



Jabra Research Institute

The Cost of *Bad* Meetings

A global study of knowledge workers reveals the hidden cost of dysfunctional meeting culture, and, most importantly, what businesses can do about it.



Introduction

Bad meetings are a *billion-dollar problem* hiding in plain sight on every calendar

We surveyed more than 2,600 workers across seven markets to understand the true cost of dysfunctional meeting culture, and what we found was striking. For an enterprise organization, the bill runs in excess of \$130M million a year in paid working time that produced nothing, meeting by meeting, across every working week. Scaled across the global economy, the figure runs into the hundreds of billions.

Our findings show that bad meetings are one of the largest unresolved costs in modern business. The reason the cost has gone unchecked for so long is that meetings have become so central to how organizations function that most people have stopped questioning them altogether.

But the reality is that meetings now carry more organizational weight than ever before.

They are where decisions get made, where strategies get aligned, where individuals signal their value and leaders maintain visibility across organizations that are rarely all in the same room at the same time. In a world of distributed teams, async schedules, and organizational complexity, the meeting has

become the connective tissue of professional life. What happens, and what fails, inside them has never mattered more.

And yet most organizations run meetings as though one format can do everything. The same defaults applied to every purpose, every room, every team. Our research shows how badly that assumption costs us.

We call this Meeting Debt — the hidden cost that bad meetings place on people's time, energy, focus, and wellbeing, compounding across every working week. Unlike most organizational costs, it has never appeared on a balance sheet. It has never been the subject of a boardroom conversation. It is simply paid, every day, by millions of workers who have learned to accept it.

This report calculates what that Meeting Debt actually costs. It shows where the failures begin, how they compound, who bears the heaviest burden, and what it would take to stop paying it.

This is the true cost of a bad meeting.



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The findings *at a glance*

Per year, bad meeting culture is
costing businesses over

\$130
million



See page 27 for a breakdown of the methodology

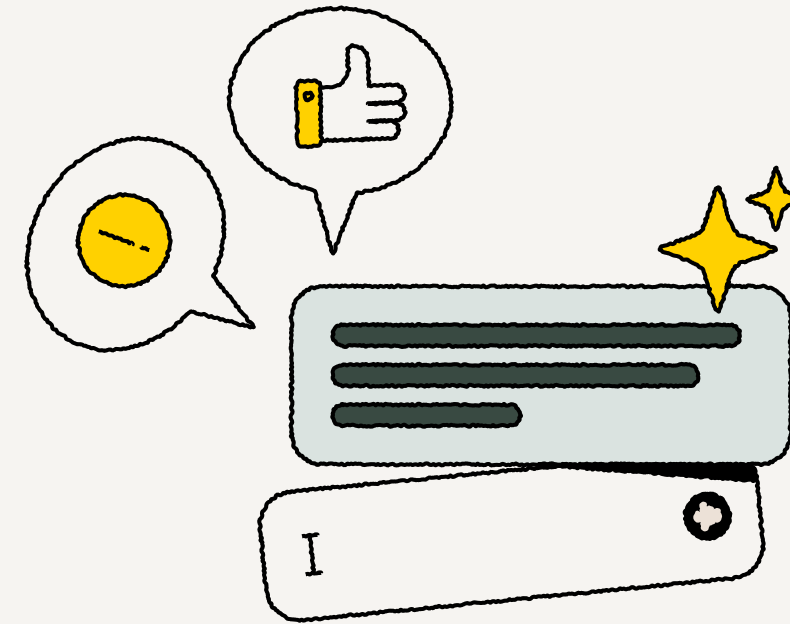
Our headline finding is that bad meeting culture is costing enterprise businesses over \$130 million a year in wasted time, technology failures, and the downstream work that bad meetings generate.



Seven things that should *change* how you think about meetings.

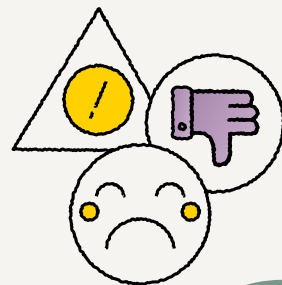
1 We spend more time in meetings than ever, and most of it is considered wasted

Workers average eight hours a week in meetings, the equivalent of 2.5 months a year. **58% of that time is considered unnecessary.** That equates to a full working month of lost productivity per person, per year.



2 87% of workers dread their meetings before they begin

Meeting dread is near-universal and it predicts what happens next. Among those who dread meetings very often, **91% leave with unclear action items** and the same amount need a follow-up meeting – 3x higher than those who don't dread meetings.



3 Meeting tech is broken, and people have stopped expecting otherwise

75% of hybrid meetings experience at least one tech failure. The cost to each employee is **three full working days** of lost productivity every year. For enterprise workers, nearly four. The invisible broken room has become a chronic operating condition.

4 AI depends on meeting quality, not the other way around

Three quarters of workers have tried AI meeting tools. Fewer than a third trust them enough to use them regularly. Our findings show that AI can accelerate a good meeting system. **It cannot repair a broken one.**

5 Bad meetings don't end when the meeting does

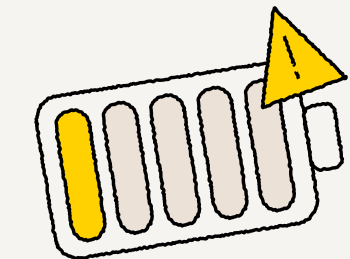
Meeting failure triggers a cascade of problems. 66% of workers leave with unclear action items. 59% need a follow-up meeting. 59% generate additional work as a direct result. **The cost of a bad meeting compounds long after everyone has left the room.**

6 The burden of bad meetings is not shared equally

Half of remote workers are routinely forgotten, talked over, or left out. Women report worse remote experiences than men across every measure. Those who feel talked over are **4x more likely to experience frequent meeting dread.**

7 The workday is designed around more meetings than people can handle

42% of workers hit their energy limit within two hours of back-to-back meetings. 83% have reached it within four. Workers who have meetings past their cognitive capacity are 1.7 times more likely to report follow-up work after the meeting ends.



CHAPTER 1

The state of meetings in 2026

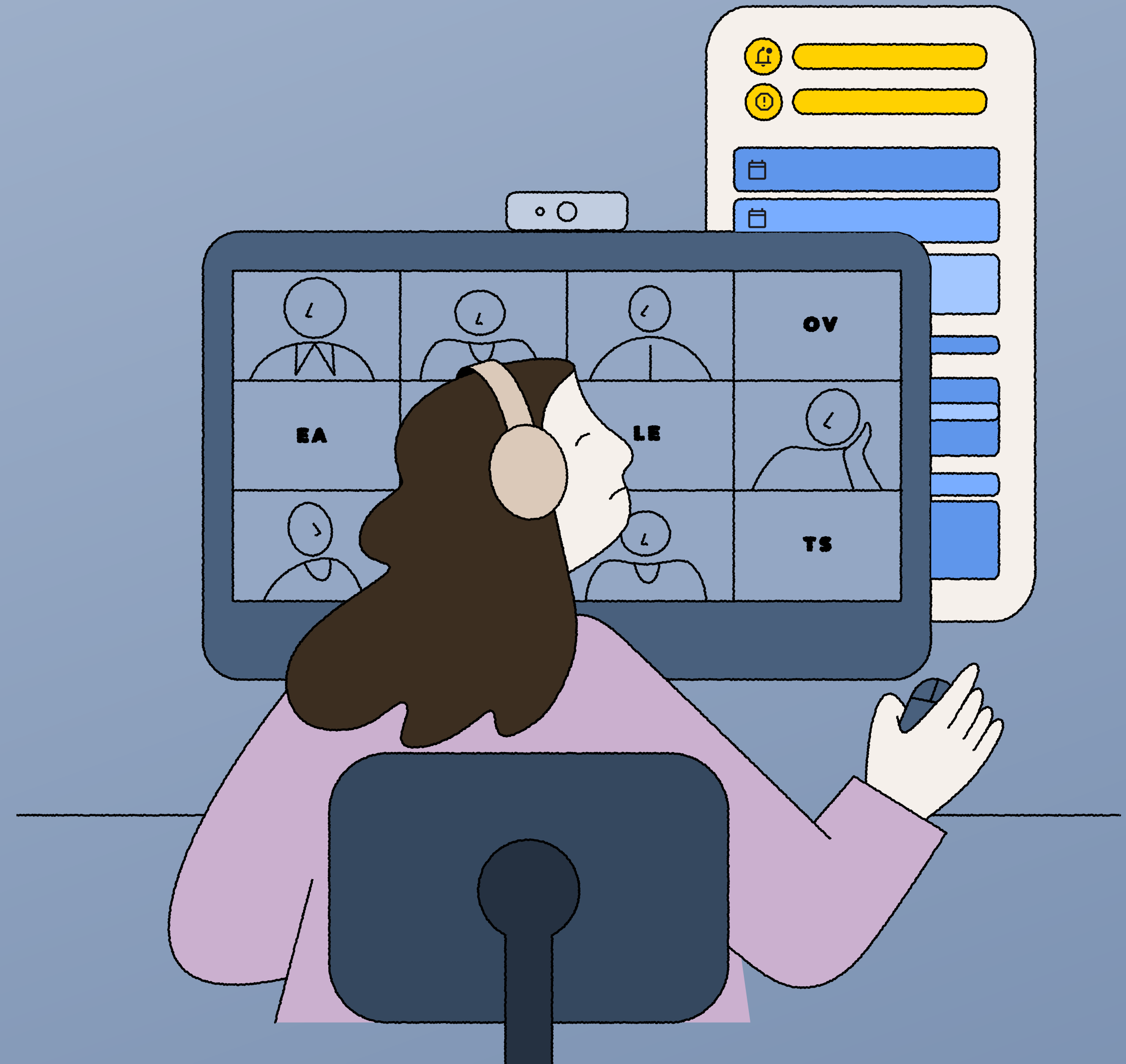
We spend more than two months a year in meetings. More than half of that time is wasted. And we dread most of it before it begins.

Every working day, millions of people open their calendars and find the same thing: a day already spoken for. Blocks of time committed before the morning has begun. For most knowledge workers, this is the permanent condition of modern professional life.

Our research confirms the scale of it. Workers across all seven markets spend an average of eight hours — or a full working day — a week in meetings. Or put otherwise, that's **2.5 months of the year** accounted for purely in meeting time.

That figure rises steadily with seniority, reaching over ten hours a week for leadership roles. In larger organizations, the number climbs higher still. In some markets, it is higher again.

When asked about how and where people meet, 55% said that their most recent meetings were either fully remote or hybrid. Virtual collaboration is undeniably the default format of modern meetings, and the technology that supports it has become a critical dependency for how organizations function.



Wasted time is the *norm*

What makes these numbers significant is the sheer volume that are perceived as wasted hours. When we asked workers how much of their meeting time they considered genuinely necessary, the answer was stark. 58% of time spent in meetings is seen as unnecessary.

That is the majority of meeting time delivering no perceived value to the people attending.

Translated into lost time, that figure becomes 26 working days a year per person. Lost inside meetings that workers themselves did not think needed to happen.

