

CONTINUOUS COORDINATION

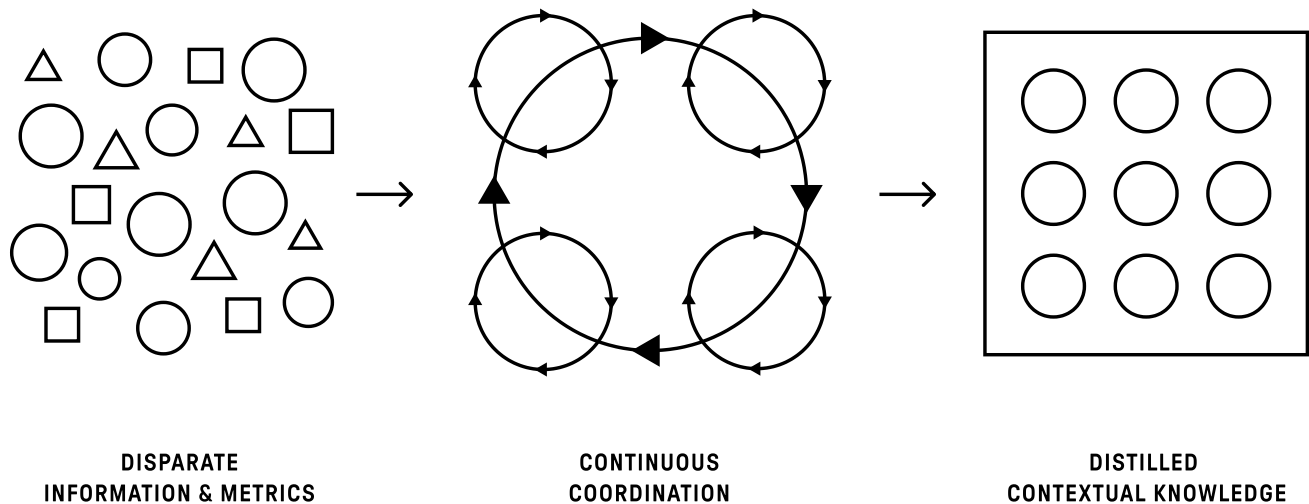
Principles for modern knowledge work

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Continuous Coordination is the practice of using open, structured communication loops, alongside a set of proven collaboration principles, to give everyone in a digital product or service organization precisely the shared context they need, when they need it, to stay productive, aligned, and engaged.



At its core, knowledge work is about making decisions. From writing code to structuring a marketing campaign to prioritizing a roadmap, knowledge workers need a stream of information — who, what, where, when, and how — to work effectively. But making timely and effective decisions also requires *context* — the *why* that drives the work of individuals and the business as a whole.

Most modern tools and processes for structuring work are remarkably good at two things: *breaking chunks of knowledge down into small parts* and *producing metrics*. Project management tools turn complex epics into consumable tasks, performance management tools quantify task completion states, and communication and collaboration tools sprinkle it all across your organization’s knowledge footprint through wikis, emails, and chats.

Once knowledge is shredded into bits, contributors and managers alike must *constantly assemble context* from this ever-growing pile of data to make the hundreds of daily choices their jobs require. This assembly process is overwhelming, sapping everyone of the time and energy they need to do their *actual work*. Also, teams and people often arrive at *different versions of context*, driving expensive efforts in multiple directions. The result is an existential crisis to the business: productivity down, poor work quality, and disengaged, burned-out people.

The good news? Thriving teams and organizations have flipped this script by distilling hard earned lessons learned over decades running knowledge work teams and embracing the distributed nature of modern work. They do this through *Continuous Coordination* — the application of seven core principles for knowledge work.

Each of the principles is powerful on its own, but combined, they are a proven force for achieving and sustaining high levels of productivity, work quality, and meaningful engagement. Even better, the principles are self-reinforcing: the more your organization uses them, the easier they are to apply. To dig in, we recommend reviewing the principles in order, starting with *Keep a steady beat*.

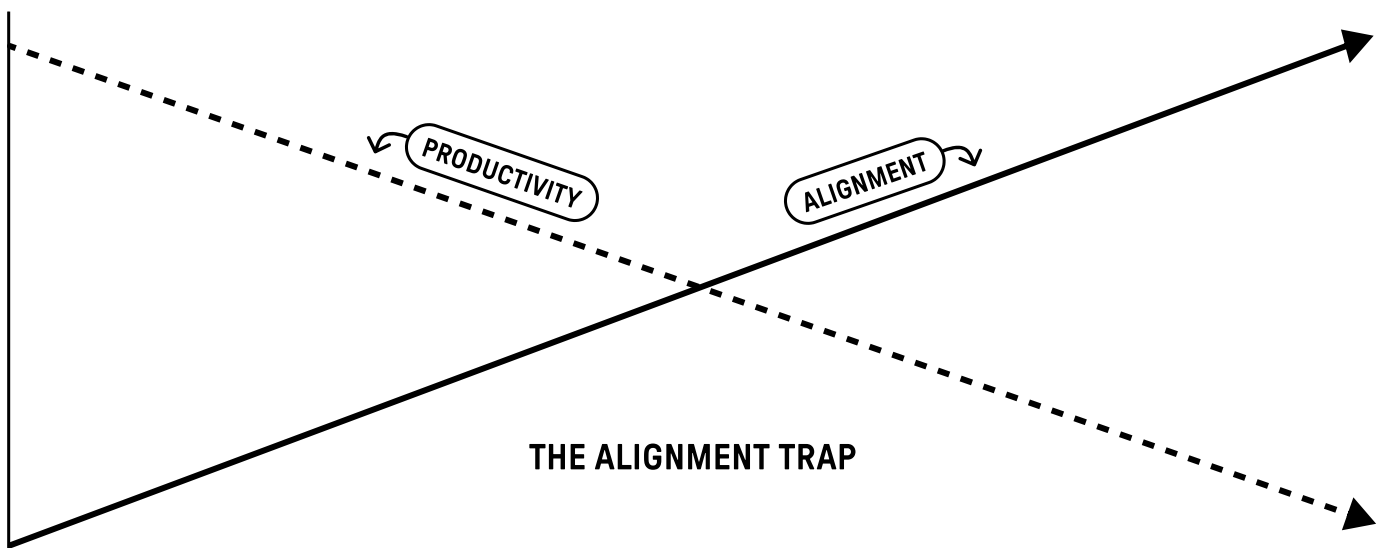
For more information on implementing the principles, see the 3-step [adoption guide](#).

