Guide to More Effective Team Collaboration and Communications

A five-step primer to help you increase efficiency and productivity

A guide from Mitel

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Mobility, the speed of communications and employee demographics have changed the business landscape. Today's market environment is always moving, continuously connected and faster than ever before. Your ability to maintain and increase your competitive advantage in this dynamic environment is determined by how well your organization adapts to the new norm. By leveraging the most advanced communications and collaboration tools, you can improve the efficiency of daily communications between employees and with customers.

New expectations require new solutions

To adapt and succeed, you must address the forces at play.

Incredible advances in mobile communications technology have served as the catalyst for change. Most people now have mobile devices that are more powerful communications tools than the desktop computers that were in every office 10 years ago. For many employees, a smartphone is the first thing they pick up in the morning and the last thing they put down at night. These devices have blurred the lines between work and play, and have made it possible for employees to work anywhere and everywhere.

As a result, your employees now expect ubiquitous connectivity that will allow them to maintain conversations with colleagues and customers at all times — whether they are in the office, at the airport or on the golf course — and with whichever device they choose. At the same time, your customers expect that they will be able to connect and conduct business with your employees using a variety of communications options — from traditional phone calls to email, text messaging, video and web chats.

These expectations are important to the Generation X and Millennials that account for two-thirds of the global workforce. They will be more important by 2020 when 50 percent of the workforce will be comprised of Millennials, the digital natives that have grown up with the web and advanced personal computing devices at their fingertips[1].

This guide outlines five steps that will help you adopt the team collaboration and communications tools that address the speed and mobility requirements of your changing workforce. With the right tools, you can enable more efficient interactions between employees and with your customers. And you can compete more effectively wherever your business takes you.

Team collaboration and communications tools increase efficiency and productivity

A 2017 study revealed that over two-thirds of an employee's work day is spent on communications-based activities[2]:

- *Almost three hours per day is spent on real-time, person-to-person communications*
- *Almost an hour and a half per day is spent on email*

The same study revealed that almost 15 percent of total work time is lost or wasted because of inefficient or ineffective communications. The study concluded that the typical cost of inefficient communications to a mid-sized organization is approximately $11,000 (USD) per employee, per year.

But it has been shown that organizations that leverage team collaboration and communications tools are more efficient, more productive and save time and money:

- *60 percent of businesses using unified communication and collaboration (UCC) report saving three hours a week per mobile worker[3]*
- *Social and team collaboration technologies can raise the productivity and interaction of workers in an organization by 20-25 percent[4]*
- *Shorter service appointments, fewer missed calls and increased customer satisfaction all result in tangible cost savings and even revenue generation[5]*

STEP 1: Identify the collaboration challenges

To get the right team collaboration and communications platform for your organization, you should first determine the challenges your employees are facing.

Consider that in today's connected world work is a continuously changing and evolving process that requires employees to collaborate to support a customer, solve a problem, measure results or improve output. Communication between employees usually takes place with a variety of applications, including emails, chats, texts, phone calls, voicemails, conference calls, video streaming and document sharing. Typically, employees have to manage each application individually to stay connected with colleagues and keep projects moving. The number of individual tools that have to be managed and the volume of messages that have to be addressed complicates the communications process, slows down collaboration, hampers decision making and reduces productivity.

Start the discovery process by asking a few key questions about how existing communications tools are affecting employee efficiency and productivity:

- *What are the major frustrations with existing communications tools?*
- *Are complaints focused around missed calls, lost connections, ease of use or a lack of integration?*
- *Are employees in your main office able to collaborate efficiently with employees in satellite offices?*

At the same time, project teams are no longer comprised of people working in the same location.

Some employees may work primarily from their desks in a traditional office setting. Some may be scattered across different offices in different countries and time zones. And others may be constantly on the move visiting customers. This makes it harder for teams to stay connected, especially if employees have to manage multiple applications to maintain workflows.

Take a close look at the communications platform you have and why it is not meeting requirements:

- *How old is the platform?*
- *Has it reached end of life?*
- *Is the platform digital or IP based?*
- *Is the vendor still able to provide service?*
- *Can the platform support the way your employees want to work in the future?*

A new team collaboration and communications platform will bring together core collaboration and communications tools into a single interface to:

- *Keep employees connected across all applications, in different locations and while on the move*
- *Enable knowledge sharing and seamless access to experts*
- *Streamline workflow*
- *Speed response times*
- *Improve the quality of decisions being made*

STEP 2: Define the capabilities and features employees need

The discovery process will reveal that your workforce includes a variety of perspectives, personal preferences and ways to work. You can ensure you get the right team collaboration and communications tools for your organization by defining the capabilities and features that are needed by different users.

