

On why coordination, and not individual output is now the binding constraint on team work.

# The Big Problem of Team Coordination in the Age of AI.

The individual output curve bent. The work that actually moves businesses - collective and cross-functional did not.

In the age of AI, team coordination has not caught up. The Present and Future of Team Coordination in the age of AI

## — INTRODUCTION

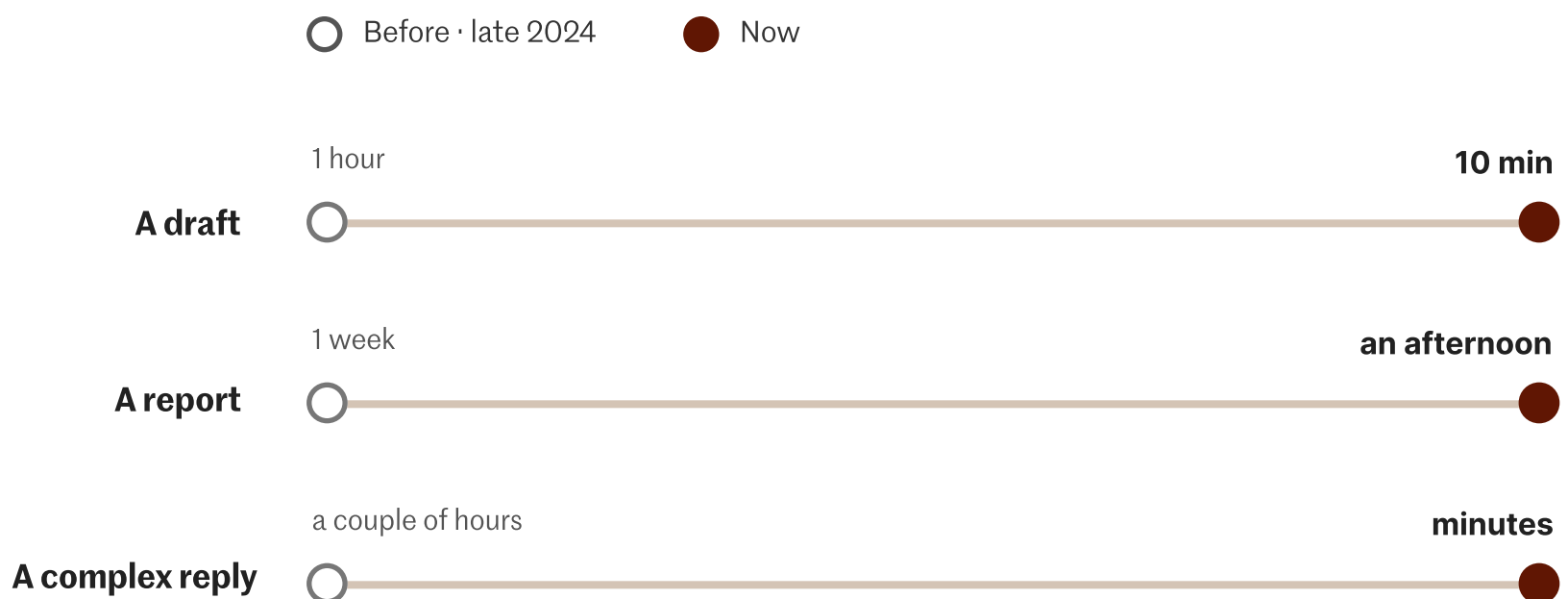
# Speed arrived for the individual. It never arrived for the team.

Since AI tools became widely usable in enterprises, around late 2024, every knowledge worker has been promised dramatic speed. Most have got it, but for their own work. The individual output curve has bent: a draft that took an hour now takes ten minutes, a report that took a week takes an afternoon and a complex customer reply that took a couple of hours now takes minutes.

But the work that actually moves businesses is not individual. It is collective: cross-functional projects, multi-stakeholder decisions, handoffs that span people, time zones, and tools. And there, the speed gain hasn't shown up. In many cases the opposite has happened. More outputs are landing on the same number of human reviewers. More decisions are being proposed without anyone named to act on them. More handoffs are dropping into the gap between systems.

**Figure 1 · The individual curve bent**

*Time to complete one person's task*



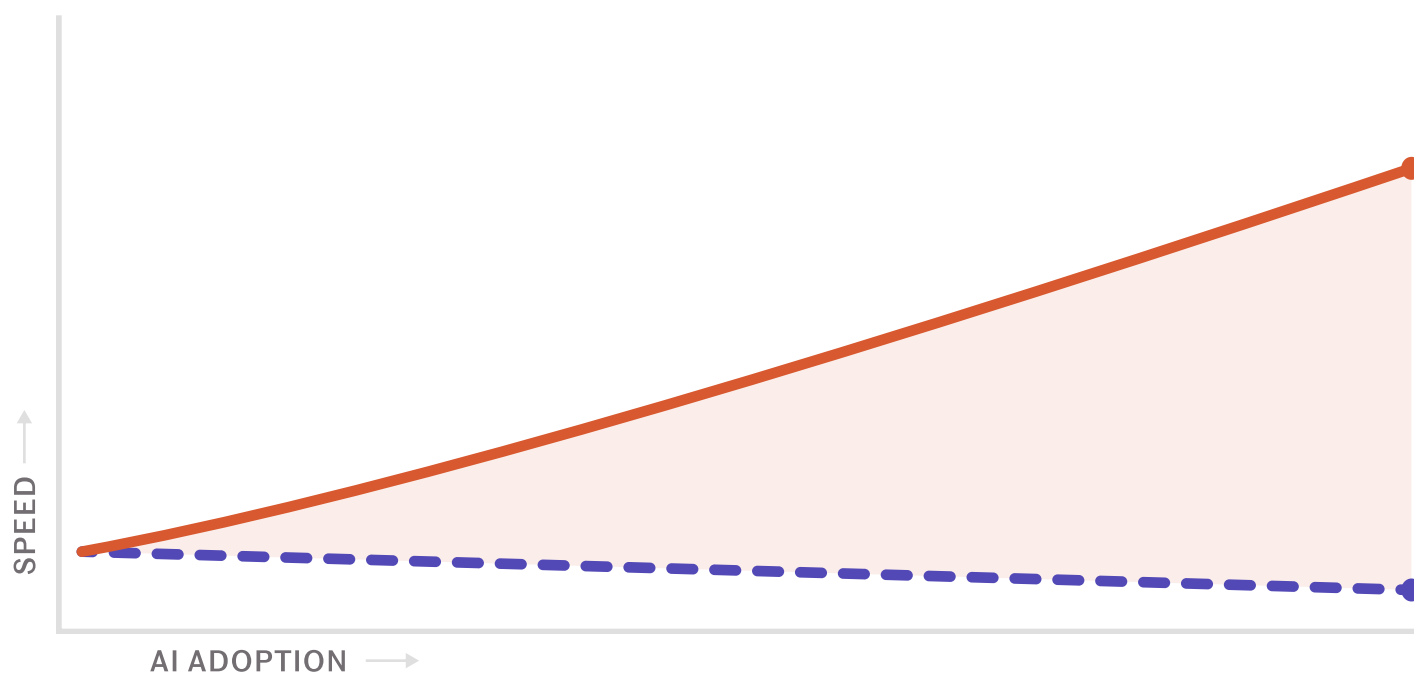
The coordination layer that surrounds individual work hasn't scaled and the cost of that gap, when added up across a 30-person company, runs to between £180,000 and £270,000 a year of human time absorbed by coordination rather than the work itself. And it does not land evenly, it lands disproportionately on the person measured whether the work actually ships. This includes the COO, the Chief of Staff, the Head of Operations - these people are bearing this weight.

