

THE DIGITIZATION OF COLLABORATION

**New Social Tools Can
Empower Better Ways of
Working Together**

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At Workplace, our mission is to give the world a place to work together. That means building social collaboration tools that solve real organizational problems. But it also means developing a deep understanding of the people who use them. Especially young people.

By 2020, 35% of the workforce will be Millennials. We built Workplace to meet their expectations, based on six principles that we believe will define the future of work.

Open: Workplace uses Groups and News Feed to bring communication into the open, while encouraging instant engagement with comments, sharing, or even just a “like.”

Mobile: With the Workplace mobile app, it’s never been easier to collaborate on the go. Workplace Chat, our messaging app, makes instant text, voice, and video communications totally intuitive whether you’re in an office, the factory, or the field.

Expressive: A picture may be worth a thousand words, but the ability to broadcast live to your team is priceless. Whether it’s video, photos, GIFs, or reactions, Workplace takes communication to places words simply can’t go.

Integrated: Workplace connects with popular enterprise tools like Office 365, G Suite, Box, and Okta so your teams can get work done faster.

Connected: Workplace connects everybody from the CEO to frontline workers to back office staff to enable more efficient communication and collaboration.

Personalized: News Feed is a unique, scrolling source of information that uses machine learning to surface the content individuals are most likely to find valuable.

What does this mean for organizations?

It means that people can communicate, collaborate, and connect across desktop and mobile, using features that have been familiar, in some cases, for virtually their entire lives.

And it means transformational impact for organizations across all departments and functions.

For internal comms, it means the ability to reach everybody inside an organization and hold two-way conversations at scale. Top-down communication used to take the form of email memos or even written notices pinned to a staff board. Imagine instead revealing the quarterly numbers through a Live video broadcast with real-time feedback. Sharing strategy updates directly into News Feed to break down organizational silos. Or automatically provisioning employees into Groups based on job function or department.

For HR, it means engaging employees to drive culture. Great organizations focus on their people, not technology. That’s why Workplace promotes openness, feedback, and diversity. Not only does this increase engagement, it impacts the bottom line. Polls in Groups can provide a quick-fire pulse on company issues. Workplace Chat bots can make payroll, benefits, or onboarding processes quicker and easier. While Live video can make training more scalable and cost-effective.

For CIOs, it means driving adoption and engagement of existing collaboration tools, maximizing the investment across your entire ecosystem. Not only can you connect to the tools you already use or explore over 50 apps in the Workplace Integration Directory, you can build custom integrations with Workplace Service Partners, and easily deploy Workplace with one-click provisioning and single sign-on.

To learn more, visit facebook.com/workplace. Or check out our customer success stories at facebook.com/workplace/case-studies.

THE DIGITIZATION OF COLLABORATION

New Social Tools Can Empower Better Ways of Working Together

The workplace is changing. So are the ways people collaborate—and the tools they use.

Organizations in recent years have shed their rigid hierarchies, becoming instead “flat.” As a result, employees from a wide range of levels and functional areas are now expected to work with multiple teams at any given time. And because business has become so global, workers now must collaborate across not only multiple offices, but also multiple countries. On top of all this, as organizations take on increasingly complex challenges, their workers are expected to collaborate, innovate, and document in richer, more meaningful ways than ever before.

Fortunately, new social tools have evolved to support these new ways of working. Equipped with novel capabilities and functions, these tools have become vital elements of workplace collaboration.

That’s important, because today’s collaboration transcends mere cooperation. Instead, it’s a matter of “putting together great minds and engaging in true breakthrough thinking,” says Thea Singer Spitzer, a consultant and author of a related book, *The Power of Collaboration: Powerful Insights from Silicon Valley* (Career Press, 2017). “That’s much more than just sharing information, or lending a hand to another group, or doing better project handoffs. It’s truly about leveraging the collective intelligence and turning it into better ideas and solutions.”

Going even further is Tsedal Neeley, a professor at Harvard Business School who has written on social tools and management. “Without these tools,” she says, “global collaboration cannot happen.”

