5 Tips for Improving Collaboration

As a business leader, you're constantly anticipating and responding to the evolving needs of your employees. Because of that, you may be under pressure to evaluate, understand, and possibly adopt varied "best-in-breed" solutions for your teams. Some employees may actively ask for new tools or even go ahead and install them without involvement or oversight from IT, while others may be fatigued and skeptical of learning to use yet another new app or solution.

While it's important to understand everyone's needs, ultimately, your employees need to be able to collaborate and communicate securely, wherever and however they work. They share files, work remotely, and exchange knowledge across departments every day—and the tools they use should help, not hinder, them. Fragmented, stand-alone applications cause headaches for both your employees and your IT team. These point solutions present a variety of problems: increased costs and complexity, holes in security and compliance, limited ability to scale, and diminished productivity. For your employees this means logging in and out of more applications, keeping track of passwords, and learning additional tools. For your IT team, overseeing the maintenance, security, and administration of these tools can waste valuable time. Even without the complexity of managing dozens of independent programs, the potential for information overload is enough to push anyone past sanity.

"So how do you deliver the best of modern collaboration, while reducing the complexity challenges? Use a platform that seamlessly blends as many of these features into a single user experience as possible."

—

Alan Lepofsky
Vice President and Principal Analyst,
Constellation Research[1]

[1] "Why Your Organization Should Buy a Collaboration Platform Instead of Best-of-Breed Solutions," 2015, Constellation Research, Inc.

The solution? An all-encompassing suite of collaboration tools that enables productivity more effectively than an assortment of tools. When your team has tools that work together seamlessly, everybody wins. Not only will employees be more productive, but you will feel confident knowing every tool is supported and secure. Constellation Research reports that "[collaboration] platforms excel at providing a common set of attributes," which can be appreciated by both end users and your IT team.[1]

Using an all-encompassing collaboration suite saves time, money, and sanity.

Employees will be able to more easily collaborate, communicate, and share because all their tools will be on one platform—improving search capabilities and eliminating the need to switch between various programs. Instead of dealing with dozens of products, employees will use one suite, which means less training, less support, and fewer passwords to remember.

They will be able to experience how easily the solutions work together, enabling seamless collaboration across departments. With Microsoft Office 365, you and your employees can feel confident in a suite that contains some of the best tools on the market, like SharePoint—ranked as a leader in enterprise content management and horizontal portals by Gartner in 2015.[2]

SharePoint's integration with Office in the cloud, Outlook and Exchange Online, Yammer, and OneDrive for Business sets it apart from competitors. Gartner calls it a tool with "strong collaboration and team-room functionalities" and notes that SharePoint is often the basis for social and collaboration functionality.[3]

An integrated collaboration suite will provide the strong technology support that your teams need. Here are five tips on improving workplace collaboration.

[2] "Magic Quadrant for Horizontal Portals," 2015, Gartner
[3] "Magic Quadrant for Enterprise Content Management," 2015, Gartner

TIP #1

Save time and increase productivity

The ability to quickly access information and communicate seamlessly from anywhere helps teams work faster and smarter. With employees and departments working across different floors and offices (or even across the world), sharing ideas and staying in sync becomes easier with a productivity suite.

With hybrid (cloud and on-premises) server systems like Microsoft SharePoint, your organization's files can be stored and shared securely and at any time. Employees can identify the files they have access to, find relevant connections, then directly share and discuss with their teams on Yammer. When programs seamlessly connect, there's no extra work or time wasted.

According to IDC, collaborative applications in the cloud enable employees to work across departments, locations, and organizational boundaries with ease.[4] That's not only great news for local teams looking to improve productivity, but for remote workers or "road warriors" who are on the go more often than they're in the office. And once companies adopt collaboration software, these employees can save about one hour per day after three years of implementation.[5]

[4] "Worldwide Content Collaboration Software Forecast, 2015–2019," 2015, IDC
[5] "The Total Economic Impact of Microsoft Office 365: Enterprise Customers," 2015, Forrester Research

How did Office 365 help Booz Allen Hamilton?

