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Cisco Collaboration Work Practice Study

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CISCO COLLABORATION WORK PRACTICE STUDY

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Executive Summary

Executive Summary

Introduction

This paper presents the analysis, findings and recommendations from the Cisco Collaboration Work Practice Study, a qualitative, ethnographic research study with Cisco employees globally. The purpose of the study was to gain insights into the human behavior of collaboration; how it affects employees' productivity, workplace efficiency, and business results.

In order to glean deep insights into how people work, we conducted a study in which we immersed ourselves in the employees' workday—wherever they went, we followed. The key for us was to understand what actually happens in a typical workday. This intense focus provided insights into how employees do their jobs in their native work environment. The study was grounded in employee behavior, and sought to understand work styles, tools, motivations, challenges, and successes in the context of the employee's physical space, their current role, and their projects. It is far more in-depth than a survey, but when combined with traditional data gathering sources, such as corporate-wide surveys, the result is a very comprehensive, qualitative and quantitative view into collaborative work behaviors.

The insights from the study helped us better understand how collaboration works at Cisco. As a result, new opportunities to enable more effective collaboration through our technology, culture and supporting processes emerged, as well as additional services to offer to our customers. We will share not only what we learned but several ways Cisco has addressed findings in this study plus actionable recommendations that can apply to any team or company looking to effectively achieve results through collaboration.

What we learned

The top findings show how employees think about collaboration, what makes collaboration successful, and what challenges may hold companies back from effectively achieving results through collaboration. We also noticed several patterns emerging in how employees collaborate that can be leveraged to better support and encourage successful collaborative efforts, through changes to process, culture, and technology.

Employees Value Collaboration

Our research participants expressed that the collective intelligence and diverse perspectives of people working together creates **better overall results**.

But we also uncovered a tension between the human interactions of working together and the ability to produce outcomes. Corporate culture is often driven by results. For collaboration to be valued, it must be an effective means to achieve an objective and ultimately produce an outcome.

The Formula for Successful Collaboration

During the study, no formal process for collaborating was referenced, however we identified several strategies, that when used together, can provide a formula for success.

Build relationships and networks that lead to trust

At the core of collaboration is people interacting with people. When it comes to successful collaboration, the human interactions between collaborators becomes a key factor. Our participants sought out ways to meet face to face. If that was not possible, they embraced technology, such as Cisco's TelePresence video-

conferencing, that closely emulates human interactions. Simply said, participation and engagement increase when people can see and hear each other well, and thus, interact.

Taking the time to build relationships that eventually lead to trust is critical—as well as fostering these relationships as they grow. Getting to know fellow collaborators, beyond their role and job title, goes a long way in making the collaborative endeavors more successful. When the relationship becomes more personal, the collaboration goes more smoothly. As one of our participants stated: **“We need to get back to the intimacy.”**

Turn human interactions into results

Taking the human or personal part of collaboration and turning it into concrete results is a challenging but worthwhile endeavor. When the collaboration experience is not engaging and participatory, it can become stifled. Creating an open and participatory environment that engages others to participate is key. Taking time to plan a collaborative session, engage the right people and choosing the right technology and forum can help achieve successful results. Setting expectations, being aware of cultural and regional differences and facilitating an open and contributive session are also key factors to success. Ensuring that collaborators leverage best practices to personally engage is a big way in which companies can facilitate effective interactions without relying on technology alone.

Executive Summary

Evolve the culture for productive collaboration

Creating a culture where collaboration is valued, modeled and rewarded is essential. When collaborative leaders model the attitudes and behaviors that drive successful collaboration, this permeates through their organization, their employees and team members. Leveraging key individuals in the company, with skills to accelerate collaboration and bring the right people together, reinforces the culture of collaboration. And while many of our participants stated the experience of collaboration can be rewarding in itself, it becomes less of a driving factor over time if the efforts become continually challenged by loss of work/life balance or the rewards and recognition do not feel worth the effort. A balanced approach between recognition and tangible rewards like compensation, bonuses and promotions is necessary to reinforce positive collaborative behaviors.

Balance decision making and consensus building

Trying to reach consensus while making decisions collaboratively can be a delicate balance. When inputs and opinions are gathered, “20 to 1” cannot be considered a tie vote if a company wants to effectively make decisions. In addition, a consensus-driven culture can develop over-socialization habits- meaning more meetings for everyone. Creating a culture of decision making and accountability can correct these habits as well as providing guidelines on decision making and facilitating consensus building. Shifting behaviors from “always meeting” to “meeting when needed” will give more time back for efforts best served in a synchronous session. Adopting alternative approaches, such as, asynchronous communication and collaboration tools and evaluating who really needs to be in the room can also help.

Leveraging the Patterns of Collaboration

When looking at behaviors in context to how people work and collaborate during their day, several patterns emerged about collaboration.

Collaboration is more than an Instance

One of these patterns revealed that collaboration is more than just the instance of a “meeting.” There are before, during and after activities that take place online and offline, asynchronously and synchronously, using a variety of disparate tools. More can be done to support the way people plan, prepare and collaborate across multiple interactions in a variety of modes and objectives. Cisco’s next generation [WebEx meeting platform](#) is beginning to do just that by redefining the meeting experience – including aspects to manage the complete meeting lifecycle. Meeting organizers can plan their meeting using the technology (before), richly interact and share in the session (during) and capture and share the meeting artifacts, even scheduling follow up meetings with the same group of collaborators (after).

Collaboration types

In addition, four types of collaboration emerged based on the unique patterns of interactions that form around the collaboration objective. Each collaboration type has unique characteristics regarding the set-up, roles and technology typically used to achieve the desired outcome.

These are the four collaboration types:

Collaboration Type	Outcomes
Relationship Building & Networking	Partnership; Trust Personal Networks
Problem Solving	Resolution Options
Innovation	New Ideas
Execution & Communication	Decisions Project Deliverables

By understanding these patterns and supporting them through process, culture, and technology, many companies can set up employees—and the corporation—for success.

What we recommend

The study captured a rich and extensive amount of data that provides a wealth of opportunities, not only for Cisco, but for any company looking to drive successful collaboration throughout the organization.

As you read through this document, you will find actionable recommendations at the end of each section (aptly titled “Take Action”) that are applicable to individual employees, company leaders, and organizational programs and processes. The recommendations reflect aspects of culture, process, technology and the physical and virtual working environments.

What follows is a closer look at our findings and how to act on them.

The Value of Collaboration

“The value that comes with working with others is the diversity of thoughts. Once the conversation gets started, it can take on many ideas. Thoughts feed on other thoughts.”

The Value of Collaboration

Collaboration is a vital part of any company’s daily activities. Dealing with challenges, creating new products, redefining internal processes—virtually any business decision can benefit from collaboration. During the course of our study we found that employees definitely understand the value of collaboration—it provides diversity of thoughts, creates stronger relationships, and provides validation for business decisions. Our research found that through collaboration, employees have learned new skills, been more productive, and built networks of colleagues.

“Collaboration is the bundling of experiences. Sharing the expertise and being able to leverage the experience of many people gives you diversity, and different views. It sums up to more than if you do it on your own.”

When asked to define collaboration, the majority of the participants provided a clear and consistent definition that is in line with how business thought leaders talk about it.

We consistently heard these phrases:

- Shared goals
- Common vision
- Teamwork
- Working together

Collectively, the definition from participants looks like this:

“Two or more people working toward a shared goal that might be out of their reach as individuals.”


This definition, with the addition of how participants

described the value, experience and motivating factors perceptions and expectations for collaboration in the of collaboration, paints a representative picture of their workplace. With collaboration relying so heavily on human interactions, insight into the behaviors and perceptions of participants provides a realistic view of the ways collaboration is part of an employee’s daily work life.

“Collaboration behaviors are seeking input, feedback, checking in, group discussion, group interaction. It’s “We vs. I” mentality.”

More importantly, participants emphasized how important it is to **align** through shared goals and vision in order to succeed.

To work jointly with others or together especially in an intellectual endeavor.



-Merriam-Webster Dictionary

The act of people working together to reach a common goal.




-Cisco Collaboration Framework¹

People working together to share knowledge and expertise, combined with communication technology to create business outcomes.



-Collaboration Consortium²

Two or more people working towards a shared goal that might be out of their reach as individuals.



-Cisco Employees (Work Study Participant)

Common **Act** Others Create
 Individuals **Expertise**
People Working
 Jointly **Together** Towards
 Combined **Reach** Technology
Shared Goals Business
 Communication Intellectual
Endeavor Outcomes

¹ [Cisco Collaboration Framework](#)

² [Collaboration Consortium](#).

The Value of Collaboration

The tension

We see by participants' collaboration definitions, that they were quick to mention that the outcome of working together is simply better than working individually. But we also uncovered a tension between the human interactions of working together and the ability to produce outcomes. Corporate culture tends to be driven by results. For collaboration to be valued, it must be an effective means to achieve an objective and ultimately produce an outcome.

How employees experience this tension

Collaboration at a human level

At its core, collaboration is simply people interacting with other people. The collective intelligence and diverse perspectives of people working together creates better, overall results. One participant even described this as a means to achieve "spectacular" results. In addition, several participants spoke about the innovation and new thinking that comes out of collaboration, driving potential value and impact to business.

"There is rich dialogue that comes out of the ideas of others."

And because collaboration is so "grounded" in human interaction and relationships, many participants described how the experience "felt" in the following ways:

- **Rewarding**—the essence of working together feels rewarding as better results come from a diversity of thoughts/perspectives
- **Engaging**—participation by all team members feels

right. Welcoming diverse opinions enables a feeling of trust which is critical to creating relationships

- **Community oriented**—a feeling of community and togetherness. Ownership is shared which reduces the chance of territorial attitudes.
- **Enjoyable**—throwing in some fun enhances the experience

However, we also heard the collaboration experience described as:

- **Frustrating**—decision making can be time-consuming especially when a consensus is not reached
- **Stressful**—the feeling of inclusion led to the stress of "have I invited everyone?"

"We just have these really long debates"

Balance is critical to success.

Collaboration that achieves results

Many participants spoke about collaboration as an effective way to achieve results and improve overall productivity.

From a participant: *"I, as an individual, can create a deck, but it's exponentially better when we work together. The traditional way some people go about the work is to craft a deck and conduct formal peer review. The results are not as good [as working collaboratively]."*

For collaboration to work on both levels, it's necessary to address the tension with good structure, awareness, and expertise in order to turn those human interactions and relationships into effective results. One participant, a Senior Director, described a successful collaboration experience as, *"grounded in trust, shared goals and a*

good mix of collaboration technologies and process to move it forward."

Take action

Take a look at how your organization perceives collaboration. You can use some of the questions and guidelines from this section to begin a discussion.

Ask employees:

- How do you define collaboration (in any context, not just from a corporate perspective)?
- What value do you see in collaboration?
- What makes collaboration successful?
- What barriers have you experienced?
- Are you motivated to collaborate? Why or why not?
- What kind of work benefits most from collaborating with others?

Remember: understanding the perceptions of collaboration in your company or organization can show you how employees feel about the process, but more importantly, it can help you understand what will motivate employees to collaborate and help you pinpoint areas to focus on to drive more effective collaboration.