01: Keep a steady beat

Ad-hoc approaches to keeping everyone informed and aligned are brittle, time-consuming, and tedious. Replace them with automated, structured communication loops to create a steady beat that keeps everyone in tight sync without all the effort and interruptions.

Company and team alignment has a half-life. It's highest after that all-hands presentation or quarterly goal-setting session, but memory fades and static docs tend to collect dust in the face of day-to-day work. If you want to stay aligned, you have to feed it.

The problem is, **meetings are too inefficient to keep up with the half-life of alignment.** Without a more efficient approach, companies get caught in an *alignment trap*; you either have strong alignment and a velocity problem (AKA the "I do my work after work" problem), or weak alignment and a "cats in a bag" problem where teams are misaligned, working in the wrong direction, or actively undermining each other. Either end represents a serious risk.



What's worse, meetings and other ad-hoc approaches are *brittle*. They depend on everyone doing the right thing, on their own, day in, day out. That works for small teams, but 50 people? 500? 5000? The odds aren't in your favor. Adopting an ad-hoc approach is *actively signing up for endless process policing*.

The way out? Take a page from the [Continuous Integration](#) playbook by breaking alignment work down into smaller, higher-frequency, automated async loops. Daily within teams, weekly/bi-weekly/monthly across teams.

Daily loops keep individual teams in tight sync, and help individual contributors prioritize tasks, address budding issues, and coordinate action plans.

Weekly/bi-weekly/monthly loops — like updates on a team or company-level goal — keep multiple teams and entire companies aligned by providing everyone summary-level insight into where things stand.

This dual loop strategy cuts the alignment trap [Gordian Knot](#). Everyone up and down the org has complete context day in, day out, *and* plenty of time for deep work. Even better, you have a full record of history of who's done what and why, and nobody gets saddled with the frustrating, low-value process police job. It's a game changer for working as a team.

Further reading

- [Clear, J. \(2018\). *Atomic Habits: An Easy & Proven Way to Build Good Habits & Break Bad Ones*. Avery.](#) Decodes the process and positive compounding effect of adopting a series of small habits, like the dual-loop communication approach.
- [Harnish, V. \(2002\). *Mastering the Rockefeller Habits: What You Must Do to Increase the Value of Your Growing Firm* \(1st ed.\). SelectBooks.](#) Harnish advocates for establishing a rhythmic communication pattern within an organization, which is crucial for ensuring everyone is aligned and moving towards the same goals.
- [Fowler, M. \(2006, May 1\). *Continuous Integration*. *mortinfowler.com*.](#) In this essay, Fowler describes the then-nascent concept of Continuous Integration, how it works through automated asynchronous loops, and its benefits to the software delivery process.

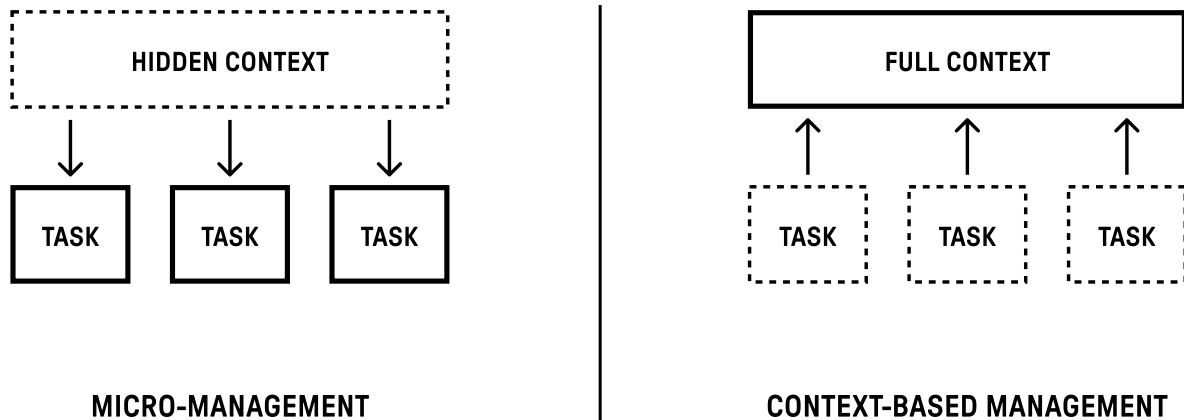
02: Lead with context

“Butts in seats” management is an engagement killer, and a non-starter when you can’t see actual butts in actual seats. Instead, give people the context and coaching they need to make independent decisions that move the business forward. High-autonomy teams are high-functioning teams.

