Collaboration and technology
Working together for business growth

Why collaborate?
Collaboration is a word that’s increasingly heard, but not necessarily always fully understood. What exactly does it mean, what can it mean for a business, and what is the best way to go about it?

Process or strategy?
Whereas collaboration might once have meant simply ‘working together’, in today’s more forward-looking organizations it has a wider meaning, as a strategy for transforming their culture.

Collaboration technology, methods and processes are no longer simply about helping employees to talk about their work. They are about helping to create new ways for employees actually to do their work.

When collaboration helps teams to work differently, they become more engaged, more productive, and create more value. In fact, organisations which achieve the highest levels of collaboration have been shown\(^1\) to achieve up to 300% more value than those with the lowest levels.

“Collaboration does not mean everyone must agree...”

\(^1\) Source: Filigree Consulting, VISUAL COLLABORATION SOLUTIONS BEST PRACTICES: Global Report and Recommendations, July 2012.
The effects of collaboration solutions on a group of employees or an organization can be seen both in 'soft' values, and also in hard figures.

**Soft values**
Richly integrated collaboration solutions, working hand-in-hand with supporting services and practices, have been shown¹ to produce benefits such as:

- Better idea creation
- Better problem solving
- Better decision-making
- More positive action
- Creation of stronger and more engaged teams

**Hard facts**
Comparing organizations which employ high-quality, integrated collaboration technology, combined with best practices, against those at an earlier stage of integrating collaboration technology and practices, shows¹ that collaboration has a higher impact in several areas:

- 3.1x more impact on the rate of innovation
- 2.3x more impact on faster and more informed decision-making
- 2.2x more impact on meeting productivity
- 1.8x more impact on increased individual productivity
- 1.6x more impact on improved information quality

Collaboration also produces a positive Return On Investment², having a:

- 29% impact on profitability
- 26% impact on profit growth
- 27% impact on sales growth

² Source: Frost & Sullivan, Meetings Around the World: The Impact of Collaboration on Business Performance

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Collaboration business performance guide
Organizations which have recognized the benefits of collaboration for their productivity and profitability are embracing the technology, the processes and the change in their culture.

In fact, 82% of businesses already using collaboration tools want to use even more in the future.

Companies are also looking to broaden the scope of their collaboration beyond immediate employees, to encompass their vendors, outsourcers, partners and others. When they all work together towards a unified goal, the potential benefits are huge.

Enthusiasm for collaboration is hardly surprising, when research has shown its positive impact on business performance is more than double the effect of strategic orientation, and more than five times that of market and technological turbulence influences.

So what types and methods of collaboration should businesses be using, to realize the greatest benefits?

82% of businesses want to use more collaboration tools.

2. Source: Frost & Sullivan, Meetings Around the World: The Impact of Collaboration on Business Performance
Project collaboration
Projects are the natural home of collaboration, and there are a number of technology tools available to enable the sharing of content, and joint performance of tasks.

Social software
An open and collaborative culture needs ways to communicate freely and access resources. Social software platforms such as Yammer, Chatter and Jive enable communication, transparency and openness.

Workflow collaboration
A social workflow platform can guide a team through a standard workplan, featuring pre-defined roles, tasks and templates. The platform can then be used to ensure each stage of a workflow is executed correctly, shared, reviewed, approved and fully completed by the relevant team members.

Innovation management
Tools for exchanging expertise and for crowdsourcing ideas are increasingly being applied by organizations wanting to create or improve products or features. Cloud-based innovation tools enable end-to-end innovation with business process integration, project management and even ROI analysis.

Web conferencing
Enables virtual meetings wherever attendees are located. As a collaboration tool, web conferencing provides a useful adjunct, reducing the number of face-to-face meetings required – which encourages a higher level of attendance and engagement when they do take place.

Wiki tools
Useful for building knowledge bases and maintaining documents, as well as for helping to manage decision support systems.

50% of employees use personal laptops and 43% use personal tablets in the workplace.
When they are properly organized and managed, and properly equipped, more collaboration takes place in meetings than anywhere else. However, the right tools are essential to ensure successful collaboration.

Collaborative meetings generally take three forms: virtual, physical, or a combination of the two: with some participants in the room and others taking part via the web.

**Virtual meetings**

With many organizations now geographically widespread, virtual meetings can be an effective way to bring people together to collaborate. These can be achieved in a number of ways, depending on the level of ‘presence’ required.

**Audio conferencing**

Carried out by telephone. The simplest but also most limited solution.

**Web conferencing**

Require scheduling: a meeting must be created and then participants invited. May require different product solutions for different scenarios, such as a separate audio conferencing tool to run alongside the web conference.

**Video conferencing**

Generally only possible in fully-equipped meeting rooms, therefore requiring advance planning.

**True virtual meeting**

Participants join from their personal computers, so no need for dedicated meeting room or for pre-planning. Audio, video and data are combined in a single integrated solution.

**Physical meetings**

Unparalleled for the collaboration opportunities they offer, physical, face-to-face meetings can be the most engaging, productive and rewarding for all involved. With the right tools – ensuring that all attendees can participate fully – physical meetings encourage effective discussion, collaboration, creativity and decision-making.

**BYOD**

The growing Bring Your Own Device trend can make meetings a tangle of cables and a technology nightmare, with more time spent trying – and failing – to connect than actually collaborating. But with the right tools, BYOD can actually strengthen engagement and collaboration. Tools such as Barco ClickShare allow greater collaboration by enabling all devices (PCs, Macs, tablets and smartphones) to connect easily to meeting room facilities (audio and video), and by allowing easy sharing of data and meeting room screen space.

**Interactive whiteboards**

A wall- or floor-mounted whiteboard is a large interactive display that connects to a computer. A projector projects the computer’s desktop onto the board’s surface, where a single user standing by the board can control the computer using a pen, finger, stylus, or other device.

**Screen sharing**

In a Barco survey, 8 out of 10 business leaders said they would be more efficient if they could get more than one person on-screen at the same time – which is exactly what Barco ClickShare offers. At the click of a button, the content of any participant’s laptop, tablet or smartphone is displayed on the large screen, while they remain seated at their device. The result is that all participants are involved more intensely – and some simultaneously – in the meeting and the decision-making process. Barco ClickShare enables screen-sharing without connecting to the meeting room network, and with no user-training required.
It is a company’s culture and processes which first of all encourage people to work collaboratively. Introducing technology to an organization which is not prepared to be open, transparent and collaborative will not make it happen. The technology can only be as effective as the people who are using it.

Keep it simple
Although the attitude to collaboration is crucial, selecting the right technology to facilitate the process is also key.

Communication and collaboration technologies must be user-friendly, cost-effective and easy to install. If employees need extensive training to use a collaboration tool, they will continue to work in the ways they are used to, and collaborative working will not happen.

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