Attitudes like these may explain the near ubiquitous presence of social tools for collaboration. When Harvard Business Review Analytic Services surveyed executives in May 2018 on the topic of social tools for collaboration, receiving more than 700 responses, it found the use of social tools to be extremely widespread: Roughly nine in 10 (89%) respondents say they use some sort of social tool. And at large organizations—those with 5,000 or more employees—use of social tools is essentially universal. Ninety-five percent of respondents working at these large organizations use social tools now, while the remaining 5% are exploring the tools for future use. [FIGURE 1](#)

HIGHLIGHTS

89%
OF RESPONDENTS SAY THEY USE SOME SORT OF SOCIAL TOOL

95%
OF RESPONDENTS WORKING AT LARGE ORGANIZATIONS USE SOCIAL TOOLS NOW, WHILE THE REMAINING 5% ARE EXPLORING THE TOOLS FOR FUTURE USE

FIGURE 1

SOCIAL TOOLS: UBIQUITOUS ... OR WILL BE SOON

Does your organization offer social tools to its employees?

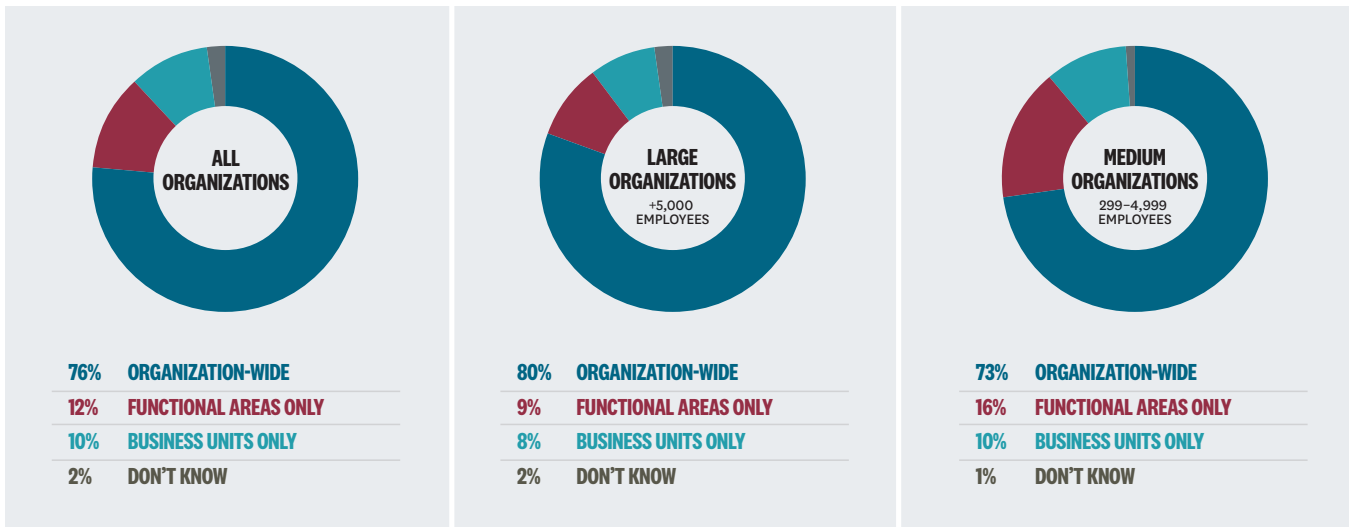


SOURCE: HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW ANALYTIC SERVICES SURVEY, MAY 2018

FIGURE 2

SOCIAL TOOLS: BROADER USE IN BIGGER ORGANIZATIONS

Where in your organization are social tools used?



SOURCE: HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW ANALYTIC SERVICES SURVEY, MAY 2018

Respondents cite Microsoft Teams, Yammer, LinkedIn, JIRA, Slack, and Chatter as the social tools they use most frequently. “These social applications allow people to work not just faster and cheaper, but also in ways they simply couldn’t have before,” says Heidi Gardner, a distinguished fellow at Harvard Law School’s Center on the Legal Profession and the author of a book on the topic, *Smart Collaboration: How Professionals and Their Firms Succeed by Breaking Down Silos* (Harvard Business Review Press, 2017). “The technologies allow cross-organization collaboration with experts within a firm, as well as across organizations, that can securely and creatively solve problems in real time.”