Micromanagement doesn’t work. *Particularly* so when it comes to knowledge work. Few better ways exist to squash productivity, kill engagement, and increase turnover.

People and teams do their best work when they understand *why* the work matters and have a high degree of autonomy over how they pursue it. So instead of deploying top-down management practices that were designed for assembly line manufacturing work, focus on the outcomes or future state you want to see by setting high-level goals, and let teams and people figure out how to get from A to B.

Contributors who help shape their work expectations and goals (“I do X, it’s necessary in order to get us to Y”) report higher satisfaction, productivity, and engagement. Because their work is nourished by their own sense of purpose, they’re far more likely do it well, and less likely to overextend and burn out.



Consistency and clarity is key. Relate work back to goals, and goals back to company-wide mission and vision. Anyone and everyone should be able to articulate how their work fits into the big picture.

Further reading

- [Sinek, S. \(2009\). *Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action*. Portfolio.](#) Why constant examination and communication of context and purpose is what it truly takes to lead and inspire.
- [Grove, A. \(1995\). *High Output Management \(2nd ed.\)*. Vintage Books.](#) A comprehensive guide to effective business management, focusing on maximizing productivity and efficiency through systematic planning, decision-making, and team empowerment.
- [Wodtke, J. \(2016\). *Radical Focus: Achieving Your Most Important Goals with Objectives and Key Results*. Cucina Media LLC.](#) Combining storytelling with practical advice, Christina Wodtke demonstrates that focusing on a small set of well-defined goals can drive progress, alignment, and success in an organization.
- [Bielaszka-DuVernay, C. \(2008\). *Micromanage at Your Peril*](#) A deeper dive into the counterproductive perils of micromanagement.

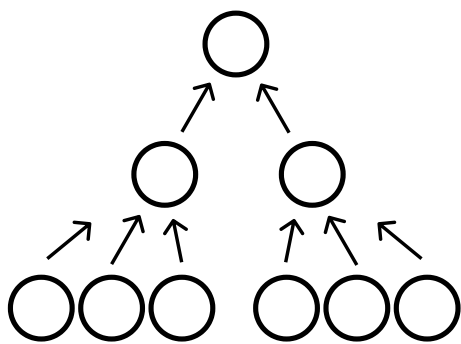
03: Work in the open

Working in the open builds trust, a prerequisite for high-performance teams. Working in the open turns bottom-to-top information funneling into autonomy-enabling information sharing. Working in the open keeps stakeholders and adjacent teams up to speed without asks and interruptions.

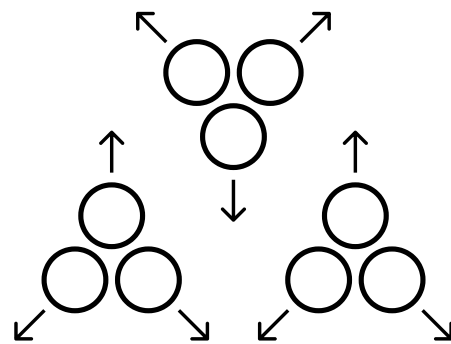
Everyone wants to build high-performing teams or be part of a high-performing team. One of the fundamental requirements of high performing teams is *trust*. You simply can't get the former without the latter. How do you build trust amongst a group of people who don't work together directly and might not ever meet face-to-face? By building a culture of transparency, where everyone works in the open.

Working in the open stops "what is that person/team even doing?" in its tracks, promotes natural accountability, builds empathy for other disciplines, and gives people clear venues to talk about the work they did and *why* they did it.

In most traditional organizations, information flows in one direction: up. The lower you sit in the hierarchy, the less information and context you have. Transparent organizations invert that model by giving everyone unfettered access to information, maximizing context and minimizing red tape, interruptions, and waiting for answers.



INFORMATION FUNNELING



INFORMATION SHARING

Building a transparent organization requires leadership, but you can't lead if you can't be seen. Leaders and managers working in the open serve as powerful role models for the behavior you want to see, building trust by constantly shining a light on their own questions, course-corrections, and decisions.

