



making sense of the  
connected world

# Success in the New World of Work Starts with a Digital Collaboration Strategy



## Work Is Changing

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a dramatic impact on the way people work. Sustained stay-at-home orders worldwide have forced organizations to contend not only with enabling remote working by equipping employees with the necessary technology, but also with how this shift affects the way people work outside a traditional office environment.

With the arrival of Covid-19 vaccines, attention is turning to what the experiences of the past year will mean for the future of work and the actions businesses must take now to ensure their long-term strength and viability.

One thing seems certain: flexible working is here to stay. The new vaccines bring cautious optimism that employees will be able to start returning to offices by the end of 2021. However, many business leaders expect remote working to continue to play an important long-term role in their

organizations: 34% of companies expect more than half of their workforce to work from home for three or more days per week after the pandemic, according to CCS Insight's Senior Leadership IT Investment Survey, 2020, compared with just 15% prior to the crisis.

# 34%

of businesses expect more than half of their employees to work mainly from home after the pandemic





# 37%

of businesses plan to invest in collaboration solutions in the next 12 months

## Hybrid Work Is the “New Normal”

In addition to meeting demands from employees for increased flexibility in how and where they work, this new hybrid-working reality brings opportunities for businesses as they accelerate their workplace transformation efforts.

However, it also presents challenges for IT leaders tasked with providing the right tools to support a more agile and resilient organization when its workforce is increasingly distributed. Security concerns — long a top priority for IT leaders — are only exacerbated by the shift to remote working, with employees no longer safely secured inside the company network. New strategies are needed to enable companies to embrace change, and to ensure business continuity while allowing for future

growth. Yet as the world of work is becoming increasingly complex, IT organizations are finding themselves under greater pressure to achieve more with less.

## Transformation through IT Investment

Technology is inevitably a cornerstone of enabling the future of work. Despite economic pressures, 63% of business leaders expect to expand their investment in IT in the next 12 months, according to CCS Insight’s survey research. Furthermore, 37% plan to invest in collaboration technology in the coming year, as they seek to build business resiliency and agility toward sustainable long-term growth.

This report examines the role that enterprise collaboration technology can play in workplace transformation strategies, and offers recommendations for business leaders to maximize the success of their initiatives.

## Priorities for Business Leaders in the New World of Work

### Enabling Effective Teamwork and Productivity

At the heart of every company's success is its workforce — enabling employees to work together effectively and productively to meet the needs of customers and achieve business goals. During the pandemic, many organizations have realized that their long-established processes break down when employees are dispersed, and tools such as e-mail are insufficient for effective collaboration when the business needs to move quickly. When information is locked in people's inboxes, it creates silos that inhibit transparency and visibility into how work is progressing.

# 33%

of employees cite a lack of social interaction with colleagues as a major challenge of remote work



Video meeting software has been embraced as a substitute for in-person meetings, but employees increasingly suffer video fatigue from spending many — often unnecessary — hours in meetings each day. Almost a fifth (18%) of participants in CCS Insight's Employee Workplace Technology Survey, 2020 complained of too many video meetings when working remotely, with this group spending on average more than three hours in video calls each day. Remote working is expected to remain a long-term reality as part of business operations, so these problems will remain a concern even as employees return to offices.

### Maintaining Employee Engagement and the Corporate Culture

One of the biggest challenges for businesses as they shift to a highly distributed, hybrid working scenario is keeping employees engaged and connected with the organization and its strategic goals. An engaged workforce is more productive because employees feel a shared sense of purpose and a shared understanding of the organization's goals, leading to better results.

Corporate communication strategies, strong and progressive leadership, and a culture of openness, transparency and community are critical to fostering high levels of employee engagement. Technology plays an increasingly important role in facilitating this type of culture, particularly where organizations are widely distributed.

Social interaction between employees is also increasingly in the spotlight. CCS Insight's research shows that this is the biggest challenge facing employees working from home, with 33% citing a lack of social contact with colleagues as one of their primary challenges in working remotely. This lack of connection is not only felt at a peer level: 22% of remote employees also feel more disconnected from what is going on across the company.