This paper makes the case that team coordination has become the binding constraint on efficient modern team work. That the existing tools like individual AI assistants, enterprise search, workflow automation, AI task agents, in-house builds deepen the problem rather than close it. And that the next category of software must be designed for team execution, not individual productivity.

## The coordination gap

AI makes individuals faster. Collaborative work hasn't kept up.

— Individual output (AI-boosted) — Team coordination speed ■ The coordination gap



ESTIMATED COST · 30-PERSON COMPANY  
AI ADOPTION →

**£180k—£270k**

a year of human time absorbed by coordination, not the work itself.

### AND IT LANDS ON ONE DESK

- COO** owns whether the work ships
- Chief of Staff** absorbs the handoffs
- Head of Operations** names who acts next

# Why team coordination is breaking

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The work that moves a business is collective – and the layer that holds it together never scaled with the rest of the work.

## What actually is coordination

When most people talk about “the work”, they mean the delivery output: a report, a deck, an email, a ticket or a line of code. But every delivery output sits on top of an invisible layer of work that doesn’t appear in any deliverable. And that is finding the right person to ask, locating the latest context, understanding who is responsible for what, chasing the inputs that haven’t arrived, etc. It can even be taking initiative to tackle something outside of your scope, but critical for your mission.

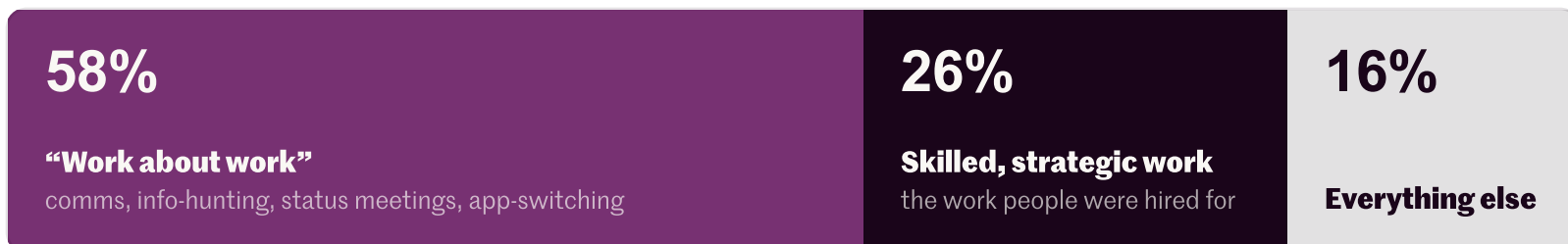
That layer is coordination, and in SaaS and professional service organisations it constitutes a big chunk of what people spend their time on.

Asana’s Anatomy of Work study, which surveyed roughly ten thousand knowledge workers globally, found that 58% of the workday is taken up by “work about work”. That is communication around tasks, hunting for information, attending status meetings or switching between apps. Only 26% goes to skilled, strategic work. McKinsey’s research on the social economy puts the figure at roughly 1.8 hours per knowledge worker per day spent simply searching for information or chasing colleagues. Atlassian’s State of Teams 2025 estimates the equivalent of 2.4 billion hours per year wasted on information searches across the Fortune 500 alone.

These numbers are not new. The category they describe - coordination overhead - has been measured and complained about for two decades. What is new is that the rest of the work has changed, and the coordination layer has not. This leaves people guessing, not taking action and wasting time of inefficient communication.

**Figure 3 · Where the workday actually goes**

Coordination overhead, three studies



A knowledge worker’s day · Asana, Anatomy of Work (≈10,000 workers)

**1.8 hrs** per worker, per day

spent searching for information or chasing colleagues

**MCKINSEY**

**2.4 bn** hours per year

lost to information searches across the Fortune 500 alone

**ATLASSIAN, STATE OF TEAMS 2025**

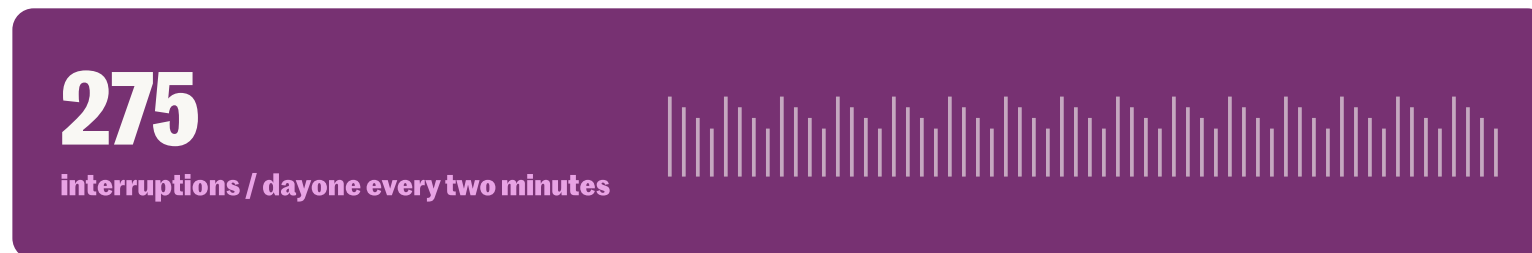
Sources: Asana, Anatomy of Work · McKinsey, the social economy · Atlassian, State of Teams 2025.