Further reading

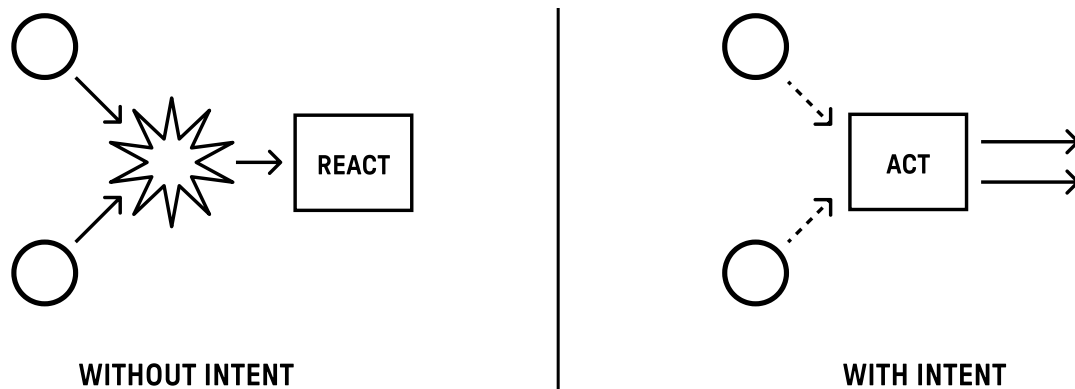
- [Duhigg, C. \(2016, February 28\). What Google Learned From Its Quest to Build the Perfect Team. *The New York Times Magazine*.](#) This article discusses the findings from Google's Project Aristotle, a research project aimed at understanding what makes a team effective. The research found that psychological safety, where team members feel safe to take risks and be vulnerable in front of each other, was the most critical factor in successful teams. This conclusion highlights the importance of trust and open communication in team dynamics.
- [Gino, F. \(2017, October 10\). Radical Transparency Can Reduce Bias – but Only If It's Done Right. *Harvard Business Review*.](#) Examines Ray Dalio's practice of "radical transparency," its implementation, and the ways in which social science research confirms its core ideas.
- [Brock, L. \(2015\). *Work Rules!: Insights from Inside Google That Will Transform How You Live and Lead. Twelve*.](#) Encapsulates Google's revolutionary workplace culture, highlighting the pivotal role of transparency in enhancing employee empowerment, trust, and organizational success.

04: Tell the future

You can learn from history, but you can change the future. That makes communicating intent across your org an *_actual superpower_*. When contributors do it, leaders can course-correct before days/weeks/months get burned. When leaders do it, contributors can drive progress autonomously.

Too many organizations default to a culture of working reactively — addressing the new chat request that just popped up, the issue that landed on your plate, etc. — and end up making very little forward progress on the high-impact work that's more important, but less urgent.

Consistently communicating intent — via daily plans, weekly objectives, or long term goals — is an inherently clarifying practice, and a way to shift your culture from reactive to proactive. It pushes people to focus on outcomes, and provides a simple, effective framework for prioritizing work.



For managers, a culture of communicating intent is a *powerful* tool for eliminating risk. Managers have ample time to step in and course correct before days/weeks/months of time and resources get burned working in the wrong direction.

For contributors, the upside is more trust, and more autonomy. Consistent communication and consistent delivery lets managers and peers know that you're more than capable of working without heavy-handed intervention.

As the practice develops, the intentions become more pointed, course-corrections become rare, and opportunities for trust-eroding micro-management disappear.

Further reading

- [Stoddard, A. \(2023, June 12\). The cure for micro-management. *Status Hero*](#). How to use goals to get things done without telling people what to do.
- [Marquet, L. D. \(2012\). *Turn the Ship Around!: A True Story of Turning Followers into Leaders*. Portfolio](#). Former nuclear submarine commander David Marquet's seminal book on building leader-leader organizations, including proactively managing deliberate intentions rather than simply reacting to situational variables.

05: Spare the meetings

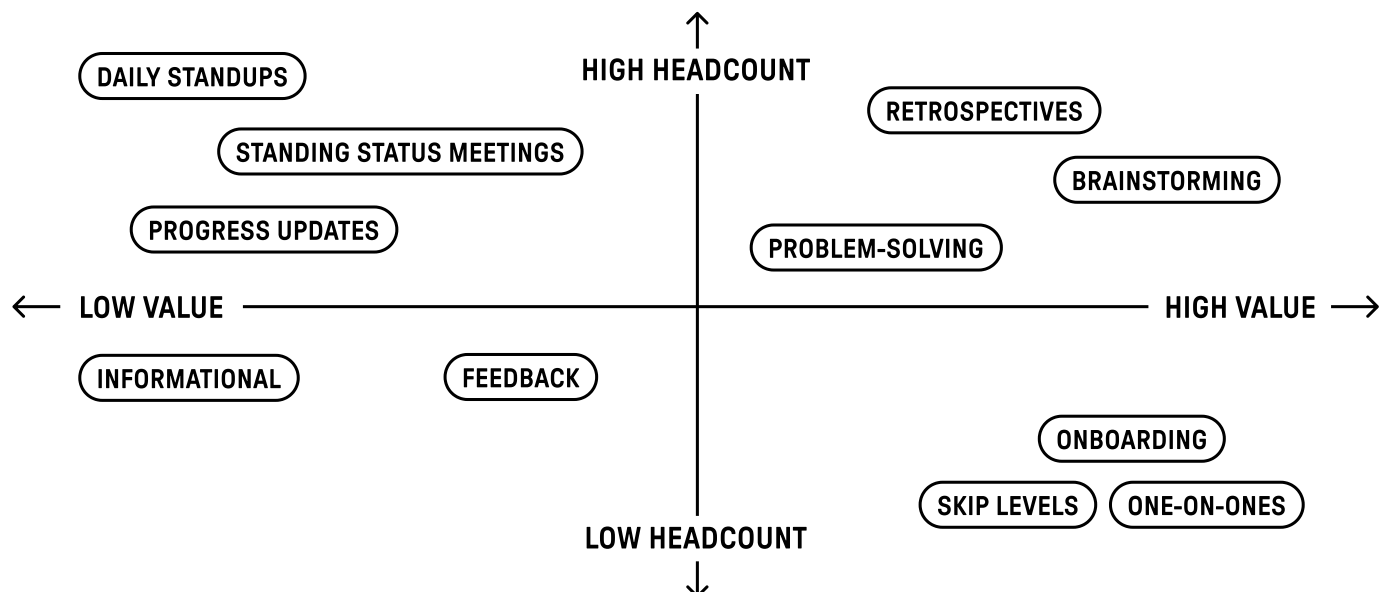
The answer to everything can't be “have a meeting.” Zoom fatigue is real, and people need big blocks of time to do deep work. Save meetings for the high-value stuff — collaborating, team-building — and use async tools for the rest.

