Selecting the Right Collaboration Tools for Your Environment

HOW TO CHOOSE THE RIGHT COLLABORATION TECHNOLOGY FOR YOUR ENVIRONMENT

Overview

Businesses of all sizes recognize the importance of internal and external collaboration. Collaborating internally builds teamwork, increases productivity and improves business processes. External collaboration reduces travel costs, strengthens customer relationships, improves supply chain management and gives access to specialist skills and resources.

The benefits of collaboration are clear, but many businesses are unsure which technology and equipment best support different forms of collaboration. The selection of available tools has grown because advances in communication technology means meetings and conference calls are no longer tied to the fixed equipment of the boardroom. Collaboration now can take place in any location, at any time, on any device - fixed or mobile.

This guide identifies and explains the variety of available solutions and how they fit into the different workspaces and collaboration needs within an organization.

This guide explains the important role Unified Communications plays in collaboration, the collaboration benefits of Skype for Business and how it supports total collaboration in any organization and for any workspace.

Collaboration is Important

Collaboration is key to improving competitive advantage by building relationships and improving business processes. These are just some of the benefits it delivers:

- Builds teamwork
- Supports remote working
- Creates a better working environment
- Increases productivity
- Makes best use of organizational skills
- Brings in external skills and resources
- Improves decision-making
- Supports effective supply chain management
- Improves project management
- Enhances customer service
- Improves sales results
- Strengthens customer relationships

BUILDS TEAMWORK

The right collaboration tools help break down traditional barriers between departments. This enables employees to work on multidisciplinary teams that combine the best skills and resources. A team-based culture helps all employees work toward the same company objectives, rather than separate departmental objectives.

SUPPORTS REMOTE WORKING

By eliminating the problem of distance, collaboration solutions enable employees who work from home or other locations to participate fully, creating an inclusive collaborative culture for all employees.

CREATES A BETTER WORKING ENVIRONMENT

Employees expect businesses to provide a stimulating and collaborative work environment with the technology to support it. A collaborative culture creates an attractive workplace, helping businesses recruit and retain the best employees.

IMPROVES PRODUCTIVITY

Collaboration tools enable employees to work productively and efficiently by saving time in setting up meetings and eliminating travel time. This helps drive improved performance throughout the organization.

MAKES BEST USE OF ORGANIZATIONAL SKILLS

With the right collaboration tools, employees can share information, knowledge and expertise with colleagues. They can request help or knowledge, or offer their own expertise, which could be useful to others.

BRINGS IN EXTERNAL SKILLS AND RESOURCES

By collaborating with external partners such as universities, suppliers, research groups and customers, businesses can bring in additional skills to supplement their internal resources.

IMPROVES DECISION-MAKING

Efficient collaboration tools make it easy for employees to obtain the essential information or feedback they need to make informed, balanced decisions that take account of all important views.

SUPPORTS EFFECTIVE SUPPLY CHAIN MANAGEMENT

Efficient supply chain management requires collaboration to reach critical decisions. When a sudden change in business conditions triggers changes in demand, collaboration tools help all members of the supply chain to share information and agree on a response.

IMPROVES PROJECT MANAGEMENT

The Project Management Institute found that project teams with high levels of collaboration, communication and flexibility achieve better project outcomes than teams without those attributes. The right collaboration tools can add the communications agility, reach and flexibility to help businesses derive the full benefits of project management.

ENHANCES CUSTOMER SERVICE

Quality customer service is essential to business survival and success, and collaboration tools can help agents and service representatives in the field deliver the highest standards of customer care. Agents can bring in specialists to handle complex issues and engineers can obtain advice and support to complete a difficult task or diagnose a complex problem.

IMPROVES SALES RESULTS

Collaboration between sales and marketing teams can help to improve the results of sales and marketing campaigns and increase revenue. The right tools make it easier to collaborate and share content and other market information, leading to faster sales closing times, increased revenue and lower cost per sale.

STRENGTHENS CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIPS

Working closely with customers helps businesses build strong, long-term relationships, rather than concentrate on short-term sales. The right collaboration tools support regular communication on day-to-day business issues, or closer project working on joint product development, cost reduction or streamlined administrative programs.