A snapshot at the state of meetings

8 hours

average time in meetings per week

90%

had hybrid meetings over the last 2 weeks

58%

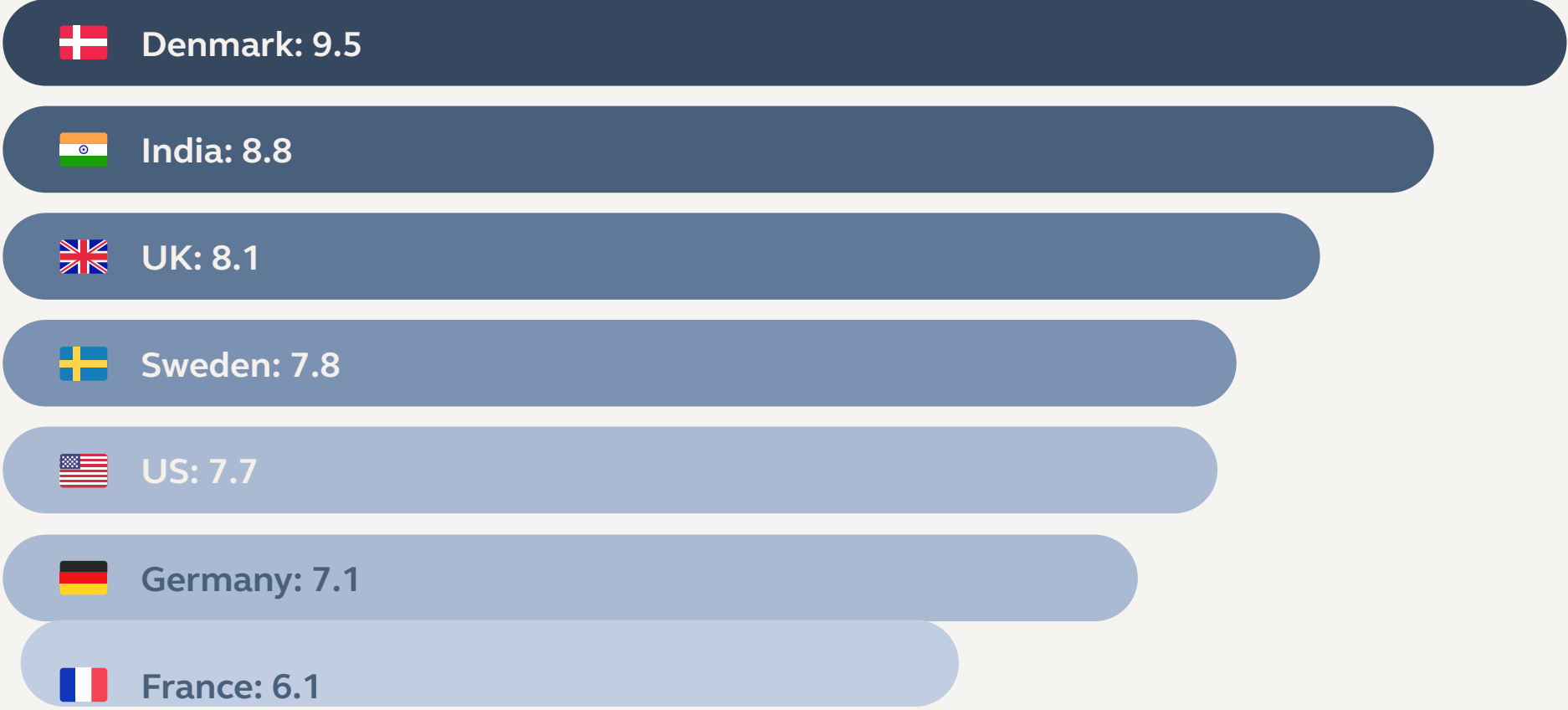
of meetings are seen as unnecessary

26

working days in meetings per employee each year

Number of hours spent in meetings per week

Country



Seniority



Company Size

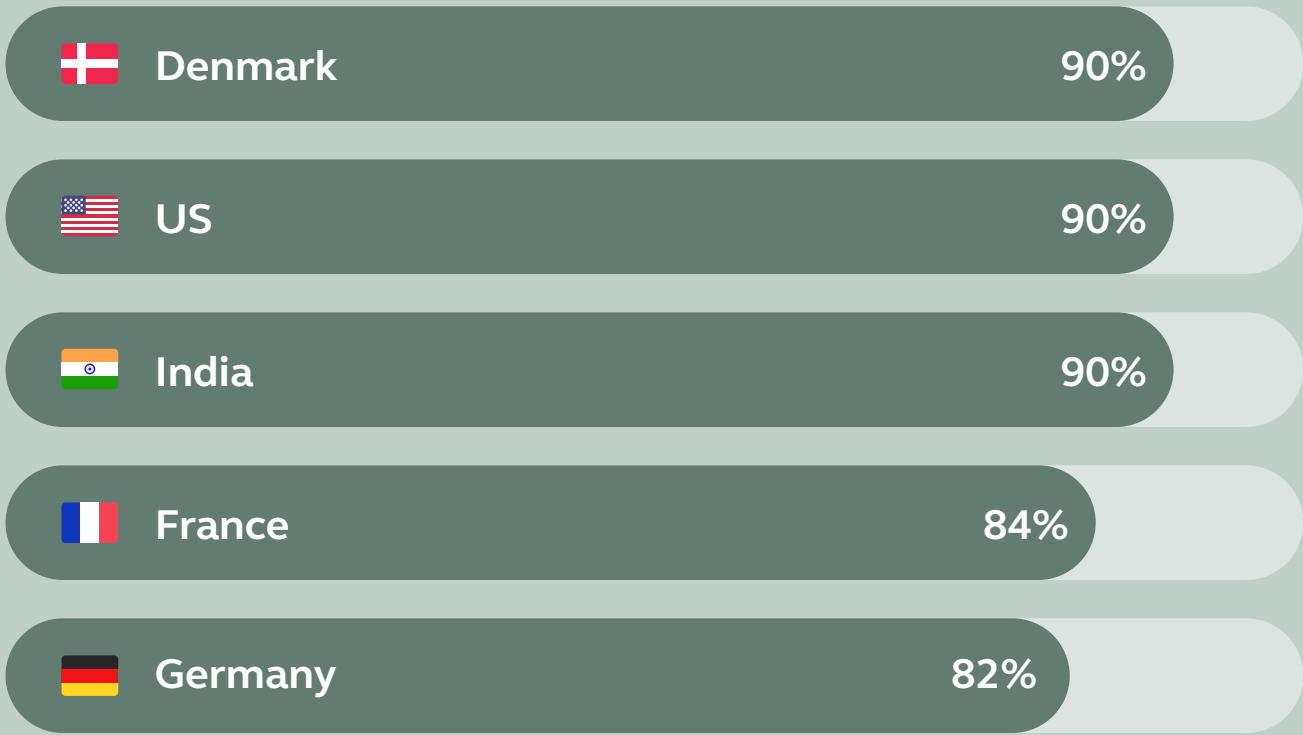


The *dread* index

A large majority (87%) of workers now report some level of meeting dread.

That feeling is not evenly distributed. It rises with meeting load and is highest among those who spend the most time in meetings. In other words: the more meetings we have, the more we dread them.

% of employees who experience some level of meeting dread



87%

of workers report some level of meeting dread.



66%

of workers regularly leave meetings with unclear action items.



59%

need a follow-up meeting as a direct result.



59%

generate additional work to recover from the confusion.

The *purpose* gap

Part of what has gone wrong is purpose. Meetings were not always expected to do everything. They were once a specific tool for a specific kind of work: real-time collaboration, shared decision-making, problems that truly needed multiple people in the same conversation at the same time. But as organizations have grown more complex and more distributed, meetings have absorbed functions they were never designed to serve.

That is perhaps why our data shows that 66% of workers regularly leave meetings with unclear action items. 59% need a follow-up meeting as a direct result. 59% generate additional work to recover from the confusion.

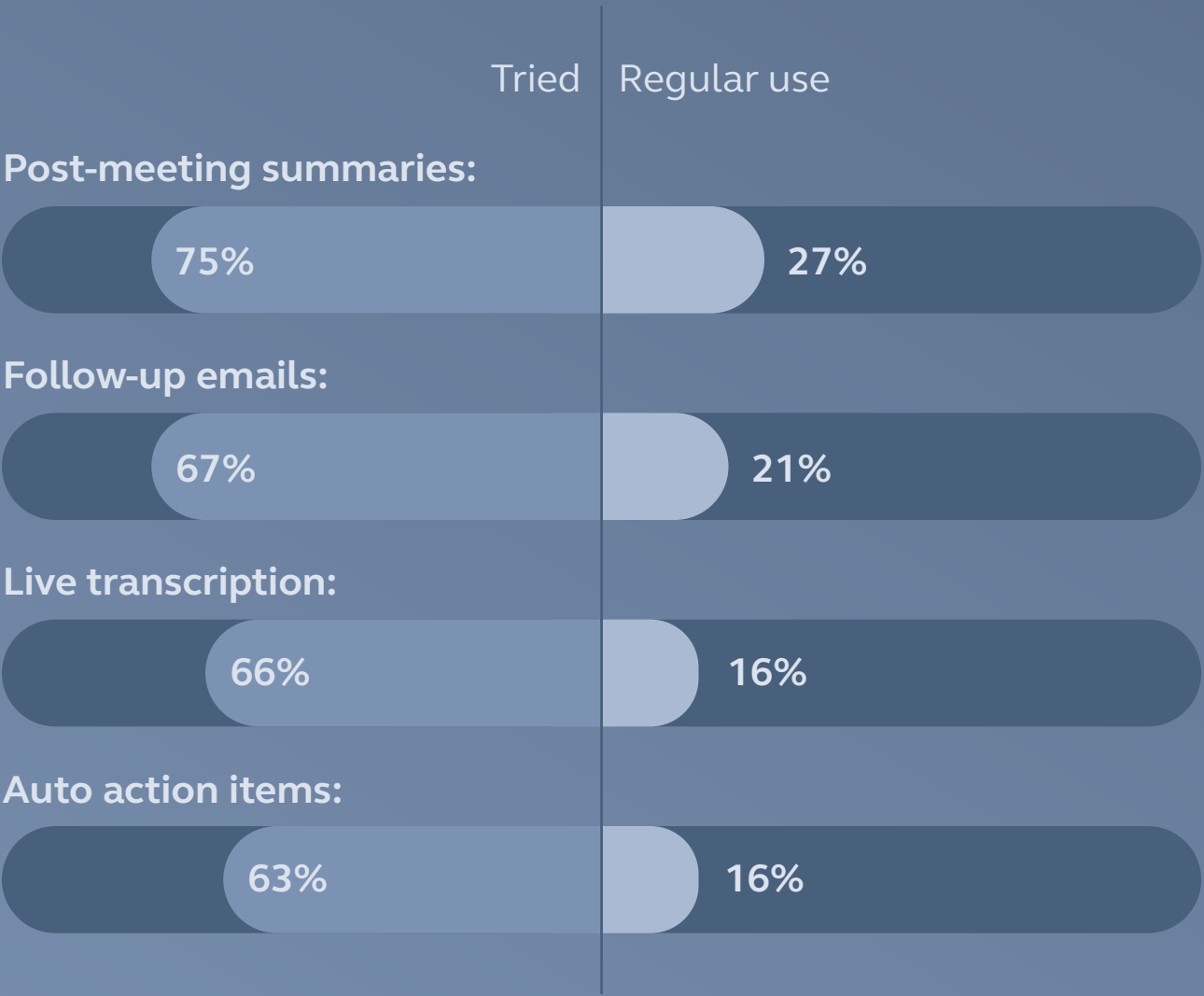
The result is that every morning, millions of people walk into meetings that are almost guaranteed to fail, causing a cascade of knock-on issues.

This is the foundational problem that everything else in this report builds on. Not that meetings are inherently bad. But that organizations have allowed meetings to become a catch-all without ever establishing what a good meeting actually looks like, what it is trying to achieve, and whether it is the right tool for the job at all.

AI has entered the room... kind of

Our data shows that 75% of workers have now tried AI meeting tools such as post-meeting summaries, live transcription, automated action items and follow-up emails. However, despite this, fewer than 1 in 3 of us are using those tools regularly. In fact, the most popular feature – post-meeting summaries – is used regularly by just 27% of those that we surveyed.

The message is clear: people are willing to experiment with AI. They are not yet willing to rely on it.



The top barriers to AI adoption are accuracy/trust (42%) and privacy/compliance (39%).

So, who’s driving AI use across the workforce?

AI adoption in meetings is not evenly distributed. The clearest predictor of whether someone uses these tools regularly is seniority. C-suite leaders are the most consistent users, with nearly three times the regular adoption rate of individual contributors. The pattern is consistent across every feature and every market: the more meetings someone has, and the more consequential those meetings are, the more likely they are to reach for AI to help manage them.