Employees' satisfaction and motivation hinge on their ability to build and maintain rewarding social and professional relationships within the business. This also helps to create a sense

# 38%

of IT leaders identify ease of use or employee preference as a leading factor in collaboration tool selection

of unity and to connect different parts of the business, enabling teams to share knowledge and solve problems more quickly.

In a remote or hybrid working environment, in which social interaction is less likely to happen naturally, businesses need to find new ways to facilitate and encourage informal conversations and social community building, not only for the well-being of their employees but also for effective team working. This is particularly important for helping newcomers settle in and build a rapport with their colleagues, whom they may not have the opportunity to meet in person.

## Improving the Employee Experience

It is critical to equip employees with the tools they need to get their work done, whether they are in the office or working remotely. Having supplied newly remote workers with laptops and remote access to applications at the start of the pandemic, companies are now turning their attention to giving employees a better experience with their workplace technology, in an effort to maximize their effectiveness wherever they are working.

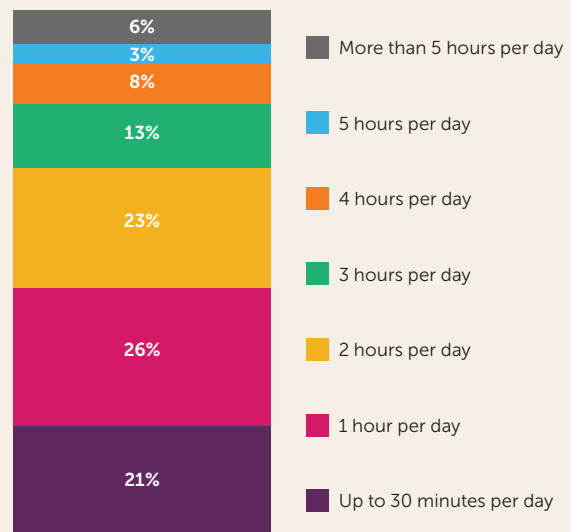
Employee experience has become a principal indicator for IT business leaders, with 38% of leaders identifying ease of use or employee preference as a leading factor in collaboration tool selection, according to CCS Insight survey research. Thanks to their familiarity with consumer tools, employees have increasingly high expectations for the usability of technology,

and they demand business tools that make their jobs easier and more enjoyable.

This experience of workplace technology is compounded by the complex IT environment that employees now face in their everyday tasks. With tools for communication and productivity, core business processes and corporate administration, employees find themselves constantly switching between applications to get things done, inhibiting their productivity and making for a frustrating user experience.

Furthermore CCS Insight's survey shows employees spend an average of 2.1 hours per day on simple, repetitive tasks, limiting their capacity to do more meaningful work and negatively influencing their experience and satisfaction at work. In the financial services sector, a fifth of employees dedicate more than four hours of their day to this type of work.

## 79% OF EMPLOYEES WASTE MORE THAN AN HOUR A DAY ON REPETITIVE TASKS



Source: CCS Insight Employee Workplace Technology Survey, 2020



For employers, this affects employee retention and the ability to attract new talent; 76% of employees in the survey said that a good workplace technology experience plays an important role in their decision about a prospective new employer.

Employees rely on technology even more to remain connected and productive in a hybrid working environment. This reliance, combined with the added complexity for employers of supporting employees' IT set-ups in their homes, means that employee experience is becoming an increasingly important strategic priority for businesses.

## The Solution: A Digital Collaboration Strategy

CCS Insight believes that a digital collaboration strategy underpinned by a cloud-based, secure enterprise collaboration solution can address these needs. Best-in-class tools offer a

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breadth of capabilities that connect and enable a hybrid workforce, improving its efficiency and creating a flexible, scalable and secure platform to support an open and engaging corporate culture.