Collaboration is Changing

The previous scenarios highlight the importance of giving employees throughout the organization the right collaboration tools. It's essential to understand that collaboration tools are no longer restricted to executives in the boardroom – they can help all employees improve their performance and productivity. And, collaboration is becoming an integral part of many strategic business processes.

It's not just the role and extent of collaboration that's changing. Video and other tools are transforming the way people work together. Collaboration no longer requires a dedicated environment like a boardroom or conference room.

Collaboration can take place any time, any place on any device. And, smartphones, desk phones, laptops, and personal computers are as important to collaboration as conference phones or video installations.

A collaboration workspace can be whatever participants want it to be. For some, it could be a desktop or a coffee shop with Wi-Fi. Others take to small huddle rooms or sophisticated immersive studios. There's a difference in scale, but the objective is the same – to let people work together effectively.

Collaboration style is changing too. For the millennial generation which is familiar with technology and social networks, a more informal style is replacing the more structured type of meeting found in boardrooms and conference rooms.

But, whatever the style, face-to-face contact is increasingly important and affordable video solutions are bringing the technology to every workspace. Communication tools also make it

easy for participants to share content, helping teams make faster, and more informed decisions.

COLLABORATION WORKSPACES

Trends like that are helping bring down the barriers to collaboration that existed in the past. A 2014 survey by research analysts Quocirca found that a number of factors contributed to these barriers:

- Limited application of collaboration tools due to high costs of dedicated facilities
- Restriction by job title to executives and senior managers
- Inconvenient location in boardrooms or dedicated conference rooms
- Support requirements because of system complexity, reliability and compatibility issues

The latest generation of collaboration solutions eliminate most of those barriers by taking collaboration tools out of the conference room and making them accessible to any employee. With easy-to-use, affordable solutions available for smartphones, personal computers, laptops, tablets, conference phones, and desktop phones with screens, collaboration is a practical reality for any employee, wherever they happen to be working.

This flexibility means that collaboration can take place in many different workspaces. However, it's important to choose collaboration tools that are right for each environment. Size of business is not a limiting factor. Small and medium businesses use similar workspaces to large enterprises. The only difference is scale.

The most common collaboration workspaces include:

- Personal space
- Huddle rooms
- Teaming space
- Conference room
- Executive suite/Boardroom
- Immersive studio

PERSONAL WORKSPACE

Individuals can take part in audio or video conferences at their desk, on the road, at home or any other location. They can join from fixed or mobile devices with suitable screens and conferencing software. For employees who are regular collaborators, a hands free device like the Polycom Communicator PC Speakerphone makes a versatile collaboration tool. This is a suitable collaboration environment for businesses that support BYOD (Bring your own device) programs, which give employees greater choice.

HUDDLE ROOM

A huddle room is a small room for meetings of up to six people, generally with a table and chairs. Huddle rooms are ideal for the informal style of meetings that are increasingly popular. For smaller businesses without dedicated conference rooms, they make an ideal meeting space.

Participants can use their personal devices to share content or connect with remote participants. For audio calls with remote members, teams can use a table-top conference phone like the Polycom RealPresence Trio. In more sophisticated huddle rooms, teams can use a simple video solution like the Polycom RealPresence Trio Visual + to enable all team members to collaborate face-to-face with remote contacts.

TEAMING SPACE

A teaming space is an informal meeting area. It doesn't have to be a room and it may not have

furniture or collaboration facilities. Like huddle rooms, teaming spaces are suitable for informal or ad-hoc meetings.

Participants can share or connect with remote contacts via personal devices. If the teaming space is in a permanent location, team members can use a device like the Polycom RealPresence Centro, which creates a collaborative circle that gives all participants equality of contribution regardless of where they are located.

CONFERENCE ROOM

Conference rooms provide a dedicated area for meetings of 7 – 16 people. This is the traditional resource for collaboration and is an ideal environment for project groups or management teams working in a more formal style.

Conference rooms are generally equipped with permanent audio-visual equipment to ensure that all participants can be seen and heard clearly. The Polycom RealPresence Group 500 is an example of a solution that supports video and audio conferencing, and interactive content collaboration. In meetings with larger numbers of participants, additional microphones may be necessary to ensure audio clarity.

