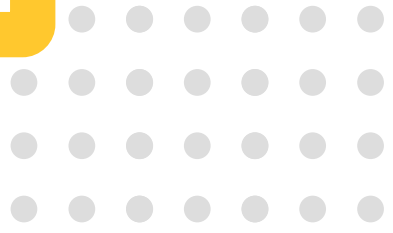
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Introduction

When TechSmith was established more than 30 years ago, we made a commitment to ourselves and our customers: **We would create solutions that empower people.**

Over the decades, both content itself and the spaces in which it is created have changed significantly. Technology became faster and more accessible. Work expanded across languages, time zones, and locations. As our customers evolved, so did TechSmith.

But running a successful business requires time and focus from everyone involved. So when our employees asked to have "fewer, better meetings," leadership listened — and it's how our **"Async-First in July"** experiment came to life.

Like most companies before the COVID-19 pandemic, our business worked primarily on-site, with in-person teams. In the summer of 2022, the time of Async-First July, employees were working in 100% remote conditions as a new company headquarters was being constructed. We were operating from a place of unfamiliarity...but knew we could figure things out, together.

This ebook shares how TechSmith led a company-wide, immersive experience intended to innovate workflows, reduce meeting fatigue, and improve team communications. The results of the "Async-First" experiment were compelling:
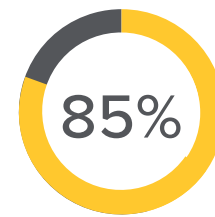
+15%

increase in employees who felt more productive

With meeting-free calendars, employees felt more productive and in control of their time.

+8%
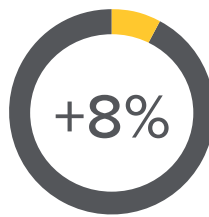
increase in the perceived importance of meetings

Eliminating meetings helped employees think more critically about how they use synchronous time.

85%

employees who will consider replacing future meetings

Employees agreed, async communication habits were worth learning and adopting.

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But our findings went well beyond just data points. We collected feedback directly from employees throughout the experiment in order to understand the effects that an "Async-First" environment had on them individually, and to provide support along the way. What we heard confirmed something we already suspected: Work is deeply personal, and everyone has their own unique ways of getting things done. We all spend a significant amount of time learning, doing, and interacting, and we all want to make our days the best they can be.

If your company is interested in a creative new approach to workplace communications, read on for some thought-provoking details (or jump straight to the **big lesson**).

About TechSmith

INDUSTRY

Image/video capture, recording, creation

FOUNDED

1987

EMPLOYEES

300

CUSTOMERS

73 million+ in 190+ countries

WORKPLACE

Hybrid in-person/ remote

Mission

We empower people to create remarkable videos and images that help share knowledge and information

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ASYNC-FIRST
From "why" to "how"

Synchronous meetings are increasingly complicated to coordinate. Schedules are hard to align, and bouncing from call to conference room to task time can be disruptive to teams. Even a small number of meetings with few participants could have a potentially large impact on overall workflows.

Acknowledging the challenge of meetings was why we shaped our Async-First in July experiment around this proposition.

We defined two primary objectives for the Async-First experiment:

1 To better understand asynchronous workflows and communication

2 To reboot TechSmith's own meeting culture and communication norms for the new normal of flexible work styles

OUR HYPOTHESIS

Adopting an "Async-First" culture will have a positive impact on employee satisfaction, job attitude, productivity, and innovation by offering greater flexibility and more dedicated "think" time.

The (A)Synchronous Spectrum

Where companies should be

Where most companies are

ASYNCHRONOUS   SYNCHRONOUS

Communication happens in writing or prerecorded video only, with team members reading/viewing and responding on their own schedule. Prioritizes individuals' focus and productivity.

Communication happens only in real-time, with team members having meetings via video, phone, or in-person, or responding to messages immediately on group chat or email. Prioritizes speed of collaboration.