### A Digital Office for Collaboration and Teamwork

The cornerstone of modern, cloud-based collaboration solutions is the provision of a virtual shared platform for chat-based team communication and deep engagement with work. This "digital office" becomes the place where

conversations and decisions happen, organized around specific projects, initiatives or programs.

By moving these discussions out of e-mail and into a shared, collaborative online platform, everyone on a team, regardless of their location, can keep track of progress and priorities. The result is improved transparency and alignment and less time spent in formal meetings for status updates and project coordination. For organizations looking to move to a more flexible, agile approach driven by outcomes, this allows teams to monitor progress without disrupting the flow of work.

The benefits of an open and centralized collaborative platform stretch beyond improving efficiencies in project-based work. This approach also breaks down information silos by creating an audit trail of decisions, capturing the rationale and the participants in those decisions and enabling the platform to become a self-maintaining and searchable knowledge repository. Keeping records of each project and the role of its participants is also incredibly valuable for new members of a team, allowing them to get up to speed more quickly and understand the broader team dynamics and their opportunities to contribute.

## Enabling Social Engagement and Community Building

In addition to enabling project-based work, enterprise collaboration tools provide a platform for corporate communication, meeting employees where they get their work done, rather than depending on them to search out the information on a corporate intranet, for example. Collaboration tools also allow employees to interact with each other and connect informally through chat or video calls, providing the vital points of contact between team members (or between managers and their team) that help to build confidence and

trust. As workplace demographics shift, there is also growing demand for tools that meet the expectations of younger users and facilitate communication between generations.

Rich user profiles become increasingly important to help employees get to know their peers, and support for features such as emojis and GIFs in chats allows for informal conversations and conveying individual personalities. These are important features in helping colleagues build genuine relationships with people they may have never met face-to-face.

Groups of employees can establish their own grass-roots communities of interest in professional and social topics on the platform, helping forge relationships that span the business. As well as encouraging knowledge-sharing and peer support, this breaks down departmental silos to create a more networked organization, allowing employees to get faster answers to questions. It also enables people to better understand the wider business, improving cooperation between teams and allowing individuals to participate in areas of interest outside their core role. For businesses, this boosts employee engagement and nurtures an interactive and supportive company culture.



## Reducing Application Complexity

Collaboration technologies help businesses unlock the value of existing technology investments for the whole organization by creating a central hub where employees can interact with the multitude of applications they use each day, without leaving the collaborative, conversation-based environment where they are working. By integrating applications, content and processes from tools such as those for customer relationship management, enterprise resource planning, HR or help desk systems, organizational data becomes more accessible to a wider proportion of the workforce, without training or costly additional licenses.

For employees, this streamlines their technology experience, improving their productivity by reducing the amount of context



# 38%

of employees say they spend too much time switching between applications to get work done

switching as they grapple with different application interfaces. This is a big area of frustration for employees, with 38% saying they spend too much time switching between applications, according to CCS Insight's survey research.

With a "hub" approach, application event notifications can be automatically channeled directly into the relevant conversation within the collaboration environment, for example when new content is published or a deal is closed. In addition, integrations enable employees to interact directly with other systems and processes from within a conversation thread, for example to request a status update, to progress a sales opportunity or to raise a help desk ticket. These capabilities are delivered either through packaged or custom apps embedded into conversation workflows, or through conversational bots which allow employees to interact using natural language.

## Automating Personal and Team Workflows

A growing area of focus in collaboration applications is the availability of tools that enable non-technical users to automate the simple, repetitive tasks that interrupt their work.

Low-code tools are an emerging investment priority in organizations, providing a way to accelerate the pace of digital transformation and innovation by empowering every employee as a citizen developer, allowing them to create custom workflows and applications without needing specialized IT skills.



CCS Insight's survey research indicates that 46% of organizations are already using low-code tools in their businesses, with a further 30% planning an investment in this area in the next 12 months. There is also a strong appetite among employees for a low-code strategy, with 49% of employees open to building apps themselves if the tools were available. Among those who would not consider doing so, most argue that it is not their job or that they do not have the skills to do it.