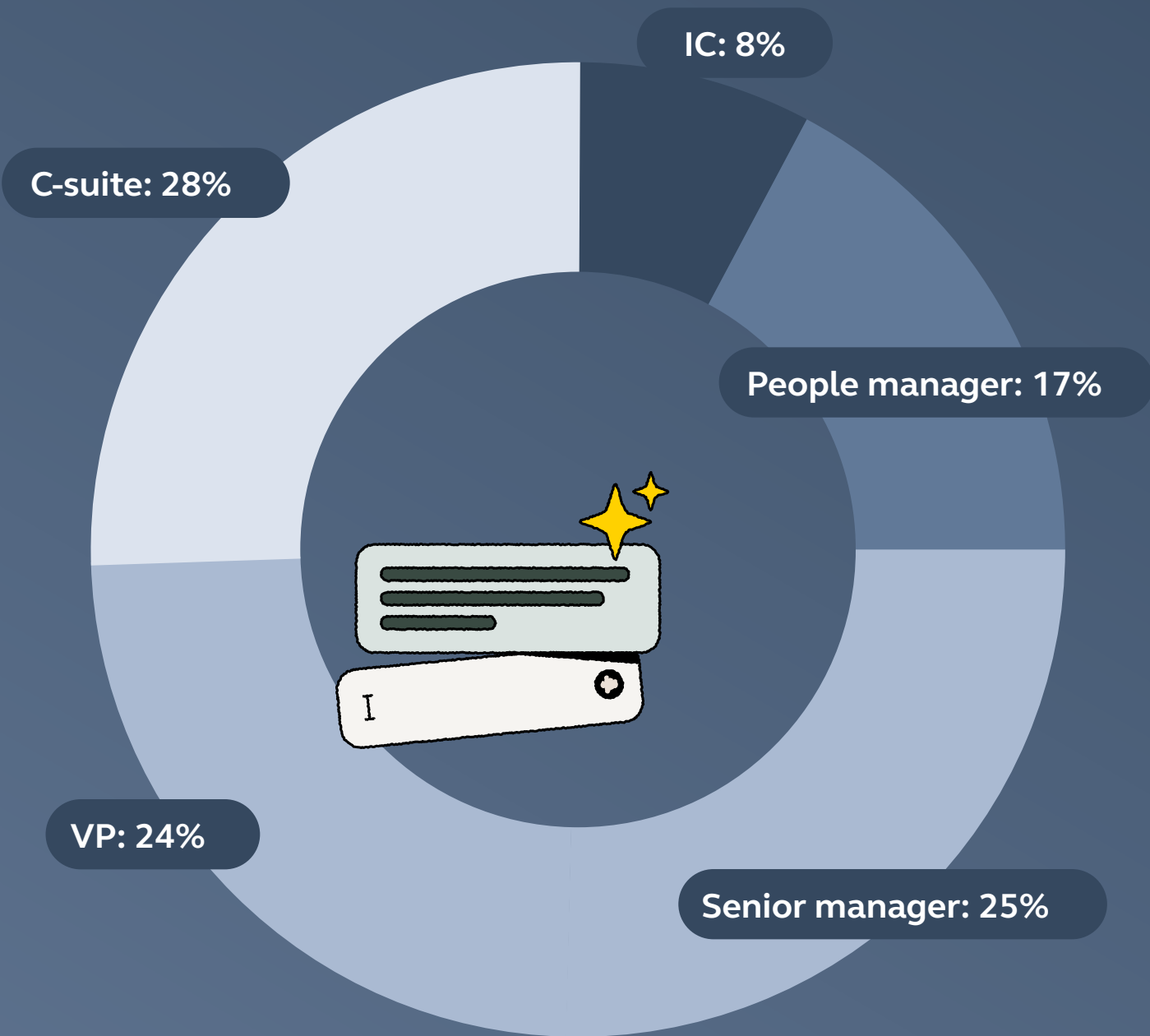
Within that seniority gradient, mid-career professionals tend to be the most active adopters at each level. Workers in their thirties are using AI meeting tools more consistently than both younger and older colleagues at equivalent seniority, suggesting that the drive to adopt is strongest among those managing the heaviest combination of meeting load and organizational responsibility.

What’s clear is that AI has not resolved the fundamental problems with modern meetings. But it has made those problems more visible.

Every misaligned summary, incorrect action point or transcript that is too garbled to be useful, these are not really AI failures. They are meeting failures — both technology and behaviour driven — that AI has made harder to ignore.

AI use increases with seniority

% of respondents who say they 'regularly' use AI



CHAPTER 2

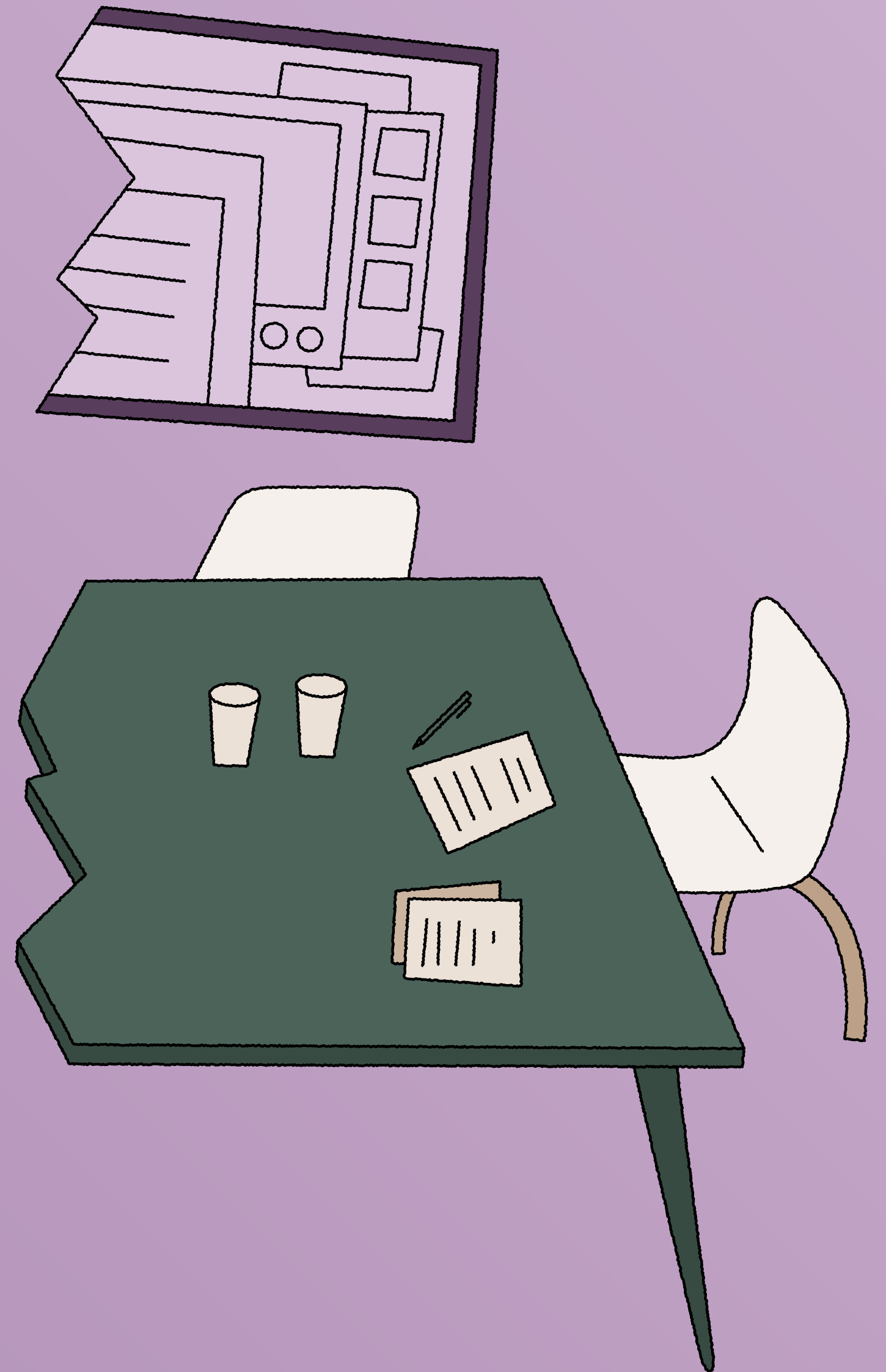
The anatomy of a *bad meeting*

Three in four meetings have tech issues. The broken meeting room has become a chronic operating condition, and nobody is fixing it.

Meeting failure is not random. It is patterned, predictable, and overwhelmingly concentrated in the same places, the same formats, and the same broken conditions, meeting after meeting, week after week.

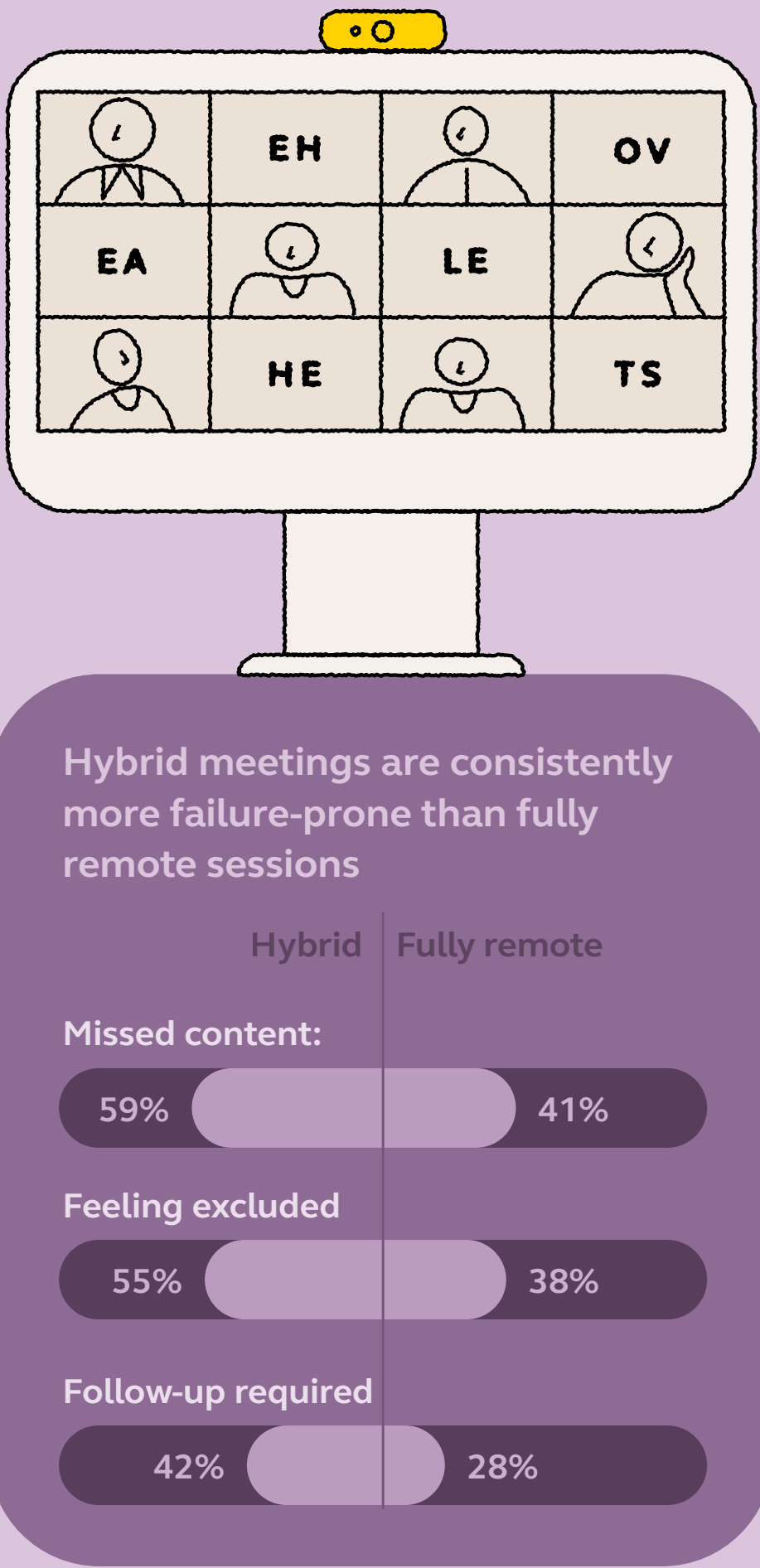
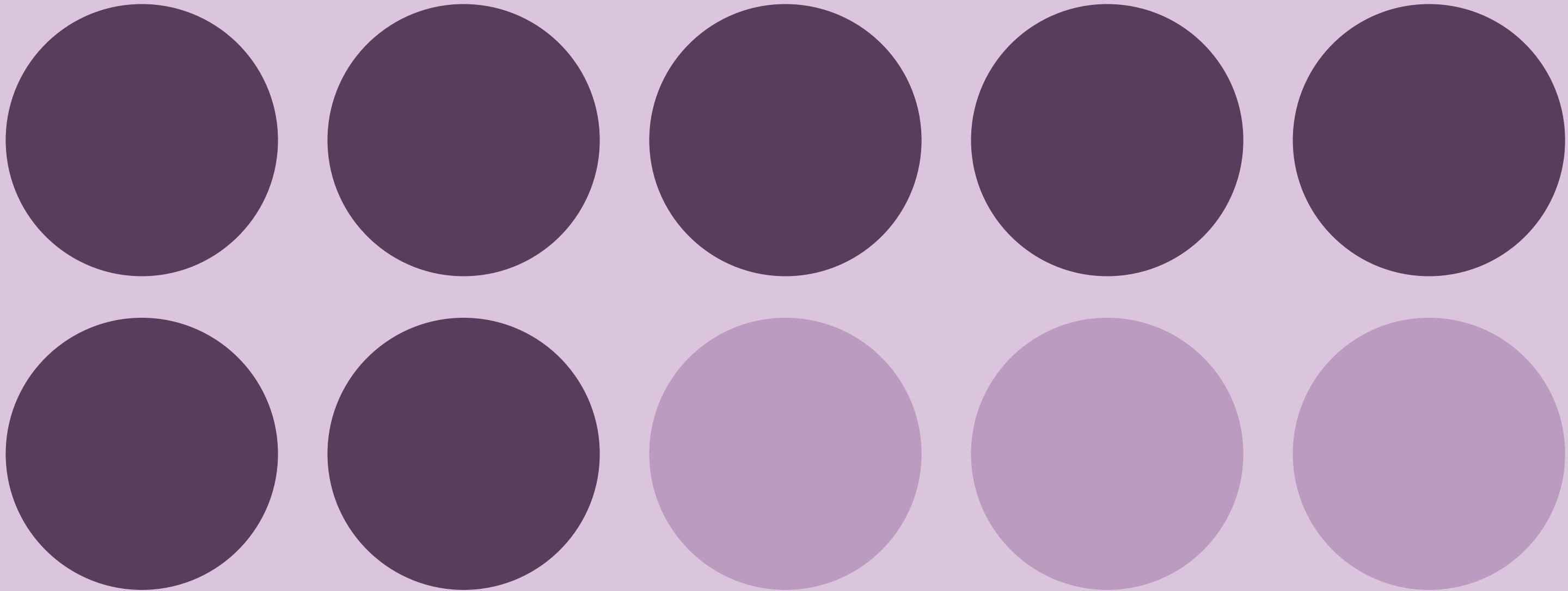
Three in four meetings experience at least one technology failure. That figure alone should give any organization pause. But what makes it even more significant is that fully remote meetings experience 28% fewer failures.