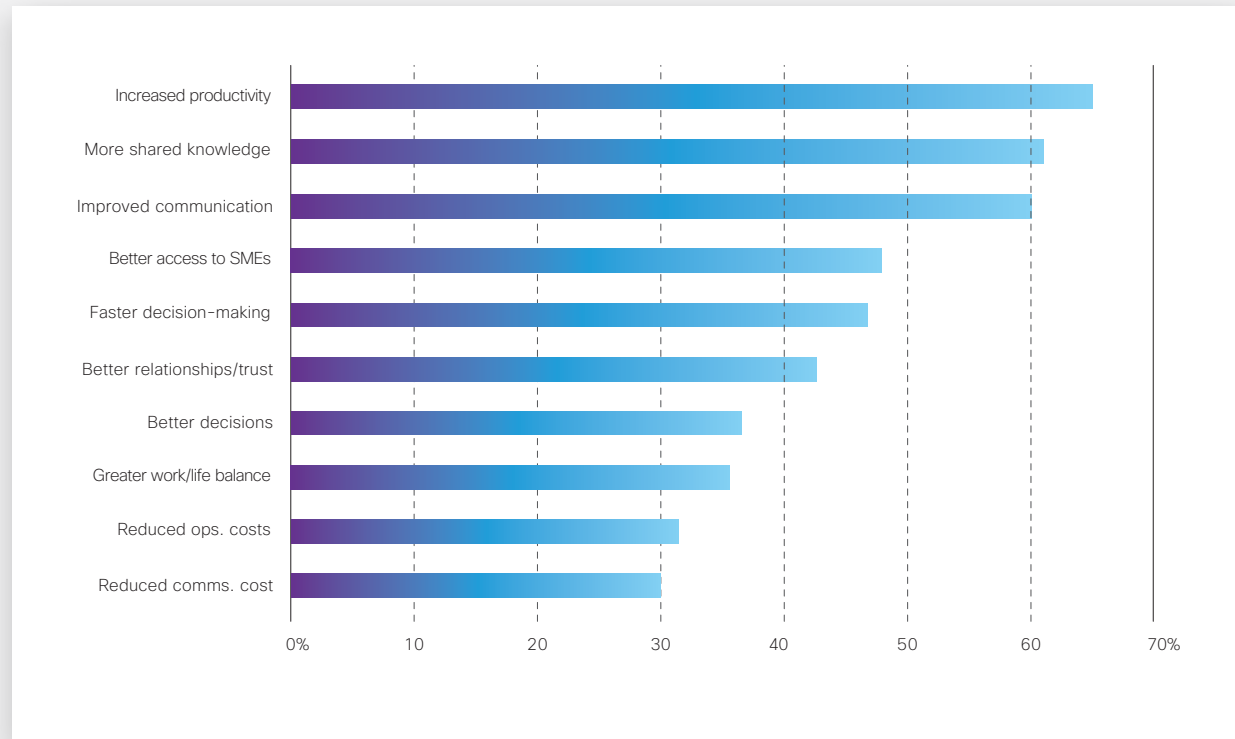
Now that we've reviewed the value of collaboration from the participants' perspective, we will reveal several principles for successful collaboration that quickly became apparent.

The Value of Collaboration

Top Ten Collaboration Benefits (Cisco Internal)

Cisco's annual internal survey on collaboration supports the findings from the work practice study. In a ranking of the top 10 collaboration benefits, elements of results (productivity, faster/better decisions) and human connection (improved communication, better relationships/trust) intermingled. The top-reported collaboration drawbacks also illustrated this tension, and included things like information overload and unstructured or chaotic work processes that sometimes lead to stress.

Cisco employees ranked the top benefits of collaboration¹.



¹ From the Cisco Collaboration Survey (2012), an annual company-wide survey that assesses global employee collaboration perceptions and opinions. The 2012 survey is the fourth annual survey at Cisco. The survey helps inform decisions about enhancing how employee communicate, collaborate and ultimately transform business at Cisco, and generally has 1000+ respondents.

The Value of Collaboration

Why do I collaborate with others?

- Better Results
- Collective Intelligence
- Diverse Perspectives
- Innovation & Scale

What is collaboration?

- Shared Goals
- Common Vision
- Working Together

What motivates me to collaborate?

- Personal Fulfillment
- Being Part of the Team
- Recognition
- Incentives & Tangible Reward



How does successful collaboration feel?

- Engaging, Inclusive
- Synergistic
- Community
- Rewarding
- Enjoyable, Fun
- Empowering

...but can also be

- Time Consuming
- Chaotic
- Frustrating

The Formula for Successful Collaboration

“The essence of collaboration is working together with people, communicating openly and not losing the human elements and interaction.

Once you develop a personal relationship with somebody, your work becomes more collaborative.”

The Formula for Successful Collaboration

BUILD RELATIONSHIPS AND NETWORKS THAT LEAD TO TRUST

As we studied employee collaboration, we identified several strategies that, when used together, can provide a formula for success.

- **Build relationships and networks that lead to trust**
- **Turn human interactions into results**
- **Evolve the culture for productive collaboration**
- **Balance decision making and consensus building**

In this section, we'll take a look at each of these strategies that can help employees realize successful collaboration, and in turn, gain effective results.

Build relationships and networks that lead to trust

Since collaboration at its core is people interacting with people, building relationships that eventually lead to trust is critical. But fostering them after they've been created is just as significant. It should come as no surprise that the "human element" and personal nature of collaboration seemed to weave itself into nearly all successful collaborative endeavors.

Employees we talked to thrived on building relationships and strong partnerships with those they were working with. They sought out ways to emulate human interactions through technology, such as video conferencing technology, when working with virtual teams. And they valued making connections with others. In fact, personal networks are a critical resource to leverage in order to tap into the expertise and knowledge of the company. The "human element" of collaboration came across very strongly and it should be a key consideration as any company considers the opportunities to enhance successful collaboration.

"We all have a different mindset, [and] we need to understand each other as much as possible to create trust so when [we] are challenged, we know it's not personal."

Nearly all the participants expressed that building relationships and trust is key to successful collaboration, and many noted it was the most critical component of collaboration. In fact, "building relationships and trust" was ranked 6th on a list of 17 collaboration benefits on the Cisco Collaboration Survey (2012). Investing the time and effort to do this, whether with team members, mentors, customers or partners is well worth the effort. Relationships that are developed and nurtured over time lead to trust. Trust is what provides the confidence in the sincerity, the reliability, and the competence of the people they were working with.

"There is clarity and transparency across the organization. [Collaboration] breaks down barriers between organizations."

To that end, interpersonal relationships went beyond just getting the job done. When describing successful collaboration experiences, participants spoke of the degree to which they got to know more about their fellow collaborators above and beyond their job titles and work experience. Again, the human element or personal nature of collaboration plays out here. Understanding not only their work style but taking time to get to know them on a personal level plays heavily into that sense of trust. Being sensitive to regional and cultural differences is important here as well.

"The essence of collaboration is working together with people, communicating openly and not losing the human elements and interaction. Once you develop a personal relationship with somebody, your work becomes more collaborative."

Face-to-face interactions help create new relationships and trust

For customer-facing job roles, building relationships and trust with customers is critical in order to establish new sales opportunities and create future revenue streams. All the participants stated it is most effective to build relationships in person, or face to face, rather than virtually, particularly when relationships are just forming.

Casual, unscheduled meetings also occurred regularly. The study found employees participated in many in-person, 1:1 meetings and even ad-hoc hallway or "drop

The Formula for Successful Collaboration

BUILD RELATIONSHIPS AND NETWORKS THAT LEAD TO TRUST

by cube” conversations where people interacted on a personal level to grow their relationships. Several went out of their way to meet in-person (one participant did so while on a personal vacation) just because they’d be in the area of someone they had previously worked with only virtually. Several people who didn’t work at company headquarters expressed the value in meeting people face to face when visiting that area. Managers also expressed the importance of an “open door policy” for their employees to grow the relationship and trust that is important for teams to function effectively.

Emulating human interactions brings the personal nature into a virtual reality

When it is not possible to interact face to face, employees embraced technology tools, such as video conferencing that bridge the gap. It is not just the investment of time in these interactions, but enabling interactions through technology and the working environment that is equally important. The participants expressed that building relationships was a way for them to feel connected and engaged.

“Collaboration isn’t new. We’ve been doing it for thousands of years. If we add virtual in front of it, this changes the world.”

As companies become more global and with more teams becoming virtual, face to face isn’t always possible or cost effective. Emulating human interactions through technology is critical for any company’s virtual reality initiatives. Real-time video conferencing such as TelePresence has been heavily adopted at Cisco, not only because the company developed the technology, but also because of its ability to facilitate intimate human interactions. In fact, TelePresence was used as part of the research methodology for this study to more

effectively reach other areas of the globe for very candid interviews.

“TP [TelePresence] is fantastic technology. It is a much richer and effective way to have conversations.”

When TelePresence isn’t available, WebEx (a Cisco-owned technology) is used extensively. Impromptu, informal real-time interaction (similar to an ad-hoc meeting in a hallway or café) is enabled virtually through technologies like video conferencing, real-time document sharing, and using rich high-definition video. Combining with existing email, voicemail and Instant Messaging (IM) practices have made collaboration more convenient, faster, and more flexible. Finding ways to enable richer ad-hoc interactions virtually is still a need. Our participants suggested that video-enabled cafés, break-rooms and labs would be great ways to informally connect with others and create the feel of an impromptu collaboration that typically happens when collaborators are co-located.

Participants generally spoke of the gains these technologies brought to their collaboration efforts—it allowed them to work more effectively with more people, at longer distances, than ever before.

The key is to not to lose the intimacy. One participant said: “WebEx is huge. I am on WebEx about 4 times a day with a global team. We can share docs, see each other face to face and get things done. The challenge is the personal element... the way you approach WebEx is very important.”

Leverage personal networks to enhance collaboration

As a result of building relationships and making connections with others through various interactions, employees can grow their personal network of contacts.

Investing in Team Relationships

The Collaboration Work Practice Study findings that related to the human element of collaboration and the personal nature of relationships was not necessarily something “new.” However, it did cause several teams to take a step back and reflect. Are we investing the time to get to know each other better? When is the last time we met as a team in-person or over TelePresence vs. just a phone conference? Did we incorporate any social activities when we met?

Harbrinder Kang, Sr. Director of Collaboration Business Technologies stated after investing in an in-person two day working session with his leadership team that spans across three regions: “Getting together in-person fostered the interactions we needed to move ideas forward; especially with new team members. We were able to achieve a ton of work in a short time. The social activities we planned provided a great way for the team to connect on a personal level. It was an energizing and successful session.”

The Formula for Successful Collaboration

BUILD RELATIONSHIPS AND NETWORKS THAT LEAD TO TRUST

This personal network is leveraged as a critical resource to connect with experts, socialize a new idea, or even explore career development opportunities. It was a valuable tool for participants in successfully driving collaborative initiatives, especially when this required pulling together a team or solving an issue.

In fact, building and extending a network of colleagues has been in the top five list of “collaboration motivations” for the last three years in the Collaboration Survey. In 2012, it ranked 5th of 13 items on a list of top “collaboration motivations,” and placed 3rd on a list of positive career impacts.

“Who you know” becomes a critical component in moving things along faster, getting an answer quicker, or connecting on areas of similar interest or focus. Participants with tenure and seniority were shown to have large professional networks inside the company and were able to form ongoing collaborative partnerships. Often, newly hired individuals leverage their managers’ or senior team members’ network of contacts until they build their own personal network at the company.

“I’m fairly new to Cisco but my manager has been with Cisco for 12-13 years. He points me to the right people. I have to understand who they are and what they do.”