Intuitive, visual workflow design tools allow non-technical employees to create simple workflows for activities such as team updates and notifications, approval processes, information gathering, or processing help desk requests, for example, integrating with external tools to capture, organize or share

# 49%

of employees are open to building apps themselves if the tools were available

the information. These workflows can often be shared with colleagues or saved as templates that can be customized for specific purposes, increasing their time-saving potential and making it easier for new users to apply them.

This empowers individuals and teams to take control of their technology experience, freeing up their time for more valuable,

strategic work. Not only does this reduce their reliance on overstretched IT teams, it improves productivity throughout the business and fuels a more agile, responsive organization.

## Balancing Ease of Use with Enterprise-Grade Security and Control

Ease of use is the key to success with adoption of enterprise collaboration services, ensuring that employees can quickly become comfortable using the tool with minimal training or technical expertise. This is particularly important where employees are working remotely or when large groups need to be enabled in a short time frame. Chat-based enterprise collaboration tools build on employees' familiarity with one-to-one and group messaging in their personal lives, while giving businesses the security and management controls they need to meet regulatory and corporate governance demands.

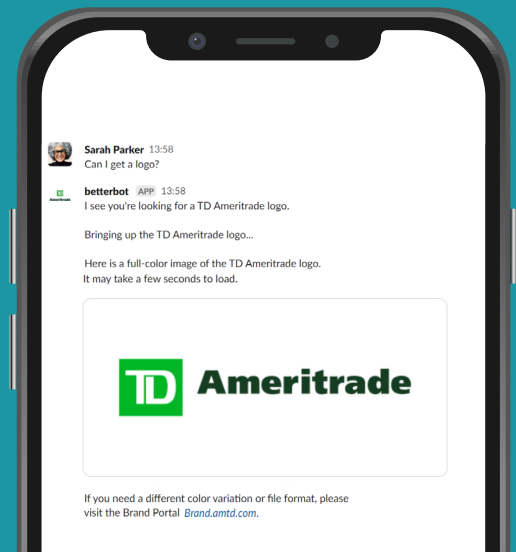
## CASE STUDY

### AUTOMATING WORK WITH CUSTOM APPS

Online brokerage firm TD Ameritrade uses a custom Slack app, called BetterBot, to provide employees with fast, automated answers to support queries via the company's Slack platform.

Programmed to understand natural language, BetterBot handles about 2,500 support questions per week, which frees up resources to focus on tougher challenges that require specialized knowledge.

<https://slack.com/customer-stories/td-ameritrade>



This remains a difficult balance for businesses: IT leaders highlight security as their biggest focus area amid the shift to remote working, according to CCS Insight survey research. However, employees are largely unaware of the increased security risks to themselves and their employers when

working from home. Indeed, less than a third of employees recognize any additional risk.

**Security** is the top investment priority for IT leaders in 2021

Tools that give employees the usability of consumer apps while providing the security, privacy and data management capabilities

businesses need to stay compliant and secure are vital to ensuring that employees remain productive without resorting to unsecured consumer-oriented tools that create challenges with shadow IT.

## A Platform for Building Better Relationships with Customers and Partners

Although enterprise collaboration strategies tend to focus primarily on enabling internal teams, market-leading tools can also provide a platform for working with partners and customers. Improving external collaboration can often deliver even more tangible benefits to organizations than internal collaboration, for example helping to speed up sales cycles or improving the time it takes for projects to deliver value. However, many businesses continue to rely predominantly on email for external collaboration, even as they reimagine how employees collaborate inside the company boundaries.

State-of-the-art collaboration tools allow businesses to extend the concept of a secure, shared collaborative environment to their external stakeholder communities too. This further reduces the complexity for employees, who have a single tool for all their collaborative interactions and a platform for more streamlined business-to-business processes.

Organizations and their partners can share information, coordinate joint ventures and facilitate day-to-day interaction between working groups. This helps to strengthen relationships through increased openness, transparency and trust, and enables all parties to maximize the value they get from the partnership.