Hybrid meetings, a necessity of modern work, are in practice **84% more failure-prone** than meetings where everyone joins from their own device. A blend of in-person and online participation is the new normal, but it's error-prone, and costly.



The scale (and impact) of tech failures is stark.

Approximately 7 in 10 meetings result in participants not being able to be seen or heard.



Meeting problems scale with the size of the room

Room size compounds the problem further with very large rooms losing the most time per meeting. Boardroom-scale meetings consistently act as time sinks, with higher rates of technical issues and longer delays. As room size increases, so does the likelihood of mic problems and total time lost.

What is striking about all of this is not the scale of the failure. It is the acceptance of it. Organizations would not tolerate a building where the lights failed in three quarters of meetings, or a printer that broke most times it was used.

But for some reason, we’ve accepted poor performance of meeting rooms as an unquestionable operational overhead. The dysfunction is never logged, never escalated, and never fixed at source. If you couldn’t join 75% of your calls on your laptop, it would be very quickly a priority issue to resolve. But because we mostly all cycle through the rooms we meet in, the problem is never ‘ours’ and never acute enough to solve.

This is what we call the invisible broken room.

Over time, that normalizes a lower standard. Meetings are expected to start late. To require fixing. To lose time. To be inefficient. To exclude people. And so meetings continue to break. And when they do, the impact is immediate and rarely contained to the room.

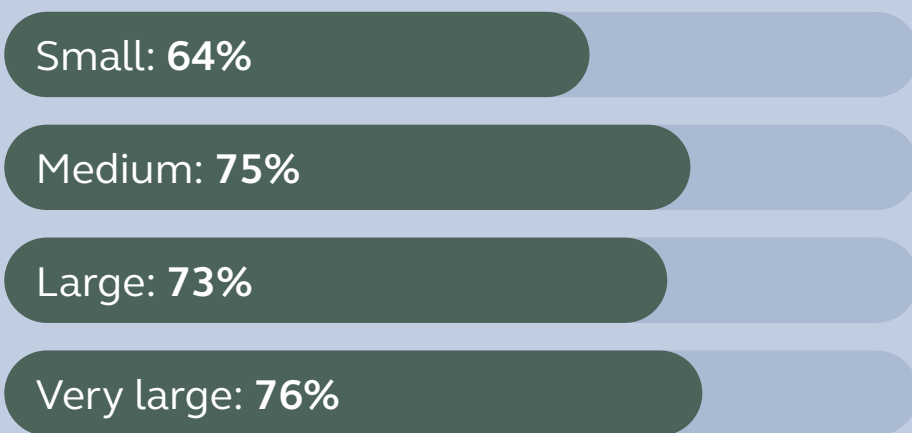
Large meeting rooms lose 30% more time to tech failures than small ones

- Small: 1-4 people
- Medium: 5-8 people
- Large: 9-15 people
- Very large: 16+

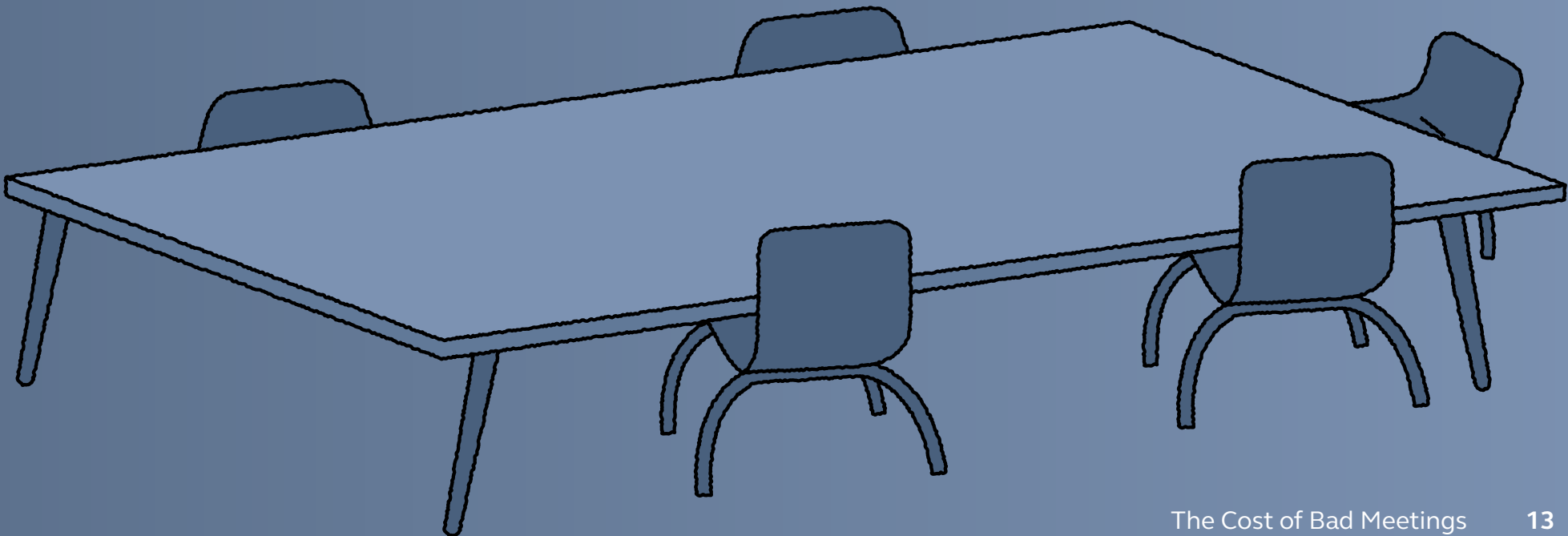
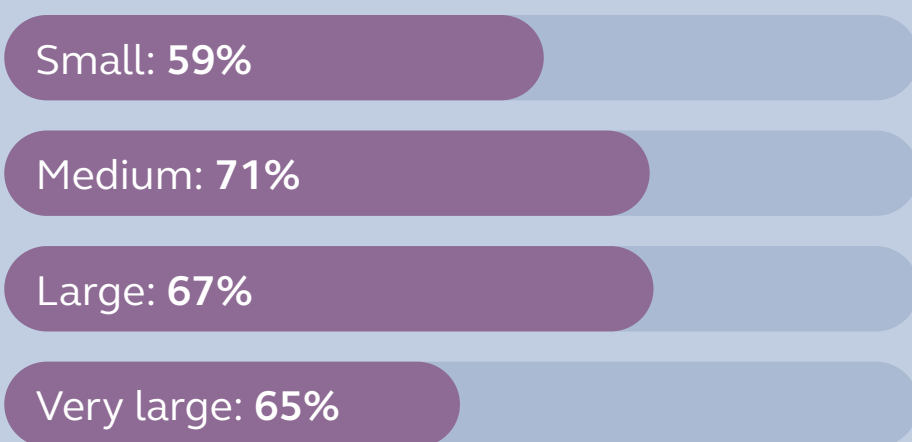
Total time lost



Mic problems



Video problems



CHAPTER 3

Meeting debt: calculating the *true cost* of a bad meeting.

Bad meetings are a \$130 million dollar problem hiding in your workforce's calendar

Over the past decade, we have grown familiar with the idea of digital debt, which is the notion that the accumulation of technology demands on our time and attention has outpaced our ability to sustain them.

Our research suggests it is time to start thinking about meeting debt in the same way: a genuine organizational liability — financial and human — that has been building for years inside businesses that have never stopped to calculate what it is costing them.

The failures do not announce themselves. They accumulate. Each bad meeting adds a little more to the balance. Each year the debt grows. And most organizations carry it without knowing its size.



