

The Power of Collaboration in the Workplace

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Enterprises that focus on improving collaboration inevitably face some employees who resist changes to the digital and physical components of the workplace. They dislike the idea of open workspaces and collaboration using video and chat. Overcoming resistance requires listening to employees throughout the transition and following a clear organization change management (OCM) plan.

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THE POWER OF COLLABORATION IN THE WORKPLACE

SUMMARY & KEY INSIGHTS

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PERSPECTIVE

For the recent ISG study [Creating the Workplace of the Future](#), ISG talked with 30 enterprises about the workplace. In this cross-industry, cross-region study, we heard the term “collaboration” more often than any other. Since collaboration is critical to innovation, enterprises seeking to attract the best talent and remain competitive are consciously and regularly re-evaluating how employees work together. This working together embodies several elements – the physical workspace, technology and enterprise culture. Our study found enterprises transforming in each of these areas in the spirit of being lighter on their feet and attracting the very best talent. Here is how business leaders consider the elements playing a role in today’s definition of collaboration:

- **Physical workspace.** Enterprises are evaluating and expanding “open plan” workspaces to improve collaboration and increase project velocity and agility. Enterprises also are increasingly likely to condone remote working, including working from home.
- **Technologies.** Enterprises consider chat, videoconferencing and enterprise social networks as a key component of their collaboration efforts.



- **Culture.** Enterprises are seeking to meet employee needs regardless of seniority or level and are creating policies that support workspaces and technologies that fit the task at hand.

We find that IT, HR, and facilities executives who have seen open, collaborative workspaces perform well elsewhere are more likely to push for them at organizations with more traditional offices. These initiatives often face resistance from employees without such positive experiences. What's most critical, though, is that employees want workspaces and technologies that fit the task at hand. When they need to collaborate, employees seek easily accessible meeting spaces with electronic whiteboards and audio-visual capabilities that support rather than hinder working together.

After years of discussion about whether cloud environments are suitable for enterprise workloads, it's clear now that, for most organizations, adoption of the public cloud is a matter of how and when, rather than if. In this study, we noted an almost-universal move by large enterprises to cloud-based office tools for email, word processing, presentations, spreadsheets and team collaboration. The large enterprises we interviewed rely on Microsoft Office 365 as their primary collaboration suite.

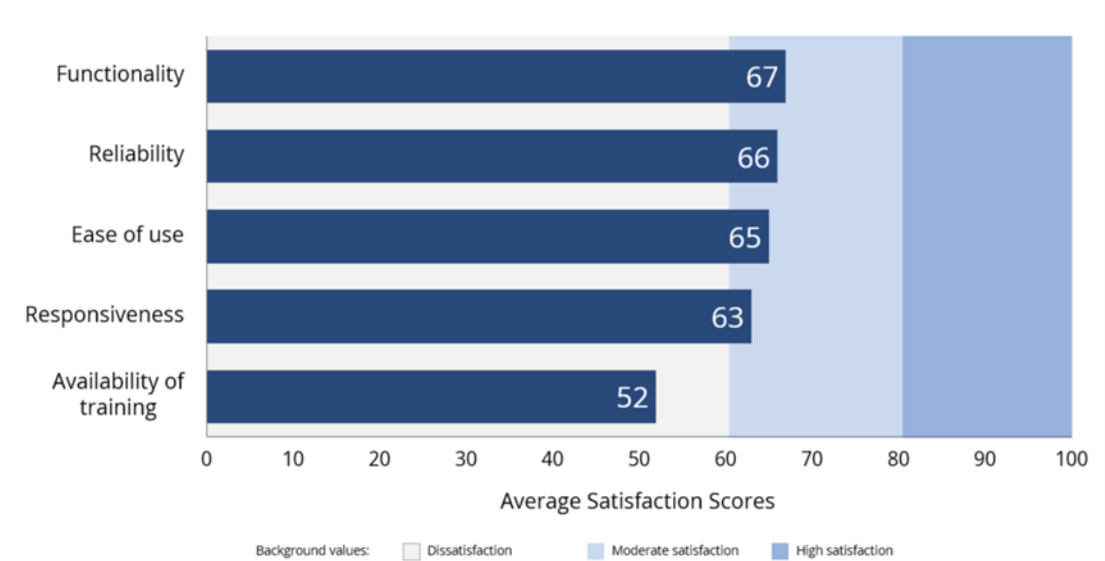
To enable enterprise-wide collaboration, however, enterprises are allowing non-Microsoft tools as additions to Office components, not as replacements. Additions to Microsoft Office include alternatives for file sharing (i.e., Box Inc.'s Box and Dropbox, Inc.'s Dropbox), meetings (i.e., Cisco's WebEx), social intranets (i.e., Atlassian's Confluence), team collaboration (i.e., Slack Technologies's Slack), project management (i.e., Atlassian's Trello) and video collaboration (i.e., Zoom Video Communications's Zoom and BlueJeans Network's BlueJeans). These most used enterprise collaboration solutions integrate with each other and Office 365.