Having visibility to the personal networks of others (such as in the new hire example above) is extremely valuable. Obtaining a visual view of the “human” networks within a team or organization is another valuable insight. Several organizations within Cisco have undergone an [Organizational Network Analysis \(ONA\)](#) to better understand the working relationships and flow of information between team members and groups of individuals. An ONA helps an organization

visualize the relationships on the team; who the change agents are and how information is flowing in and out and around. In doing so, it provides a tangible resource for viewing the construct of the team network and for modeling the impact of potential personnel changes. Michael Lenz, Director of Experience Strategy and Design at Cisco, discusses the value of conducting an ONA in his blog [“We Can Learn Some Things About Collaboration From Duke’s Coach K”](#). ONA provides organizational dynamics similar to what we’ve come to expect from data analytics, but at a human level, much like social network analysis does.. The organizational dynamics often hidden behind nuances and intangibles are now transparent and telling. ONA has been an instrumental tool in change management and is one of [Cisco’s Advanced Services](#) offerings based on customer requests.

Similar to building relationships and trust, participants spoke highly of opportunities where they were able to network and make new contacts. These social interactions were often positive and engaging. Participants expressed the importance of continuing to “expand horizons.” This includes regular meetings with other organizations, partners, regions, or others outside their normal circle of contacts to gain insight and new perspectives. And a new connection may lead to a future opportunity to collaborate and partner.

“Be prepared to take risks [for successful collaboration]. This whole opportunity came about because I speculatively sent an email to someone I met at a conference and the conversation and relationship built from there.”

Take action

People interacting with people is at the core of collaboration. Follow these best practices to foster relationships, build trust, and enhance the interactions between collaborators.

- Do not lose sight of the “human element” when considering opportunities to enhance successful collaboration.
- Invest time in building relationships and provide tools and technologies that help people not only connect, but learn more about each other.
- Encourage employees to develop personal networks and to expand them outside their immediate circle.
- Leverage personal networks to produce new opportunities, connect people and find expertise.
- Consider conducting an Organizational Network Analysis (ONA) to better understand working relationships on the team.
- Use available video technologies to emulate human interactions whenever face-to-face is not an option; especially early on in building a relationship.
- Provide venues and/or technologies that enable rich virtual ad-hoc collaboration.
- Bring the human element to the physical and virtual environment – consider things that create a more comfortable, personal, and engaging environment for collaborators. Don’t forget to build in flexibility and fun!

Now that you’ve seen how building and fostering relationships to create trust benefits the collaboration process, let’s examine how companies can turn human interactions and collaboration into results.

The Formula for Successful Collaboration

TURN HUMAN INTERACTIONS INTO RESULTS

Turn human interactions into results

Turning human interactions into concrete results is an important aspect of making collaboration successful. To achieve this goal, companies must take a closer look at the level of participation by the collaborators. To achieve “diversity of thought” that leads to successful outcomes requires certain considerations: Have we created an environment that is open and participatory? Do the collaborators feel comfortable sharing and exchanging ideas? Do they understand the shared goal and outcome that their participation will contribute to?

A Cisco Executive who participated in the study talked about the importance of the emotional environment. He stated that the key ingredient of a collaborative environment is making sure people are comfortable to participate.

When the collaboration experience is not engaging and participatory, it can become stifled. Ensuring invested and engaged collaborators is an immense way in which companies facilitate effective interactions without relying on technology alone. While technology did contribute to the success and challenges of engaging collaborators, it is apparent that aspects of culture, process, and physical environment contribute as well.

The root cause for employees becoming disengaged or non-participatory varied. Sometimes expectations were not set up front, and participants did not understand why their contributions were valuable, or the facilitation of the session was not conducive to participation, or a remote team member may not feel included as part of a U.S.-based team. Regardless of the cause, the end result is a lack of participation, which makes it difficult to achieve a successful outcome through collaboration.

When it comes to setting up a collaborative session, consider these techniques that will ultimately impact participation.

“You really need to focus on the people aspect first... to focus on the natural human interaction component... get individuals to feel engaged, and to continue to be engaged.”

I think too many times we rely on the technology. We have to create that engagement.”

Set the stage for the best results

In a results-driven culture, ensuring investment and engagement means setting expectations— and these expectations should be communicated up front and should also be aligned around a shared goal. When employees are results-driven, they want to do the right

thing for the company and they are passionate about what they do. They want to be involved, engaged and contribute. They want to accomplish something and interact with others to do so. They don't like wasting time—they want it to mean something. They come to meetings ready to engage.

Take time to plan

Planning is a critical part of any endeavor, and that applies to individual meeting sessions as well. Many participants described unsuccessful collaboration sessions as those where no outcome was reached, which made them feel like nothing was accomplished during that session. This in turn can make the employee feel like their time was wasted. And as a result, their investment in that effort begins to diminish. Often this happens when planning and communication was lacking prior to the meeting or collaborative session. It wasn't clear why everyone was brought together and in some cases no agenda was communicated ahead of time.

Another contributing factor was participants' inability to see or understand alignment of the work to larger organizational or company goals. Because employees' time is a huge commodity, they need to see the value in the effort, and determine whether it's a good investment of their time—especially if it is an effort outside of their daily work responsibilities. Proper planning with clearly-defined objectives and milestones goes a long way to combat cycling in a discussion phase.

“Not many people put the agenda in the meeting requests...making it hard for people who would have to attend at night to decide whether they need to attend or not.”

The Formula for Successful Collaboration

TURN HUMAN INTERACTIONS INTO RESULTS

Help facilitate the session

Participation means everyone has a voice and is comfortable using it. For active participation to occur, people need to feel comfortable sharing, listening and exchanging ideas. They also need to feel their contributions are considered and valued.

Frustration results when people want to participate but face difficulties due to their “personal circumstances” or with the set up and facilitation of the meeting itself. With the latter, in many situations, the choice of the forum or technology used for the interaction did not lend itself to the objective at hand and was not conducive to the type of participation required for the effort. For example, trying to use a whiteboard in a brainstorming session when many will be on the phone is often not successful.

In other situations, the lead or facilitator did not actively engage or solicit participation from all team members, especially when the majority of the team members were in a conference room together while several others were on the phone. Regarding personal circumstances, including time zone differences, participants in remote locations often needed to participate in calls late in the evening. This puts the remote collaborator at a disadvantage because they are not always in a situation that allows them to participate fully.

“The key ingredient of a collaborative environment is making sure people are comfortable to participate.”

Outside of a specific collaborative effort, engagement can mean interacting with and feeling part of your organizational or working team. This was particularly true for remote participants, who expressed feeling isolated at times. The challenge is how to enable more interactions and even informal, ad-hoc collaboration for

individuals who work from home or are the only team member in a given location.

“This was a great collaboration experience. All participants are invited to contribute. There was a lot of discussing and conversing throughout the day and participants interacted with a variety of people in different activities. The organizer of this event spent a lot of time preparing. She focused on the people aspect (human interaction) of it first and ensured everyone was engaged.”

Choose the right forum and technology for collaborative interactions and objectives

The choice of forum and technology for collaborative interactions can be a contributing factor in whether participants are engaged or not, can play a role in how successfully the objective is achieved, and factor into whether the time invested is effectively utilized. Faced with numerous tools, technologies and options it is difficult to know which is best, especially when there is a lack of guidance and easily accessible best practices to help collaborators choose appropriately based on what they are trying to accomplish.

When the forum and technology did not match the expectations of the participants in how they are being asked to participate or be involved, it can cause frustration. This discontent seemed to come from one of two places – either the inefficiency of the interaction (wasted time, too much detail when less was needed, difficult to participate, etc.) or the feeling that the interaction (tone, body language, personal relationship and trust) was lost in the choice of medium used. In fact, several participants expressed some tools or practices felt “more right” for some kinds of interactions than others.

The fidelity, or richness and quality, of the communication medium has a direct influence on the speed and effectiveness of the dialogue—a key consideration for anyone setting up a collaborative session. If the collaboration requires a high level of interaction and dialogue and a timely resolution, using a rich medium is the most effective option. For example, using technologies like TelePresence allows for real-time interaction and may speed up the face-to-face dialogue. This is especially true if the alternative would require travel by global or geographically dispersed team members. The richer the medium, the more effective and faster it is to reach consensus, build relationships and resolve issues.

When a relationship is already established, the fidelity of the interaction required for a successful dialogue decreases. In this case, text (e.g., email, Instant Messenger), voice (e.g., voicemail) or video (e.g., WebEx) mediums can be effective based on the collaboration needs and objectives. For example, when a relationship is already established, instant messaging and the real-time interaction it provides is as close to an informal hallway conversation as you can get. It provides

“I prefer to watch [a recorded video] if it’s just to find out news about something, rather than sit through a meeting about it.”

The Formula for Successful Collaboration

TURN HUMAN INTERACTIONS INTO RESULTS

a very effective way to quickly get an answer to a question or a quick collaboration to vet an idea or obtain feedback.

In some cases, a text or voice option may be the perfect choice. For example: a blog is a great option for communicating ideas to many and inviting interaction because it does not have a time constraint. In contrast, resolving a critical customer issue needs timely resolution and engaged interaction. While “in person” may be the most effective option, if that’s not possible, a video or TelePresence option would be the next best choice.

Those who facilitate collaborative sessions could benefit from guidelines and best practices that help them understand the relationship between the criteria of the collaborative session (objective, participation requirements, timeliness, maturity of the personal relationships in the team, etc.) and the communication mediums best suited to accomplish their goals.

Fidelity of Communications

When considering which forum and technology is best for a collaborative endeavor identify the following needs based on the objective:

- Communication (reach, personal connection)
- Interaction (level of participation)
- Speed (real-time, urgency)
- Maturity of Personal Relationships



The Formula for Successful Collaboration

TURN HUMAN INTERACTIONS INTO RESULTS

Consider the number of attendees

Sometimes the size of the meeting becomes a barrier to participation. Couple this with a “one-way” communication approach, and the attendees become disengaged or give partial attention to the session while they multi-task on something else. When a conference call has a large number of attendees, there is a lot of “white noise” and it becomes less comfortable to voice a thought or opinion or ask a question. This doesn’t mean that large meetings aren’t effective, but it is critical that considerations are made in advance for the intended objective and how to execute it with the suite of options available.

Thoughtfully choose the collaborative environment

Through video or in-person workplace tours, participants showed a variety of spaces that support different needs of working together or working alone. While the study was not conclusive on all accounts, certain environments (low cube walls, co-location) were very conducive to the collaboration needs of a team that interacted daily.

How to facilitate the type of interactions required for the collaborating teams through the physical and virtual environment is an important consideration. Many teams are globally dispersed and may not have an option to create a collaborative physical space but they may need to facilitate a similar environment virtually.

Create a culture of global awareness

To collaborate globally in virtual teams, everyone needs to be aware of and respect those in different time zones, or those who may have a different way of working or interacting based on culture. This is part of building relationships and trust and important to maintain

“With working remotely, it’s up to other people to share information with you, so if you’re not connected with people you’re not going to get information.”

engaged and invested collaborators. U.S. participants—both individual contributors and leadership—felt that the U.S. adopts an open, fair and meritocratic approach: “here’s what we want to achieve, let’s all figure the best way to get it done”. The best idea wins, regardless of where it came from. This “fair” and open approach makes it easy to assume that it transcends across all interactions. However, this isn’t always the case.

Working across time zones was ranked #3 of 20 collaboration barriers on the Cisco Collaboration Survey, and continues to be a challenge for many teams. Many U.S. employees feel they are sensitive to time zone differences. However, if the majority of attendees are in similar time zones, the majority tends to rule. Often, people not in the U.S. were given an option to attend (or not) if a meeting occurred at an inopportune time. Attending a meeting late at night put that attendee at a disadvantage for actively contributing. And, the offer of “we will record the meeting for you,” can sometimes send a message that their participation in the dialogue is not valued. Certainly, the time zone issue is a challenging one to resolve, as there is always a “bad time” for

someone – but more sensitivity and creative approaches can help.