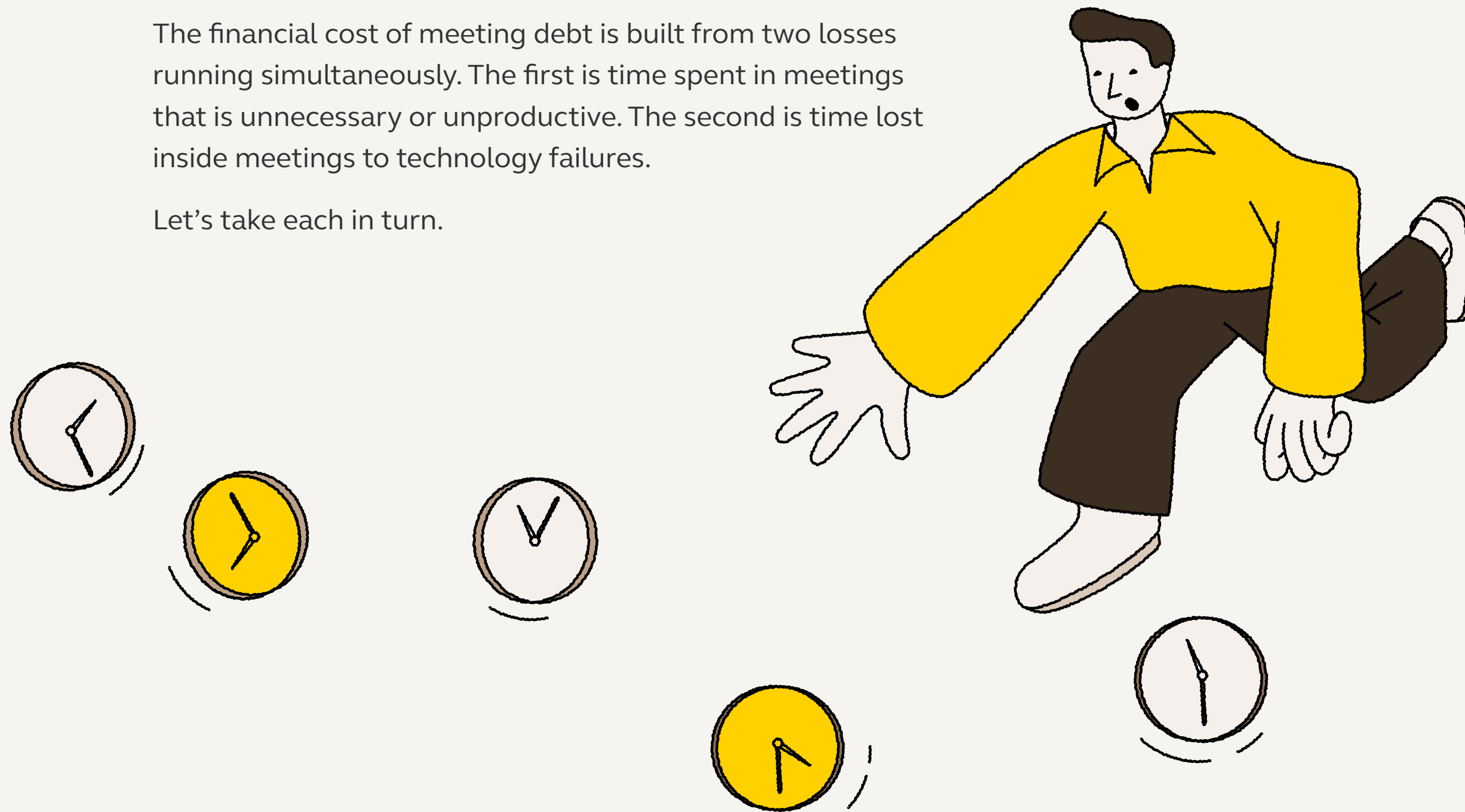
What bad meetings *actually* cost

The cost of a bad meeting is rarely visible while it is happening. It looks like a few minutes lost at the start. A delay while the room gets set up. Some muffled speech. Nothing that feels significant in isolation.

But those moments accumulate. And the cost of them doing so is likely much larger than most of us realise.

The financial cost of meeting debt is built from two losses running simultaneously. The first is time spent in meetings that is unnecessary or unproductive. The second is time lost inside meetings to technology failures.

Let's take each in turn.



1 Wasted time

We asked more than 2,300 workers across seven markets to tell us how much of their meeting time they considered necessary. The answer was stark: 58% of meeting time is considered wasted time.

At an average of eight hours a week in meetings, that is 26 working days a year per person. Multiplied by headcount, this is one of the largest unplanned expenditures hiding in plain sight.

Taking an average of US seniority-weighted salaries, for an enterprise business this equates to:

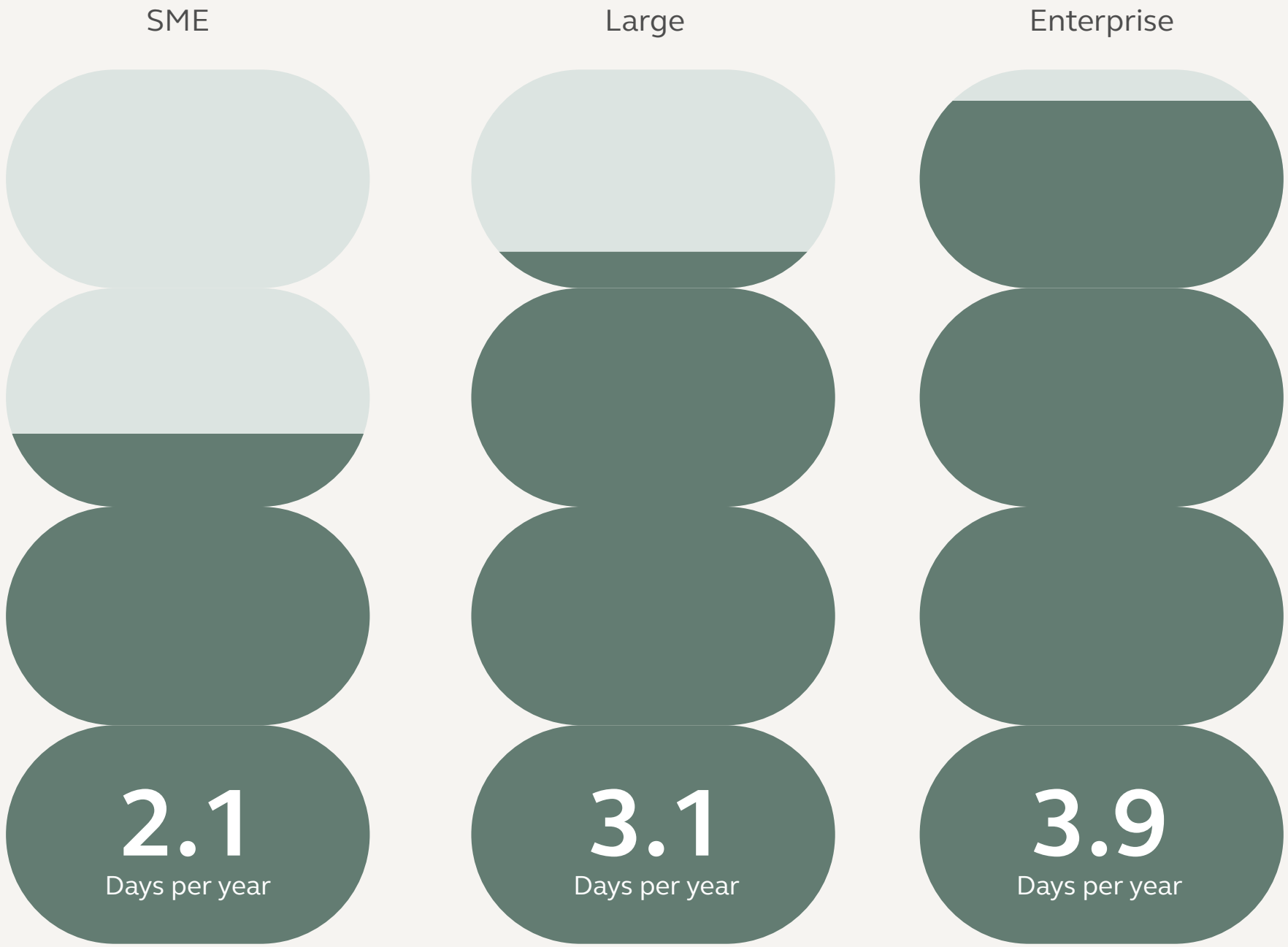
\$130m

Based on a 5,000-person enterprise. Calculated by applying 58% perceived meeting waste to total meeting hours (5,000 employees x 8 hours/week x 46 working weeks), then costing those hours using a seniority-weighted blended hourly rate derived from US national salary benchmarks (BLS OES 2024), weighted to a typical enterprise workforce mix across entry-level, mid-level, senior, manager, and director/VP/C-suite roles. Blended rate approximately \$99K per annum.

2 Tech failures

According to our research, every meeting loses an average of nearly eleven minutes to technology failures alone. That compounds to three full working days lost per employee every year. For corporate workers, who attend more meetings in larger and more complex rooms, it rises to nearly four.

Number of lost working days per year increases according to company size



3 The overall cost

When both losses are translated into salary costs — weighted by seniority and benchmarked against national earnings across all seven markets — the meeting debt for a typical enterprise organization reaches in excess of \$130 million a year.

Scaled across the world’s largest organizations, the figure runs into the hundreds of billions.

That figure is not tracked, not reported, and not managed.

It is simply paid. Every year. By organizations that have no idea they are paying it.

Costed against seniority-weighted salary benchmarks, tech failures cost an average enterprise business (with an average of 5000 employees)

\$8.27m



The human cost of meeting overload

The financial cost is the part of meeting debt that can be calculated. But there is a second debt accumulating alongside it that organizations are even less equipped to see.

People have a finite capacity for meetings. Attention depletes. Cognitive energy runs out. And our data shows that most workers may well be hitting that wall before they've even gotten to lunchtime.

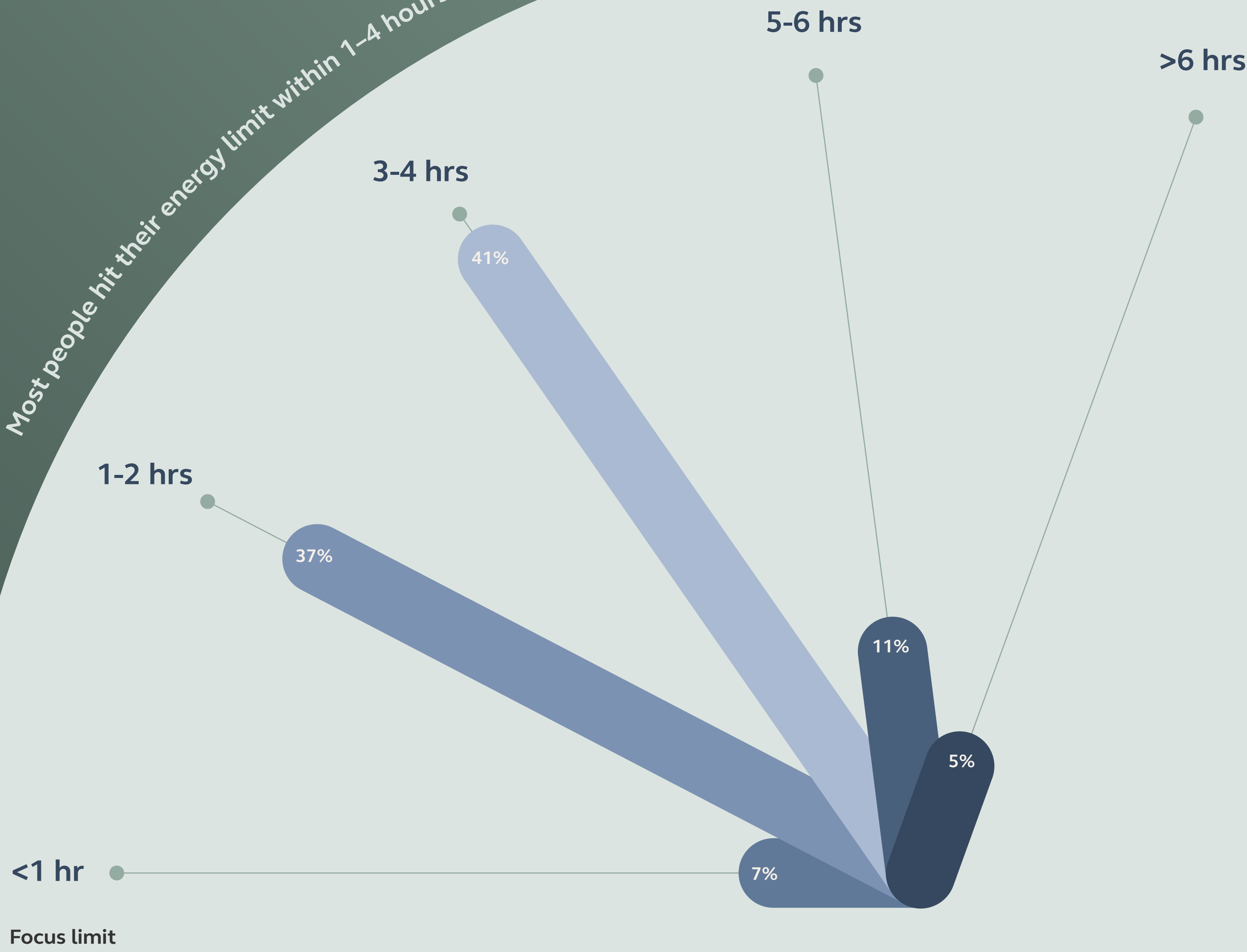
According to our data, 42% of workers reach their energy limit within two hours of meetings. 83% have hit it within four. They are people whose capacity has been consumed, and then expected to keep contributing as though it has not.

