



IMPROVING COLLABORATION THROUGH VIRTUAL TEAMS

A BEST PRACTICE GUIDE



THE NEW ORGANISATION

Today, work isn't somewhere we go; it's something we do. How, when and where we work isn't predefined or confined, instead we are embracing the flexibility and mobility that the digital age has brought to our personal lives into our professional ones.

Organisations have acknowledged this change for some time, but the pace of adoption is varied. Now, with tech-savvy Millennials making up more than half the workforce, employers need to focus on building a culture that meets their high expectations to attract and retain the best talent.

The proliferation of mobile devices, Big Data and the Internet of Things has also led businesses to explore how they can simplify communication and improve employee experience by taking a new approach to digital culture.

There are few places in 'the new organisation' where technology is having a greater impact than on teamwork. New applications have led to the introduction of highly empowered virtual teams that can connect and collaborate continuously from wherever they are around the globe.

WHY WAIT?

Achieving this new level of collaboration is difficult without access to the cloud and organisations are always tempted to put off infrastructure change until existing equipment has reached end-of-life. However, the sheer number of devices and applications that make up a modern IT environment means that there is rarely an 'ideal' time to change everything.

Thankfully, modern IT practices make it possible to benefit from the ease of use, security, cost-effectiveness and reliability that the cloud brings without needing a complete overhaul of systems.

In this best practice guide, we look at the driving factors behind modern and continuous teamworking and how organisations can act today to improve collaboration through virtual teams.

THE DIGITAL WORKPLACE

The workplace has changed from the single location where everyone works, at a desk, nine-to-five. Instead, people are working from multiple sites, from home and 'on the road' in a way that suits both personal and professional commitments.

This shift has defined a new type of workspace; one that allows teams to easily connect and collaborate instantly, from any location, across devices of their choosing. They require instant access to workspaces and tools that can accommodate the 'any place, any time' nature of collaboration, allowing them to work their way.

Providing teams with these flexible, virtual workspaces also has a positive impact on employee satisfaction. Staff can share ideas more easily, work in groups without interruption, choose where they work and accommodate other remote workers.

CONNECTING DISPERSED TEAMS

Research shows that 90% of employees who rate themselves as both highly satisfied and engaged work in an environment that accommodates remote working, while 98% say the same of mobile working.

With team members spanning multiple locations, often globally, connecting them together from any location, at any time, ensures that they can collaborate however they choose using a combination of voice, video and content sharing.

STEPPING UP SECURITY

98% of highly satisfied employees also attribute the ability to freely express and share ideas as a driving factor, but easy access to information can come with risks if not properly secured.

With access to business-critical data and applications being shared across public and private infrastructure, security is a key consideration for the digital workplace. Data security should include elements of both protection and prevention, as businesses need to ensure the integrity and security of data both at rest and in motion across the extended WAN.

THE MODERN WORKFORCE

From Millennials to Generation Z, the next generation will soon make up the majority of the workforce and move into senior decision maker roles. Indeed Forbes predicts that 75% of the global workforce will be made up of Millennials by 2025. This shift presents a challenge for all organisations; how can they instil a culture that accepts the habits and practices of Gen Y and Z without alienating the incumbent Generation X?

Tech-savvy Millennials and Post-Millennials expect a flexible, mobile and connected workspace to be a prerequisite. To attract and retain the best talent, organisations need to be exceeding these expectations by providing flexible and intuitive technologies, such as app-based meeting, messaging and sharing, that allow a greater work-life balance.

The needs for Generation X who, while being in-tune with modern technology, often do not grasp it to quite the same extent as later generations, cannot be ignored either. Gen X workers may choose to use different types of technology for their every-day work, opting to use their desk phone rather than their mobile device for meetings, for example.

MINDING THE TECHNOLOGY GAP

The key to unifying the modern, multigenerational workforce is to balance these differing expectations and working habits. Gartner state that 57% of Millennials use storage and sharing tools at least once per week, while 44% have the 'latest and greatest' personal devices. While Generation X utilise some of this technology, it's often not to the same degree.