As we mentioned previously, building relationships and trust is a critical part to successful collaboration. Taking time to learn more about the people you collaborate with extends to understanding more about their culture based on the region they are from, what organization they are a part of, and what their background and experience is. This will lead to more successful participation and dialogue.

Some of these suggestions can help your company overcome time zone challenges when collaborating:

- Allow a few minutes of the meeting for small talk or personal topic conversations. Get to know your colleagues!
- Acknowledge and thank the people who are attending the meeting at an inconvenient time.
- Rotate the meeting time so the same teams/people aren’t consistently inconvenienced simply because of their time zone.
- Open the meeting with appropriate and multiple greetings for every time zone—good morning, good afternoon, good evening.
- Use active listening to check for clarity and understanding—both locally and remotely.
- Take notes using a shared, online source so any misunderstandings can be cleared up immediately.
- Record the meeting using tools that are deemed best for everyone involved.
- Be aware of local customs, traditions, and holidays—and don’t assume others will know of U.S.-centric holidays.

The Formula for Successful Collaboration

TURN HUMAN INTERACTIONS INTO RESULTS

Take action

At first, turning human interactions into concrete results may seem challenging. To meet this goal, companies can take a closer look at the level of participation by the collaborators, and ensure the environment is open, welcoming, and participatory.

- Teach people to be better collaborators—provide best practices on how to facilitate and engage participants in collaborative sessions and how to plan and run effective meetings.
- Create guidelines and best practices for selecting the best forum and technology for the interactions.
- Invest time in building relationships and provide tools and technologies that help people not only connect, but learn more about each other.
- Build in accommodations for time zones, holidays and working hours so they are the “norm” not the exception in your team’s daily routines.
- Be explicit and aware of the challenges of collaborating across cultures and embrace the opportunity to learn more.
- Don’t lose the intimacy. Consider situations where “in person” is the better option and make it happen.
- Avoid overusing technology (like meeting recordings) as a substitute for live interaction.

We’ve shown some tips and techniques for turning human interactions into results. Now, we’ll review how corporate culture, including how leaders and other employees can create policies and provide support for successful collaboration.

TelePresence - Bringing Global Teams Face to Face

It is not surprising that TelePresence as a choice of technology for synchronous meetings is becoming more prevalent internally. With team members and experts dispersed across the globe, the ability to bring people together utilizing a rich medium for communication is the most efficient way to enable the dialogue to move quickly.

“I think the interaction via Telepresence is similar to face-to-face meetings. It saves time and cost from travel and increases productivity. Now I can bring expertise and partner together quickly in virtual meetings. My team can scale to support multiple partners better too.”

More and more teams are utilizing TelePresence for regularly scheduled meetings, not only for the real-time interactions but the benefits it brings in building relationships. One participant in the study, located in Amsterdam, championed TelePresence for their regular “all hands” meetings. It didn’t take long for the team to realize the benefit in the areas of collaboration, team building, and better understanding of each other cultures. It continues to reinforce the influence the richness of the medium has on the fidelity of communications.

The Formula for Successful Collaboration

EVOLVE THE CULTURE FOR PRODUCTIVE COLLABORATION

Evolve the culture for productive collaboration

The culture of a company plays an important role in driving successful collaboration. From the top down, leaders and other invested employees must model behavior, facilitate involvement, and literally champion the process. And, as with any other mind-shift or culture change, rewarding the new, successful behavior is a must.

The Cisco Collaboration Survey results show that employees feel collaboration is explicitly stated as a priority for the company—which creates a corporate culture that supports collaboration. Employees also stated that “leaders are genuinely collaborative” and “support” the launch of collaborative efforts that build on innovative ideas. When these attitudes are pervasive in an organization, employees are empowered to take action.

Take a closer look at company culture

But while many companies do a great job in building a culture of collaboration, people are not always comfortable with change. As difficult as it may be, behaviors may need to shift so employees can achieve positive collaboration results and propel the company forward.

Here are some potential pitfalls that can derail collaboration within a company.

Territorial ownership and lack of shared goals

While many participants spoke about collaboration as “letting go” of personal agendas and taking a “we” approach of shared ownership, many situations resembled a territorial battle—employees were not open to sharing information and couldn’t look more

broadly at “the greater good.” In some cases, personal agendas create conflict. These attitudes prevent positive, productive collaboration to happen, shut the interactions down and perpetuate the problem of siloed tools and processes that create redundancies and a fractured experience for the collaborators.

“Some people try to create their own kingdom or become a gate keeper. Collaboration can take a lot longer when this happens.”

Using what’s known instead of trying something new

Humans are creatures of habit. There is a tendency to fall back to what is already there, easy and known, versus trying something new, be it a new process, tool or technology. Many are not willing to take the leap until they are completely convinced of the value. And often, if it is not immediately convenient, they don’t see value.

Build a culture of collaboration and flexibility

To succeed, collaboration must be internalized in the company culture. Every participant in the study was clearly aware of the imperative for and value of collaboration. Everyone seemed to be invested in the success of integrating collaboration into their work, seeing collaboration both as a “way of working” and also as a suite of tools and solutions.

Participants were empowered to reach out to others and in general had a spirit of “helping out” for the greater good—which was also evidenced in the Cisco Collaboration Survey as a top motivator. Companies must support flexibility in how their employees accomplish their work. This is critical in enabling people around the globe to collaborate with one another. Flexibility enables virtual teams to function effectively and for employees to achieve a better work/life balance. Our participants

Technology Influencing Meeting Behavior

Do meetings always happen in exact 30-minute increments? Not often. While a regular cadence of “too many meetings” can stem from several root causes, consider the influence of technology (email/calendar tools) on meeting scheduling. If tools used 15-20 minute blocks, meeting behavior might be significantly different and match the real needs of the collaboration better.

After our Collaboration Work Practice Study findings were released internally, this became a hot topic of discussion. We began to see a new awareness of “time” within several teams. People began to plan more carefully and manually change the defaulting time allocations to more realistic increments. Employees were quick to add to the conversation around “breaking out of the 60-minute meeting”, noting that the sheer ease in which meetings can be scheduled in 30-minute blocks often ensures they WILL be scheduled in 30-minute blocks, and that this is the most reasonable choice for the task at hand. And, in some cases the time increment allotted for the meeting implies that you “have” the attendees for that full time regardless if the meeting’s agenda concludes early. For example, “Since I have you all here, let’s discuss...” is often heard. It’s much better to say “15 minutes back for everyone,” – your participants will be appreciative for the time back, and who knows when you will be the attendee, needing a few minutes back yourself. Changing behavior takes time; this particular behavioral change will take technology, culture and process to move the needle.

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appreciated a flexible working style and recognized the positive impact it has on their overall productivity.

This flexibility extends not only to work hours but the physical environments (car, home, office) in which they can work and collaborate. And video conferencing and asynchronous collaboration tools are great alternatives when employees are traveling or if a face-to-face meeting is not possible.

“I was able to use TP(TelePresence) and WebEx to deliver an important presentation and avoided travel when my wife was due for delivery.”

Several participants were observed using their mobile devices regularly—they provide flexibility, and a lightweight option, to take a meeting in the car on the drive home, check in while at a customer or external event, or quickly check email and voicemail without the overhead of a laptop. Participants talked about their cars, kitchens, dining room tables, couches and even beds as extensions of their offices. Flexibility in general, is a theme for driving successful collaboration. In addition to the flexibility given to employees to do their job anytime, anywhere, and on any device, flexibility should also extend into the virtual and physical workplace.

Encourage leaders to shape a corporate culture of collaboration

In the field, collaborative attitudes and behaviors define the “leader” in a given situation. Although 19 of the 53 participants were directors and above, it was clear that within any given initiative the leadership role is not determined by title or the number of direct reports. On several occasions, several individuals with key knowledge or experience leading an effort did not have a leadership “title.”

“I think people become leaders not because of titles but through their leadership.”

When collaborative leaders model the attitudes and behaviors that drive successful collaboration, this permeates through their organization, their employees and team members. Attitudes and behaviors can have a contagious affect. Collaborative leaders foster and exhibit positive human interactions and behaviors needed for relationship building and trust and making the collaboration experience “engaging and participatory.” They not only model these behaviors but also support their employees and team in their development as collaborative leaders themselves. Several participants stated that they developed their collaborative behaviors by learning from their mentors and leaders.

We observed numerous cross-functional collaborations among the leaders in the study. They understand the value of building relationships and partnerships, and gathering inputs from across the functions to be successful. In fact, collaborative leaders excel at building relationships and growing their network of connections. They were very engaged in their interactions and open to other perspectives and ideas. Several examples of openness and transparency in sharing information and resources to support a cross-functional need were noted.

“I thought to do my job, I will have a set of resources and

just direct my resources. I then found out I only have a small set of resources and I have to work with a broad extended team. It’s not command and control. I later learned I don’t need many direct reports to get things done. Communication is the key.”

Often, the partnerships they form with other internal functional groups helps others accomplish their goals despite few direct reports. Leaders supported their teams by creating an environment that is open and collaborative, where team members feel empowered to make decisions and bring their ideas to the table.

“I hire people with diverse backgrounds, high performance and high EQ [emotional quotient]”

“I don’t need to make all decisions. I trust my people will make good decisions.”

Use “Catalysts” and “Connectors” to accelerate collaboration

People within any organization have unique skills that can help reinforce a culture of collaboration. Some can help accelerate collaboration, and others can bring the right people together—we call these two types of people catalysts and connectors.

Participants described individuals who accelerate collaboration by lifting barriers, as “catalysts.” Often described as extroverted and liking to work with people, catalysts ensure participants are engaged and invested

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in the goals of the team. They make the experience rich and meaningful. These individuals see the opportunities and value of working together as a team rather than in silos. And when a collaboration effort stalls, they take the initiative to change the status quo. They are the change agents and often the instigators of many collaboration initiatives. An individual serving as a “catalyst” can make a big impact on the success of the collaboration.

“Not everyone is comfortable with collaborating virtually. [A catalyst’s] outreach encourages participation and makes the experience rich and meaningful.”

In addition to catalysts, another type of person—a “connector”—helps collaboration by becoming a living “friend finder.” Connectors help the person who needs resources connect to the expert they need. Their extensive personal network is a highly prized asset. These individuals may or may not be the sponsor or lead of the project going forward; often times they are just an initial touchstone. Many participants pointed out that there was no real equivalent for this kind of institutionalized knowledge. As recommended earlier, conducting an [Organizational Network Analysis \(ONA\)](#)

is a great way to identify not only the catalysts and connectors in the company but people that are the hubs for communication inside and outside of the organization.

Recognize behaviors and reward the results

A company and its leaders and employees can evangelize and support collaborative efforts to the extent that it becomes part of the company’s DNA. But unless there is a reward and recognition program that supports the message, the collaborative behaviors critical to success will be difficult to sustain in the long run.

It should be noted that in this context recognition is defined as soft awards that encourage observed behavior. They are typically non-monetary and not tied to a budget. Some examples: acknowledgement of “great job” from managers or colleagues, visibility on a project, opportunity for a new assignment or career development, enhanced system recognition or reputation.

Rewards are tangible awards based on results, and are typically associated with a budget. Some examples include: cash, stock options or a promotion.