## Why distributed teams make it worse

Coordination is the work of holding context across people and across time. In a co-located team, this happens partly through osmosis: you overhear conversations, you see your colleague at the whiteboard, you know roughly where people are because they are in the room. None of those mechanisms survive a distributed team.

**Figure 4 • A distributed workday**

Microsoft, Work Trend Index 2025



Across Teams messages, emails and calendar invites

**153 / 117**

Teams messages / emails

**30%**

of meetings span time zones

**60%**

of meetings are ad hoc

**+16%**

meetings starting after 8pm

### Microsoft's data shows what has filled the gap:

- 275 interruptions per day, one every two minutes across Teams messages, emails, and calendar invites.
- 30% of meetings now span multiple time zones, up eight percentage points since 2021.
- 60% of meetings are ad hoc; one in ten is scheduled at the last minute.
- 275 interruptions per day, one every two minutes across Teams messages, emails, and calendar invites.
- 153 Teams messages and 117 emails received per worker, daily.

The cumulative effect is not subtle. Microsoft's same study found that nearly half of employees and leaders describe their work as "chaotic and fragmented," and one in three say the pace of work over the past five years has become unsustainable. That is not an AI-adoption problem. It is a coordination-throughput problem: the rate of inputs has outrun the human capacity to absorb them.

The fundamental physics of distributed coordination is that the time window in which a decision can be made compresses, while the time required to assemble the right people expands. A team that decides at the end of one working day hands work to a colleague who is just beginning theirs. That colleague needs context, owners, and unanswered questions assembled in a way that can be acted on without a synchronous call. In the absence of that infrastructure, a four-hour task becomes a multi-day round trip, and four-hour tasks are most of the work.

#### THE DIAGNOSIS

**It is not an AI-adoption problem. It is a coordination-throughput problem — the rate of inputs has outrun the human capacity to absorb them.**

## — THE FOUR FAILURE MODES

## Where coordination actually breaks

Four failure modes account for the majority of coordination loss. They are recognisable to any operations leader who has ever asked the question “why hasn’t this been done yet?”

 01

### Decisions that don’t get owners

Decisions are made in conversations - Slack threads, meetings, Zoom calls. Forty messages and three thumbs-up later, everyone walks away aligned on what should happen. But rarely do they walk away with their name attached to making it happen. Two days later and not much has moved. The decision existed; the ownership did not. This is the most common failure mode in fast-moving teams: the conversation feels productive, but commitment never converts into action.

 02

### Handoffs that drop context

Work crosses functions: marketing to product to customer success, sales to delivery, design to engineering to QA. At each crossing, the next person needs to know what was decided, what was already tried, what the constraints are, what “done” looks like, who the customer is, where the assets live. In practice they get a Slack message and a folder name. The next two days are spent reconstructing what the previous person already knew. By the time work crosses three or four boundaries, the project’s accumulated context has been re-derived four times.

 03

### Status that requires manual aggregation

Senior leaders need to know where things stand. Their teams know, but partially, in pieces, in different tools. So somebody, usually a head of operations or a chief of staff, spends half their week chasing those pieces into a usable shape. By the time the picture is assembled, parts of it are already out of date, and the cycle restarts.

 04

NEW · CREATED BY AI

### The proliferation of unowned outputs

This last failure mode is new, and it is specifically what AI has created. Every team has adopted some combination of assistant tools, whether that’s Slack AI, Notion AI, Copilot or ChatGPT. Every one of them produces drafts, summaries, transcripts, proposals, replies. The output rate has multiplied. The number of humans available to read, route, decide on, and act on those outputs has not. The result is a backlog of unowned artefacts: a draft that nobody approved, a transcript that nobody actioned, a customer reply that nobody sent. AI has scaled the inputs to coordination without scaling the coordination itself.

## Why it lands on the Ops leader

This problem doesn't fall evenly across the company. It lands disproportionately on one person.

McKinsey's research on the modern operating role is explicit about why. "The senior-most operations leader is the backbone of delivering the organisation's strategy," with consistent productivity improvement now the ultimate benchmark of operational leadership. The COOs who differentiate, McKinsey finds, are those who "reach across the aisle, working with marketing and sales leaders" which is exactly the cross-functional surface where coordination breaks down.