The demographics of your workforce will have a major influence on what you will need. Today's younger employees have grown up using the web and advanced personal computing devices. They are comfortable leveraging technology to facilitate new ways of working. They expect flexible hours, as well as the ability to work remotely and on the move — whether it's from a coffee shop, logging into a network from another site or from a home office. And they're more than content to do all their business on a smartphone. In fact, many expect to be able to do so.

Strike the perfect balance between the needs of your employees and your organizational objectives by asking a few key questions:

- *What are the different types of employees in your organization?*
- *Do you have teams that are located in different locations?*
- *How many employees are mobile and how important is mobility to the work process?*
- *How do employees communicate and interact with their colleagues and customers?*
- *How many desktop applications do employees use, and do these applications integrate with how you do business? Are they optimized for mobile?*

- *Do employees want to be able to communicate from any device other than their desk phone? Do you need to support different mobile operating systems?*
- *Are employees asking for flexible working environments? Does legislation demand this?*
- *Have employees already expanded where they work to non-office locations?*
- *Is there an expectation that the organization will allow employees to bring their own devices?*

Having employees working from multiple locations, in different ways and at different times makes it difficult to ensure everyone is accessing and finding the same information, documents and other resources across the entire team. But team collaboration and communications platforms that leverage virtualization, the cloud and mobile technologies enable innovative working environments that are no longer tied to a physical office location. These platforms enable access to documents stored in a central database and allow employees to provide updates wherever they are, at any time and on any device so all team members always have access to the latest and greatest information.

A cloud-based platform can extend basic and advanced functionality past your company walls to mobile employees and external team members. If the platform supports a bring-your-own-device (BYOD) strategy, it will address the needs of Generation X and Millennial employees who are most comfortable with one device for their personal and business communications. As Forrester Research noted, 76 percent of organizations that implemented BYOD reported improvements in employee responsiveness and decision making[6].

The ideal solution should simplify the buying process by addressing more than just basic service requirements or the service needs of only one group. Look for an integrated solution that enables your organization to conduct business in a new way by leveraging the power of team communication and collaboration for all employees. Focus on a solution that enables you to provide basic unified communications and collaboration (UCC) capabilities for everyone and more advanced team collaboration features and functions for specific types of employees, such as mobile and remote workers.

At the core, the ideal solution will offer five key features:

1. **A single point of access** to all communications and collaborations tools, which makes it easier to address different types of users, including contact center, field services, sales, support services and administration staff.

2. **A multi-function, highly collaborative workspace** for team-based meetings, conversations and content collaboration, which can be accessed directly from desktops or mobile devices and connects teams together no matter their location.

3. **A mobile-first design**, which supports a broad portfolio of mobile devices and enables seamless pivoting across multiple devices so users can go from a document review to a conference call to an instant message at their desk and on the move.

4. **Presence information**, which, when coupled with other UCC tools (calendar access, messaging, video, etc.), allows colleagues to immediately know where their peers are and whether they are available.

5. **A single, intuitive, user-friendly interface**, which maximizes efficiency by allowing employees to access all interactions, including talk, chat, work streams, video, collaboration sessions and conferences from a single interface.

STEP 3: Select an operating model

Business requirements change over time, so your team collaboration and communications solution must adapt to your changing needs. Look for a solution that's easy to implement, administer and support — and is secure. Examine the resources and technologies you have in place and pick a team collaboration tool that is a good fit for where you are today and where you want to be tomorrow.

Based on your assessment of employee needs, decide whether it makes sense to move to a completely new platform for all your sites or just for satellite offices. Consider the flexibility and agility a move to the cloud will provide to adapt to the changing needs of your workforce and your customers. With this in mind, determine how you want to deploy the new solution:
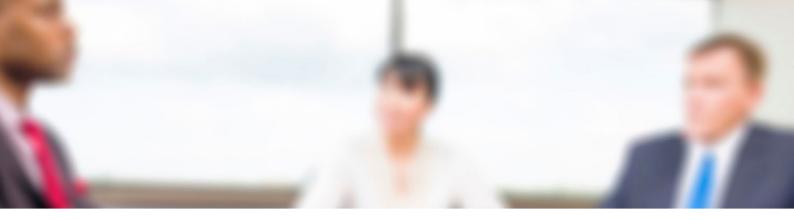
- *Do you want to purchase it outright and have it deployed in-house so it can be managed by your IT team, or do you want someone else to manage it for you in the cloud?*

- *Does a virtualized data center make sense to service all employee needs?*

- *If you are moving to the cloud, do you need a private environment, a hybrid cloud or will a public cloud provide the right balance between capabilities and cost?*

- *Should the solution be integrated into a traditional IP infrastructure or should it be migrated into a WebRTC environment?*

Beyond features, functions and capabilities, your team collaboration and communications solution should complement, not disrupt, your existing IT infrastructure.