Pushing past our cognitive capacity for meetings has real consequences.

Workers who experience an early energy drop are 1.7 times more likely to report additional work generated after the meeting ends. A depleted person leaving a bad meeting does not recover and move on. They carry the cost of it into the rest of their day, and into the next meeting, and the one after that.

We have normalized a culture where workers arrive each day already on course to burn past their capacity for good work.

Most people hit their energy limit within 1-4 hours



The compounding cost of a bad meeting

The first meeting is the problem. The second one is the cost. Here's how bad meetings breed more bad meetings.

A bad meeting does not end when the call drops or the room empties. It multiplies. In the emails sent afterward to clarify what was decided. In the follow-up meeting booked to cover what the first one failed to resolve. In the work done twice because nobody left with a clear understanding.

The reality is that bad meetings breed bad meetings, and the compound effect over time can be hugely consequential.

Two thirds of workers regularly leave meetings with unclear action items. More than half need a follow-up meeting as a direct result. And more than half generate additional work to recover from the confusion — work that would not have existed if the meeting had functioned as intended.

The downstream impact scales with seniority. As management responsibility increases, so does the rate of unclear actions, follow-up meetings, and additional work generated. The people whose decisions carry the most organizational weight are also the most likely to leave meetings confused.

So what is driving this?

In part, it is the way people respond when meetings start to break down.



59%
of meetings require a follow up session because of issues with the first

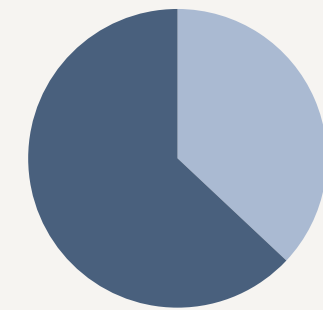
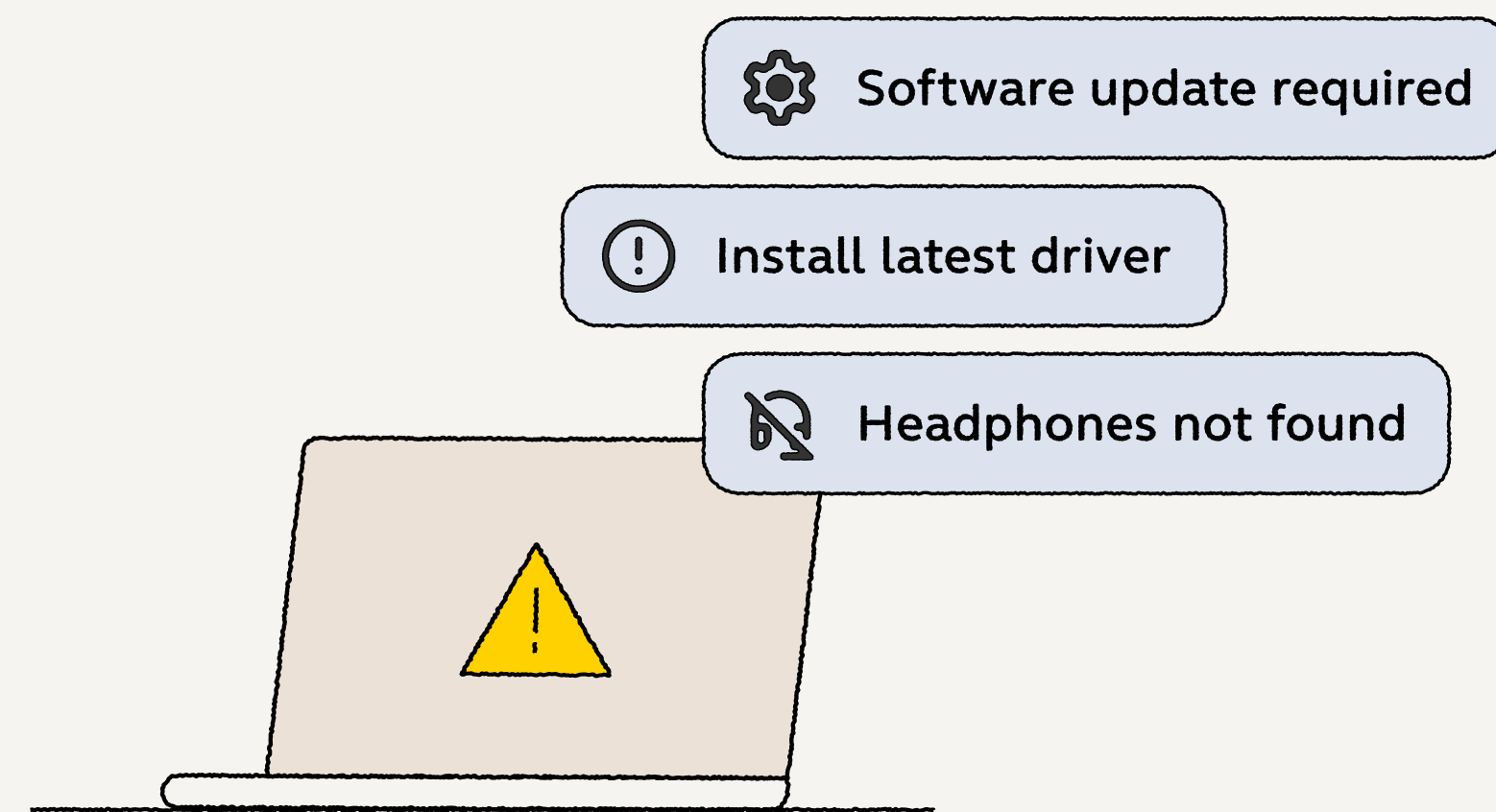
	Unclear Actions	Follow-up meeting	Additional work
IC	58%	46%	47%
People Manager	70%	64%	61%
Sr Manager	69%	65%	66%
VP	74%	68%	67%
C-suite	72%	64%	65%

The patchwork meeting effect

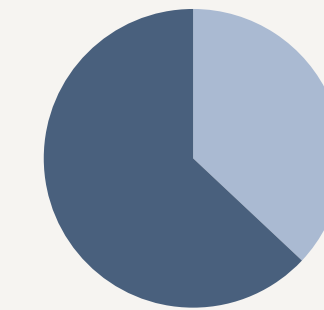
When a meeting starts to break down, the instinct is to fix it. People move rooms mid-session to find a better connection. They abandon video to get the meeting started. They dial in separately by phone. They resort to using a single laptop as the microphone and speaker for an entire room.

But starting a meeting is not the same as making it work.

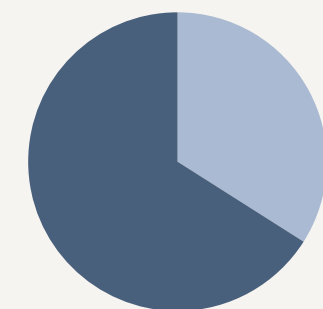
And our data shows that the workarounds that feel pragmatic in the moment are directly contributing to a snowball effect of follow on work, misunderstandings and additional meetings



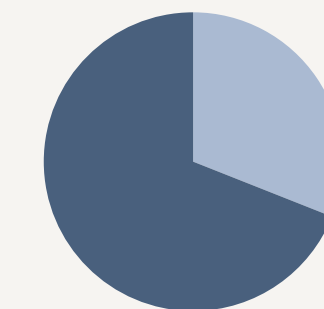
37% of meetings start late, still figuring out the room



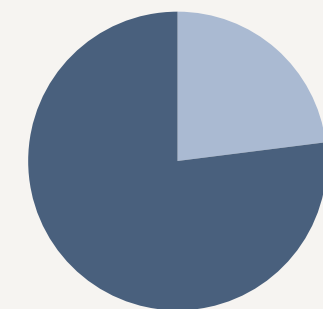
37% use a single laptop as mic and speaker for the room



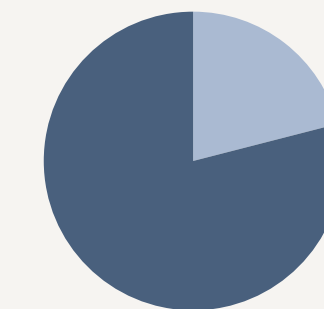
34% everyone joins individually on their own device



31% gave up on video resulting in audio-only meeting

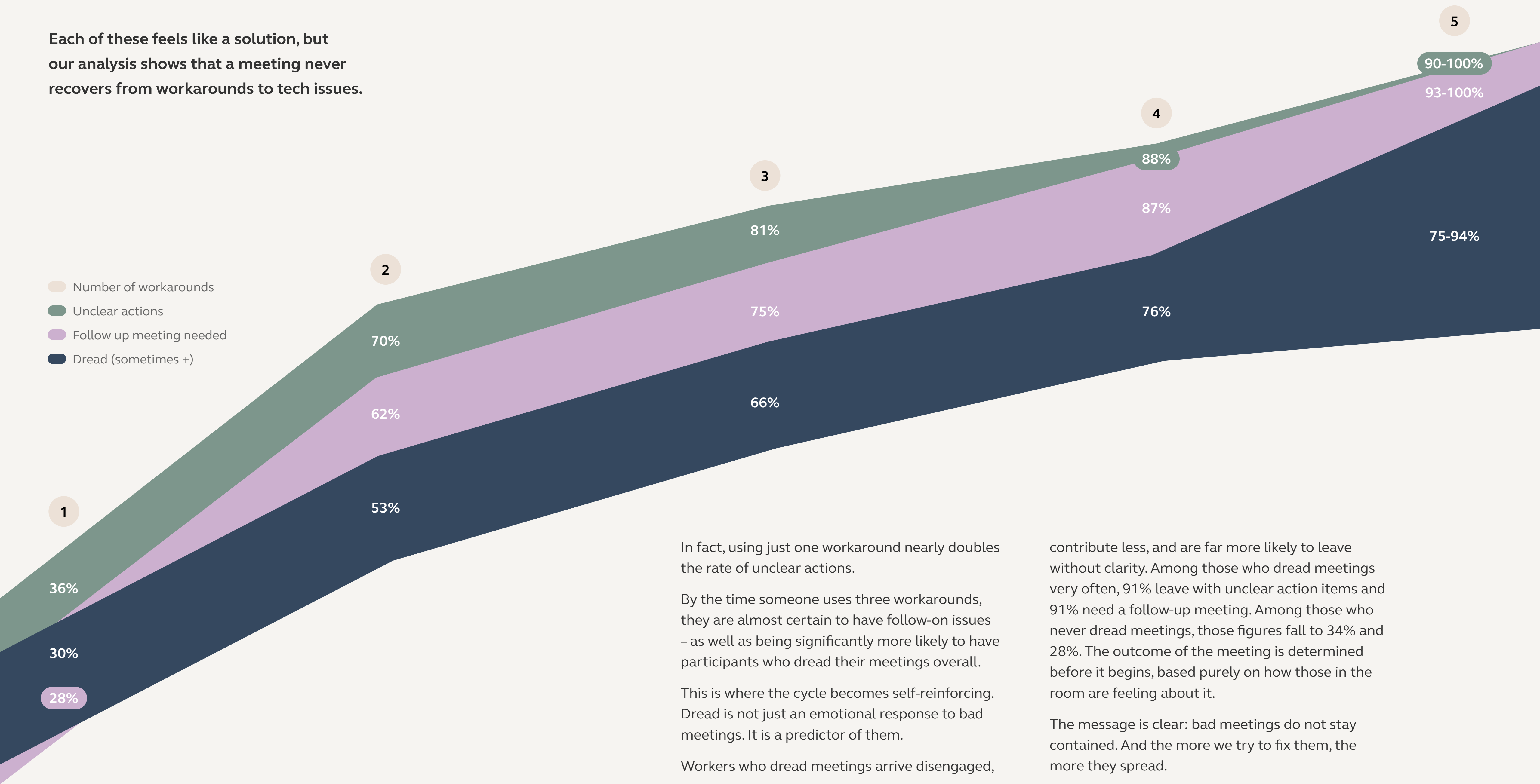


23% dialed in by phone for audio



21% relocated to another room mid-session

Each of these feels like a solution, but our analysis shows that a meeting never recovers from workarounds to tech issues.



In fact, using just one workaround nearly doubles the rate of unclear actions.