SOURCE: Adapted from blog.doist.com/async-first

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Setting the stage

In order to move into a "no meetings" mindset and form new, lasting workplace habits, TechSmith wanted sufficient time for teams to immerse themselves in the experience. We decided to make July 1–31, 2022 our inaugural Async-First month.

At the beginning of June 2022, a seven-member multi-departmental task force — with roles from Vice President of Human Resources and Director of Shared Services to Manager of Customer Education and Senior Product Marketing Manager — was established to lead the experiment. Throughout June, these individuals shared a few common ground rules.

FOR THE COMPANY

- Business-critical interactions such as hiring interviews and vendor engagements cannot and should not be replaced with asynchronous communications

- Continue to put employees and customers first

FOR TEAMS

- Make a collaborative async plan

- Review roles and responsibilities

- Be clear in communications, e.g., "Need [item] by [date/time]" or "FYI only, no response needed"

FOR INDIVIDUALS

- Stay focused on work priorities

- Schedule uninterrupted "think time" for yourself

- Keep asynchronous emails and videos short and direct

Each TechSmith department chose specific tools and platforms to use in this experiment, but selections were not mandated company-wide. This was intentional for two reasons: We wanted to encourage technology exploration while allowing each team to decide how they worked best.

Teams were encouraged to leverage technology platforms to best meet their unique needs. This included Slack and email for messaging, Trello and Asana for project management, and Snagit to create quick video messages for more nuanced conversations needing clarity and context.
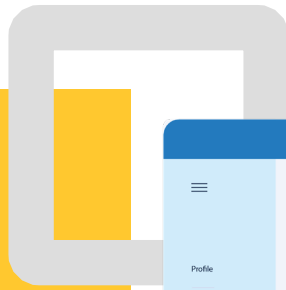
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Surveying the landscape

TechSmith worked with Convince & Convert to develop a robust questionnaire sent twice to all 300 employees: once a week prior to the start of Async-First and again a week after Async-First had concluded.

The 31-question survey collected responses via a variety of answer options including single and multiple choice, open-ended text, and 5-point agreement scale. Questions were designed with the intention of gauging company sentiment around Async-First, and employees were encouraged — but not required — to respond to both pre- and post-experiment surveys.

TechSmith's human resources team also sent out short, weekly surveys to keep a pulse on the project. These surveys were neither an official part of the Async-First experiment nor considered in final learnings, but TechSmith wanted to provide employees with complete support throughout the experiment.

> **"**
>
> A primary guardrail we set was to stay connected with and prioritize the wellbeing of our people. We said to engage synchronously if a topic could elicit anxiety or strong emotions.
>
> Wendy Hamilton
> CEO, TECHSMITH

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Core findings

When TechSmith introduced the concept of Async-First, we expected a wide range of responses. From our 300 employees, we received 270 survey responses pre-experiment and 202 responses post-experiment, although not all respondents answered every question each time. Employees did, however, share their enthusiasm for a "month without real-time meetings"... as well as a little friendly honesty.

EMPLOYEES TOLD US

> Trying new stuff is great to see what we learn from it.

> It'll make us take a hard look at what meetings are most important. I think we'll walk away with some new ideas/practices to make us more efficient.

> I don't think this will change my situation very much.