“Meeting hours” are the most precious commodity in a knowledge organization. They carry a high cost but are incredibly valuable when used correctly.

- **Meetings are expensive.** Companies spend a disproportionate amount of payroll on meetings, to the tune of *hundreds of millions of dollars* at large companies.
- **Meetings are zero-sum.** You're either talking about the work, or doing the work.
- **Excess meetings are draining.** Too many meetings too much of the time leaves you with little energy for real work.
- **Meetings are flexibility killers.** Rigid recurring meeting structures erase one of the biggest advantages of remote and hybrid work; *flexibility*.
- **Meetings erode deep-work.** Knowledge workers like developers and designers need large, uninterrupted blocks of time to get into flow state do their best work. Nothing of significance is getting done in that 30-minute gap between meetings.

Despite the price, meetings are *absolutely vital*, especially in remote and hybrid teams. Rich human interaction — collaborating, spit-balling, celebrating, commiserating, etc — is the foundation that great work and strong team culture is built on.

Get rid of low-value meetings — status meetings, high-frequency all-hands, etc. — in favor of async updates and save your meeting budget for high-value collaboration and teamwork.



Further reading

- [Laker, B., Pereira, V., Malik, A., Soga, L. \(2022, March\). Dear Manager, You're Holding Too Many Meetings. *Harvard Business Review*](#). Research shows that 70% of meetings keep employees from doing productive work. Deliberate and asynchronous approaches can alleviate the problem.
- [Rossi, L. \(2023, February 9\). How to Reduce Meetings. *Refactoring*](#). Strategies and practical ideas for better async communication, and a detailed case study.
- [Graham, P. \(2009, July 5\). Maker's Schedule, Manager's Schedule. *PaulGraham.com*](#). Graham posits that managers' schedules are typically segmented into one-hour intervals for meetings, while makers (like programmers or writers) prefer long, uninterrupted blocks of time to be productive in their creative or technical work.
- [Boyle, M. \(2022 September 26\). Useless Meetings Waste Time and \\$100 Million a Year for Big Companies. *Bloomberg*](#). Employees say they don't need to be in nearly one-third of the meetings they attend, a survey shows.

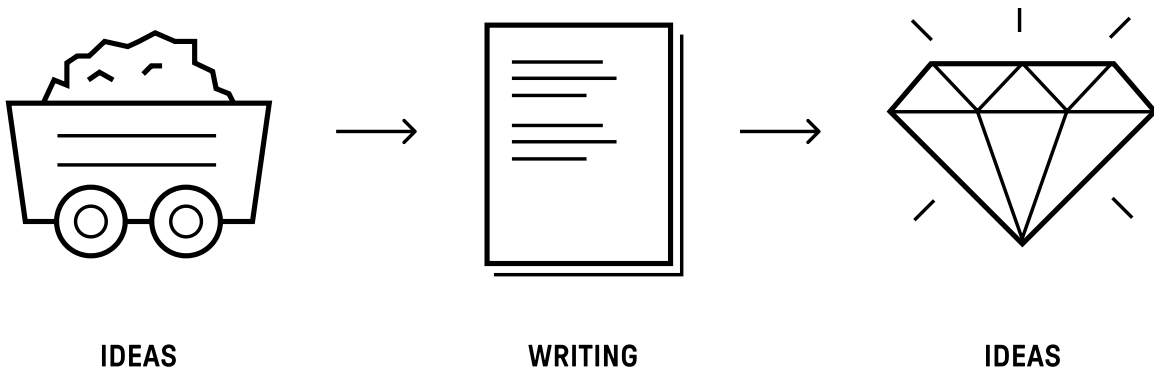
06: Write it down

Writing helps you clarify your thoughts and ideas before you share them. Writing makes your thoughts and ideas digestible for others. Writing doesn't require everyone showing up at the same time. Writing is accessible. Writing is searchable. If it "could have been an email", by all means. Default to writing.

When it comes to knowledge work, nothing beats writing in terms of efficiency, flexibility, and clarity of message. Compared to formats like video, it's cheap and easy to store, searchable by default, and accessible by default. Writing-first cultures makes it far easier to build and maintain a "company brain" of context and information; a powerful tool for empowering people to self-help and make decisions autonomously.

Writing is defacto asynchronous, which makes it a natural choice maximizing flexibility in remote and hybrid contexts. It doesn't matter where people are working from, what time they're working, or even what device they're using. Write, post, and share; people will read and respond when they're on.

Writing is the ultimate idea clarifier, refining ideas into their sharpest form before they get shared. It ensures that messages aren't just heard, but *understood*. A culture of writing leads to stronger alignment for less effort, and fewer half-baked ideas.