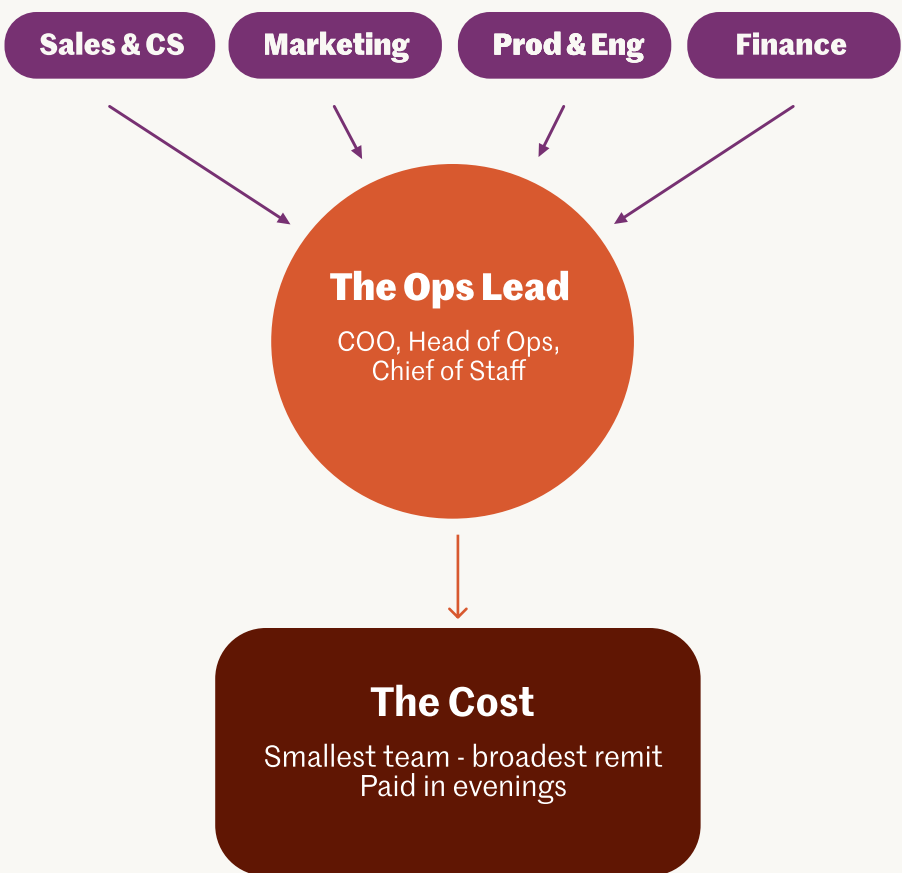
In other words: the person being measured against productivity outcomes, working primarily across cross-functional boundaries, is the person sitting in the cross-functional coordination gap. Atlassian's State of Teams 2025 confirms the framing from the leadership side: 93% of executives say cross-functional collaboration is more crucial than ever.

The cost lands hardest on the role with the smallest team and the broadest remit. In most growth-stage companies, that role is the Head of Operations, the COO, the chief of staff, or the project director. They become the human glue holding the coordination layer together. And pay for it in their evenings.

## The economic cost

In a typical 30-person company, between 20% and 30% of team time is absorbed by coordination overhead rather than producing actual outputs. At conservative loaded-labour assumptions, that translates into roughly £180,000 to £270,000 a year of paid human time that produces no deliverable. It is the equivalent of three to five hires whose entire job was to manage the management. The cost does not appear on any budget line because it is distributed across every person; but it is paid in late nights, missed deadlines, client conversations that nobody wanted to have, and senior people doing work two levels below their pay grade.

**93%**  
of executives say cross-functional collaboration is more crucial than ever.  
ATLASSIAN • STATE OF TEAMS 2025



**20–30%**  
of team time absorbed by coordination

**3–5 hires**  
worth of time, "managing the management"

## Why this gets worse, not better

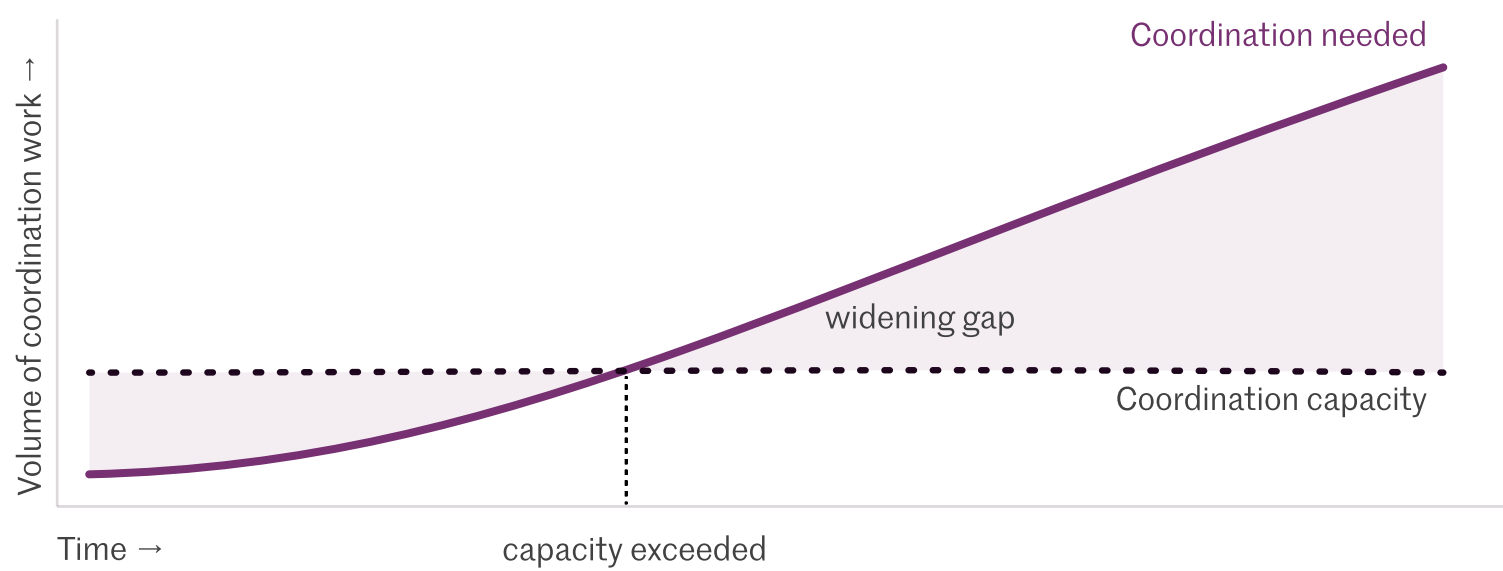
The two structural drivers of the coordination gap are distribution and AI volume, both intensifying. Companies are not de-distributing; the share of work that crosses time zones is still growing year over year. Companies are not de-adopting AI; individual productivity tools are spreading to every function. Both forces increase the surface area over which coordination has to operate. None of the existing software categories were designed to scale coordination at the same rate.