Organizations are also using social tools broadly across their various departments and business units. Slightly more than three-quarters (76%) of respondents say they use social tools on an organization-wide basis. Only about one in 10 (12%) uses the tools in functional areas only, and about the same number (10%) use the tools in business units only. Once again, large organizations are even more likely than others to use social tools organization-wide, with 80% of respondents saying they do so. [FIGURE 2](#)

Today’s social tools go far beyond mere texting and file sharing, leveraging recent advances in mobility, big data analytics, cloud computing, and other newer technologies. Wayne Kurtzman, a researcher on social, communities, and collaboration at market watcher IDC, points out that today’s enterprise social tools also borrow design and functional components from the same social platforms workers use in their personal lives. It’s part of the “consumerization of IT” trend, the same force that earlier brought smartphones and tablets to the workplace.

It also means social tools can empower teams to work “bigger, better, faster, and cheaper,” Kurtzman adds. The latest social tools enable processes to be highly repeatable, and they can include a broad spectrum of contributors, including not just employees but also suppliers,

contractors, and distributors. “We’re still in the early stages of this current incarnation of collaboration,” Kurtzman says. “But these tools are really pushing the future of business.”

Oxfam, the international aid and development organization, is among those helped by social tools. A confederation of 20 independent charities, Oxfam had little in the way of central IT, and collaboration and communication across its enterprise was difficult. So Oxfam installed a social platform to bring its workers together. Now it offers a shared venue, rather than email silos, for communication. Oxfam also integrated its social platform with cloud-based tools for identity management, allowing single sign-on while bolstering its security.

Greater Capabilities

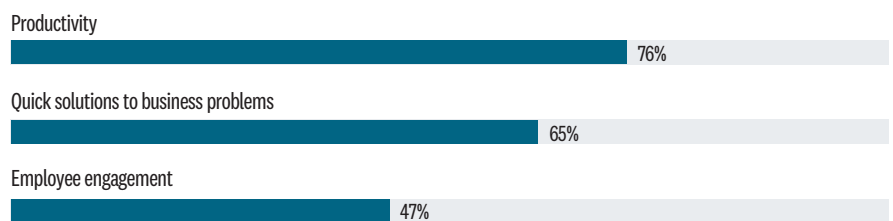
Today’s social tools enable collaboration in ways that older, single-function technologies—such as email, instant messaging, videoconferencing, and file sharing—simply cannot.

Indeed, survey respondents attest to the benefits of social tools. Roughly three-quarters (76%) say social tools have improved productivity at their organization either somewhat or significantly. Nearly two-thirds (65%) have seen social tools provide quick solutions to business problems. And almost half (47%) say social tools have improved employee engagement. [FIGURE 3](#)

FIGURE 3

SOCIAL TOOLS: VALUABLE

Percentage of respondents who say their organizations’ use of social tools has improved business goals either somewhat or significantly [MULTIPLE RESPONSES PERMITTED]



SOURCE: HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW ANALYTIC SERVICES SURVEY, MAY 2018

TODAY’S ENTERPRISE SOCIAL TOOLS BORROW DESIGN AND FUNCTIONAL COMPONENTS FROM THE SAME SOCIAL PLATFORMS WORKERS USE IN THEIR PERSONAL LIVES.

SOCIAL TOOLS: REGIONAL CULTURE MATTERS, TOO

North America is the home of social collaboration, right? Wrong.

When Harvard Business Review Analytic Services surveyed more than 700 executives in May 2018 on the topic of social tools for collaboration, it found North American respondents to be comparative laggards in their adoption of social tools.

Specifically, while 80% of the survey respondents outside North America say they use social tools organization-wide, only 73% of those inside North America do.

Similarly, while nearly half (48%) of respondents outside North America say they use social tools to learn, only a third (36%) of those inside North America do.

Experts say these gaps reflect long-standing differences among how various regions view work, collaboration, and sharing. Outside North America, and particularly in Europe, organizations have a rich tradition of collaboration, they explain. By contrast, North American organizations have traditionally focused more on contributions by individuals, and less on cultivating team-centric cultures. “Europe has tended to collaborate a bit more than other regions,” says Wayne Kurtzman, a researcher on social, communities, and collaboration at industry analyst IDC, “and they were early to knowledge management in the 1970s and ’80s.”

Another factor is language, says Charlene Li, principal analyst at research and advisory firm Altimeter. With so much online content already in English, most workers in North America, where English is the predominant language, have not had to create much online material. In other regions, workers have experience creating and translating content into their local languages. “Here in the United States, everything is in English, so we’re kind of spoiled,” she says. “Other countries have a digital heritage of expressing themselves online. Here, it isn’t as mature.”