Writing levels the playing field, shifting the focus from the people who talk loudest to those with the best ideas. Writing promotes a culture where substance beats dominance.

Start with asynchronous writing and use other tools — like meetings — only when need be.

Further reading

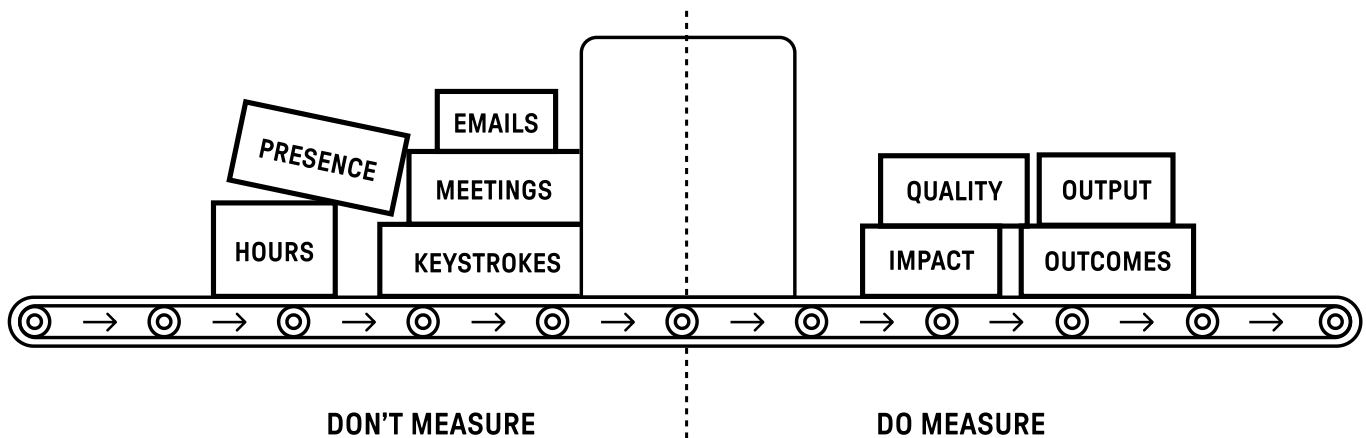
- [Scott, J., Murph., D., et al. \(2021, May 24\). How to embrace asynchronous communication for remote work. *GitLab*.](#) GitLabs' comprehensive guide on mastering asynchronous work and remote communication.
- [Bryar, C., Carr, B. \(2021\). *Working Backwards: Insights, Stories, and Secrets from Inside Amazon*. St. Martin's Press.](#) Amazon replaced PowerPoint presentations with narrative-driven memos to improve decision-making and information sharing, as detailed in this book. This approach emphasizes clarity and depth of ideas over presentation skills, enabling better analysis and shared understanding.
- [Parrish, S. \(2023, November 21\). *Writing to Think. Farnam Street*.](#) This essay highlights the importance of writing for fostering deep thinking and understanding, contrasting this with the superficial convenience of AI-generated text, which diminishes the opportunity to develop critical thinking and unique perspectives.
- [Zinsser, W. \(1988\). *Writing to Learn: How to Write - and Think - Clearly About Any Subject at All*.](#) This classic encourages and guides readers to develop their writing skills to clarify their thoughts and communicate more effectively.
- [VandeHei, J., Allen, M., Schwartz, R. \(2022\). *Smart Brevity: The Power of Saying More with Less*. Workman Publishing.](#) A guide from the journalists at Axios and Politico to effective communication in the digital age, focusing on delivering clear, concise, and impactful messages.
- [Strunk, W., White, E. B. \(1959\). *The Elements of Style*. Macmillan.](#) A concise guide to English writing style and grammar. It emphasizes clarity, brevity, and precision in writing, offering practical rules and tips for effective written communication.

07: Track output, not input

When it comes to knowledge work, real productivity isn't measured by hours clocked, meetings attended, how long a lunch break was, or number of emails sent. Set clear goals, and focus on output and outcomes instead.

Knowledge work isn't factory work. It's the assimilation, organization, and execution of ideas, which may or may not correspond to a physical act. A programmer can have a breakthrough idea while walking their dog. A marketer can envision a groundbreaking campaign in the shower. That makes management approaches based on inputs — commits pushed, bugs fixed, days and hours worked, meetings scheduled — *irrevocably flawed*.

Even worse, measuring inputs often leads to surveillance via “bossware”, a new crop of remote tools that incinerate trust and incentivize employees to “perform work” instead of doing actual high-value work.



Instead, focus on the results that drive the business, like product goals, sales targets, quality standards, and customer impact. The only effective measures of knowledge work are output, quality, and outcomes, not inconsequential productivity metrics and performance theater.