**Figure 5 • Both drivers intensify – capacity doesn't**

The widening coordination gap

↕ **Distribution** ↑  
share of work crossing time zones keeps climbing

↕ **AI output volume** ↑  
productivity tools spreading to every function



# Why existing tools don't close the gap

Five categories of tooling are most often invoked when a team confronts the coordination problem. Each has genuine merit. None closes the chat-to-action gap.

Five categories of tooling are most often invoked when a team confronts the coordination problem. Each has genuine merit. None solves the chat to action gap.

## 1 Individual AI productivity tools

**EXAMPLES** ChatGPT, Claude, Microsoft Copilot, Slack AI, Notion AI.

These tools have transformed individual knowledge work. A 90-minute report becomes a 15-minute report; a 30-message customer reply becomes a 3-message exchange. The productivity gains for the user are real and well-documented.

The structural limit is also clear: these tools serve one person at a time. They have no memory of what the rest of the team is doing, no awareness of who else is involved in a project, no sense of what has already been decided. They optimise the input side of work while leaving the connective layer between people entirely untouched. In coordination terms, they make individual contributors faster, and thereby produce more inputs for the team-level coordination system that does not exist.

## 2 Enterprise search and knowledge tools

**EXAMPLES** Glean, Guru, Notion AI search.

These tools address one specific symptom of coordination failure: information being lost across systems. They index documents, conversations, and tickets across the team's stack and surface the right answer when asked. For well-defined informational queries, they work well.

What they cannot do is act on the information they retrieve. A search tool tells you who knows about the deal; it does not get that person to respond to you. A retrieval tool surfaces the latest version of the document; it does not write the next version, route it to the reviewer, follow up on the approval, or alert you when the deadline is at risk. Search closes the gap between knowing and needing to know. It does not close the gap between knowing and doing.

## 3 Workflow automation platforms

**EXAMPLES** Zapier, Tary.io, Workato, n8n, Make.

These tools automate predictable, rule-based work: when X happens in system A, do Y in system B. They are powerful and widely deployed. For well-defined repeatable workflows like onboarding a new user or syncing a record, they remove genuine toil.

But coordination work is not predictable rule-based work. It involves judgement, ambiguous inputs, multiple stakeholders and decisions that cannot be specified in advance. "When the customer health score drops below 7, send a renewal email" is a Zap. "When this client raises a concern that might affect renewal, gather context, brief the account team, draft the response, and route it to the right person for approval" is coordination and it cannot be encoded as a rule. Automation platforms answer pre-defined questions, coordination is the work that happens when the question itself has to be figured out.

## 4 AI task-execution tools

**EXAMPLES** Viktor, Jared and the emerging category.

This is the newest category and the most adjacent to the gap this paper describes. These tools accept a request and execute a task across connected systems including drafting a report, pulling data, building a one-off dashboard, etc. They are improving rapidly, and on a per-task basis the work they produce is often impressive.

The structural limit is shape, not capability. These tools hold context and execute well. The gap is that the loop runs between one person and the agent - you ask, it works, it returns the artefacts to you. Two things never happen. There is no routing. When the next step belongs to someone else on the team, the agent has no model of who that is or how to hand it over, so the human picks the work back up and carries it across the boundary by hand. And there is no approval gate. When the agent acts on the outside world, it simply acts; no human is positioned between the proposed action and the people it reaches. In coordination terms this is single-player execution: a real productivity gain, but one applied to the agent instead of the person who asked, still solving only the individual layer. Team execution, meaning work that moves between people with a named owner at each step and a human approving every outward-facing action, is what stays unaddressed.

## 5 The self-build instinct

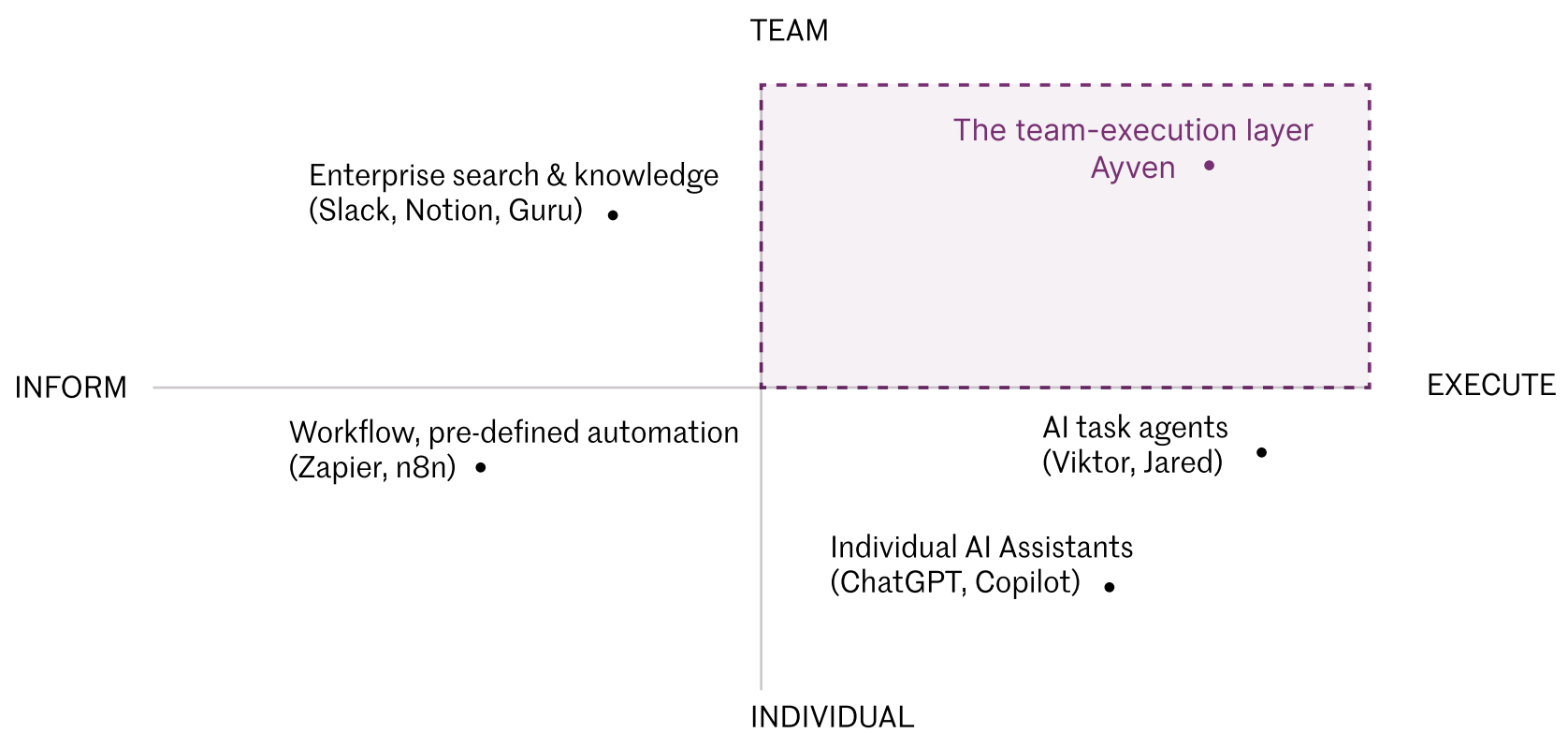
**EXAMPLES** In-house automations built with Claude Code, custom GPTs, internal scripts on top of Slack and Notion APIs.