Both senior leaders and catalysts were observed evangelizing collaboration, making significant impact on the organization, and recognizing and rewarding collaboration results. For example, being “known” for successfully leading collaboration efforts and earning this reputation could pave the way to a new career opportunity.

Participants did express that the experience of collaborating can be rewarding in itself. They are motivated to collaborate based on personal fulfillment and feeling part of the team, the ability to be challenged, to advance in their career, or build their reputation. The

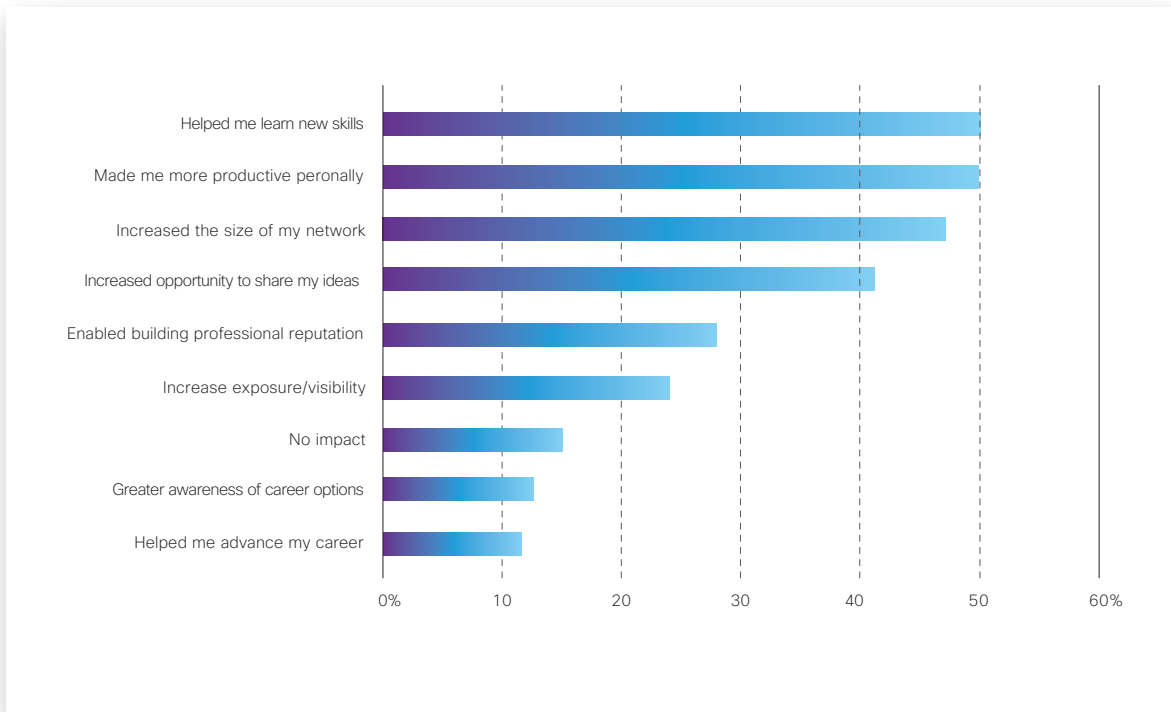
participants believe, and have experienced firsthand, the great value gained through collaboration with others, as evidenced in the Cisco Collaboration Survey.

However, in some cases, innovative ideas or collaborative efforts were not recognized and negatively impacted the employee. Often the rewards or recognition were not timely to the effort, which also diminished its impact on the individual or team. Participants were clear that recognition (soft awards) became less of a driving factor over time if the efforts became challenged by work/life balance, or rewards and recognition weren’t seen to be viable in the foreseeable future or worth the effort. A good balance between recognition and rewards like compensation, bonuses, and promotions is necessary.

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Employee Ranking of Positive Career Impacts of Collaboration¹



¹ From the Cisco Collaboration Survey (2012), an annual company-wide survey that assesses global employee collaboration perceptions and opinions. The 2012 survey is the fourth annual survey at Cisco. The survey helps inform decisions about enhancing how employees communicate, collaborate and ultimately transform business at Cisco, and generally has 1000+ respondents.

Take action

Collaboration must be successfully internalized in the company culture. Modeling and rewarding behavior can help companies achieve this task.

- Encourage a team or “we” approach to collaboration. Have employees check their personal agendas at the door.
- Encourage employees to try something new (such as new technology or meeting frequency) and get involved in the process (such as participating in a pilot program).
- Create a company culture that is flexible and enables effective global collaboration through policies and standards.
- Identify and leverage the Catalysts and Connectors in the organization; encourage them to model collaborative behaviors, facilitate collaboration, and influence the attitudes around them.
- Foster, reinforce, and reward the positive attitudes and behaviors associated with successful collaboration through formal and informal programs.
- Create a balance between personal and social incentives and more tangible incentives like compensation, bonuses, and promotions
- Legitimize the motivating factors for collaboration such as visibility, recognition, and career growth.
- Leverage enterprise social networking to recognize collaborative behaviors and enable employees to build reputation and credibility.
- Develop collaborative leaders and invest in mentoring programs.

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BALANCE DECISION MAKING AND CONSENSUS BUILDING

Next, we look at that fine line of balancing decision making with consensus building.

Balance decision making and consensus building

Collaboration in itself is work, but reaching a consensus can be challenging as well. When inputs and opinions are gathered, “20 to 1,” cannot be considered a tie vote if a company wants to effectively make decisions. In addition, a consensus-driven culture can lead to over-socialization—more meetings for everyone. Let’s take a look at both of these challenges.

Making decisions

When it comes to process, participants did express frustration with decision making. The expectation? Decisions should be made efficiently and even quickly. As decisions are often a gate to get to the next step, quick decisions can help remove a roadblock and pave the way forward. When a decision takes longer than expected or is not executed effectively, there is a negative impact to the collaborative effort.

To help avoid frustration, several components should be defined by the team early on in the process. For example, ask these questions:

- What approach to decision making will we take?
- What are the decision criteria?
- Who is (are) the decision maker(s)?
- Is this a final decision or a recommendation?

When the process for how decision making will happen, what the criteria will be and who are the decision makers was not determined early on, it had an impact downstream when it came time to gather the team for

the decision discussion. Including the right people at the right time was critical. Decision makers may not have needed to get involved in the beginning stages, but their participation was critical at the conclusion of an effort. Ensuring the right involvement at the right time avoids delays and frustration.

“Not having the right people represented in a meeting can lead to decisions that later get changed.”

Creating consensus

Some companies could lean towards the extreme end of “consensus.” In this situation, everyone must agree, which makes it challenging to close on the decision at hand. This may be ingrained in a company’s culture, which obviously bleeds over into the decision-making process. Generally speaking, a consensus approach is perceived as valuable in collaboration. However, a highly collaborative culture can create “over-socialization” behaviors in which employees are required to participate in back-to-back meetings all day to debate ideas, rethink approaches, and revisit decisions. This can quickly devolve into frustration.

Attempting to move to closure without the right techniques can also challenge companies and its employees. While there is no simple recipe for balancing this delicate act, the high-level guideline heard from successful leaders is “You can’t let the collaborative process take over without results or deliverables.”²

“Collaboration isn’t about gaining consensus from everybody. We’re not running a jury. If the decision making becomes the delay in the process, then it’s a problem.”



² From Rosen Evan, The Culture of Collaboration p 206.

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Get the right people in the room

It's important to determine who the decision makers are so they are present for key decision-making sessions. In this case, focus on the experts, who have knowledge that can help reach a decision, solve a problem, or provide necessary insight and knowledge to a situation at hand. Participants expressed the importance of finding expertise in the enterprise and the challenge of locating the right person or people to participate in a collaborative discussion. The impact of not finding the right expert may mean delays to closure of an issue, getting a question answered for a customer, or completing the objective at hand.

As discussed previously, having tenure in the company often comes with a rich personal network that has been built up over time, making it easier and faster to get an answer, or find the right person to help. However, for newer employees (or even for those who have tenure), situations may arise where knowledge is needed outside these existing networks. And at times, the need to find someone is urgent. Several participants noted the challenge of finding available experts. Often, when found, sought-after experts want to help out but are unable to due to their current workload and being in high demand in the enterprise. With expertise location growing in importance it becomes important for companies to look at a holistic approach across technology, process and culture to successfully meet the need. Providing the tools to share expertise and find experts is a great start. Supporting the technology with process and a culture that enables experts the flexibility to help others is necessary for expertise location success.

Decide whether or not to meet

When it comes to the question “Should we meet on this?” Invariably, the answer was “yes” and there was a tendency to choose a synchronous option for the majority of collaboration efforts. Generally speaking, the tendency to “meet” seemed to stem from the feeling that everyone needed to be included, or from the concern that if a meeting was not held, people who needed to “stay in the loop” would not be informed—potentially causing communication break-down later on.

The impact of this behavior was that employees (particularly leadership) attend back-to-back in meetings or becoming double- or triple-booked for the same time slot. This presented a myriad of challenges, but primarily it created a conflict between the meeting organizer who needed the correct person there, and the attendee who needed to fully understand why he or she was invited, and then making a choice to attend or not.

Collaborative Behavior and Technology

Companies often have a myriad of established technologies for employees to leverage for their communication and collaboration needs. And often the established technologies exist in silos as each organization implements technologies customized for their own needs. The impact is two-fold. On one hand established technologies have gained a certain level of adoption and “loyalty”. On the other hand, the siloed nature of the technologies affects how the business operates. Islands form within the business isolating business functions that need to be collaborating and sharing with one another.

Cisco is now seeing the benefit of a common enterprise collaboration platform, powered by Cisco's WebEx Social, where teams across the company can share knowledge and expertise and spawn discussions on common topics. As an example, prior to WebEx Social, experience design teams existing in pockets across the company leveraged different technologies to communicate and collaborate in support of their aligned business function. Now with a common platform to share topics, ideas and common work practices what used to be a conversations with and internal team can now evolve to a conversation with the larger experience design community and extended to others that have a stake, such as engineering and governance teams.

The experience design team communities themselves have not changed but the use of a common platform enables them to communicate and collaborate in a way that allows for transparency, improved chance of buy-in and diversity of thought making solutions more holistic and better.

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BALANCE DECISION MAKING AND CONSENSUS BUILDING

Take action

Quick and easy decisions in a collaborative session aren't always the norm. Many companies will have to balance a consensus-building approach with making a decision. It is also important to evaluate when collaboration can be most effective, what type of collaboration and who needs to be "in the room" for the discussion. Here are some guidelines:

- Create a culture of decision making and accountability.
- Communicate and model that consensus does not mean "20:1 is a tie vote."
- Consider ways to reduce the obligation to socialize initiatives for buy-in at too many levels.
- Provide best practices and guidance on decision making and particularly how to facilitate consensus building.
- Ensure that the collaborative process includes agreement on approach and criteria early on.
- Find the expert who can help the process. Or, find the person who knows the expert who can help the process.
- Consider which participants are critical to attend a meeting. Encourage clarity to "you don't need to attend" messaging so that potential participants know what they truly will gain or miss from those choices.
- Shift from meeting all the time, to meeting when needed; consider an asynchronous approach giving time back for efforts that are best served synchronously.

- Remind and instruct users that meetings can take place in other than 30-minute increments so people can begin to buy back time for their meeting-heavy days. Defining an agenda ahead of time can help determine appropriate time to allocate to the meeting.

Now it's time to examine the different patterns and types of collaboration that emerged during our study.

Leveraging the Patterns of Collaboration

“You have a real-time component and a non-real-time component. ...the question becomes how do you add the process to it?”