Further reading

- [Orosz, G., Beck, K. \(2023, August 29\). Measuring developer productivity? A response to McKinsey. *The Pragmatic Engineer*.](#) Gergely Orosz and Kent Beck respond to McKinsey's controversial method for measuring developer productivity.
- [Poydar, H. \(2022, August 18\). Bossware, Trust, and "Productivity" Scores. *Status Hero*.](#) High-performing knowledge teams operate on trust, yet many companies are rushing into adopting tools that destroy it.
- [Jaworski, B., Parasuraman, S., Gowda, J., Spotts, E., Schloesser, D., Hunter, C. \(2021, December 23\). The Future of Work: Behavioral and Social Science-Informed Considerations for a Hybrid Work Environment. *National Institute of Health*.](#) An analysis of the changing landscape of hybrid work environments, including the importance of measuring outputs over work inputs as a way to re-imagine the definition of workplace productivity.
- [Molla, R. \(2023, May 5\). Your boss is obsessed with productivity without knowing what it means. *Vox*.](#) Some 71 percent of business leaders say they're under immense pressure to squeeze more productivity out of their workers. But most are measuring what workers put in, rather than what they put out. In turn, workers say they're spending a third of their time "performing" work — that is, making an effort to look like they're working rather than actually working.

Adopting Continuous Coordination

A 3-step guide for implementing the Continuous Coordination principles

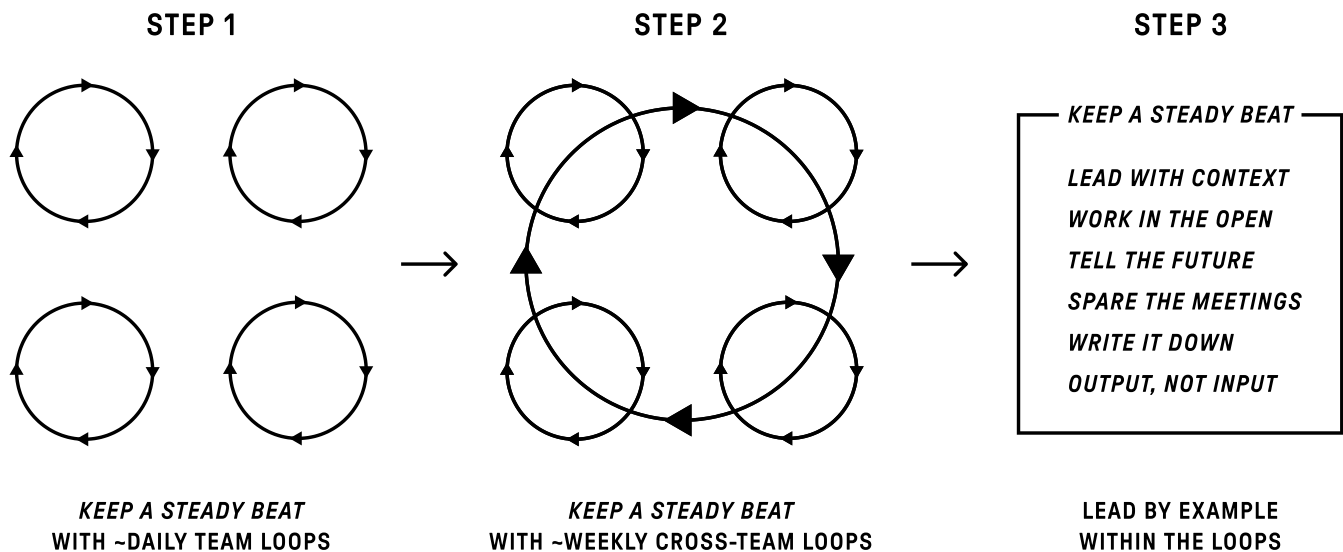
Every digital product and service organization is unique, with a variety of tools, processes, skillsets, and headcount that drive *how* they work. And with modern work, input variables also include *where* and *when* the work gets done — hybrid, multi-office, distributed, etc.

Because of these differences, there's no precise formula for implementing Continuous Coordination. So here we outline broad guidelines in a 3-step pattern known to work for others. You'll have to tailor it further to fit your organization, but it's a proven and solid start.

It's also important to note that Continuous Coordination is not designed to replace established tools, processes, or communication channels. Instead, it's a lightweight *overlay* practice that offers instant improvements by solving for the underlying problems that typically hold organizations back: miscommunication, opaque vision, fractured context, micromanagement, and misalignment.

As you follow the steps, look for efficiencies, but we don't recommend *replacing* existing processes right away. As an overlay, Continuous Coordination will work alongside waterfall, agile, OKRs, and many other embedded processes.

Shoot for a gradual, incremental approach and let the principles do the heavy lifting.



Step 1: Establish high-frequency, single-team communication loops

Implement *Keep a steady beat* at the team level on a daily basis.

Within each team, automate a way for all contributors and managers to *briefly* summarize their intentions for the day in writing and share it with the rest of the team. Use existing communication channels that have the best chance of getting these check-ins in front of the whole team. Configure notification prompts so that team members don't have to remember to check in. This will help the motion become habitual.

Step 2: Establish low-frequency communication loops for team and cross-team objectives

Implement *Keep a steady beat* at the organization level on a weekly or bi-weekly basis.

Automate a way for contributors and managers to update their progress — in writing — against shared objectives and share it with the rest of the organization. For example, a team could have a quarterly goal and update their progress against that goal every week or two. Keep these updates short and consumable but not shallow, with enough context and details to underpin further discussion if necessary. Use communication channels that ensure the updates are highly visible and not buried in a folder or the dark corners of your knowledge base.

Step 3: Lead by example

Use the *Keep a steady beat* communication loops established in Steps 1 and 2 as vehicles for the other 6 Continuous Coordination principles.