So how do you drive efficiency through technology? Simple. Consulting staff of different generations allows you to build a picture of what's important to them, how they differ in working habits and the synergies that exist between them.



THE EVOLUTION OF TEAMS

Teamwork as a concept is nothing new, but the way in which teams are communicating and collaborating have undergone a transformation. Collaboration is connecting the workforce together in a way we have never seen before.

This shift is also changing things from a management perspective; gone are the ridged, hierarchical structures of old, instead being replaced with flatter, more interconnected teams of people working together toward a common goal.

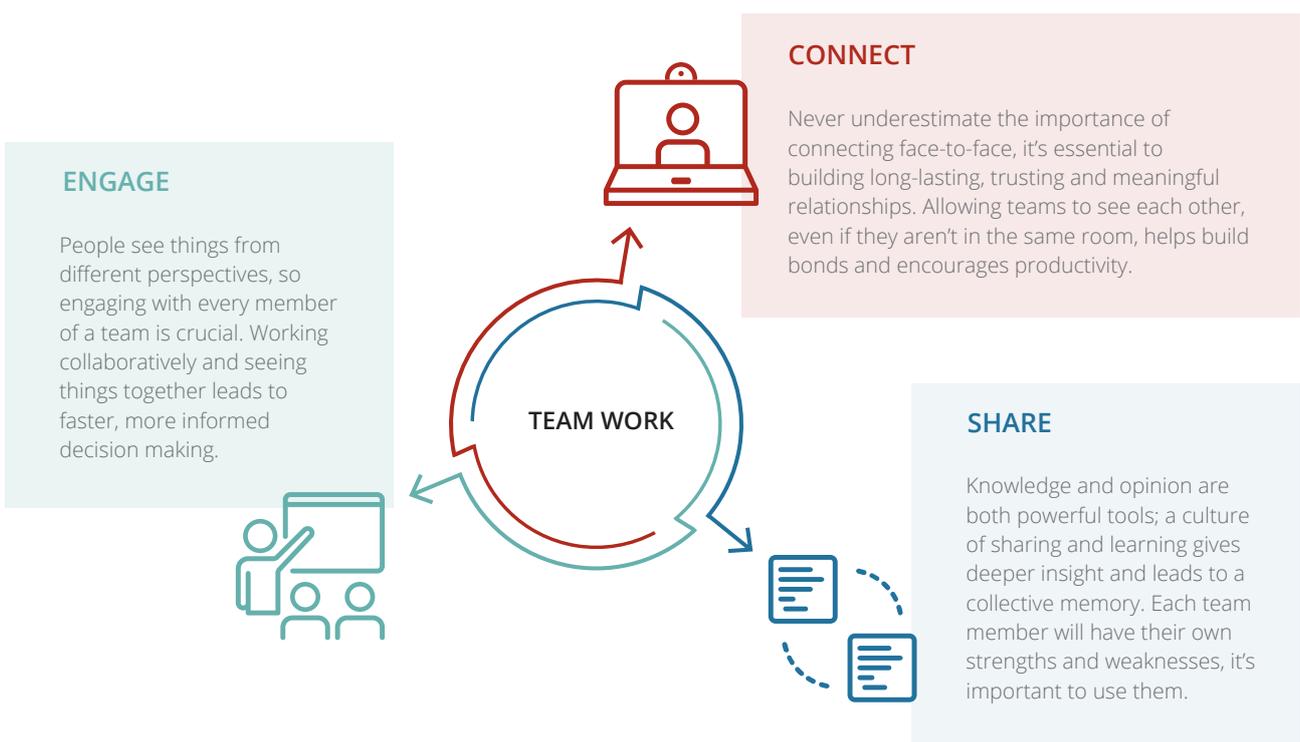
The need to nurture this new way of working is key to sustaining market leadership in the digital era. To maintain a competitive edge, organisations must adapt and react faster than the competition. This makes a culture that supports continuous teamwork very important; the right people need to be brought together at the right time, with the right information, regardless of their location.