"We have to address the workplace preferences of different generations of employees who expect to be mobile, connected, and productive anytime, anywhere, on any number of devices. That's exactly the work environment supported by Office 365."
—

Deborah Youmans,
Senior Manager of Collaboration Development, Booz Allen Hamilton

"Out of approximately 22,500 employees, 21,000 moved 6 terabytes of data to OneDrive for Business in eight months. Sharing information to drive innovation has reached an all-time high at Booz Allen."
—

Joseph Atwell,
Technical Architect, Booz Allen Hamilton

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TIP #2

Lower costs and reduce complexity

The collaboration tools we purchase are meant to help us, but licensing costs, service fees, IT resources, and employee downtime can add up. You might be trying to save your company time and money by adding more productivity tools without realizing the hidden costs. Instead of pulling from multiple vendors, installing a set of collaboration tools from a single suite can save a staggering amount of money.

By using a suite from a single vendor, functionality across tools will feel easier and cost less. Licensing cost and installation time decrease drastically, as noted by Constellation Research. "Platforms offer a single contract instead of having to deal with multiple vendors. This usually results in a much lower overall price than adding together services from multiple best-of-breed solutions. It also removes the administration burden of dealing with multiple renewals."[1]

In fact, Forrester Research revealed that when switching to an all-encompassing platform, organizations can see total benefits of $8.8 million. On average, total costs only reach $3.2 million over three years, resulting in a net present value (NPV) of $5.6 million.[5]
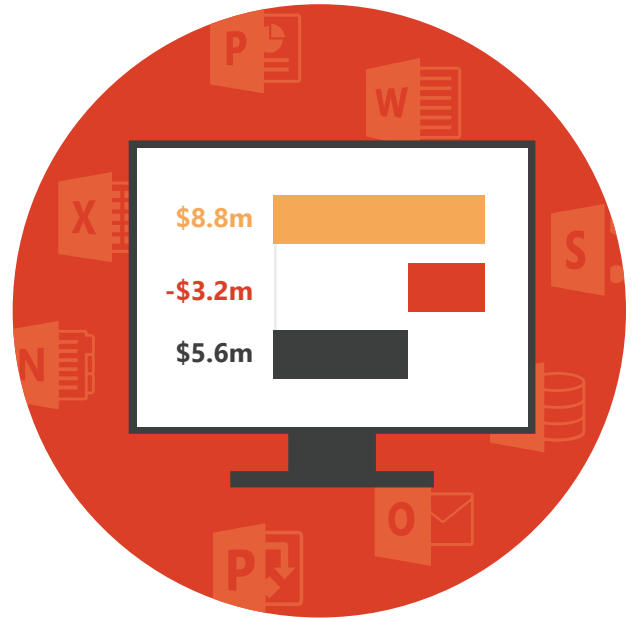
Switching to an all-encompassing solution can result in:

- $8.8 million: total benefits
- $3.2 million: total costs
- $5.6 million: net present value (NVP)

"Our operational teams take advantage of SharePoint to aggregate information into one view instead of having to access multiple systems."

—

Allen Chang,
Manager of IT Innovation and Technology, Air Canada

Read the case study

Average consolidated total cost of a data breach in 2015 was $3.8 million—a 23% increase from 2013.[6]

TIP #3

Ensure end-to-end security and compliance

With the risk of data breaches continually on the rise, your security team is likely apprehensive about your company's information security posture—and rightly so.

Hackers are more prolific than ever, damaging organizations' financial stability, reputation, and employee relations. Additionally, threats can originate from within, when an employee unknowingly puts an organization a risk by clicking on malicious links or sharing sensitive information externally using an unsecure app.[6]

Using a suite of collaboration tools isn't just more simplistic, it's also more secure. You'll know where your organization's data is stored, which employees have access to it, and what methods of security and compliance are protecting it, Constellation Research's Alan Lepofsky explains. "Also, when you tie together multiple tools, information flows back and forth from one vendor to another, rather than staying under the control and governance of a single source." [1]

[6] "2015 Cost of Data Breach Study", 2015, IBM Corporation

Office 365's platform's built-in safeguard and privacy features are available across devices, so you don't have to worry when it comes to security. Mobile Device Management, standard with Office 365 Enterprise, helps IT manage security risks that come with lost or stolen devices. It allows IT administrators to perform selected wipes on any lost or stolen personal devices or company-owned devices. Additionally, Exchange Online Advanced Threat Protection scans all of an organization's incoming and outgoing email for sophisticated attacks, unsafe attachments, and malicious links.

