

# The Collaborator's Time Audit

Thinking exercise for those who need to improve the balance between collaboration and deep work

## Introduction

For those collaborators who need to juggle between collaboration and deep thinking, life is seldom calm. Meetings, tasks, requests and competing priorities can take over the calendar and get overwhelming very fast.

**Overflow of work is caused by the environment in which we operate, not by our shortcomings as people.** By tweaking the environment we operate in, we can improve how we use our time and how our time is being used by others.

This audit provides a guide for exploring ideas for optimizing the calendar by optimizing the work itself.

By the time you finish, you will have inspected and updated your calendar from four angles:

1. **Priorities** - Which (types of) activities are important for your success?
2. **Stakeholders** - Who do you need to collaborate the most often and regularly with?
3. **Energizers** - What types of activities and interactions have been energizing and valuable?
4. **Drainers** - What types of activities and interactions have been draining or low-value?

By scheduling your most important work first, improving collaboration practices with stakeholders, and replacing draining activities with more energizing versions, it may be possible to **win back time not only for yourself but for the people you work with.**

It can take about 1-1.5 hours to reflect and a few more to prepare/negotiate the changes you can't make right away. But if that effort gets you 2 hours back each week, you will be net positive in a few weeks and save 8 hours every month going forward.

Every improvement you make today that saves time and sanity tomorrow is not a cost, but an investment.

Be bold and get creative,  
Maret Kruve

### **How to get started**

1. Schedule yourself 1.5 hours of focus time for this exercise
2. Get a copy of the Google Doc template: File > Make a copy
  - a. Or [Miro template](#) which is more interactive
3. Get started

### **Legal information**

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### **I'd love your feedback**

If you choose to try out The Collaborator's Time Audit, let [me know](#) how it worked out for you. It's still an early version so I'd love your feedback.

# Exercise

## I Review

Open your calendar and a todo list for an examination.

## II / III Reflect and ideate

Examine your typical work week: does the way you spend time align with your priorities, stakeholders, and energy levels? Turn your reflections into potentially actionable changes and experiments.

PRIORITIES	
REFLECT: Do you know your priorities? Does your calendar reflect your priorities? Which (types of) activities are important for your success? Are these activities scheduled?	IDEATE: What do you have to change for your calendar to start reflecting your priorities more accurately?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• (EXAMPLE) Industry research - <i>in calendar</i></li><li>• (EXAMPLE) Sharing research insights with the team - <i>not regular and sometimes forget, but important</i></li><li>•</li><li>•</li><li>•</li><li>•</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• (EXAMPLE) Schedule a recurring biweekly task for sharing insights</li><li>•</li><li>•</li><li>•</li><li>•</li></ul>
STAKEHOLDERS	
REFLECT: Who's work and success does your success depend on? Who do you need to collaborate frequently and regularly with? Are these interactions scheduled and well-structured?	IDEATE: What do you need to change to improve the effectiveness or timing of collaboration with the stakeholders? Who do you need to align and sync your calendars with?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• (EXAMPLE) Product team - <i>in calendar, but in the middle of the</i></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• (EXAMPLE) Negotiate to move one product team meeting to</li></ul>

<p><i>day where it interrupts deep work</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (EXAMPLE) Team X who's progress we're dependent on - <i>not in calendar</i></li> <li>• (EXAMPLE) Manager - <i>regular meeting in calendar, OK</i></li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<p><i>the end of the day</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (EXAMPLE) Schedule a regular catch up (async?) with the X team</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> </ul>
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**ENERGIZERS**

REFLECT: What types of activities and interactions have been energizing and valuable in the past? Why?	IDEATE: Where else could you apply similar interactions?
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (EXAMPLE) Design Reviews - <i>because productive and focused discussions around specific issues</i></li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (EXAMPLE) Design review format but for research work?</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> </ul>
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**DRAINERS**

REFLECT: What types of activities and interactions have been draining or low-value in the past? Why?	IDEATE: Which of those draining or low-value activities/interactions could be...
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (EXAMPLE) Weekly team syncs - <i>important discussions are not happening, always in a hurry to move to the next topic</i></li> <li>• (EXAMPLE) Weekly meeting with X - <i>not much happens in a week, so very little to discuss</i></li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Reformatted:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ (EXAMPLE) Weekly team syncs =&gt; biweekly deep dives + weekly written updates</li> <li>○</li> <li>○</li> <li>○</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Less frequent:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ (EXAMPLE) Weekly meeting with X =&gt; biweekly instead of weekly?</li> <li>○</li> <li>○</li> <li>○</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Concentrated / shortened:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○</li> <li>○</li> <li>○</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○</li><li>● <b>Automated:</b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○</li><li>○</li><li>○</li><li>○</li></ul></li><li>● <b>Delegated:</b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○</li><li>○</li><li>○</li></ul></li><li>● <b>Left undone:</b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○</li><li>○</li><li>○</li><li>○</li><li>○</li></ul></li></ul>
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## IV Design

Design a template for your ideal workweek that reflects your priorities, preferences, and energy levels. You can do this on paper, in [Miro](#) or create a new view in your calendar tool e.g [Google](#).

After design, review your ideal calendar template. Does it:

- Take into account when you're most productive and can tackle hard tasks more easily?
- Reflects your long-term and short-term priorities? Not just assigned projects, but also your personal needs like growth or well-being?
- Leaves a reasonable amount of buffer for work that comes in with short notice?
- Take into account the needs of your partners and stakeholders, but don't overvalue them?
- Balances well between focused work and collaboration?
- Is it reasonably feasible to execute in most times?

## V Execute

Make a plan. You might not be able to bring your ideal calendar to life 100%, but every improvement you do make is an investment for your future.

### NOW

What important changes can you make right away? Do it right away

- *(EXAMPLE) Schedule weekly slot for strategic work*
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CALCULATE THE IMPACT: If you complete these changes how much time you win back every week/month?

### NEXT 2 WEEKS

What high-value changes do you need to prepare or negotiate first? Who do you need to align your calendars with? Schedule those activities.

- *(EXAMPLE) Negotiate with team X to move meeting Y from weekly to biweekly and evenings instead of mornings*
- *(EXAMPLE) Prepare a proposal how to make meeting X more like a design review*
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CALCULATE THE IMPACT: If you complete these changes how much time you win back every week/month?

## LATER

What changes could be done later?

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## RULES

What principles and rules will you apply going forward to manage your time and energy better?

- *(EXAMPLE) Always schedule priority work in the calendar*
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