

WHITE PAPER

# IMPROVING BUSINESS OUTCOMES WITH MODERN COLLABORATION

Strategic collaboration solutions and services can help organizations meet their mission-critical objectives.



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the years leading up to 2020, business needs had already undergone dramatic changes; then the business world turned upside down. Now more than ever, company leaders and employees need reliable technology solutions that can empower them to communicate and be productive from anywhere — and these needs will continue to be pressing, even after a degree of normalcy returns to business life.

In the darkest days of the coronavirus pandemic, when leaders at many companies were unsure how to carry on

operations in a way that kept their employees safe, businesses turned to collaboration platforms. These solutions gave end-users access to features such as voice, calendar, chat and file-sharing, as well as video meetings, which suddenly became ubiquitous and necessary as employees across entire industries worked from home for months.

As they seek to optimize their collaboration environments, businesses must carefully select and adopt infrastructure, strategies and services to help them meet their specific goals.

## Collaboration in a New Era of Work

When the books are written about the first half of the 21st century, the current era will likely serve as a great dividing line. Students will learn about the "before" era: a time when remote work and collaboration tools already existed, but many enterprises continued to resist work-from-home programs, out of fear of diminished productivity or weakened corporate culture. And they will learn about the "after" times: when collaboration technologies were as central to business as the telephone was during the 20th century.

This does not mean that the physical office will disappear entirely (or even shrink significantly). But it does mean that anytime, anywhere collaboration will be an absolute must going forward, now that employees and managers have seen what is possible.

In March 2020, many organizations essentially rolled out a forced proof of concept for collaboration technologies. With employees required to work from their homes in order to comply with lockdown orders, and with no time to plan, companies had to take leaps of faith, standing up new systems and training users at the same time, unsure of the eventual results. This harried approach actually had some benefits; rather than digging in their heels and resisting the new technology, workers dived into the tools head-first, teaching themselves and their colleagues how to use collaboration platforms and discovering new ways to leverage them for mission-critical workflows. However, the overnight rollouts had some obvious downsides, including potential security vulnerabilities.

With the dust of the initial frenzy of the pandemic now settled, organizations must take a step back to assess their collaboration environments and optimize them for the future. To do that, IT and business leaders must carefully examine their current systems and workflows, as well as their business goals. Often, a

trusted third-party partner can be a valuable resource during this process — especially if internal stakeholders lack experience with multiple collaboration platforms.

Although every company's situation is unique, many organizations find themselves grappling with one of three broad problems:

1. The pandemic has taken an economic toll, and the organization is simply looking to cut costs as much as possible while still empowering employees to be productive.
2. A company is too small to have a robust IT staff, and business leaders are scrambling to find solutions that they will be able to support and maintain without employing in-house experts.
3. Over time, an enterprise has made investments in multiple collaboration platforms, and leaders are now looking for ways to consolidate or integrate these disparate solutions.

Although the business landscape has experienced tectonic shifts recently, collaboration platforms provide largely the same benefits that many organizations have been experiencing for years. The only difference today is that more business and IT leaders have come to understand just how transformative these solutions can be. As collaboration technologies have improved, organizations have changed their strategies to take advantage of

new capabilities. For example, simpler, faster, clearer and more reliable videoconferencing solutions enabled some organizations to change their work and meeting strategies, even before the coronavirus pandemic forced these changes.

Some common benefits of collaboration technologies include:

**Reduced costs:** One of the earliest, most widespread business justifications for video meetings was the opportunity to minimize travel costs. By enabling face-to-face conversations without travel, collaboration platforms have allowed many organizations to drastically cut expenses associated with



The percentage of the workforce that spends at least one day per week away from a primary office<sup>1</sup>

flying candidates to corporate headquarters for job interviews, and with periodically bringing executives together at a central physical location. The restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic have demonstrated just how many travel-intensive activities can be conducted remotely, via video. Even many industry conferences and conventions have temporarily moved to an online format.

**Greater agility:** With meetings set up more quickly and simply, work gets done faster. No more waiting for a time when everybody will all be in the office. Instead, project managers can take a quick glance at everyone's shared schedules and find days and times when all parties can connect, from wherever they're working.

**More powerful collaboration:** Being able to work with colleagues around the world more simply creates more opportunity for innovation. More than 85 percent of employees and executives say that a lack of collaboration or ineffective communication leads to workplace failures. And [according to McKinsey](#), improved internal collaboration could increase the productivity of employees' interactions by 20 to 25 percent.