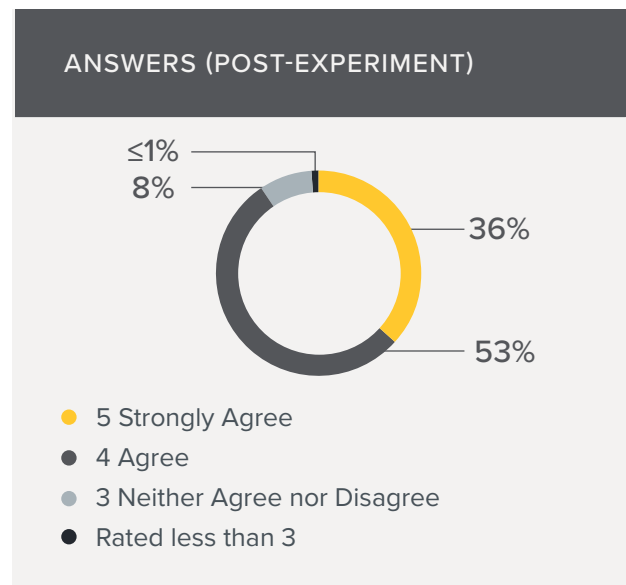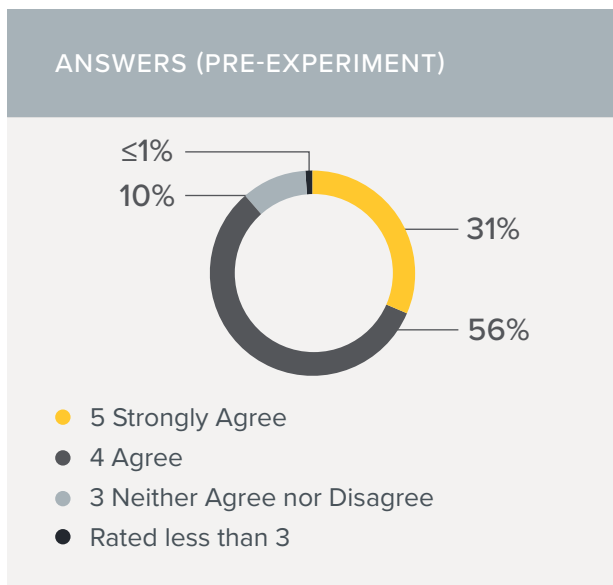TechSmith®

Better, stronger, and happier together

We hoped that an Async-First environment would provide greater work flexibility and increased focused thinking, and found both happened in the results.

Personal productivity rose

We asked our employees to describe their level of productivity before and after Async-First July, and saw a positive upswing, with a **15% increase** in employees who strongly agreed they felt productive in their work during the experiment, compared to before the experiment. This was encouraging, and reinforced our hypothesis that productivity can be fine-tuned at both an individual and corporate level.

QUESTION   OVERALL I FEEL PRODUCTIVE IN MY WORK

ANSWERS (PRE-EXPERIMENT)

≤1%
10%
31%
56%

- ● 5 Strongly Agree
- ● 4 Agree
- ● 3 Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ● Rated less than 3

ANSWERS (POST-EXPERIMENT)

≤1%
8%
36%
53%

- ● 5 Strongly Agree
- ● 4 Agree
- ● 3 Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ● Rated less than 3

> **"** Our new async workflow is amazing and effective. We used to have hours of meetings a week and still often fell behind. Now we are more caught up than ever before.
>
> TECHSMITH EMPLOYEE

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Meetings do matter

No organization can achieve "fewer, better meetings" without first quantifying them. We asked employees to review all synchronous meetings on their calendars and rate each on a scale of 1 ("Not Important") to 5 ("Very Important"). Prior to Async-First, the average meeting score was 3.32 but this increased nearly 8% to an average of 3.57 at the end of July.

Meetings are an undeniable necessity; they provide significant — and meaningful — opportunities for individual interactions and collaborative problem solving.

Experimentation is worthwhile

TechSmith initiated Async-First in July to better understand and evolve our workplace but, as often occurs in research, we discovered answers to unexpected things.

Some of the most interesting feedback speculated on what the experience might bring to individuals and the company as a whole.

> "
> I think async is the most efficient way to work, but I need some social contact!
>
> TECHSMITH EMPLOYEE

QUESTION   WHAT DO YOU THINK WILL BE THE BIGGEST BENEFIT FROM THIS EXPERIMENT?