A CONNECTED & CONTINUOUS WORKSPACE

It has been a long time since the workplace was confined to a single place and technology has played a key role in this shift. Shared data is the key to business intelligence and it's crucial for companies to empower staff to collaborate with their teams anywhere, on any device and at any time.

While this fast and easy access to information is crucial, it needs to be supported in the right way and by the right technology. Failure to deliver staff the tools and technology they need in order to collaborate with their teams will inevitably lead a rise in 'shadow IT'. This will, in turn, lead to communications silos and form disconnects across the business.

To prevent this, a collaboration strategy that is secure, compliant and connects all staff together must be implemented from the top down.



FORMULATING YOUR STRATEGY

Forming a strategy that promotes best practice for collaboration across the organisation is a crucial part of promoting adoption. It's important that you consider the different generations that make up your teams, workspaces they operate in and their working habits. Doing so allows you to implement the right technology which, in turn, will encourage adoption.

Optimise for user experience: Users need to find the tools you provide them simple to learn and use. Meetings must be easy to join with reliable, high-quality AV. Poor quality video or lagging audio are not acceptable.

Work beyond the meeting: True collaboration happens before, during and after the meeting. Make sure that sessions are easy to arrange or kick-off at short notice, can be easily managed in-session and that recordings, notes and whiteboards can be made available to all instantly.

Share business intelligence: Ensure that staff have fast and easy access to information, files and teammates through file sharing and presence to maximise efficiency and deliver a seamless experience.

Keep information secure: Make sure that sensitive information is kept safe both at rest and in transit so that security risks are mitigated. Do ensure you retain ownership and control of data your business and staff produce and share across any platform.

Ensure scalability: Think about the future as well as the present. Ensure that your solution has the capability to scale with your organisation quickly and easily as you grow, open new sites and become more dispersed.

CONSIDER YOUR WORKSPACES

The makeup of your workspaces is also key to a successful implementation as without a considered workspace plan, the business benefits and return on investment will be limited. Providing staff with environments that promote collaboration will allow them to get the most out of their meetings. Key considerations include:



CREATING YOUR CULTURAL SHIFT

Introducing a new collaboration solution is not just about a change in process and policy, it is about affecting a change in communications culture. User adoption is the single biggest indicator of success; when you introduce new capabilities, you must bring the users with you on the journey.

To facilitate this, you should build a transition plan that includes engagement with users from beginning to end. If stakeholders participate in the process, they are more likely to be happy with the outcome, more likely to realise the business benefits set out as project goals and will accelerate your return on investment.

In the same way that adoption is the key to success, ease of use is the key to adoption. Many of today's collaboration solutions come equipped with a wide range of features; but how many of them are being effectively exploited by users?

Surveying your users will help you understand which functions they are using and which they are not. This helps you to understand preferences, uncover difficulties and build plans that improve adoption. Moreover, this exercise shouldn't be exclusive to the start of your process; you should continue to solicit responses throughout the solution's lifetime.

Finally, you should encourage each department to nominate evangelists and super-users who will be able to demonstrate the value of your new collaboration tools and can help train their peers. Remember that not everyone learns in the same way, so try to offer a variety of training methods and materials – including visual, text and interactive sessions – to make the tools easy to learn.

The last thing you want is to invest in a sophisticated collaboration solution, one that provides all the bells and whistles, and have your employees use it like a standard telephone

TRACKING SUCCESS

Key metrics that you can use to track the success and ROI of your implementation include:

- User adoption rates
- Workforce productivity measures
- Employee satisfaction rates
- Customer satisfaction rates
- IT downtime costs (business continuity)
- Cost savings in both CAPEX and OPEX (TCO)
- Reductions in travel costs
- Carbon offsets



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