**Better customer engagement:** Omnichannel connections open up new possibilities for improving the customer experience. With many organizations now offering customer channels that include chat, texting and video sessions, collaboration suites can help businesses keep pace with their competitors and deliver the sort of service experience customers have come to expect.

**Workplace flexibility:** Enabling anytime, anywhere work delivers a variety of benefits. Contrary to the conventional wisdom, many companies actually saw slight upticks in employee productivity in the early days of the pandemic, as workers proved adept at managing their own time and collaboration on their own schedules. Workplace flexibility also yields a number of benefits related to employee retention and satisfaction. [According to surveys](#), job seekers would be willing to take a salary cut of up to 8 percent in exchange for more flexible working arrangements, and about 4 out of 5 workers say they would be more loyal to their employers if they offered more workplace flexibility.

## Innovations in Collaboration

It may be difficult to remember now, but it wasn't long ago that it seemed as though video collaboration would never have its day. For decades, the technology was described as holding promise for the future, and yet it seemed for a long time that vendors might never be able to create an experience that was seamless enough to penetrate the enterprise and consumer markets. The telephone worked, after all, and it was tough for some to imagine how a technology that was (at the time) plagued with glitches and poor resolution could ever be seen as truly necessary.

It's a happy accident of timing that video solutions came into their own just as the world desperately needed them. In the years leading up to 2020, vendors had finally created tools that truly added value for users. Then, when the pandemic hit, millions of managers and employees were forced to rely on these solutions for the first time, and got a chance to see exactly what they could do.

## What Business Leaders Say About Video Collaboration

Large portions of senior business executives agree with the following statements about video collaboration:

**Video meetings are the best team communication tool for creative and collaborative tasks.**

79%

**Video meetings help drive the engagement of remote workers.**

76%

**Video meetings enhance the engagement and effectiveness of remote participants.**

75%

**Video meetings improve work/life balance for employees by allowing them to meaningfully participate in meetings wherever they are.**

74%

**Seeing remote workers via video — including where and how they work — helps traditional workers and managers develop trust in remote team members.**

72%

**Video meetings are particularly effective in enhancing the engagement and effectiveness of remote "gig" workers.**

66%

Source: Forbes Insights, "The Visual Advantage," October 2019

Here are some of the latest innovations in collaboration technologies, and how they can help businesses achieve their goals:

**Videoconferencing:** While video calls are still sometimes hampered by poor network connections when people connect from their spotty home Wi-Fi, videoconferencing is leaps ahead of where it was only a few years ago. High-definition video helps users read each other's facial expressions and nonverbal cues more easily, leading to a more lifelike experience that mimics face-to-face interaction. Additional features such as screen-sharing add even more value, making video collaboration the preferred form of communication for many business professionals.

**Cameras:** As users worked from home, most did the best they could with their laptop cameras or inexpensive webcams. However, cameras can be an important differentiator in video meetings, especially for high-level board meetings, important sales calls, training sessions and other interactions where a stationary camera might lead to a dull experience. As employees return to physical offices, many companies will likely see the need to invest in tools such as wide-angle cameras, 360-degree HD cameras and pan/tilt/zoom cameras that can focus on the action of a meeting without sacrificing resolution.

**Audio features:** Although it is an often-overlooked factor, audio quality is a critically important part of an effective

video collaboration solution. Today, enterprises can purchase microphones and speakers manufactured by vendors that have traditionally been associated with music production and recording, and then integrate these tools with their video collaboration systems. Almost as important as the tools themselves is the way they are deployed. For instance, microphones should be placed as close as possible to the people who will be speaking to enhance sound quality, and as far away as possible from electronic speakers to avoid feedback. Conference rooms should also receive professional acoustical treatments to prevent reverb and echoing.

**Displays:** While the emergence of ultra-high-definition (UHD) displays may seem like an incremental improvement over the already high quality of HD displays, the truth is that fine details matter. When people interact in person, they make all sorts of unconscious observations about other people's facial expressions that can sometimes be lost in video calls. With today's high-quality displays, meeting participants can more accurately convey their affect and their meaning.

## Video Collaboration: By the Numbers

- Among remote employees, **87 percent** say that video collaboration helps them feel more connected to their colleagues.
- More than 1 in 3 employees (**36 percent**) say they would choose the opportunity to work remotely over receiving a pay increase.
- During the COVID pandemic, **67 percent** of companies increased their spending on videoconferencing tools.
- In 2020, some videoconferencing platforms saw up to a **2,900 percent** increase in daily active users.
- Among users of video collaboration solutions, **89 percent** say that the tools reduce the time required to complete projects or tasks.
- By 2023, the market for video collaboration technology will be **\$13.8 billion**.
- Nearly all (**94 percent**) of business stakeholders say that video collaboration improves productivity.
- Video collaboration can reduce travel costs by **30 percent**.
- Companies report cost savings of up to **\$11,000** per year for each employee using video collaboration tools.
- Employees themselves can save between **\$2,000 to \$7,000** per year on travel and other expenses via videoconferencing.
- **90 percent** of Fortune 500 companies use multiple videoconferencing platforms.