Some of this new power comes from the way today’s social tools can combine diverse features and functions onto a single platform. To be sure, they support the same real-time communication, document-sharing, and information storage capabilities of the prior generation of social tools. But unlike those earlier products, today’s social tools can also house a range of innovative functions. That can even include the ability to track how many minutes during a meeting each worker is permitted to speak, thereby helping to ensure that everyone has equal opportunities to offer their thoughts and opinions. Another innovative function enforces breaks in meetings, giving participants time to reflect—a feature particularly helpful for introverts.

Increasingly, today’s social tools can also be integrated with other applications. This creates a centralized hub that can leverage the data types into one place, with a threaded conversation and a history that minimizes email and meetings. “The assets of the team—and the company—remain together,” says Kurtzman of IDC. “That creates not just content, but context, as well as a reusable history,” he adds. “Artificial intelligence will make collaboration and content an annuity, adding value over time.”

Kurtzman also expects social tools to soon use AI. This technology could analyze collaboration data and aid in decision making.

Today’s enterprise social tools mimic social media in at least one other way: They enable connections among people (in this case, coworkers and business partners) who in the past were unlikely to meet, let alone collaborate. For example, a worker in a large, multinational organization could use social tools to locate and connect with relevant subject-matter experts in their organization’s other business units and locations—people they would not know otherwise.

Today’s social tools can also be used to create team goals and objectives, identify new opportunities, create and share business plans, cascade objectives, invite other people to work together, and then track their progress. It’s this combination of features and functions that supports new forms of collaboration.

And these new forms are urgently needed, says Gardner of Harvard Law. “Collaboration gets a bad rap because in the past, workers were just thrown together,” she explains. “But today’s technology allows people to accomplish tasks better and in new ways—and to break down old barriers.”

For example, organizations with social tools can both draw in more experts within an organization—such as lawyers from the legal department—and bring them into projects earlier, improving productivity and quality alike. “The technology allows for specialists to be brought on board much sooner,” Gardner says. “This creates a more efficient process and reduces the amount of rework typically required at the end of a project.”

Better than ‘Real’

Similarly, organizations can leverage today’s social tools to significantly reduce the time their staffs spend on comparatively inefficient activities, such as email and meetings, and increase the time they spend on strategic collaboration. Social tools can even enable collaboration online that’s more effective than working together in the “real world,” asserts Charlene Li, a principal analyst at research and advisory firm Altimeter and the author of several articles and books on social technology. “These tools,” she says, “let organizations involve much larger groups of people with much less friction.”

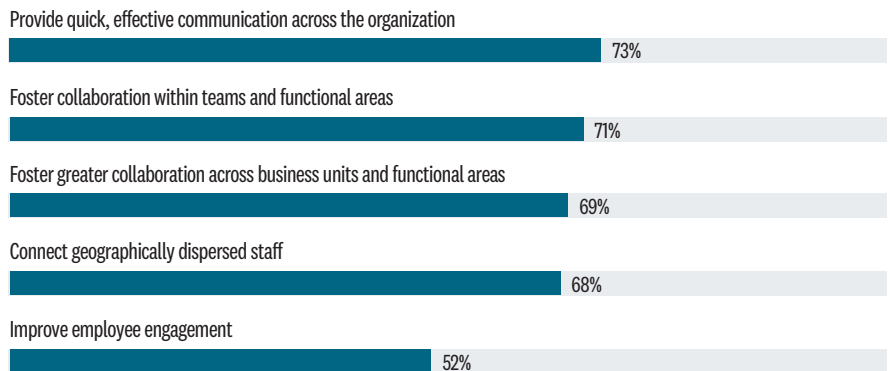
For example, individuals may find it difficult to share and hear critiques in a live meeting in front of many colleagues. But on a social platform, individual comments can be specific and targeted. Workers can contribute without fighting to be heard. “In many ways, you can have more people collaborating at one time in one place,” Li says. “In the past that was really hard to do.”

Today’s social tools can also help address another barrier to collaboration, what Li describes as the lack of transparency. “It’s no longer on your desktop; it’s there for everybody to see,” she explains. “Now I can see who’s working on a project, I can contact all of them, and I don’t have to say, ‘Send me your work’ or ‘What are you working on?’ In the past you wouldn’t even know what others were working on.”