A technically capable founding or tech team will often conclude that the coordination problem is something they can build for themselves. They are not always wrong; for very specific, narrow workflows, a custom script outperforms a generic product. The trap is the gap between solving one coordination workflow and solving the category. The architecture that makes coordination genuinely durable, such as holding state across days, reasoning over time, surfacing the right action at the right moment, routing to the right stakeholder, gating external actions through human approval takes years of focused engineering and a state model that is far harder to build than it appears. Most self-build attempts ship a useful internal tool, plateau, and quietly stop adding to it. The category gets re-solved one workflow at a time, badly.

## The signature gap

If you place these categories on two axes: individual / team on one axis and inform / execute on the other, the picture is striking. Search and enterprise knowledge platforms cluster in the informational half. Workflow automation sits in execute / pre-defined. Individual AI assistants and AI task agents sit in individual / execute. The quadrant that is consistently empty across the market today is the one that matters: team-level / execute.

**Figure 6 · The empty quadrant** Individual ↔ team · inform ↔ execute



Two axes: individual ↔ team, and inform ↔ execute. The quadrant that matters is the one nobody fills.

**That is the team-execution layer, and it is where the rest of this paper turns.**

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**WHAT A SOLUTION MUST DO**

# Five requirements – framed as principles, not features.

From the analysis above, a solution to the team coordination gap must meet five requirements. Each is derived from a specific failure mode and a specific limit of the existing landscape. They are framed deliberately as principles, not features, so they can be used to evaluate any answer, Ayven's or otherwise.

- 1 It must operate inside the tools teams already use, not add another destination.**

Coordination is the work of holding teams together. A solution that creates a new place for people to go does the opposite by adding another channel to the existing distributed-attention problem. Any team-execution layer must be embedded in the surfaces where work already happens (Slack, Teams, the existing knowledge tools), visible to everyone on the team, and accessible without changing behaviour.
- 2 It must hold state across days, people, and systems.**

Most coordination work spans more than one moment. It is multi-day, multi-stakeholder, and multi-tool. A request-response architecture, where the context resets after each interaction, cannot solve work that itself does not reset. The layer must carry a live model of every project in flight covering what has been done, what is in progress, what comes next, who is responsible and what is blocked - and update that model as the work moves.
- 3 It must act, not merely inform.**

The most common limit of the existing landscape is the gap between knowing and doing. Search tools tell you the answer; the human still has to chase the person, draft the message, route the approval. A team-execution layer has to close that loop. When work needs to move, it should move. The reduction in human effort comes from removing the chase, not from improving the search.
- 4 It must adapt to ambiguity, not follow rigid rules.**

Coordination is judgement work. The triggers, owners, and definitions of done change project by project, often within the same week. A rule-based system can encode the parts that are predictable; the coordination problem is the part that isn't. The layer has to interpret context: who is the right reviewer for this kind of decision, which deadline is the binding one, what does "done" mean for this deliverable. Adjusting as the situation evolves is key.
- 5 It must keep humans in control of every external-facing action.**

The economic cost of unchecked automation has been studied for decades. Parasuraman and Riley (1997) named the core failure mode misuse: over-reliance on a system that is right often enough that people stop checking it, until the one error that matters slips through unexamined. The lesson applies here. A team-execution layer that acts on the outside world without human approval transfers risk to the human at exactly the moments they cannot afford to absorb it. Once a message is sent or a commitment made on the team's behalf, none of it can be recalled, which is exactly why the layer must propose while the human approves. Trust, in other words, is not a setting but an architecture.