TOP 3 ANSWERS (PRE-EXPERIMENT)	TOP 3 ANSWERS (POST-EXPERIMENT)
1 Evaluate the need for meetings	1 Stop wasting/save time
2 Improved productivity	2 Improved productivity
3 Stop wasting/save time	3 Maintain information dissemination

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> It was easier to plan out my working time. It gave me more time to assist with random issues as they pop up.

> For videos in place of meetings, all individuals can watch the video whenever their schedule is best for it, and they can continue working while watching if they choose to do so.

> Organizationally I think it was a good shake-up and a moment for a lot of us to consider where our time is best spent, and how.

Our takeaways

Although TechSmith kicked off Async-First July by assessing meetings, information management became a primary theme by the end of the month. The positive employee feedback we received centered around the theme of autonomy. Employees value being able to refer back to emails, annotated screen captures, and recorded videos to verify details or refresh memories. This provides more time for deep thinking, and task completion.

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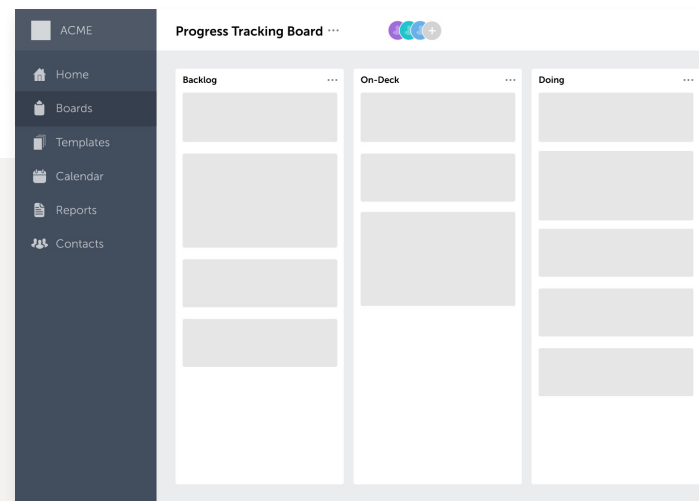
The biggest challenges can't be faced alone

Employee wellbeing was always our top priority so identifying sensitive topics before Async-First began was critical. The most significant, and personal, question we included in our survey was this:

QUESTION

WHAT IS YOUR BIGGEST CONCERN ABOUT THIS EXPERIMENT?

TOP 5 THEMES
1   Feelings of isolation
2   Wasting time
3   Requiring more time to perform tasks, work, and/or make decisions
4   Missed important conversations and collaboration
5   Team erosion

> " Async can be great for gathering input and sharing ideas ahead of time. I think making decisions can be pretty challenging async. Another concern is people not connecting with each other, or that it seems sometimes that there is less communication when not prompted by a synchronous meeting.
>
> TECHSMITH EMPLOYEE

Our takeaways

Text-only communication won't cut it
Feelings of isolation decreased overall as TechSmith teams found ways to express themselves in new ways, like recording quick video messages to add a human element to otherwise static content.

There will be trial and error
Finding the right balance between asynchronous and synchronous communication takes time. Teams will need more than a month to adjust and optimize their workflows.

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THE BIG LESSON

People first, technology second

Our Async-First experience made it crystal clear: We can all help others and create thriving hybrid work environments together.

Was this month-long experiment easy to deploy? No.

Was it worth it? 100%

For businesses that value innovation, it is imperative to explore asynchronous communications as a means to be productive and efficient. But any async-first approach must, at its heart, be founded on a people-first culture to succeed.

Preparing for the future

As a company, TechSmith knew we would learn a lot from our Async-First experiment. Since its conclusion, we've identified several areas that we are further evaluating.

Time management

Async-First was a clear reminder of just how individually each employee manages their workday and how that manifests across workflows. We all need a certain amount of time to perform work duties but the demand for attention is constant. Successful time management is highly personalized, permits flexibility for spontaneity, and provides structure for collaboration.