Source: uctoday.com, "[Must Have Video Conferencing Statistics 2020](#)," July 27, 2020

**Backgrounds:** A background image on a video call may seem unimportant — but, as knowledge workers with messy living rooms and home offices across the country will attest, a smart-looking background can make the difference between a meeting that feels professional and one that seems slapped together. Virtual backgrounds are sufficient for most meetings, but fabric or paper backwalls are small investments that create a nice touch.

**Collaboration software:** For many organizations, videoconferencing was the feature that led to their wholesale adoption of collaboration technology. However, collaboration suites have far more to offer, including calendar integration, meeting transcription, virtual meetings, noise reduction, chat, voice commands and artificial intelligence. With many features integrated in a single solution, users can easily and instantly escalate interactions as necessary. Organizations that can help their employees effectively leverage such collaboration tools will position their users for success.

**Data and document sharing:** When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, many organizations found that their on-premises file shares overwhelmed their VPN connections. Companies can modernize their files by moving data to cloud collaboration solutions, giving employees instant access to data from wherever they're working. Even within organizations that have already invested in collaboration platforms, some employees may continue to engage in legacy workflows and processes; for example, burning large files to CDs and sending them through the mail. Technology training can encourage adoption and help ensure that all employees are using the data and document sharing features of collaboration tools in ways that add value to the business.

**Data analytics:** Through data analytics, organizations can get real-time information about when and how employees are using collaboration solutions. These tools give visibility down to the user level, helping IT departments and managers better understand who is (and who isn't) using new tools, allowing them to either offer additional assistance or pull back resources to optimize the collaboration environment.

**Customer engagement centers:** Collaboration tools make it simpler than ever for companies to offer multiple, integrated channels in their customer engagement centers (sometimes called call centers or contact centers). Many customers now expect retailers and other companies they interact with to offer support not only via voice, but also through text, webchat, video and other channels.

## Strategies for Modern Collaboration

Business and IT leaders have a wealth of options available to them when it comes to collaboration technologies. With so many options available, it can be tempting to think that enabling effective collaboration requires nothing more than simply purchasing an off-the-shelf software suite and rolling it out to employees. However, different businesses will need to deploy and manage different solutions in different ways, depending on their business goals. Organizations must deploy the appropriate



infrastructure to support their collaboration environments, take strategic steps to ready their organizations for change and consider value-added services that will help to ensure the success of their efforts.

Often, a trusted third-party partner can help organizations to optimize their collaboration environments.

### Infrastructure

Getting infrastructure right starts with assessing the current environment and establishing the needs of the business.

When assessing existing infrastructure and establishing goals for the future, IT teams should consider factors such as security posture, network connectivity and storage needs. Perhaps even more important, leaders need to assess how people are currently working and where opportunities might be found to fill gaps between existing workflows and the business's desired end state. It is important to assess existing workspaces (both home and office) and to consider how workflows have already changed in recent years, as a careful consideration of these factors will minimize disruption to the organization. Application planning is another important decision, and organizations should spend as much time as

# 54%

The percentage of companies identified as "digital transformation leaders" that cite user experience as one of the most important considerations guiding their future software investments<sup>2</sup>

possible selecting the right solution. Often, managers have a tendency to select tools from vendors they're already familiar with, and these may or may not be the best solutions for the organization's particular problems and business needs. It's essential to consider all of these issues holistically, rather than taking a piecemeal approach.

As with all infrastructure decisions, organizations must decide whether to invest in on-premises or public cloud resources. In some instances, organizations may be able to shrink their on-premises footprint; for example, by moving data from an onsite file share into a collaboration platform.

### Strategic Steps

While the appropriate software and infrastructure are necessary for improving collaboration within an organization, they are not sufficient. True collaboration requires cultural change, starting with buy-in and full-throated endorsement from management, which will eventually lead to a top-to-bottom embrace of new technologies and workflows. It's not enough to simply offer a few training sessions. The organizations that see the most success in their collaboration rollouts are those that invest in internal marketing and communication around adoption. Training should be highly tailored, giving end users insight into how they can use the new collaboration tools to become more effective in their specific jobs. At the same time, IT staff must receive training that empowers them to best support end users.