It should easily integrate into your existing work processes, lower your total cost of ownership (TCO) and maximize your return on investment (ROI).

An integrated solution provides extensibility and scalability that enables you to add new applications as your needs change. It allows you to extend features and functions beyond your immediate needs to other areas of your business and create a collaborative enterprise environment that connects all employees — from frontline customer-facing sales and service to back-office administration and support — with the same set of tools. With everyone connected, your entire operation is more efficient and responsive to market needs and customer queries.

Once you have made the move to a collaborative enterprise operation, it is easier to extend the collaboration process beyond organizational borders. The same set of tools can be leveraged to allow customers and suppliers to interact with your business via cloud-based guest portals or WebRTC options.

STEP 4: Choose a vendor

The power of any team collaboration and communications solution you choose is determined by how well it meets your business objectives. But there is no one-size-fits-all solution for team collaboration and communications. As you wade through the various offerings, focus on solutions that provide the capabilities and features you need today, as well as the integration and ease of use that fits your operating model.

There are many vendors offering many options. Some vendors offer unified communications solutions, but may not provide the collaboration tools that integrate with those solutions. As a result, your employees only get part of the features and functions they need.

You could choose to purchase the piece parts independently and try to integrate them on-site. But this will create a solution that was not engineered to work seamlessly. Plus, your IT team will have to deal with multiple vendors and a variety of disparate support options. More importantly, your employees will still have to work with multiple applications and user interfaces. This defeats the purpose of unified communications, minimizes the impact of team collaboration tools, and creates a disjointed user experience that may not enhance work processes.

Look for a vendor with fully integrated solutions that address your immediate requirements and provide a seamless evolutionary path to more advanced features and functions when you need them. This will make it easier to keep employees connected, streamline communication, enable seamless collaboration and make interactions as effective and efficient as possible today and tomorrow.

The right vendor should be able to address a variety of requirements with purpose-built solutions for:

- *The cloud to break down team silos and consolidate diverse communications and collaboration tools into a single work stream-style experience*

- *On-premises deployment to bring together all of your team's disconnected methods of communications, collaboration and sharing into one integrated work stream*

- *Over-the-top deployment to provide teams with a secure environment where they can work together in real time to coordinate projects, events or situations with messaging, video, content sharing and real-time connectivity*

STEP 5: Manage the integration

You have decided what your employees need, you have picked a solution that fits your business objectives and operating model and you have chosen a vendor. How do you ensure that the implementation delivers the promised benefits? Create a structured integration process that allows employees to be involved and includes key checkpoints on the road to full deployment:

1. Assemble a cross-functional project team that includes representatives from sales, marketing, customer service, risk management and human resources.

2. Choose a project leader from IT to drive the project.

3. Create an implementation roadmap and timeline.

4. Identify your requirements (and nice-to-haves) for collaboration and communications and turn them into a checklist for your request for proposals (RFPs).

5. Select a cross-functional workgroup that will serve as beta users for the new solution.

6. Launch pilot programs in various departments as a way to gather user feedback.

7. Develop an implementation plan that aligns with both user requirements and broader business goals.

8. In conjunction with the HR department, establish training sessions and post technical support resources on the corporate intranet, including training materials, FAQs, user testimonials and user support forums.

9. Use "mentors" and Help Desk resources to streamline training and user adoption.

10. Add new applications incrementally, and ensure that users promote these applications internally.

11. Regularly update management on project status and any measured improvements in efficiency and productivity.

12. Maintain an ongoing dialog with users to keep them abreast of new features on the horizon.

REFERENCES

[1] *PWC reference from Team Collab for Dummies book, page 7*

[2] *"2017 Workplace Productivity and Communications Technology Report", Webtorials State-of-the-Market Report, March 2017*

[3] *Nexus study statistic from Client conversation guide; front page*

[4] *McKinsey & Co statistic from Client conversation guide; front page*

[5] *Frost & Sullivan statistic from Client conversation guide; front page*

[6] *Forrester statistic from Team Collab for Dummies book, page 26*

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