By following steps 1 and 2 with *Keep a steady beat*, you'll naturally develop several other principles within your organization:

- Surfacing check-ins and goal updates to the whole organization is how to *Work in the open*.
- Cataloging plans and intentions within communication loops is the way to *Tell the future*.
- Written check-ins and updates reinforce the *thinking* that's the basis for *Write it down*.
- Keeping a steady beat with written communication loops can avoid low-value "catch-up" and status meetings eschewed in *Spare the meetings*.

Implementing *Lead with context* will require a more deliberate, demonstrative effort by managers and leaders. Use the communication loops to constantly lay out why the work matters so that contributors can function autonomously. In the updates leaders provide in Step 2, clarify the ties back to parent goals and the organization's mission.

Finally, to apply the *Track output, not input* principle, make sure the updates in Step 2 aren't an examination of input metrics — like lines of code written or meetings attended — that don't correlate with the outcomes you're shooting for. Focus on the output metrics that matter in the updates.

None of the principles are exclusive to managers or contributors. It's therefore *critical* that managers lead by example and fully participate in the communication loops, both in writing thoughtful updates that

demonstrate the principles and engaging in updates from others. Model the behavior you want to see across the organization for best results.

About Continuous Coordination

Modern knowledge work is broken. We've over-engineered "process tech" — project management, performance management, workflow automation, et cetera — and overlooked the fundamentals that drive *real* human collaboration. We're communicating with our tools and systems instead of each other.

And in doing so, we've lost the plot for progress, swamped in a dizzying constellation of tools, time zones, tasks, notifications, interruptions, mandates, emails, issues, chats, and back-to-back-to-back-to-back-to-back meetings. It's a productivity-killing, morale-sapping burnout machine.

What's worse is the exasperated tendency to accept this mess as the status quo. "That's just how it is here at XYZ Co, like everywhere."

But it's *not* like this everywhere. With decades of experience in remote, hybrid, and distributed work, Adam and I have had the good fortune of witnessing and contributing within tech's highest-performing organizations. Places where it's invigorating to work. Where managers, contributors, and teams build things in harmony. Where Zoom fatigue is not a thing.

What do these standout orgs have in common? A people-first approach for collaborating and communicating that supersedes time, geography, and team boundaries. *Continuous Coordination* is the distillation of this approach.

At first, our company set out to build a product called [Steady](#) to enable the principles that make up Continuous Coordination. Steady is an alignment layer: it overlays HR, collaboration, communication, and project management stacks to give everyone in an organization the targeted context they need to do great work together.

But along the way, we realized the principles themselves are the main character — a transformational set of ideas that floats all boats. Sure, Steady is a shortcut for implementing them, but they deserve elevation and treatment as a definitive approach to modern work on their own. And they should evolve as work evolves. So with the help of our [colleagues, our customers, and industry thought leaders](#), we wrote it all down and published it under an open-source license.

For more information about redistribution, republishing, remixing and/or contributing to the Continuous Coordination document, please visit the [GitHub repository](#).

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Henry has built successful software products and led high-performing software teams for over two decades. His rich professional history includes engineering and leadership roles in a variety of organizations, from remote-first bootstrapped businesses and venture-backed startups to publicly-traded companies with globally distributed teams.

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Adam Stoddard

Adam's unique experience working at both traditional tech orgs and remote pioneers like Basecamp — along with 12 years of experience working remotely — give him a deep understanding of the problems that new-to-remote-and-hybrid teams struggle with on a day-to-day basis, and a clear sense of how to solve them.

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David is an accomplished leader with a consistent track record of building great teams and delivering high-quality products across consumer electronics, multimedia domains, and complete hardware/software and system architecture projects. David is currently Director, Research Software Engineering and Agile Coach at Toyota Research Institute.

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As an editorial expert, Ian has led and worked with content teams remotely for a decade. Working with companies like Zappos, DoorDash, and T-Mobile, Ian skillfully turns complex concepts into engaging narratives. His work, characterized by strategic depth and empathetic storytelling, has shaped the digital identities of leading brands.

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Dinshaw has been building and maintaining commercial web applications since the early 2000's. He has worked as a developer and team lead on projects ranging from self-funded start-ups to publicly-traded, enterprise organizations. He is devoted to practicing and sharing the craft of software and believes that communication and simplicity are the pillars of success. Dinshaw is a VP of Engineering at Steady Space Corp.

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As a founding member of several remote-first businesses, and a remote product development consultant to large enterprises for more than six years, Joey is well versed in the challenges that remote and distributed teams face every day. Joey is a founding member of the design team at Steady Space Corp.

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With 15+ years of experience leading Product Management and Customer Support teams at in-office and fully remote organizations, Michael's intimately familiar with the challenges facing modern teams and leaders. Michael's experience includes a long stint at GitLab, the largest all-remote company in the world, where he learned best practices for working asynchronously with a global team.

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Kevin has extensive academic and commercial experience in the computer vision and augmented reality hardware and software space. Currently, he leads cross-functional teams of engineers and researchers at Amazon Devices (Lab126). Previously, Kevin co-founded Lightform, a start-up that built design tools for projected AR. In addition to several patents, Kevin holds a Ph.D. in Computer Science from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.

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Janice is a passionate advocate for technology, higher education, and project and portfolio management, driven by the belief that innovation and learning are the cornerstones of progress. She currently serves as the Chief of Staff for the Enterprise Innovation Institute (EI2) at Georgia Institute of Technology.

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