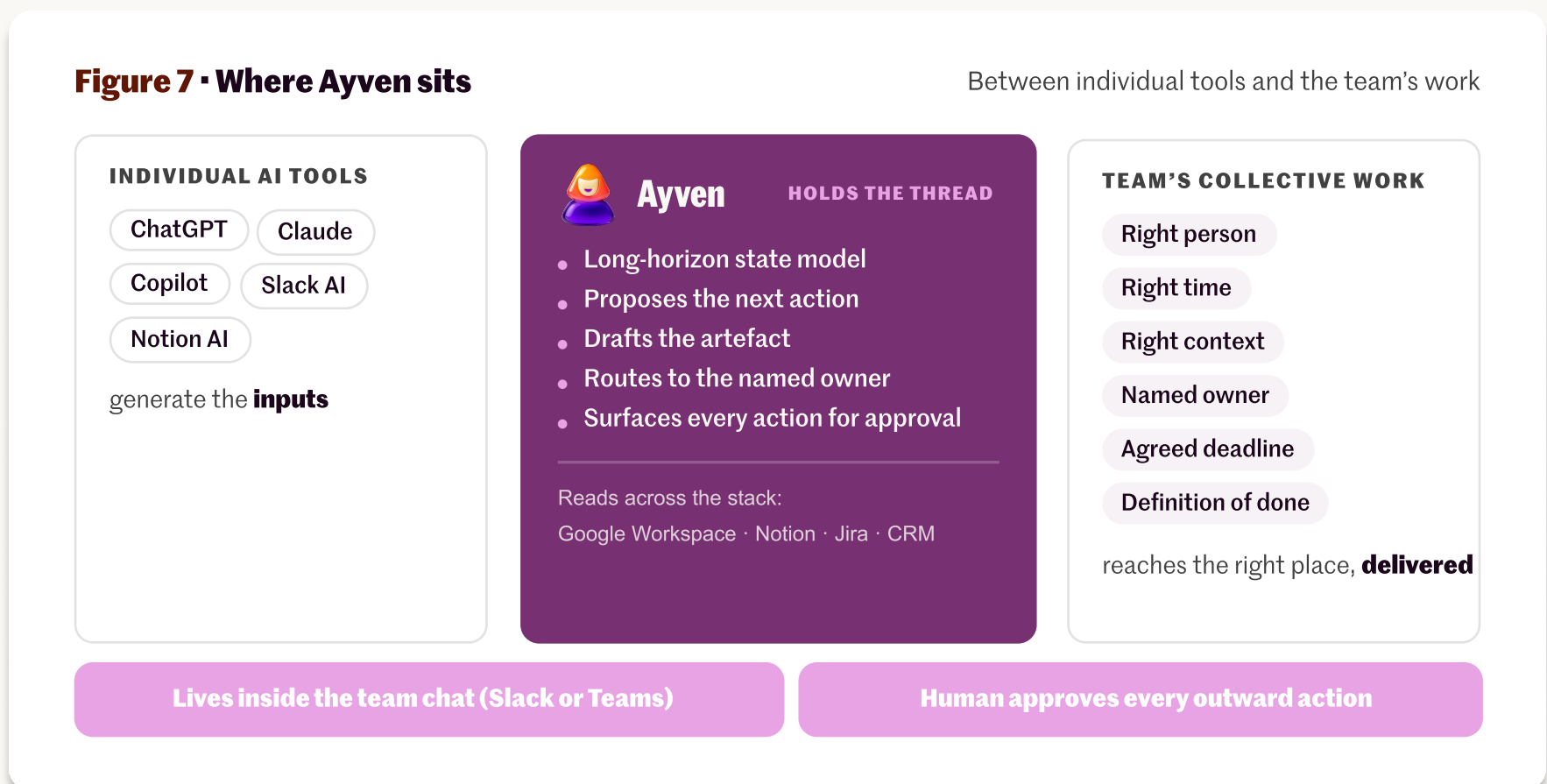
A real answer to the team coordination gap meets all five. Each requirement on its own is achievable. Combined, they describe a category of product that does not yet have an established name, and that – with one or two emerging exceptions – does not yet exist.

# The Ayven approach

Alknoma's implementation of the five requirements: a team-execution layer that lives where the work already happens.

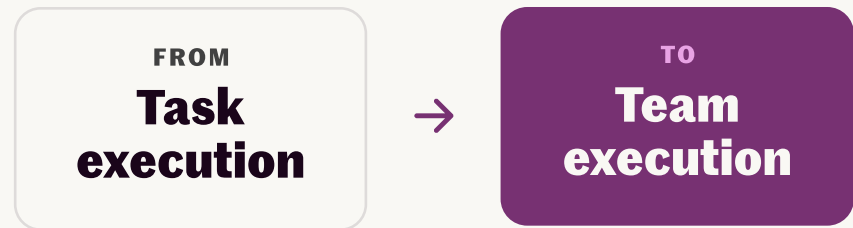
Ayven is Alknoma’s implementation of the five requirements above. It is built on a long-horizon state model: a continuously updated representation of every project the team has in flight, with owners, deadlines, dependencies, and decisions tracked across days and across systems. It lives directly inside the team’s chat (Slack or Teams), reads context across the company’s tool stack (Google Workspace, Notion, Jira, the CRM), proposes the next action when one is needed, drafts artefacts when a deliverable is required, routes to the named owner when ownership has been established, and surfaces every outward-facing action to the human for explicit approval before it ships.

Functionally, Ayven sits between the individual AI tools the team is already using and the team’s collective work. The individual tools generate the inputs. Ayven holds the thread that ensures those inputs reach the right person at the right time with the right context, with a named owner, with a deadline that has been understood, and with a definition of done that has been agreed.



**THE CONCEPTUAL SHIFT**

The conceptual shift Ayven represents is from task execution (the current category boundary) to team execution (the gap this paper identifies). It enables proactivity without reprimand and a collaborative environment built on truly efficient communication.

**WHAT AYVEN IS NOT**

What Ayven is not: it is not a chatbot, it is not an AI coworker, and it is not an autonomous agent. It does not act outside the organisation without explicit human approval. It does not aim to replace the people doing the work; it removes the coordination overhead that surrounds them, returning their time to the work they were hired for.

— ~~A chatbot~~

— ~~An AI coworker~~

— ~~An autonomous agent~~

## — IN PRACTICE

## Preparing a quarterly board pack.

Consider a routine workflow: preparing the board pack for a quarterly board meeting. In most companies of 30 to 80 people this work consumes 40 to 60 hours of senior time spread across two to three weeks, most of it coordination rather than analysis.