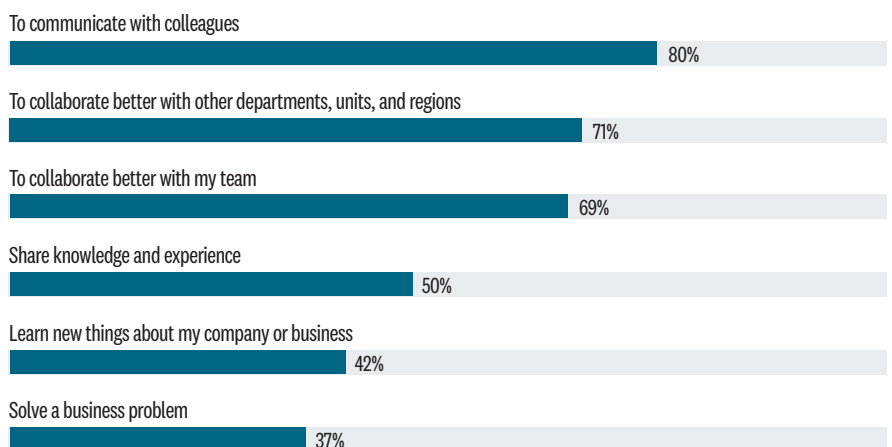
FIGURE 4

SOCIAL TOOLS: WHY THEY’RE USED

Why organizations implement or plan to implement social tools [MULTIPLE RESPONSES PERMITTED]



Why executives implement or plan to implement social tools [MULTIPLE RESPONSES PERMITTED]



SOURCE: HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW ANALYTIC SERVICES SURVEY, MAY 2018

The survey backs her up. Nearly three-quarters (73%) say their organizations have implemented social tools to provide quick and efficient communication. And nearly the same percentage (71%) use social tools themselves to improve collaboration. Half use social tools mainly to share knowledge and experience, while 42% use social tools to learn new things about their companies or businesses, and more than a third (37%) use these tools to solve business problems. [FIGURE 4](#)

Workers at the U.S. National Aeronautics and Space Administration’s Jet Propulsion Laboratory adopted a single social platform after finding they were spending hours every day navigating a range of social tools and message archives. With the system now in place, NASA developers across the Lab’s 110 buildings can easily search all their conversations in a single location. They also now share and discuss project status, track and assign bugs, list priorities, and surface industry news in a single platform, ensuring that nothing gets lost.

Those kinds of gains can produce real value for organizations, says Michael Chui, a partner at McKinsey Global Institute, the research arm of the consultancy McKinsey & Company. “You can actually see a reduction in time in accessing expertise and knowledge; you get to it faster, and you get to more relevant expertise faster,” he says. “And that’s a big deal.”

As Chui explains, today’s social tools not only speed collaboration, but they also enable new types of collaboration that could not otherwise occur. “Imagine an organization where all communication happens through one-to-one private channels; in that case you’re only learning things

through your silo,” he says. “Next, imagine a second case, where all communication—except for a very small amount that has to be private—is out on a social platform where everyone can see it and search it. Now I can find someone who, though not in my silo, knows a lot about my problem.”

Chui offers another example: In the past, when a new employee joined an organization, they’d get up to speed mainly by listening to others explain the processes. But even then, much of what they needed to know remained stuck in someone else’s inbox. Today, however, new social tools mean that same employee can go online, where all the work happens. “They can just look at it,” Chui explains, “and have this entire base of knowledge.”

Spyglass Realty, a real estate company in Austin, Texas, created an onboarding and sales-training group on its social platform for new hires to review before their in-person training. The social group, which contains videos and other resources, has helped transform a process that once took 20 hours over a couple of weeks to a single session lasting just 30 to 60 minutes. Spyglass also uses the platform to speed collaboration and communication, saving its employees valuable time.