## CASE STUDY

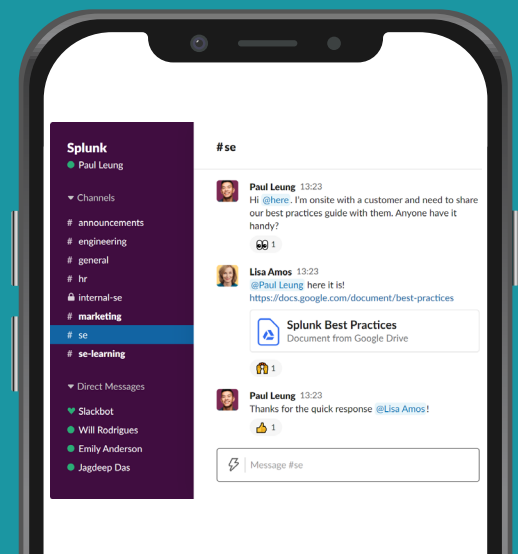
### CUSTOMER SUCCESS THROUGH COLLABORATION

Sales engineers at software company Splunk create Slack Connect channels to work directly with their customers, providing a secure collaboration space to discuss each proof-of-concept of their solutions.

These channels effectively replace email and extend collaboration to everyone an organization works with — inside and outside its walls — increasing visibility and alignment for all stakeholders.

As a result, the sales engineers are able to deliver faster than their competition, and increase success rates with their customers.

<https://slack.com/customer-stories/splunk>



## Four Strategic Recommendations for IT Leaders

For businesses considering an investment in collaboration technology, CCS Insight makes the following recommendations to maximize the success of your digital collaboration initiative.

1

### Take an Employee-First Approach to Technology Selection

To encourage daily, deep usage of the tool and maximize the value of your investment, it is critical to select a collaboration solution that people throughout the organization can quickly and effortlessly embrace.

Tools that are easy to use and inspire enthusiasm among employees without the need for extensive training and education are more effective in influencing behavioral

change as part of a workplace transformation initiative. They allow for a strategy based on viral adoption that complements and augments any strategic or top-down transformation efforts.

More importantly, intuitive and employee-focused tools drive lasting engagement and become a conduit for real work.

2

### Focus on External, Not Just Internal, Collaboration

When building your business case for enterprise collaboration technology, remember that employees often spend as much time working with customers and partners outside the organization as they do with their colleagues inside the business.

Choose a tool that recognizes the complexities of your collaboration landscape and provides a flexible, secure and configurable platform for all collaborative activity, even where processes extend beyond the organization's boundary.

It should provide the same ease of use and transparency in cross-organizational interactions as for those between employees, while continuing to meet the security and privacy requirements of both parties.

This is a major area of difference in functionality between suppliers of collaboration technology, and you should assess it carefully in your selection process.

3

### Supercharge the Employee Experience by Embracing Integration and Workflow Automation

For any business embarking on a strategy that seeks to spur adoption of collaboration technology, team communication is often the first functionality implemented.

However, CCS Insight's research indicates that the most successful initiatives are those that go beyond simple chat, integrating key applications and processes into their collaboration environment.

This approach significantly increases the day-to-day value of the collaboration tool for employees and the return on investment of both the collaboration platform and the company's wider portfolio of tools. It serves as a catalyst to adoption and enhances the "stickiness" of the tool within the organization as it becomes more embedded in business processes.

4

### Choose a Technology Partner That Will Help Your Business Navigate the New World of Work

Intuitive and engaging collaboration technology is a critical enabler in building the workplace of the future, but it is only the first step in the business change journey to becoming a resilient and agile organization ready for the future.

Transformational change, especially in large businesses, is a gradual process, involving shifts in behaviors, communication and management styles, business processes and technology.

As you evaluate suppliers of collaboration technology, choose a partner that understands the practicalities of enabling cultural and behavioral change and that can guide and support your business in this journey, providing best-practices and adoption strategies to maximize the success of your investment.



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