By the time someone uses three workarounds, they are almost certain to have follow-on issues – as well as being significantly more likely to have participants who dread their meetings overall.

This is where the cycle becomes self-reinforcing. Dread is not just an emotional response to bad meetings. It is a predictor of them.

Workers who dread meetings arrive disengaged,

contribute less, and are far more likely to leave without clarity. Among those who dread meetings very often, 91% leave with unclear action items and 91% need a follow-up meeting. Among those who never dread meetings, those figures fall to 34% and 28%. The outcome of the meeting is determined before it begins, based purely on how those in the room are feeling about it.

The message is clear: bad meetings do not stay contained. And the more we try to fix them, the more they spread.



CHAPTER 5

Who pays the *highest price* for bad meetings?

The meeting room is the most unequal place in the modern workplace. Inadequate tech makes it worse.

The meeting room is one of the most powerful inequality amplifiers in modern organizational life.

Let's start with inclusion.

Our data revealed that half of people joining meetings online are routinely forgotten, talked over, or left out of meetings.

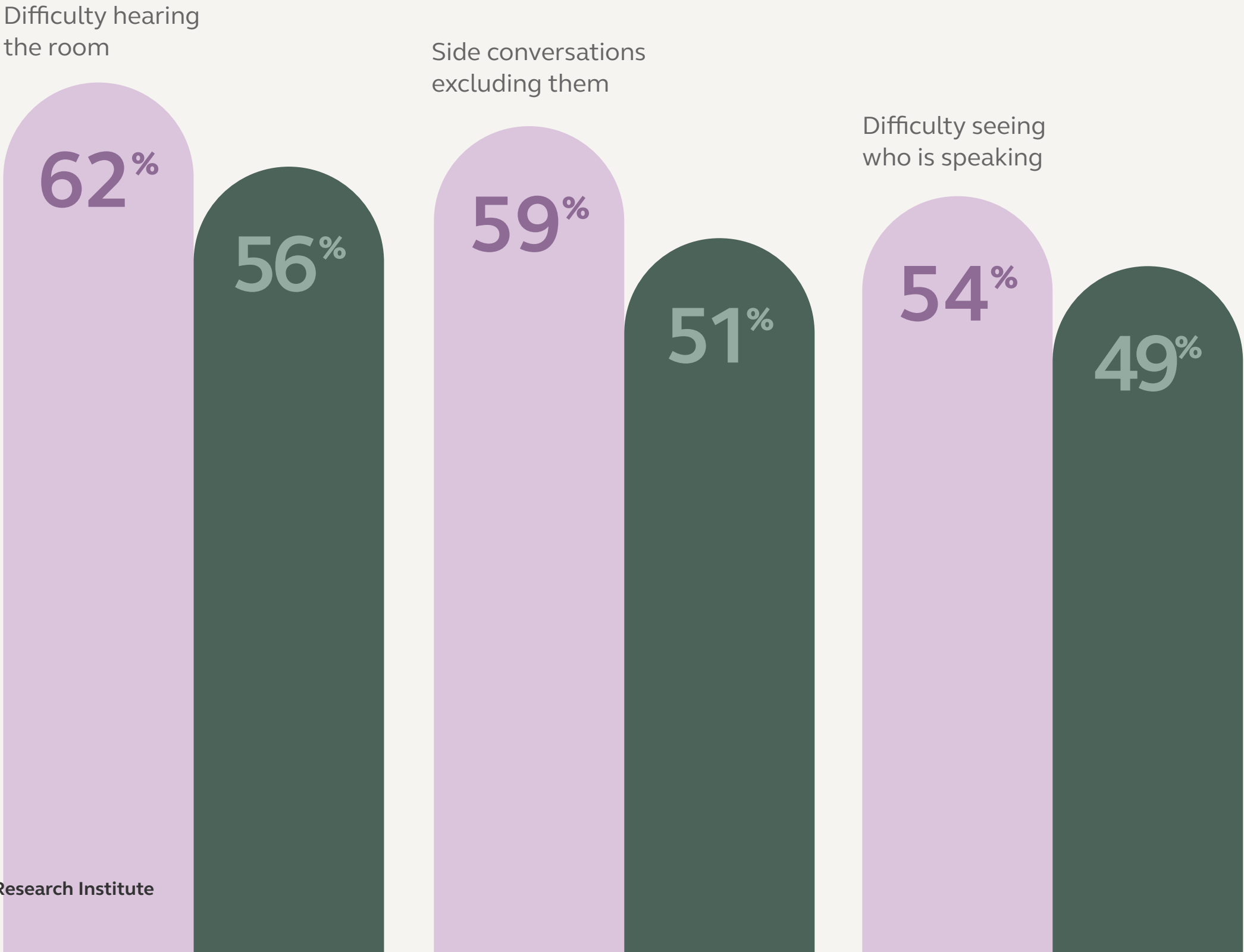
Women experience this most acutely. Across every measure of remote meeting experience — being talked over, difficulty hearing the room, difficulty seeing who is speaking — women report worse outcomes than men. The gaps are consistent and they are not small.

Seniority also significantly impacts our meeting experience.

Individual contributors are significantly more likely to be excluded from the conversation than those at C-suite level — more likely to be talked over, more likely to be forgotten entirely.

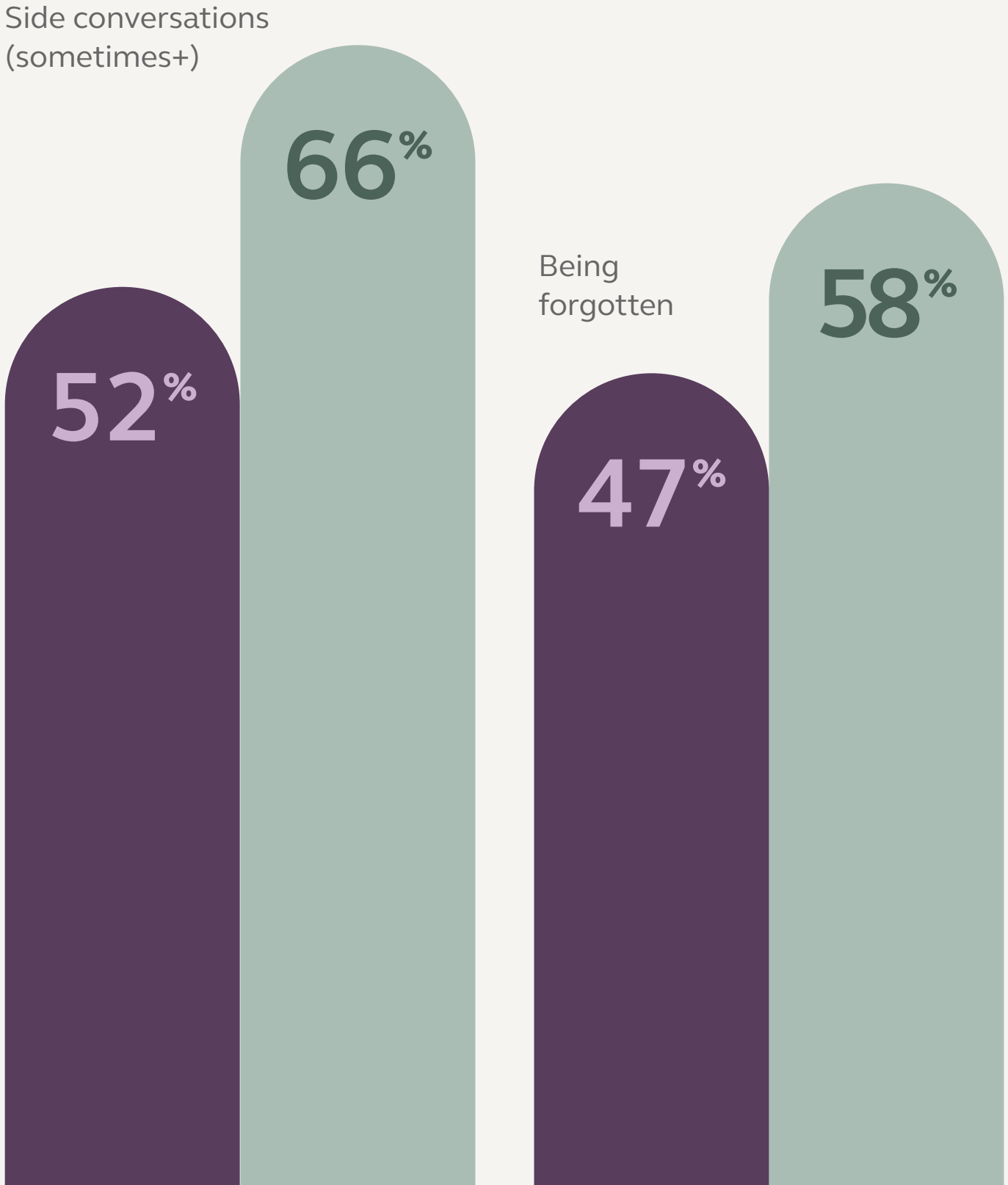
Gender split across remote experience measures

Women Men



Exclusion measures by seniority

C-suite IC



The equipment in the room compounds this structural disadvantage.