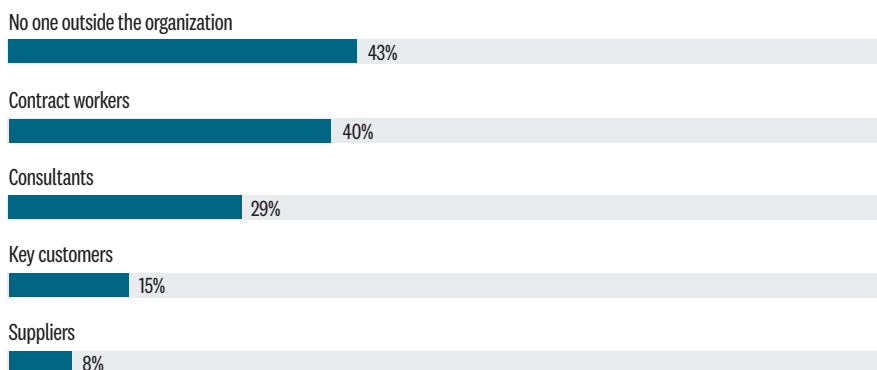
Such scenarios can translate into real returns. Gardner’s research at Harvard Law finds these returns include higher revenue, higher profits, sustainable client relationships, higher customer satisfaction, and a better ability to attract and retain talent.

Yet most organizations have yet to realize social tools’ full potential. That’s especially the case in enabling collaboration that needs to happen beyond the organization’s own walls. Approximately four in 10 (43%) survey respondents say they don’t use social tools to collaborate with those outside their organizations at all. About the same percentage (40%) share these tools only with contract workers. Meanwhile, only 15% of respondents use social tools with strategic vendors, and only 8% use these tools with suppliers. **FIGURE 5**

FIGURE 5

SOCIAL TOOLS: OUTSIDERS? MAYBE

Business partners—other than internal employees—who are given access to organizations’ social tools [MULTIPLE RESPONSES PERMITTED]



SOURCE: HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW ANALYTIC SERVICES SURVEY, MAY 2018

That's not surprising, experts say, as many employees are still learning how to leverage social tools within their own enterprises. Under these circumstances, extending social tools beyond a business unit, let alone the organization's walls, remains far down the to-do lists of most workers. "If they can't even collaborate with their own colleagues and peers, why would we expect them to collaborate with people operating in a different company where they have far fewer common objectives?" Gardner asks.

Another reason: Different organizations use different collaboration platforms—unlike email, not all social tools can communicate with others—and they lack the tools needed to integrate disparate systems. "If Organization A has one set of communication norms, and Organization B has another, it's unrealistic to think that they'll all end up on the same tool," says business professor Neeley. "It's hard enough to get everyone in an organization on the same system; you can't expect that to extend out of the organization to an ecosystem."

Today, when collaboration with workers outside the organization is needed, many organizations employ older technologies, such as conference calls, videoconferences, and email. Yet in so doing, they also miss an important opportunity to transform processes and products alike. Inter-organizational collaboration, therefore, represents one of the next major opportunities for users of social tools.

Measuring Value

While many organizations recognize the potential value of using social tools, few actually know how to measure that value. When survey respondents were asked whether their organizations are able to measure the impact of internal social tools, only about one in 10 (12%) answered in the affirmative. Roughly half (49%) said they're unable to measure the impact. And more than a third (39%) don't know either way. **FIGURE 6**

TO HANG IN LONG ENOUGH TO ENJOY THE BENEFITS, MOST ORGANIZATIONS THAT WANT TO ADOPT SOCIAL TOOLS WIDELY WILL NEED A STRATEGY FOR CHANGE MANAGEMENT.

To be sure, metrics do exist for areas that include innovation and frequency of contacts. But at some organizations, social tools are considered inexpensive enough that managers are under no great pressure to calculate their return on investment (ROI). Others simply lack the maturity or knowledge of how to use these metrics.

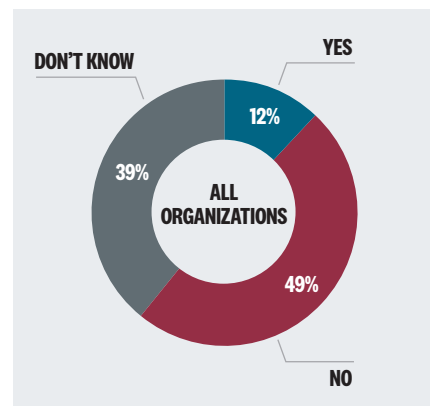
Gardner of Harvard Law sees yet another obstacle organizations face when trying to measure the potential returns of social tools: They give up too soon. That's because implementing new social tools, like any new-technology project, can involve training, change management, and other significant efforts. Faced with these challenges, some organizations bail out. "They don't stick with it long enough for benefits to flow in," Gardner adds.