"Microsoft has worked with us to provide assurances that we are working in an environment that minimizes business risk. They are clearly focusing on information security in the cloud."

—

Michael Waters,
Director of Enterprise Information Security,
Booz Allen Hamilton

TIP #4

Scale at your own pace

Implementing a new suite of tools can seem overwhelming. Office 365 lets you move at your own pace and allows your employees to get up and running faster. With a suite of tools available to implement, you decide whether to migrate employees over in groups or by program. The ability to implement a steady rollout allows you to save costs and increases productivity by helping your business adapt to new streamlined solutions over time.

For Microsoft customer Air Canada, an immediate rollout of all solutions in the suite was not a possibility for its 27,000 international and very mobile employees. In the first stages of the Office 365 migration, they worked with Microsoft Consulting Services to deploy Active Directory and Office 365 ProPlus, then to migrate to Exchange Online and deploy Skype for Business and SharePoint Online. Soon after, Yammer was rolled out across the company (starting in only one branch

of the company and growing from there), and employees began using OneDrive for Business.

This full deployment took place within the first 10 months of Air Canada's engagement. Manager of IT Innovation, Allen Chang, credited the Microsoft Consulting Services team for bringing together "multiple outsourcing vendors and getting them to work together to meet [the deployment] schedule."[7]

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[7] "Air Canada Soars Into the Cloud to Speed Processes and Improve Service," 2015, Microsoft Customer Stories: Air Canada

TIP #5

Control the back end

When transitioning to a new system, one question often remains: How can IT manage the transition and the platform's upkeep with their existing resources? As mentioned in Tip #4, not only will a transition take up valuable end-user time, but it can also be a massive undertaking for your IT team. Automatic updates will save IT some valuable time, and Office 365's team of experts will help them at each step in the process.

Air Canada's Manager of IT Innovation and Technology, Allen Chang, found that implementation moved much faster with Office 365, noting they'd only be able to manage simple patches and upgrades if they tried to match the pace. "With Office 365," he noted, "we get the improvements and we can just focus on developing applications to take advantage of them."[7]

With simplified programs and a recognizable user interface, employees rely less on IT for infrastructure. With Office 365 Groups, employees can create their own groups and aliases to quickly collaborate and connect, without IT input. And high autonomy means improvements for the business overall.

Likewise, cloud-based software update implementation enables your IT team to focus on work outside of product updates. Constellation Research notes that collaboration platforms can release new software versions more easily, several times per year, versus single tools releasing updates once every several years.[1] This frees your IT team to prioritize business operations, instead of spending their days updating applications.

"Microsoft is constantly introducing new capabilities and more storage. We would submit feature requests, and they seemed to be there the next time we used a program."
—

Allen Chang
Manager of IT Innovation and Technology,
Air Canada

Your business deserves the best, and disparate point solutions just won't deliver the services you need when paired together. Choosing to implement a suite of collaborative tools can satisfy both your early adopters and those resistant to change, all while keeping your IT department's asks manageable.

With a single infrastructure for saving your business and employees time, money, and sanity, the Office 365 suite is the simple solution to help your company's employees work together with ease. Communicate and share files across Yammer and OneDrive for Business, create a content management repository within SharePoint, set up online meetings with Skype for Business, and send and receive secure emails through Outlook and Exchange.

Curious about what Office 365 can do for your organization?

Take a guided tour today to explore the latest in-product experience and features, including key collaboration capabilities across the suite.

https://resources.office.com/landing-guided-tour-test-drive

Office

Lucidity
Cloud Services

Gold
Microsoft Partner
Microsoft