Leveraging the Patterns of Collaboration

When looking at behaviors in context to how people work, many patterns emerged about collaboration. By understanding these patterns and supporting them through process, culture, and technology, many companies can set up employees—and the corporation—for success.

In this section, we'll examine the collaboration continuum—a pattern that emerged from the study findings. And then we'll take a look at more specific patterns related to the objective of the collaborator—what we call Collaboration Types. Finally, we'll highlight the unique pattern of interactions and characteristics that exemplify each type.

Supporting the collaboration continuum

There is no doubt that specific tools and technologies can help drive successful collaboration. However, this study revealed that these tools must support not just an interaction, but the collaboration process from start to finish. It is more than the instance at hand (meeting, session, discussion) but the before, during and after processes and activities.

In addition, the process of collaboration moves through different modes during its lifecycle, and facilitating these transitions from synchronous to asynchronous, informal to formal, on-line and offline can also be challenging. After a synchronous collaboration session, some teams struggled to collaborate effectively in asynchronous mode. For example, when teams collaborated using video, voice or web-based conferencing, they shared information, brainstormed ideas and edited or created documents for later use. After these meetings, the meeting notes, action items and shared documents were shared around via emails, where discussions and

ideas were lost or difficult to find when it came time to revisit the meeting outcomes. It also makes it more difficult for re-use later either by the same collaborators or other teams that could benefit from the best practices and /or outcomes of the session.

“A meeting happens, then work happens during the week in asynchronous mode until you get back together.”

In another example, a whiteboard was used during a brainstorming session to capture ideas around a new concept. After the collaborative session, a digital picture was taken of the whiteboard drawing which was then uploaded to the participant's computer. The image was then attached to an email and shared with the other collaborators so they could continue to the work in another session at a later date. Several disparate tools and technologies were leveraged to capture the concept and share it. However, to retrieve it for future meetings required a search through emails.

During the collaboration lifecycle, employees often needed a common knowledge repository to capture, retrieve and archive artifacts from their collaborative sessions. While some companies' technologies successfully enable discrete collaboration meetings, most may not be fully interoperable and integrated to

support movement through a larger scale collaborative process that takes place over multiple interactions, in a variety of modes and varying objectives. Many other tools can be used in the field to share information and documents, but without a single repository to collect, share and evolve the outputs generated from collaboration instances, important information could be lost. The Cisco Collaboration Survey (2012) supports this—a “lack of integrated tools” was the #1 cited barrier to effective collaboration.

While the tools must do well when it comes to action, they must also help employees think through, plan and execute more effectively. More specifically, the tools must help people figure out the right way to structure their thinking or their projects, and provide assistance with thinking through whom or what kinds of people to invite, how to design a productive meeting, what to document, or how to best organize information to support collaboration objectives.

Leveraging the Patterns of Collaboration

TYPES OF COLLABORATION

Leveraging the Patterns of Collaboration to Deliver a Seamless Experience

Cisco's next generation [WebEx meeting platform](#) is beginning to do just that by redefining the meeting experience – including aspects to manage the complete meeting lifecycle. Meeting organizers can plan their meeting using the technology (before), richly interact and share in the session (during) and capture and share the meeting artifacts, even scheduling follow up meetings with the same group of collaborators (after).

Understanding the patterns of collaborative behavior has an important role in influencing product strategy and services. As we learn more about how people collaborate it can be used to not only guide the collaborators through the set-up, but also provide them with the information, capabilities, and technologies they need along the way; before, during and after the collaboration. It can be leveraged as a complement to the human behaviors that occur during collaboration.

Guiding and supporting the entire suite of possible collaboration needs in one seamless experience will undoubtedly help speed the progress toward completion and make it easier to re-use the process. With everything at their fingertips, collaborators can focus on the objective at hand, and spend less time tracking down information and people and using disparate tools to accomplish their goal.

Types of collaboration

This study found four types of collaboration based on the objective of the collaborator. Each collaboration type is based on the objective the collaborators set out to achieve. Each type has a set of outcomes, interactions and characteristics that together form a pattern for how that type of collaboration happens. Understanding these patterns presents a tremendous opportunity to better support collaboration objectives through culture, process, technology and working environment. We can leverage these patterns to, essentially, provide a “toolkit” that helps collaborators achieve their goals. This toolkit may include best practices, technologies and workflow to support their needs.

The four types of collaboration are:

- **Relationship Building & Networking**
- **Problem Solving**
- **Innovation**
- **Execution & Communication**

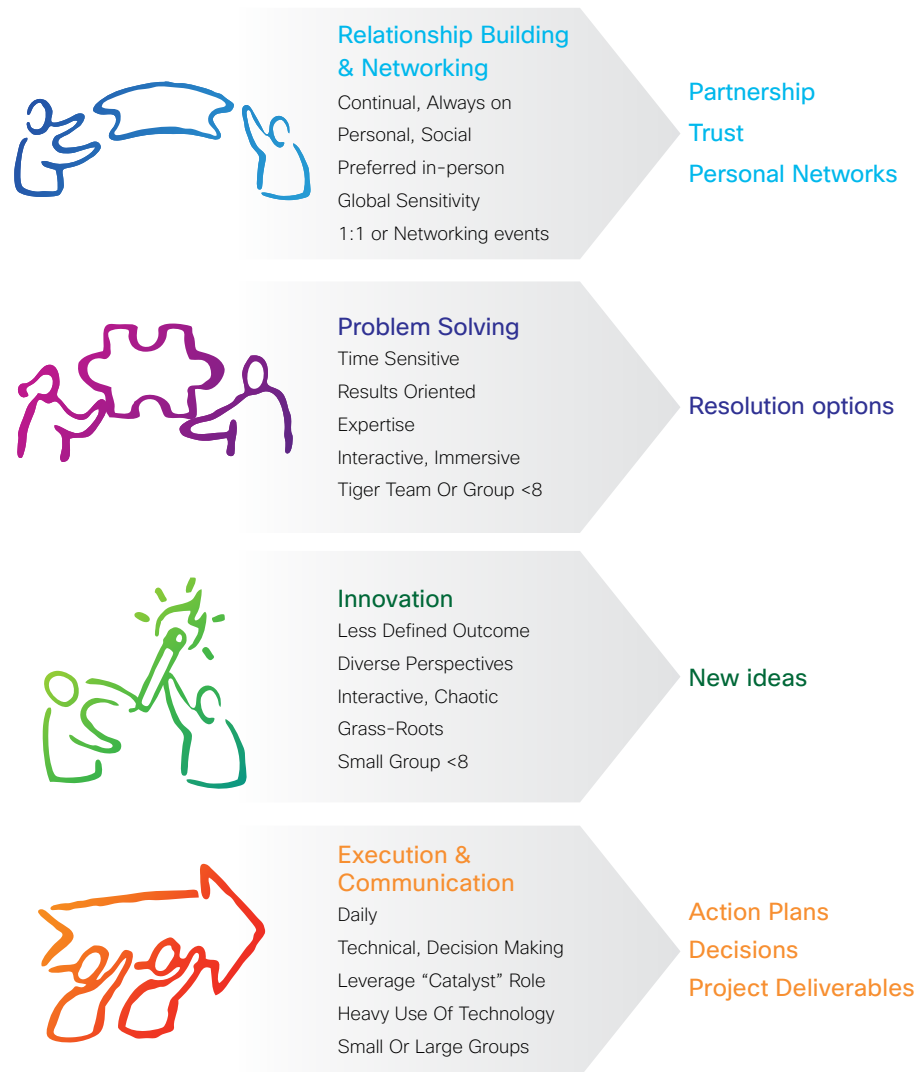
A detailed summary of the four collaboration types and the when, who, where, how and what attributes that span across them is located in the Appendix.

“I would love to see an interface that asks me questions like “what tasks are you trying to achieve?” and offers selections so the outcomes of my meetings are better.”

Leveraging the Patterns of Collaboration

TYPES OF COLLABORATION

Collaboration Types, Attributes and Outcomes



Relationship Building & Networking

This collaboration type involves establishing relationships with team members, people to work with, customers, suppliers, and/or partners. These relationships enable the trust and connections that lead to more effective collaboration and success of the objectives at hand. It also involves developing and leveraging personal networks based on these relationships. Participants overwhelmingly agreed that relationship building and networking is the essence of successful collaboration.

Relationship building is about getting to know the people you will be working with, on a more personal level, to build not only trust but also an understanding of perspectives, work style and passions. As strong relationships and deeper understandings are formed, the probability of a successful collaborative outcome is increased.

Participants viewed Relationship Building & Networking as critical for their work and important for them to feel connected and engaged. It is time well spent. The trust built over time is invaluable in promoting the success of future collaborations and opportunities for the company. From a personal perspective, making new connections and building relationships can open the door for career opportunities and advancement.

Leveraging the Patterns of Collaboration

TYPES OF COLLABORATION



Problem Solving

This type involves bringing a group of people together to collaborate on a resolution to a problem or issue. The response may be reactive or proactive, but it is always focused on obtaining results or an outcome within a given timeframe and is usually shorter in duration than the other collaboration types.

Problem solving can be complex and require more or different resources than exist. It encompasses “how to solve” collaborative activities, such as developing action plans for the improvement or “fix,” and the decision making necessary to move the resolution forward.

“Our goal is to predict issues that may arise and solving them before a “fire” breaks out. In the past, it has been reactive and proactive...predictive is the new space with [a] new team and collaboration requirements.”

Although this type of collaboration may be stressful and contentious at times, it is considered one of the most satisfying collaborations and the most consistently successful. Employees feel it is the right thing to do, especially when customer satisfaction is the driver. It leaves employees feeling a sense of accomplishment. In addition, they feel that this type of collaboration offers an opportunity to predict and prevent problems that may occur in the future.



Innovation

This type focuses on developing new creative solutions or ideas that improve an existing process or product. It could also include transforming ideas into new markets, products, solutions, or processes that can help the company successfully compete in the marketplace. It involves broader contexts and less defined outcomes. It usually has a longer time horizon but the potential to make a large impact on the organization itself.

Innovation collaboration is about large-scale change and new opportunities for the company. It is the collaboration in which an idea can be an outcome. Through continued collaboration, socialization and vetting, the idea develops into a viable solution to address a new market opportunity, re-engineer a core process, create business value, or showcase the business as an industry leader.

In general, most employees get excited about engaging in this type of collaboration. Not only does it present an opportunity to impact a company’s growth, but often, it evolves from an area of personal interest and passion. From a personal perspective, it may lead to visibility and career opportunities and result in an enhanced reputation at the company.



Execution & Communication

This type focuses on the collaborative activities that are typical in everyday engagements to keep the business moving. This is the broadest type, covering activities such as planning and operations, project and program execution, organizational communications and sharing of information. It is focused on set deliverables and is very tactical in nature.

Execution and communication collaboration is about planning, moving projects forward, and completing operational type activities. Typically this collaboration falls within most individual’s or specific functional teams’ responsibilities. Some people spend every day engaged in this kind of complex, strategic work.

In relation to the other collaboration types, execution and communication seemed to be the most lacking in engagement and invested interest. This seems to come, in part, as a result of not knowing the right forum to use for the objective, not having the right people in the room and a lack of best practices and knowledge for facilitating an interactive meeting or session. In some cases, a meeting arranged for soliciting participation is unsuccessful because the meeting either has too many people, an unclear agenda, or the facilitation of the forum isn’t inviting, leading people to wonder, “why am I in this meeting?” and “how can I contribute?” However, several well-planned and executed collaborative sessions of this type were observed.