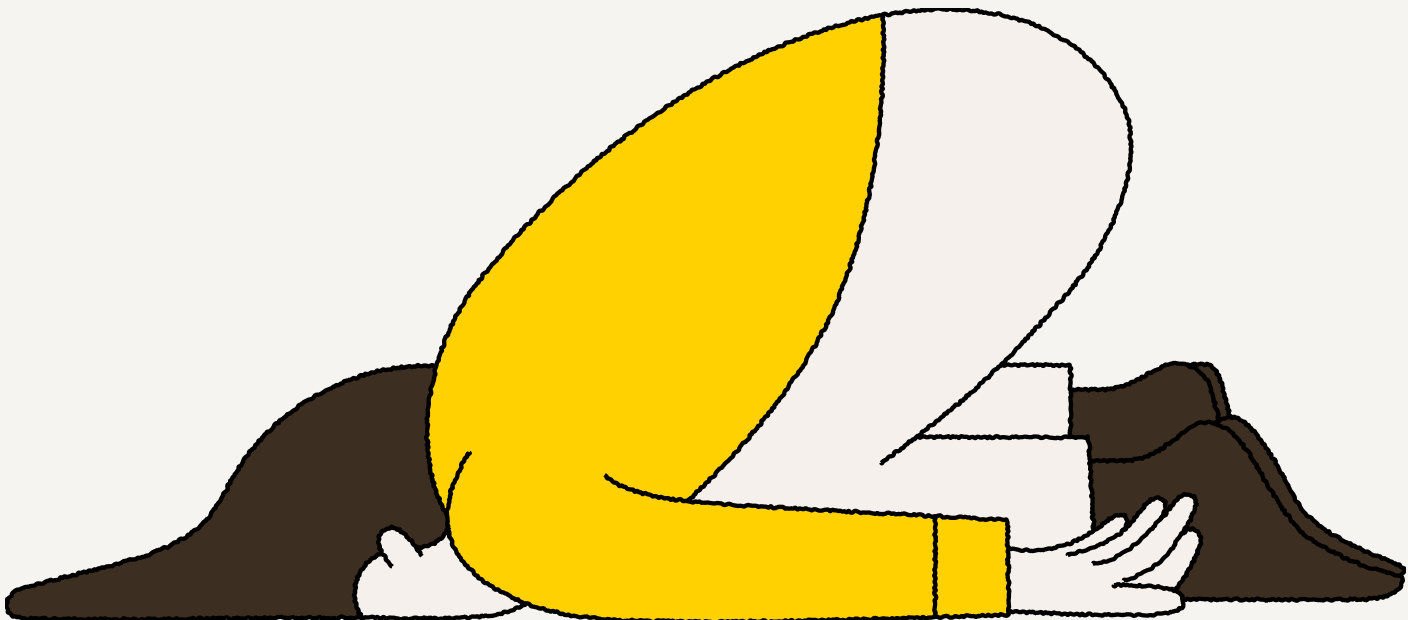
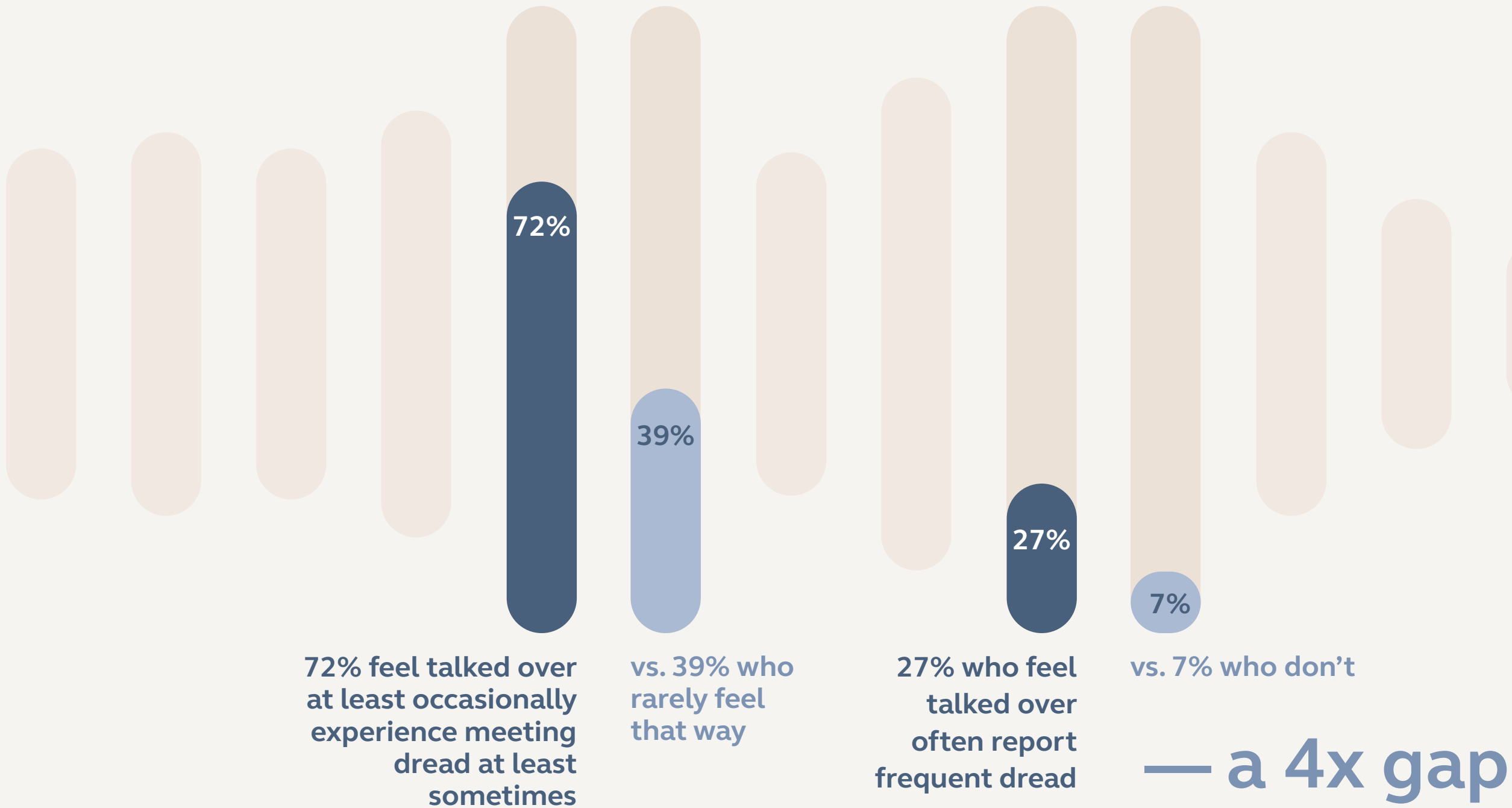
Workers in rooms equipped only with laptops are 40% more likely to feel excluded than those in rooms with dedicated systems. That gap is determined before anyone has spoken a word, by the investment — or lack of it — that their organization has made in the rooms they work in. For the workers already most vulnerable to exclusion, inadequate room technology makes a difficult situation measurably worse.

Exclusion does not just make meetings feel worse. It makes the entire relationship with meeting culture deteriorate.

Workers who feel talked over sometimes or more are nearly twice as likely to experience dread. Those who feel talked over often are four times more likely to report frequent dread than those who never do.

What all of this points to is a meeting culture that distributes its costs in a way that reinforces existing inequalities. And as AI begins to embed itself into the meeting room, the organizations that have not fixed that foundation are about to find the gaps get wider.

Dread frequency by talked-over experience:



Redesigning meetings *by purpose*

The meeting, as most organizations practice it, is a blunt instrument. One format expected to serve every purpose. One set of defaults applied to every need.

But different purposes require different formats, different environments, different participant lists, and different definitions of success. A meeting that is right for one purpose is almost certainly wrong for another.

Our research identifies four distinct meeting types, each with its own purpose, break points, and requirements for success. Understanding which type of meeting you are in — and designing for it — is the foundation of better meetings.

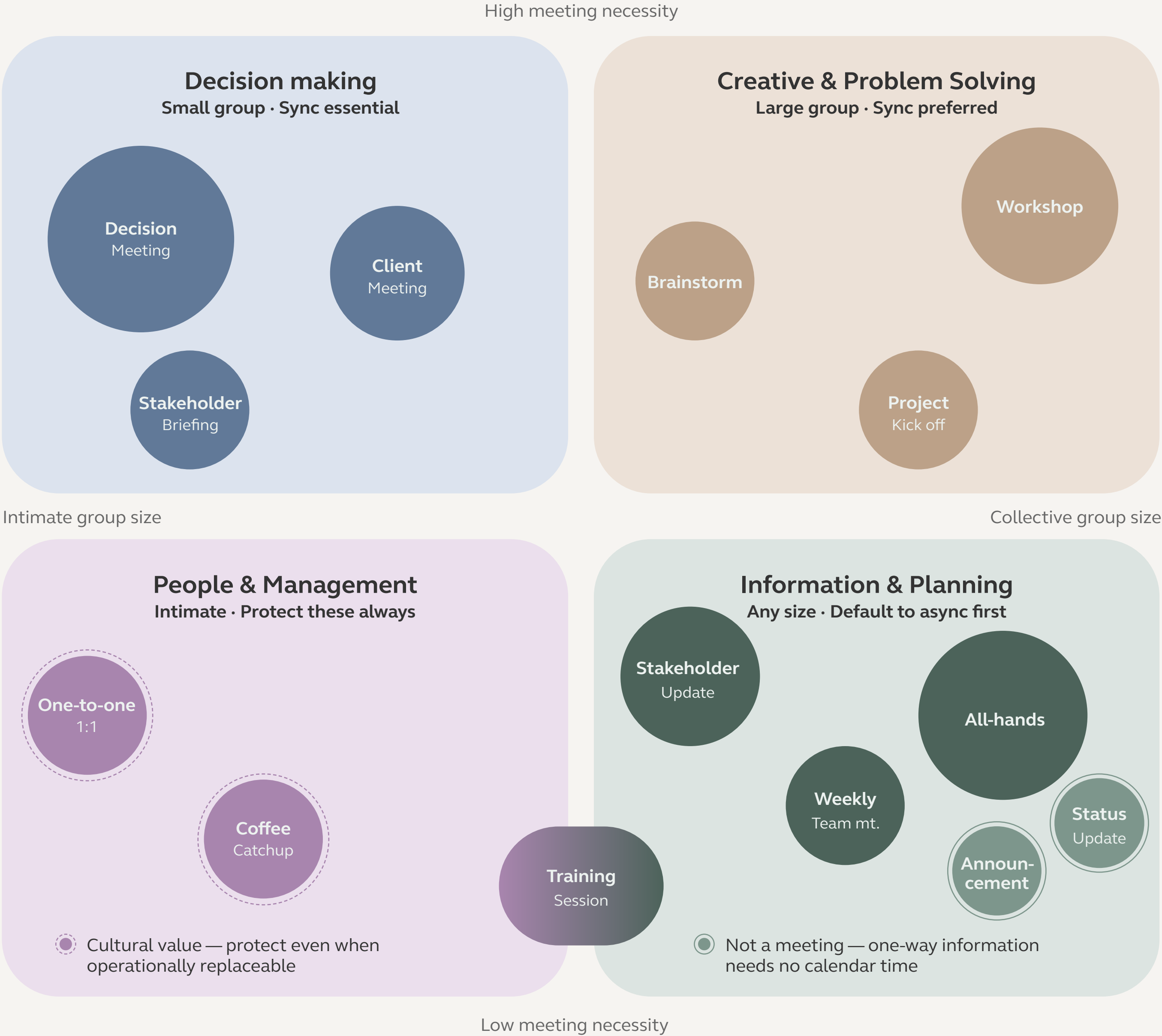


The four quadrants of meeting type (and what they need to be successful)

The four quadrants here map meeting types by two dimensions: how necessary the meeting is, and what group size it tends to require. Together, they reveal something important: a significant share of what fills your calendar sits in the lower half: low meeting necessity, high calendar real estate.

Some of those will always be worth protecting. One-to-ones and coffee catchups carry cultural weight that no async tool can replicate. But announcements, status updates, and training sessions? These are information transfers, not meetings. Giving them calendar time doesn't make them more effective, it just makes them more expensive.

Before you schedule, ask the question: does this need to be a meeting at all? And if it does, how to I design it for success?



How to run meetings that are fit for purpose



Do you need to book that meeting?

One-way information is not interaction and shouldn't be blocking your calendar time. Before booking, ask yourself: Are any of these formats are better suited?

Status update

Real-time status belongs in a system like a dashboard or shared doc

Announcement / FYI

Are people listening but not contributing? Use mail out or an intranet post

Information sharing

Use a recorded walkthrough or doc, reserve time for questions.

Jabra Research Institute
jabra.com/research

Decision making

Make decisions, meet with Clients or Stakeholders

- Share a pre-read before the meeting and reserve time for questions
- No agenda, no meeting
- Set up a standard meeting platform including meeting links by default
- Outline the meeting purpose: decision, discussion, or update
- Prepare leadership for unscripted questions
- Review meeting cadence quarterly to ensure meetings are effective

- 📄 Small group
- ↔ Sync essential
- 🕒 30-60 minutes

Doesn't qualify? → Send a one-page summary or email

Creative & problem-solving

Workshop, Brainstorm or project kickoff

- Define tangible output before scheduling (and communicate widely)
- Assign a facilitator
- Pre-work sent with plenty of time for participants to review
- Collaboration tools in place and tested
- Outputs documented and circulated within 24 hours

- 📄 Large group
- ↔ Sync preferred
- 🕒 90 min–half day

Doesn't qualify? → One-page summary or async brief

People & management

One-to-one, coffee catch-up or training session

- Maintain a consistent cadence, and prioritize even during busy periods
- Don't use for operational purposes unless it's helpful to participants.
- Use a private space that allows for open conversation and where technology doesn't disrupt the flow

- 📄 Intimate
- ❤ Protect these always
- 🕒 60 minutes

Doesn't qualify? → Audio memo, intranet post, or one-pager

Information & planning

All-hands, weekly team meeting or stakeholder update

- Written update or core content distributed before the meeting
- Agenda shared in advance
- Every agenda item has a clear purpose: decision, discussion or update (not all three)
- Cadence reviewed quarterly, if recent sessions have not produced meaningful outcomes, review the format.

- 📄 Any size
- ↔ Default async first
- 🕒 30-60 minutes

Doesn't qualify? → Email, shared doc, or recorded update

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Methodology breakdown (page 4): Meeting cost calculations use seniority-weighted salary benchmarks from official national sources (Eurostat 2024 for EU, ONS 2024 for UK, BLS OES 2024 for US, Glassdoor 2024 for India), weighted to the survey's seniority distribution with multipliers from 0.85× (individual contributors) to 4.0× (C-suite). Dysfunction cost reflects 10.94 minutes lost per hybrid meeting to tech failures (2.89 hybrid meetings/week × 46 weeks). Perceived-waste cost applies a 1.94× cascade multiplier (1.69× for the 69% of meetings spawning follow-ups × 1.15× productivity recovery tax from Gloria Mark's context-switching research) to the 58% of meeting time identified as unnecessary. Total working time: 1,760 hours annually (220 days × 8 hours).