It's important for organizations to establish metrics for success early on, and then commit to a plan to track and improve those metrics over time. By identifying key performance indicators (KPIs) for their collaboration environments, business and IT leaders can be confident that their collaboration initiatives are meeting the organization's goals, and they can make tweaks based on data around usage and other factors.

### Services

Often overlooked by organizations rolling out collaboration technologies, third-party services can be a critical factor in driving the effectiveness of such implementations. Service engagements not only bring much-needed expertise and an outside perspective to collaboration efforts but they also prevent internal IT staffers from becoming overburdened by the combined workload of their day-to-day tasks and a monumental new initiative.

CDW offers a number of engagements — from envisioning to ongoing management — to help organizations succeed at every step of the process:

**Envisioning:** During the envisioning stage, CDW's experts help company stakeholders align their business goals with an outcome-based collaboration strategy. This is the step where managers identify the "Big Why" guiding their collaboration efforts, and ensure that the organization is able to ultimately

## The Future of the Workplace

Collaboration technologies are likely to have an even greater impact on business as companies keep remote work policies in place as the coronavirus pandemic wanes. According to survey data, the post-COVID world will see a continuation of widespread remote work, although many business leaders say they don't foresee a significant reduction in the size of their physical office space.

- **61 percent** of survey respondents say that employees will be able to choose to work "fluidly" in the future, moving between remote locations and the physical office, compared with only **42 percent** that had such policies in place pre-pandemic.
- **25 percent** say that employees will be able to choose to work from home full time, compared with only **10 percent** before the pandemic.
- Previously, **36 percent** said that employees had "no choice" over where they worked. Going forward, that number will shrink to just **6 percent**.
- Only **13 percent** of respondents say they expect the importance of their physical office to "decrease significantly" in the future, while **41 percent** expect a "slight decrease."

Source: CBRE Research, "[2020 Global Occupier Sentiment Survey: The Future of the Office](#)," 2020

determine whether new solutions are helping them meet their most pressing business needs.

**Success planning:** Once CDW's experts have helped an organization identify the goals it's trying to achieve, they can provide advice about which specific solutions are best suited to achieve them. This is a step where outside advice is especially useful, as CDW's solution architects have seen countless enterprises deploy virtually every major collaboration platform, and have witnessed the results firsthand.

**Success orchestration:** CDW's solution architects and project managers can help implement and orchestrate new

technologies, preventing common configuration problems. This ensures that employees are set up for success from the first day, and project goals and target dates are met.

**Manage and measure:** Finally, CDW can help organizations to track, manage, optimize and enhance solutions over time. A collaboration effort shouldn't be considered "finished" when the rollout is complete, even if the new technology is working as expected to empower employees to communicate and collaborate, and is meeting all of the organization's initial goals. Businesses that see the most success with their collaboration efforts are those that continue to set the bar higher as new technologies and ways of working present themselves.

### CDW: We Get Collaboration

In an ever-changing world where new communication and collaboration tools are available every day, it is important for business and IT leaders to have a partner that understands the entire collaboration landscape and how different tools might help them to meet their specific needs. CDW offers:

**Expert knowledge and industry-leading partnerships:** CDW's solution architects have deep, cross-industry experience with all major collaboration platforms. They have seen firsthand how organizations use collaboration technologies to meet their business goals, and where organizations struggle during the implementation, adoption and management stages.

**Customized solutions for your business:** Organizations that partner with CDW for their collaboration initiatives do not receive one-size-fits-all solutions. Rather, CDW's solution architects work closely with business and IT leaders to understand their current infrastructure and design a foundational telephony, videoconferencing and messaging solution that will make use of past investments while also creating a modern, future-proof framework that will promote efficiency and user connectivity.

**End-to-end support:** An effective collaboration doesn't start — or end — when the technology is purchased. CDW helps organizations every step of the way, from assessment and design to implementation, adoption and ongoing management.

### CDW Amplified™ Services

CDW Amplified™ Workspace services employ a comprehensive approach that enables employees to work from anywhere, on any device.



#### DESIGN Platforms

Our design and planning workshops help you align your business goals and needs to create an outcome-based collaboration strategy based on end-user satisfaction.



#### ORCHESTRATE Connectivity

Our certified experts help you create an implementation plan, deploy your fully configured solutions and help ensure adoption success among employees.



#### MANAGE Collaboration

Our certified experts provide 24/7/365 support and routinely track, measure and optimize your digital workspace solutions to help you exceed business goals.

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