**Without Ayven****≈35 hrs • 5 people**

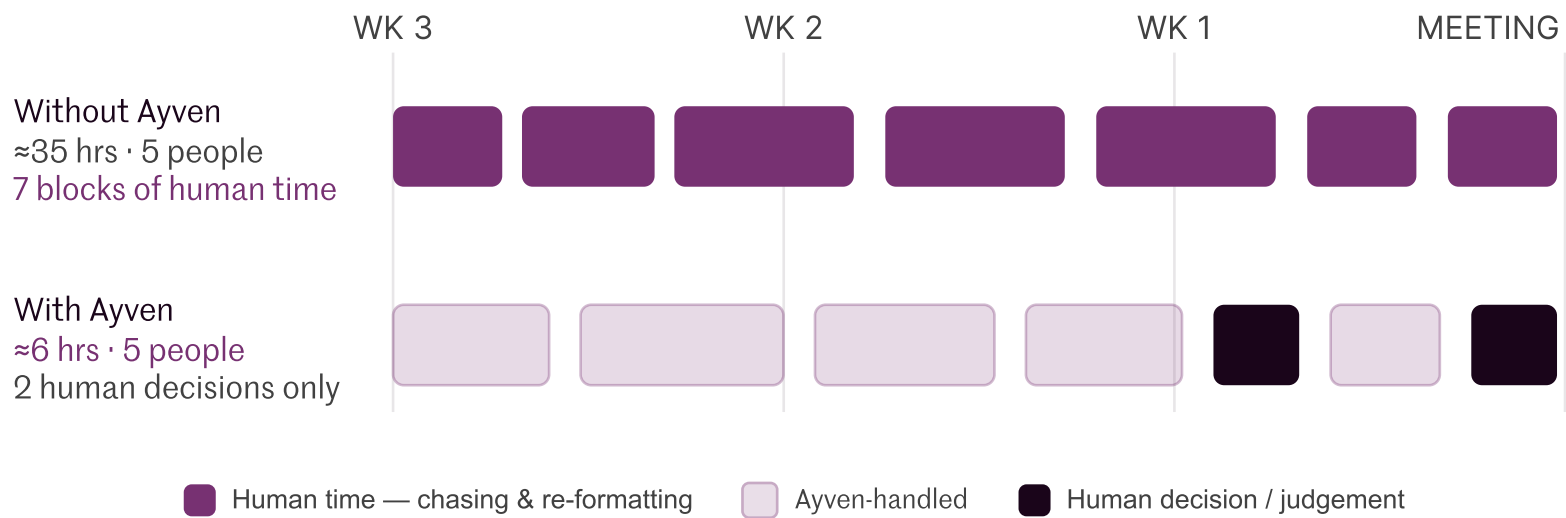
Three weeks before the meeting, the Head of Operations starts a Notion doc with last quarter's outline. She emails the CFO for the financials, the Head of Sales for the pipeline view, the Head of Product for the roadmap update, and the Head of People for headcount. Two of the four respond within 24 hours. The other two need two follow-up nudges each. Over the next ten days the numbers get re-cut as forecasts change. The Head of Operations rewrites three sections to reflect the new data, formats the slides, drafts the narrative and sends a v1 to the CEO. The CEO marks up the deck the night before the meeting. The Head of Operations re-edits at 11pm. Total elapsed time across the team: roughly 35 hours, distributed across five people, the majority spent chasing and re-formatting rather than thinking.

**With Ayven****≈6 hrs • 5 people**

Three weeks out, the board meeting is added to Ayven's mission queue with the agreed agenda. Ayven identifies the four data owners from prior board packs, schedules a request to each at the right cadence backward from the deadline, pings them in their preferred channel, and chases when responses are late. As data lands, Ayven assembles the canonical document, flags inconsistencies between forecasts, drafts the narrative sections in the team's voice, and sends draft v1 to the CEO five days before the meeting. The CEO marks it up; Ayven incorporates the feedback, drafts v2, and surfaces three items where the data and the narrative diverge. These are flagged as decisions for the Head of Operations to make. She makes them and Ayven finalises. Total elapsed time across the team: roughly six hours, spent on the actual decisions and the actual narrative.

**Figure 8 • The same board pack, two ways**

Human time vs. Ayven-handled, over three weeks



**MAPPED TO THE REQUIREMENTS**

Ayven operated inside the existing tools (Slack, Notion, the CRM); it held state across three weeks; it acted (chased, drafted, formatted) rather than merely informed; it adapted to mid-flight changes in the underlying data; and every outward-facing piece - every email to a contributor, the final pack delivered to the board. It passed through human approval before it went anywhere.

**35 → 6 hrs**

elapsed team time

**5**

people, refocused on the work

**5 days early**

v1 to the CEO, not the night before

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**LOOKING AHEAD**

# Three trends compress the gap over the next 18–24 months.

Three trends will compress the coordination gap into a more pressing problem over the next 18 to 24 months.

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**Individual AI adoption is deepening and the unsustainability is already visible.**

Most teams have only begun to integrate AI tools into individual workflows. As that integration matures, the rate of generated outputs per person rises further, and the bottleneck shifts from production to coordination. Microsoft's research already finds that one in three employees describe the current pace of work as unsustainable and that is before most companies have completed their AI adoption curve. The team-execution layer becomes more, not less important.

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**Distributed work is consolidating, not reversing.**

Despite return-to-office mandates, the share of knowledge work that crosses time zones continues to climb - Microsoft tracks an eight-point increase in cross-time-zone meetings since 2021. The coordination tax of distributed teams is structural, and the longer it goes unaddressed at the software layer, the more it gets paid in human absorption by operations leaders, chiefs of staff, founders' associates, and senior people whose calendars never come back.

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**Multi-agent systems are emerging.**

AI agents will increasingly act on behalf of individuals. Without an orchestration layer that maintains team-level state, holds approvals, and surfaces what each agent is doing to the wider team, multi-agent activity becomes a new failure mode rather than a new productivity gain. The team-execution layer is the substrate that makes the next phase of AI adoption coherent at organisational scale.

**THE BET**

**The category we describe in this paper, the team-execution infrastructure that operates inside existing chat tools, holds state across long projects, and gates external action through human approval will not be a niche. Within five years, it will be where the operating overhead of every distributed knowledge organisation is run.**

Alknoma is the company behind Ayven. It is building solutions for communication and coordination problems that teams need to operate at the velocity that their tools have promised, but not delivered.

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**Working with us.**

Ayven is currently in design-partner deployments. If your team is feeling the coordination burden this paper describes, and you would like to shape the product as it scales, we would value a conversation.

[ayven.ai](https://ayven.ai) • [contact@alknoma.com](mailto:contact@alknoma.com)

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