Employee confidence

One of the most certain conclusions we reached was that there is a viable place for asynchronous communications in the workplace. It does, however, greatly depend upon tool capabilities, platform limitations, and how comfortable employees become with a potential paradigm shift in their work styles. TechSmith leadership remains diligent for any longer-term impacts the Async-First experiment had or may have on our business.
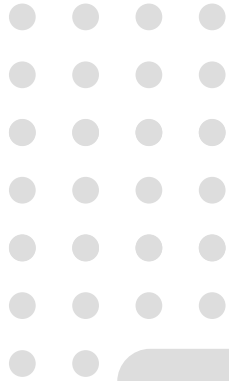
> "
> I could watch the meeting when I had a slow moment and respond then. It gave me more time to pull together my thoughts and feedback.
>
> TECHSMITH EMPLOYEE

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Communication balance

TechSmith neither expected synchronous meetings to be unnecessary during Async-First, nor to vanish once our experiment concluded. The number of regular meetings continues to vary widely across individual roles. Interaction preferences remain unique to each team. What matters is that communication evolves through a constant, iterative, and collaborative process.

TIPS FOR BETTER COMMUNICATION

REPLACE WITH VIDEOS

- 1:1 project feedback
- Project demos
- Metric updates
- Informal training
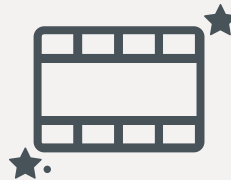
ENHANCE WITH VIDEO & VISUALS

- Proposals
- Problem solving
- Brainstorming
- Onboarding

Getting your team started

There's no one-size-fits-all answer to how an organization can best integrate both synchronous and asynchronous workflows for its employees. Our Async-First study did provide a few key take-aways, however. Consider these for your own company:

1 **PUT PEOPLE FIRST**

Pain points for one team won't be the same for another. Involve your employees from the beginning to make big changes work for them, both individually and as a whole.

2 **FOCUS ON BALANCE AND COMMUNCATION**

Get the right people together at the right times but protect time for deep-focus work. Support relationship-building through personal interactions. Clearly communicate responsibilities, next steps, and realistic expectations.

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3 **UTILIZE YOUR TEAMS' TALENTS**

High-functioning teams and subject matter experts are huge assets. Identify experienced people in your organization whose knowledge can be tapped for the benefit of everyone. Look for untapped leaders who champion creativity and naturally mentor others.

4 **INVEST IN THE RIGHT TOOLS**

Just like you would invest in the right tools for synchronous communication like Zoom and Teams, employees need access to approachable, easy to use image and video editing tools to communicate effectively in an asynchronous environment.

5 **TAKE AS MUCH TIME AS YOU NEED**

Unexpected, drastic work shifts fuel existing fears, uncertainties, and doubts. Long-term habits aren't created from short-term experiences, and change doesn't happen all at once. Your employees are human; allow time to adapt.

5 keys to async success

1	Employee involvement
2	Clear communication
3	Innovative mindset
4	Leverage technology
5	Patient humanity

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Closing thoughts

We're extremely proud of our people-first culture at TechSmith. We want to thank our employees for their willingness to participate in the Async-First experiment, and for providing the feedback that makes TechSmith better for ourselves and our customers.

Work styles and technology continue to evolve and millions of individuals share information more quickly and effectively every day. TechSmith continues to seek new ways for people around the world to connect, collaborate, and create. As always, we invite you to **share your thoughts** with us.

> **In a world where employees are doing more and more with less and less, we're going to keep developing solutions that help our employees and customers simplify and streamline their work processes — and have a little fun while doing it.**
>
> Wendy Hamilton
> CEO, TECHSMITH

TechSmith can get you there

TechSmith develops tools that help organizations move into an "async-first" mentality by using images and videos to progress work forward without a meeting, call, or long email. Interested in learning how your organization can get more done with fewer meetings? **Try Snagit today for free.**

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