EXECUTIVE SUITE/BOARDROOM

Like the conference room, the boardroom or executive suite is a dedicated room for formal board or executive meetings and collaboration with remote colleagues or other parties.

These rooms are equipped with higher-specification audio-visual equipment, conference phones and multiple microphones to ensure optimum top audio and video quality. The Polycom RealPresence Group 700 is an example of a system designed for this exacting environment. It supports multiple cameras,

microphones and content sources to give greater flexibility and assured quality.

IMMERSIVE STUDIO

An immersive studio is a dedicated enterprise resource with a sophisticated audio and video installation and arrays of large format video and content screens.

This environment is suitable for large video conference meetings with remote groups where realistic face-to-face contact is essential. Solutions like the Polycom RealPresence Immersive Studio aim to create an environment where participants from different locations feel like they are in the same room.

Collaborate Anywhere, Anytime On Any Device

While the focus in those workspaces is on easy collaboration through channels like audio or video conferencing, there are many other simpler forms of collaboration that work in any environment and on any device.

Collaboration doesn't mean employees have to arrange a meeting every time. It can take many forms:

- **Instant Message and Chat** – when employees only need a quick response to a question or an update on a project from a colleague or a team.
- **Text Messages** – also suitable for a quick response or update. Text is a convenient channel when users need to reach colleagues in another meeting where a voice call is difficult.
- **Voice Calls** – more important when individuals need to have a detailed discussion with a colleague.

▪ **Meetings** – when a number of participants are involved and they need to hold detailed discussions or share content.

With traditional communications systems, employees could access all those channels, but they would need to use separate devices and keep checking back for a response.

A solution like Skype for Business solves that problem by providing a single platform for all communication channels. This Unified Communication solution is available on any device and that makes it easy to collaborate in the most efficient way, from any location. Checking responses is simpler too because all messages go into a single inbox.

Polycom is a long-term partner of Skype for Business and supports direct integration of Skype for Business and Polycom room solutions. This partnership extends the collaboration benefits of Skype for Business to all workspaces and provides an end-to-end solution for all environments.

Tools for Any Type of Meeting

The range of collaboration tools available make it possible to choose the most appropriate and convenient format to meet any meeting objective.

VOICE

Audio conferencing is suitable for simple forms of collaboration when face-to-face contact and content sharing are not essential. Meetings are quick and simple to arrange from any location on desk phones, mobiles or conference phones.

CONTENT SHARING

The ability to share content takes collaboration up a level from voice conferencing and is important for team working, project management and customer meetings. Participants can view, review and update content including documents, reports, presentations, models and images, helping them share or present information and make better decisions.

Content sharing is available on desk phones or conference phones with screens, and on smartphones with conferencing apps. The Polycom RealPresence Trio Visual +, for example, enables smaller groups to share content without the cost or complexity of more sophisticated solutions.

VIDEO

Video conferencing is the collaboration tool of choice when face-to-face contact essential. Participants can use audio, video and content-sharing features for a richer collaboration experience.

Video conferencing is now a practical reality for any size of meeting in any workspace with simple table-top solutions like Polycom RealPresence Trio Visual + or sophisticated conference room systems like Polycom RealPresence Group 500.

Selecting the Right Tools

With the right tools, every employee can collaborate with colleagues or contacts outside the organization. To select the right tools for your environment and your business needs, we recommend the following procedure.

▪ Identify suitable meetings spaces
▪ Assess the types of collaboration essential to your organization – voice, content or video

- Identify the location of participants
- Assess type of content needed
- Discuss solution requirements with vendors
- Arrange training after implementation

Solution information

If you would like information on any of the solutions referenced in this guide, click for more information.

- Polycom RealPresence Trio
- Polycom RealPresence Trio Visual +
- Polycom RealPresence Group 500
- Polycom RealPresence Group 700
- Polycom RealPresence Immersive Studio
- Polycom RealPresence Centro
- Polycom Communicator PC Speakerphone
- Skype for Business

About Polycom

Polycom helps organizations unleash the power of human collaboration. More than 415,000 companies and institutions worldwide defy distance with video, voice and content solutions from Polycom. Polycom and its global partner ecosystem provide flexible collaboration solutions for any environment that deliver the best user experience and unmatched investment protection.

Polycom, Inc.
1.800.POLYCOM
www.polycom.com