All the enterprises we spoke with have implemented chat, videoconferencing and enterprise social networks as a key part of their collaboration efforts. With workforces becoming increasingly global, these digital tools are critical for a company to produce consistent results. However, technology alone will not solve problems that are caused by a culture or incentive structure that is out of line with collaboration goals.

The enterprises we interviewed said that, while collaboration tools are critical, they often fall short. While some face a lack of standard services and equipment, the biggest frustration among interviewees is a lack of understanding among employees about how to use the tools. ISG UserX™ measures the efficacy of video, audio and web conferencing along five criteria. Among those measured, the availability of training scores consistently lower than the other metrics (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Satisfaction with Video, Audio and Web Conferencing



Source: ISG UserX Benchmarking Database, 50 largest global organizations, 2015-2019

IMPACT AND GUIDANCE

To create a collaborative environment that returns value requires, well, collaboration. As we’ve shown, improved collaboration involves the integration of workspaces, technologies and policies. It follows then that IT, real estate management and HR are the three organizational pillars of workplace strategy development. For example, conference room technologies have the most significant impact when they focus on improved meetings with proper training, better room scheduling, a variety of room sizes, flexible setup, and easy accessibility and wayfinding.

Those that have already implemented open workspaces told us that hybrid workspaces that provide a combination of open and private areas allow workers to select the best environment for them at a given time. Here again is the need for collaboration of IT, facilities and HR. By evaluating people, technology, and space configurations at the same time, enterprises can more likely meet corporate objectives while accommodating a diverse collection of employees. As part of planning, enterprises should perform a thorough analysis of data showing office and meeting room usage and traffic flow of workday employees. Such data can be collected using scheduling programs as well as presence sensors in rooms and on furniture.

While adding disparate collaboration tools to a core enterprise collaboration suite provides flexibility, it also conveys risk. In advisory engagements with clients, we see employees overwhelmed at the large number of software/collaboration tools available



to them. Such tools are rolled out but not always with the necessary communication, training and support. This leads to the need for:

- Consolidation of various conferencing platforms
- A standard approach across the business to ensure all departments can talk seamlessly to each other
- Clearer guidelines about how and when to use each tool
- Further training to better leverage the available tools

Though it makes sense for enterprises to expand the number and variety of tools available, they must do so according to a measured plan. That plan involves talking with employees to understand their specific needs and frustrations without jumping on the latest trends in office space, technology and policies.

And, while enterprises see certain benefits from more egalitarian workplace services, many struggle with implementing them. Shifting to open office spaces without proper change management, for example, can create distractions for employees. Meanwhile, executives are accustomed to certain workplace perks. Reaching a steady state for an enterprise requires pulling together the right strategic team that includes HR, IT, and facilities / real estate management. To see the entire ISG Insights study report with more details on this and related topics, see [Creating the Workplace of the Future](#).