To hang in long enough to enjoy the benefits, most organizations that want to adopt social tools widely—and reap the most value from their use—will need a strategy for change management. Simply selecting the best possible tool is only a first step. An organization's leaders must also work with their employees to develop new best practices and processes that work in tandem with the new tools. "What's in the workflow is what gets used," says Chui of McKinsey. "You have to make these tools part of the day-to-day workflow. Then they can become a normal part of operating."

FIGURE 6

IMMATURE MEASURES

Can your organization measure the impact of internal social tools?



SOURCE: HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW ANALYTIC SERVICES SURVEY, MAY 2018

ORGANIZATIONS THAT IMPLEMENT NEW SOCIAL TOOLS AND GAIN THEIR WIDE ADOPTION STAND TO GAIN SIGNIFICANT COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGES.

Organizations may also need to invest in training employees on new procedures, practices, and processes. Managers should be willing to mandate the use of new tools to ensure their successful adoption. Otherwise, even a single holdout—say, a senior executive who refuses to use the new tool—could derail a new tool’s adoption and jeopardize its ROI. “It’s delicate,” admits market analyst Li, “but you need to be able to say to that one holdout, ‘You’re holding us back. This is the way we’re working now.’”

Also needed, says Li, is an effective strategy for change management. Such a plan will not leave the implementation of social tools to the IT department, but will lead it from a management and personnel perspective. Ideally, she adds, that will include the HR department developing programs that teach and persuade employees to use new technology. “This is absolutely an HR issue,” Li says. “It’s a cultural issue because it defines the way we work. And in most organizations, HR is ultimately responsible for culture.”

Change management for social tools should also include support from C-level executives, Li says. “Unless the C-suite says, ‘This is the way we work,’ then what HR says has no teeth,” she explains. “It has to be a perfect storm to make these collaboration platforms work successfully.”

This kind of work is already underway in many organizations, driven both by leaders who understand the high potential of these social tools and by workers who seek out the tools themselves. Experts say these organizations are indeed reinventing how they collaborate, developing more creative teams that can better span functional divisions and geographic boundaries and even organizational walls in the most leading-edge cases.

The stakes are high. Organizations that implement new social tools and gain their wide adoption among both employees and partners stand to gain significant competitive advantages. Those that don’t, won’t. “You can’t work like you did 15 years ago,” warns IDC’s Kurtzman. “Employees today are hyperconnected and tech-savvy, and they’re becoming so in greater numbers. Companies need to stay up to date, providing them with what they need to do to get their jobs done and be satisfied.”

If that sounds like a challenge that requires new forms of collaboration—well, it is.

METHODOLOGY AND PARTICIPANT PROFILE

A total of 718 respondents were drawn from the *Harvard Business Review* audience of readers, including magazine/enewsletter readers, customers, and HBR.org users.

SIZE OF ORGANIZATION

50% 5,000 OR MORE EMPLOYEES	24% 1,000-4,999 EMPLOYEES	26% 200-999 EMPLOYEES
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SENIORITY

26% MANAGERS/ SUPERVISORS	16% SENIOR MANAGERS/ DEPARTMENT HEADS	16% DIRECTORS	10% EXECUTIVE MANAGERS/EVPS	8% OTHER TITLES WERE EACH REPRESENTED BY 8% OR LESS OF THE RESPONDENT BASE
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KEY INDUSTRY SECTORS

15% TECHNOLOGY	11% MANUFACTURING	10% FINANCIAL SERVICES	9% GOVERNMENT/ NOT-FOR-PROFIT	8% OTHER TITLES WERE EACH REPRESENTED BY 8% OR LESS OF THE RESPONDENT BASE
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JOB FUNCTION

18% GENERAL/EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT	10% SALES/BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT/ CUSTOMER SERVICE	8% IT/SOFTWARE ENGINEERING	8% HR/TRAINING	7% OTHER TITLES WERE EACH REPRESENTED BY 7% OR LESS OF THE RESPONDENT BASE
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REGIONS

47% NORTH AMERICA	29% EUROPE, THE MIDDLE EAST, AND AFRICA	17% ASIA/PACIFIC	6% REST OF THE WORLD
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Figures may not add up to 100% due to rounding.



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