Leveraging the Patterns of Collaboration

TYPES OF COLLABORATION

Collaboration Can Happen Anytime, Anyplace

Through our observations it was clear that individuals and teams engage in different types of collaboration, communication and dialogue throughout their day. For example, an individual may engage in an interactive virtual meeting from their desk, move to a conference room for a meeting, require a quiet location for completing work or have an ad-hoc conversation in the hallway.

Providing flexibility in the physical workspace is important to support the changing needs of collaborators. Often collaboration “happens;” not at a given time but because of an opportunity. Conversations begin when people connect, unintentionally, in the break-room, in the hallway, outside a cube. Or perhaps they are meeting over coffee in the café’. It is often in these informal, more open settings that an informal conversation leads to a revelation, a new idea...innovation. How can the workspace enable and foster this type of interaction?

Cisco has recently explored this within their planning for converting several team workspaces into collaborative open spaces where seating is not assigned. In addition to larger conference rooms, rooms called Audio Privacy Rooms (APRs) are available if you need to meet with others virtually or in person. Instead of following an earlier plan of providing all APRs with formal seating (conference room table, 4 chairs), they are providing teams with the option to make some of these open areas with

soft seating – comfortable chairs, end tables, coffee table. Teams can now choose what they need in their workspace based on the needs of the team members. The open areas will also be in relative proximity to the open desks – providing a fluidity for the space that supports the needs of collaborators throughout their day. The soft seating, open environment and informal setting provides the right set up for engaging in conversation that could lead to successful collaboration and new opportunities.

[Learn more](#)

Take action

Understanding the four different types of collaboration, as well as the patterns that emerge during the collaborative process, can help companies better support the experience of collaboration. Follow these guidelines to help leverage the patterns of collaboration.

- Deliver solutions that support the patterns of how people work.
- Support movement through the lifecycle of collaboration; the before, during, and after activities using tools that help people think through, plan, and execute collaboration more effectively.
- Streamline the experience between the synchronous and asynchronous modes of collaboration.
- Provide collaborators with a toolkit for successfully executing on their collaboration objectives that includes supporting best practices and recommended tools and technologies.
- Provide flexible physical and virtual environments that support the shifts in the collaboration needs of teams and individuals.

Now that we’ve covered what we did and what we learned, it’s time to move on to what we recommend to help any company encourage successful collaboration.

Conclusion and Recommendations

“Collaboration is global. It reaches across the borders, across the companies. We have to minimize these boundaries and invest to do that.”

Conclusion and Recommendations

Overarching recommendations

The “take action” recommendations at the end of each section are not an inclusive list, but should be used as a springboard for additional thinking on how these findings may be applied in support of collaboration or other related initiatives.

There are several overarching recommendations to consider when looking at the impact of these findings.

First and foremost, our research was a study in the human behavior of collaboration. Therefore, it is no surprise that the “human element” and personal nature of collaboration was a key factor in nearly all successful collaborative endeavors and played a large role in what worked and what did not. The “human element” came across so strongly that it must remain in sight at all times. Simply put—get back to the intimacy.

Consider the experience of collaboration—examine how the attitudes and behaviors can be contagious and recognize the importance of fostering those positive attitudes and behaviors that lend themselves to successful collaboration.

Continue to look for opportunities that blend aspects of culture, process and technology. Provide a more cohesive solution that enhances the experience and productivity gains from collaboration. For example, look for where best practices and education can be embedded into the process and tools people work in to achieve their collaboration objectives.

Recognize and resolve the natural tension between diversity of thought and achieving results. For collaboration to work on both levels, it’s necessary to have good structure, awareness, and know-how to turn

those human interactions and relationships into effective results.

Take action

For your reference we’ve included the actionable recommendations from this white paper in the following table below.

A good place to begin is getting a baseline of how employees collaborate in your company, what successful collaboration looks like and what challenges they face. A few approaches are listed below:

- **Conduct user research**—Learn how collaboration is perceived by your employees and identify challenges employees face when they attempt to collaborate. Use surveys—but make sure you’re asking the right questions (see table below for a sample list). Invest in a survey writer and use technologies to get a large sampling of opinions. Consider focus groups and immersive ethnographic studies for a realistic view of how collaboration is happening across the enterprise.
- **Facilitate interactive workshops**—Go deeper into identified focus areas to address specific challenges and brainstorm solutions (See the Appendix for more details and templates).
- **Conduct an Organizational Network Analysis (ONA)**—Gain a better understanding of how your organization communicates and collaborates by analyzing the relationships between individuals and teams. Identify the “catalysts” and “connectors” within the team and note how information flows in and out of the team structure. ONA can be conducted by gathering information from users

about their work relationships, and/or tracking the flow of information through the network. Additional reading: [We Can Learn Some Things About Collaboration from Duke’s Coach K](#); [Organizational Network Analysis](#).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Summary of Recommended Actions

Following is a consolidation of the recommendations highlighted in each section of the report.

Section	Recommendations
The Value of Collaboration	<p>Ask employees:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you define collaboration (in any context, not just from a corporate perspective)? • What value do you see in collaboration? • What makes collaboration successful? • What barriers have you experienced? • Are you motivated to collaborate? Why or why not? • What kind of work benefits most from collaborating with others? <p>Understanding the perceptions of collaboration in your company or organization can show you how employees feel about the process, but more importantly, it can help you understand what will motivate employees to collaborate and help you pinpoint areas to focus on to drive more effective collaboration.</p>
The Formula for Collaboration: Build relationships and networks that lead to trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not lose sight of the “human element” when considering opportunities to enhance successful collaboration. • Invest time in building relationships and provide tools and technologies that help people not only connect, but learn more about each other. • Encourage employees to develop personal networks and to expand them outside their immediate circle. • Leverage personal networks to produce new opportunities, connect people and find expertise. • Consider conducting an Organizational Network Analysis (ONA) to better understand working relationships on the team. • Use available video technologies to emulate human interactions whenever face-to-face is not an option; especially early on in building a relationship. • Provide venues and/or technologies that enable rich virtual ad-hoc collaboration. • Bring the human element to the physical and virtual environment – consider things that create a more comfortable, personal, and engaging environment for collaborators. Don’t forget to build in flexibility and fun!
The Formula for Collaboration: Turn human interactions into results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach people to be better collaborators – provide best practices on how to facilitate and engage participants in collaborative sessions and how to plan and run effective meetings. • Create guidelines and best practices for selecting the best forum and technology for the interactions. • Invest time in building relationships and provide tools and technologies that help people not only connect, but learn more about each other. • Help employees become aware of cultural differences when working with collaborators inside or outside the company, or from a different region or location. • Build in accommodations for time zones, holidays and working hours so they are the “norm” not the exception in your team’s daily routines. • Be explicit and aware of the challenges of collaborating across cultures and embrace the opportunity to learn more. • Don’t lose the intimacy. Consider situations where “in person” is simply the better option and make it happen. • Avoid overusing technology (for example, meeting recordings) as a substitute for live interaction. • When possible, integrate best practices and contextual awareness into workflows where collaboration is happening (planning, scheduling, facilitating, conferencing, archiving, etc.).

Conclusion and Recommendations

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

Section	Recommendations
The Formula for Collaboration: Evolve the culture for productive collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage a team or “we” approach to collaboration. Have employees check their personal agendas at the door. • Encourage employees to try something new (such as new technology or meeting frequency) and get involved in the process (such as participating in a pilot program). • Create a company culture that is flexible and enables effective global collaboration through policies and standards. • Identify and leverage the Catalysts and Connectors in the organization; encourage them to model collaboration behaviors, facilitate collaboration, and influence the attributes around them. • Foster, reinforce, and reward the positive attitudes and behaviors associated with successful collaboration through formal and informal programs. • Create a balance between personal and social incentives and more tangible incentives like comps, bonuses, and promotions. • Legitimize the motivating factors for collaboration such as visibility, recognition, and career growth. • Leverage enterprise social networking to recognize collaborative behaviors and enable employees to build reputation and credibility. • Develop collaborative leaders and invest in mentoring programs.
The Formula for Collaboration: Balance decision making and consensus building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a culture of decision making and accountability. • Communicate and model that consensus does not mean “20:1 is a tie vote.” • Consider ways to reduce the obligation to socialize initiatives for buy-in at too many levels. • Provide best practices and guidance on decision making and particularly how to facilitate consensus building. • Ensure that the collaborative process includes agreement on approach and criteria early on. • Find the expert who can help the process. Or, find the person who knows the expert who can help the process. • Consider which participants are critical to attend a meeting. Encourage clarity to “you don’t need to attend” messaging so that potential participants know what they truly will gain or miss from those choices. • Shift from meeting all the time, to meeting when needed; consider an asynchronous approach giving time back for efforts that are best served synchronously. • Remind and instruct users that meetings can take place in other than 30-minute increments so people can begin to buy back time for their meeting-heavy days.
Leveraging the Patterns of Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver solutions that support the patterns of how people work. • Support movement through the lifecycle of collaboration; the before, during, and after activities using tools that help people think through, plan, and execute collaboration more effectively. • Streamline the experience between the synchronous and asynchronous modes of collaboration. • Provide collaborators with a toolkit for successfully executing on their collaboration objectives that includes supporting best practices and recommended tools and technologies. • Provide flexible physical and virtual environments that support the shifts in the collaboration needs of teams and individuals.

Conclusion

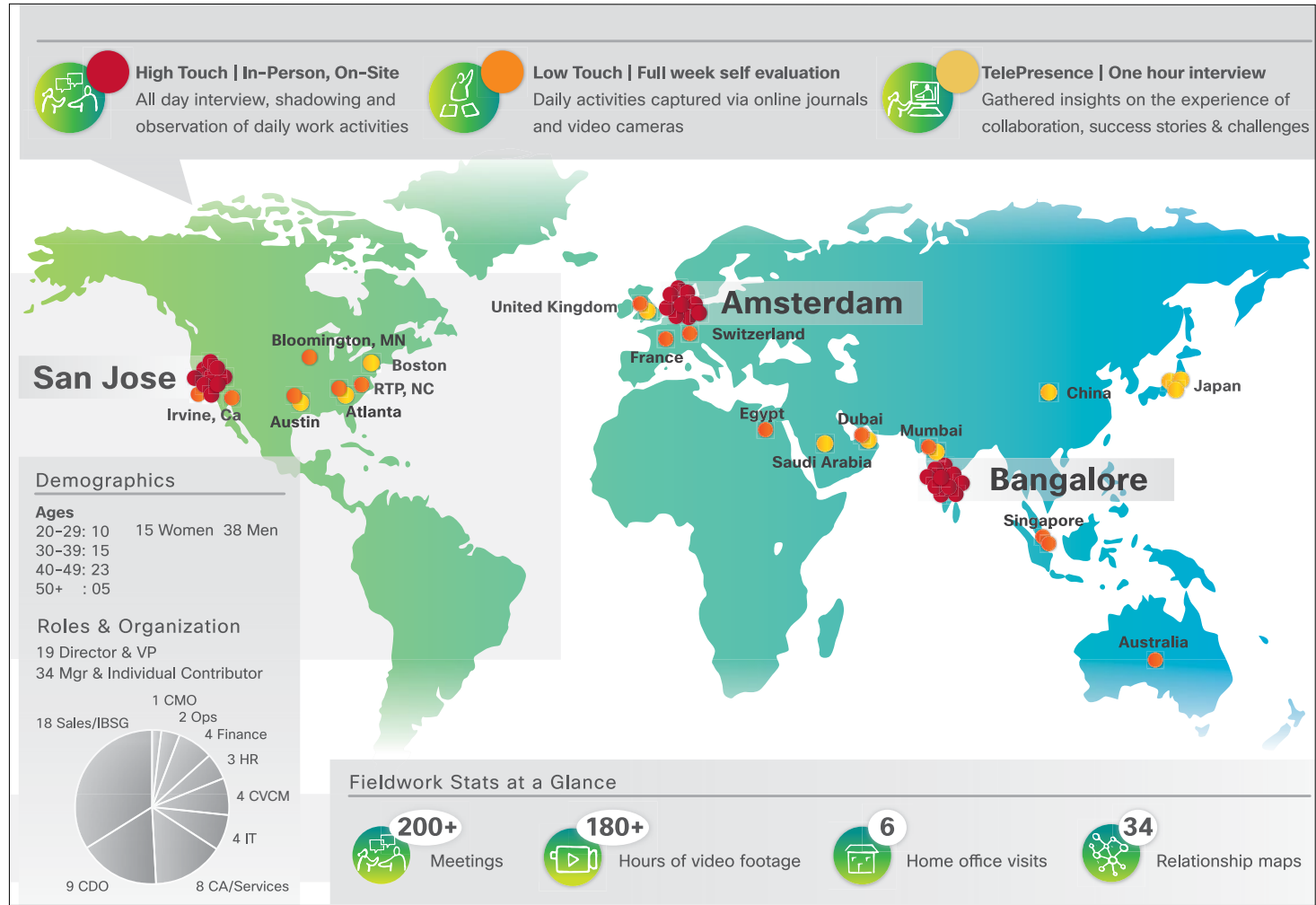
We hope you’ve found many useful and actionable take-aways from the insights and opportunities we discovered during our research on the human behavior of collaboration.

Appendix

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS





















Global Ethnographic Work Study

Over 16 weeks, 53 Cisco employees participated from a variety of roles, organizations and geographies.



Appendix

COLLABORATION TYPES TABLE

Relationship Building & Networking Attributes & Characteristics	Problem Solving Attributes & Characteristics	Innovation Attributes & Characteristics	Execution & Communication Attributes & Characteristics
 <p>When Frequency: Daily-weekly Duration: Continuous - nurtured over time</p>	 <p>When Frequency: Variable Duration: Aggressive timeline-shorter</p>	 <p>When Frequency: Variable Duration: Less defined timeline-longer</p>	 <p>When Frequency: Daily Duration: Variable - deliverable based</p>
 <p>Who Participant Size: 1:1 or small and large groups Key Roles / Participant Attributes: Awareness and sensitivity to cultural / regional differences</p>	 <p>Who Participant Size: Small group <8 Key Roles / Participant Attributes: Tiger team, expertise</p>	 <p>Who Participant Size: Small group <8 Key Roles / Participant Attributes: Diversity in perspectives, leadership support, grass-roots effort, sponsor</p>	 <p>Who Participant Size: Small and large groups Key Roles / Participant Attributes: Catalyst, facilitator, lead, decision-maker(s)</p>
 <p>Where Session: In-Person preferred Environment: Casual setting (café, lounge), hallway, break room, networking event or team off-site</p>	 <p>Where Session: Virtual or in-person Environment: Immersive, flexible, virtual set-up</p>	 <p>Where Session: Virtual or in-person Environment: Immersive, flexible, virtual set-up</p>	 <p>Where Session: Virtual or in-person Environment: Variable: conference room, cube / office, virtual set-up</p>
 <p>How Interactions / Experience: Personal, engaging, social, informal, synchronous Activities: Establish trust, make new connections, develop partnerships</p>	 <p>How Interactions / Experience: Interactive, strategic, informal or formal, synchronous to asynchronous Activities: Information gathering and exchange, solution options developed, quick decision making</p>	 <p>How Interactions / Experience: Interactive, strategic, informal or formal, synchronous Activities: Chaotic free-flow of ideas, socialization/ vetting, leverage personal network</p>	 <p>How Interactions / Experience: Tactical, formal, informal, synchronous and asynchronous Activities: Decision-making, planning / project deliverables, leverage best practices</p>
 <p>What Emulate Human Interactions: TelePresence, WebEx video Technologies: Social media, personal network, enriched profile</p>	 <p>What Emulate Human Interactions: TelePresence, WebEx Technologies: Information capture and share, whiteboard, interactive virtual tools</p>	 <p>What Emulate Human Interactions: TelePresence, WebEx Technologies: Information capture and share, whiteboard, interactive virtual tools, ideation platform</p>	 <p>What Emulate Human Interactions: TelePresence, WebEx - heavy use Technologies: Information capture and share, tracking, storage, collaborative team spaces, communication medium, functional specific tools</p>

Appendix

INTERACTIVE WORKSHOP

Consider conducting your own interactive workshop to define targeted actionable opportunities based on your company's collaboration research. We found this approach viable in producing actions we can commit to in order to be more effective collaborators. In addition, we were able to identify several new and exciting opportunities for several of our collaboration initiatives. Due to the interactive nature of the workshop, ownership was achieved at all levels and the participants felt invested in the new opportunities and ready to push them forward.

A key driver in the success of the workshop was to break the team into several smaller teams consisting of 6-8 people. The smaller group size created an environment more conducive for personal and interactive discussions. Each break-out team was given a topic to discuss and was asked to prepare a brief read-out to bring back to the larger team in the "report-back" segment.

Depending on the time allocated for the workshop overall, several "break-outs" and "report-backs" may be scheduled. This approach lends itself to less time spent in presentation, and more time is spent interacting, discussing, and brainstorming.

Below you will find a few general guidelines to help plan and facilitate an interactive workshop for your team and turn your findings into actions.

Planning

Having a successful interactive session requires planning in order to ensure that an environment is created where attendees will feel comfortable participating and interacting with each other. If possible, and depending on the size of the team, make the planning a cross-functional effort including a sub-set of the larger team.

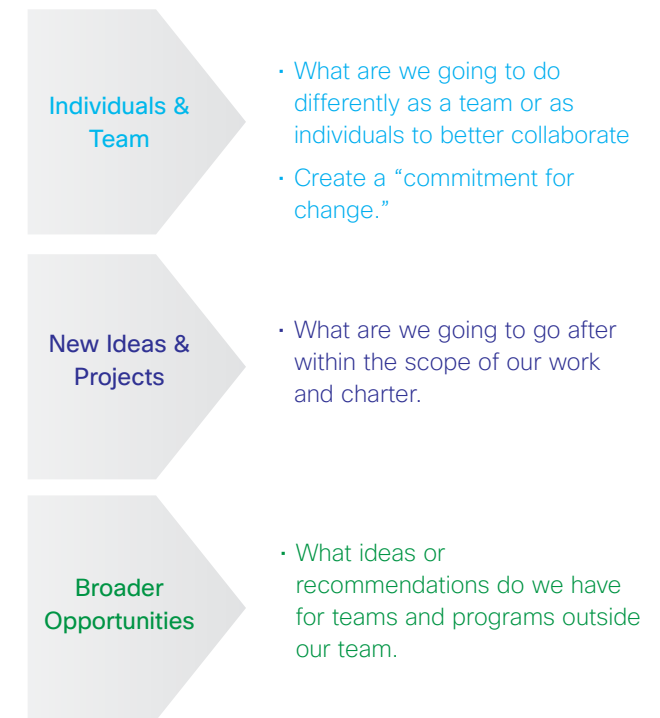
Gather "diversity of thought" from the beginning!

Set your team up for success by following these guidelines:

- Create a cross-functional workshop planning team
- Define the goals and outcomes of the workshop
- Create a structure for the workshop but make sure to build in flexibility for dialogue and interactions
- Consider available options (technology, conference rooms and other) that will facilitate a highly-interactive workshop - particularly when there will be global virtual team members participating
- Select a time of day that is "best" for all participants (time zone considerations)
- Don't forget to work in an element of "fun," such as having each team come up with a team name
- Ensure an open, participatory environment - assign someone or several team members to facilitation roles
- Keep the dialogue going; after the session make the artifacts available in a shared location and encourage continued discussion

Defining outcomes

The workshop outcomes may vary from team to team. Here is an example of high-level outcomes, but tailor to your specific needs:



Appendix

INTERACTIVE WORKSHOP

Creating a structure

Creating a structure involves developing an agenda, determining the topics for the break-out teams, creating the teams and developing any materials that will be used during the workshop (ground rules, overview presentation, report back templates, note capturing templates etc.).

Before creating the agenda, determine how many participants you will have and based on that how many break-out teams (plan to have 8 people or less in each break-out team). Determine how much time you need to complete your goals and how many break-out and report-back sessions you can work in.

The agenda or structure for the workshop may look something like this:

Time	Agenda Item
10 min	Objectives & Ground Rules
30 min	Context Setting & Break-out Instructions
30 min	Break-out 1 Ice Breaker (4 teams, 2 topics)
30 min	Report out Each team 5 min
30 min	Break-out 2 Topic Discussion (5 teams, 5 topics)
30 min	Report out Each team 10 min
15 min	Group Discussion / Next Steps

Determine the topics that each break-out team will be focused on and create a set of brief instructions they can follow. Include any materials or templates for capturing the brainstorming so it can be easily be used to “report-back” to larger team.

Keep in mind the time you have allocated and ensure that what you are asking is achievable in that time frame.

Sample Instructions for Break-out Topic:

- You have [time allocated] for discussion and preparing for report back to larger team
- Discuss the following questions/challenge/or other: keep this to 1-2 questions or challenges
- Prepare the following items: you will be given [time allocated] to report back your outcomes to the team
- Create visuals or drawing as applicable
- Take photos of your work (on whiteboards or other)

Making it happen

Reserve enough conference rooms to support both the large group session as well as the smaller break-out sessions. In the sample agenda above, we had 2 teams for break-out #1 and 4 teams for break-out #2, plus the large group room, equaling a total of 5 rooms.

Leverage video conferencing and sharing technologies during the session that can enhance human interactions and exchange of thoughts and ideas for virtual team members. As an example: we connected six locations via TelePresence video-conferencing, and additionally set-up WebEx conferencing in order to visually share the

information in the report-back segments. For break-out sessions, we set-up individual WebEx conferencing sessions so we could connect participants in several different locations to work together as virtual break-out teams.

Prior to the workshop, set expectations with participants on the intended purpose of the workshop and the participation level required. Assign participants to the break-out teams vs. participants self-assigning during the session. And lastly, assign key roles such as facilitator/s, timekeeper, and break-out team leads. Having people in these roles helps the overall session run more smoothly and stay on-track. Facilitators familiar with the goals of the workshop can help keep discussion focused in the break out sessions.

Keep the dialogue going

After the workshop, provide any artifacts created and summaries in a shared location that all participants can access. Better yet, keep the conversation going on outstanding items or topics of interest. An enterprise social software solution can be a great way to do this, especially for asynchronous collaboration. We leveraged our Cisco internal platform called Integrated Workforce Experience (IWE) that is powered by Cisco’s WebEx Social product to publish our outcomes and continue our discussions on ways we could continue to be more collaborative as a team, as individuals and through our partnerships.

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² Rosen Evan, The Culture of Collaboration, p206

Charts and Images

¹ Cisco Collaboration Framework, http://www.cisco.com/web/DE/cisconnect/2010-05/media/C11-533734-00_collab_exec_guide.pdf

² Collaboration Consortium - Making Collaboration a Reality | Insights from the Collaboration Consortium Year One, <https://communities.cisco.com/docs/DOC-14966>



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