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THE MANY FACES OF COLLABORATION

LET'S GO 



ANYWHERE, ANY TIME

We all need to talk. To share knowledge.
To be social. It's the same as it's always been.
Only different.

The massive shift to remote and distributed working during the global Covid-19 pandemic hasn't changed the need for collaboration in the workplace; just where we collaborate from – and how.

Whatever the future brings, it's likely that many employees will continue to work from home, for at least some of their working week.

As we shift from a largely physical to a hybrid workplace, people need the right tools to enhance teamwork, collaboration, and communication. Not only to ensure they remain effective and productive, but so that they feel confident, motivated, connected and part of a team.

This shift has been rapid and sudden. At the outset organisations used what tools they had, often adopted in an ad hoc manner. Now it's time to take a longer-term perspective. Enabling employees to access intelligence, share knowhow, exchange ideas, co-create and work effectively in teams is fundamental for a vibrant culture of innovation, exploration and co-creation.

This demands interconnected devices and consistent software that can work from any location. And technology that supports seamless collaboration across geographies and disciplines.

In this Executive Briefing, we explore the changing face of workplace collaboration and ask what challenges and opportunities this presents. We describe how Computacenter and Microsoft come together to connect employees and ensure creativity and ideas continue to flow. What tools, processes and cultural changes are needed for effective collaboration and wellbeing in today's digital workplace?



ONE TEAM, MANY PLACES

Collaboration. It's the act of people working together, having a conversation, solving problems, and creating as a group. Technology makes this possible from anywhere.

No matter where your people are based, it is still expected that they come together and function as a working collective. Dispersed, but still productive.

In this dynamic and distributed workplace, Microsoft technology is enabling us to do things differently and more efficiently than ever before. Designed for the enterprise, Microsoft Teams and Microsoft 365 are giving teams new ways to collaborate – all while staying secure.

We've replaced simple things like physical meeting room whiteboards covered in Post-it Notes with Microsoft Whiteboard. Projects where there was previously a single 'master' document with just one person in control, have become collaborative and shared experiences in Microsoft Teams. Co-authoring, file sharing, integrated apps and simultaneous contributions to a living, breathing document are increasingly the norm.

The value of education

These are new ways of working and demand new workforce behaviours. For example, if you're organising a Teams

meeting, there's no need to send documents by email separately – keep them in Teams to share in the meeting. This replaces the previously manual, linear process with live, working documents. Your chats and decisions are all kept in one place, too.

Education is important in all of this. If you're investing in new tools, they'll only be fully utilised if people have the knowledge to use them. This is especially the case with collaboration tools where several parties are involved. To get maximum use out of them, they need to be used in a consistent way by everyone.

Whose role?

Responsibility for this education must be assigned. We've worked with several organisations where training in new collaboration tools has fallen through the cracks, with one team assuming another has organised it. There should also be different layers of learning to accommodate user maturity and training preferences, whether that's online or one-to-one.

The rapid move from a largely office-based workforce to home working has meant this education is now more important than ever. Are your teams working at their best in this new world? Or do they need upskilling and support as they endeavour to work effectively as part of 'one team'?



Use of Microsoft Teams shot up from 32 million daily active users in March 2019 to 75 million in April 2020 with 200 million meeting participants recorded in a day.





Successful change

A Workstyle Analysis was integral to Computacenter's rapid adoption of Microsoft Teams for its 16,000-strong workforce.

Understanding people's roles and needs, including the facilitation of home-working for approximately 90% of employees, ensured that the deployment was looked at through the eyes of the users, rather than from just a technology perspective.

As well as ensuring everyone had the tools they needed to keep working, this understanding meant the calling infrastructure for Computacenter's Service Desk had the capacity needed to support the massive shift to a remote model – with no interruption to customer service.



KNOW YOUR PEOPLE

Fast, flexible laptops, such as Microsoft Surface devices, are keeping us connected in the places we now work.

Effective collaboration increases employee productivity and satisfaction. This demands tools that enable rich, office-like experiences. They may even take away some of the friction associated with office-based processes, such as booking (or a lack of) meeting rooms.

We are seeing lots of different devices being consolidated into single collaboration toolsets. And these devices are increasingly becoming multi-use, such as phones being used as scanners. But that's not all. People are increasingly using the same device for work and home life. It seems that users don't want to switch device, they just want to swap context.

In another interesting evolution, channels are blending (voice, video, chat, etc). This omni-channel model is fairly sophisticated and there will be some employees who are good at it, easily blending the channels and devices as they move from task to task. But this sophistication also means less adaptable employees won't get the most out of the tools without proper support. Once again, this comes down to the importance of education to ensure a positive employee collaboration experience.

Combat shadow IT

With so many tools and platforms available in this omni-channel landscape, adopting Microsoft 365 and Teams can help combat the security risk and cost of spiralling shadow IT as employees investigate their own collaboration tools. CIOs must also make sure they understand the different types of people in their organisation. How and where do they work to perform their individual jobs? What difference has the shift to more remote working made? How are teams still on the front line managing to collaborate with colleagues elsewhere?

Computacenter's Workstyle Analysis is a great place to start for this. It provides the insight needed to ensure people have the right tools and, importantly, the appropriate level of education to use them effectively.

What it boils down to is that if you don't know how people work, you're not always going to make the right decisions about provisioning new services. We deployed this approach in our own business when we accelerated our planned adoption of Microsoft Teams in response to Covid-19.



IN THE RIGHT MIND

In today's hybrid workplace people may need help to use their time to best effect.

When you're working from home where the norms of office life don't apply, it's extremely easy to jump from video call to video call without leaving the desk. Suddenly, you find you've spent all day in meetings with no downtime in between. Home and work life start to merge into one.

Managing this requires a level of personal discipline, as well as considerate advice from the business. Leaders must encourage people to respect colleagues who want to take breaks. And they should investigate the tools available to support best practice. For example, Microsoft has announced several new features focused on mental health, including meditation breaks and insights. It has also teamed up with meditation consultancy Headspace to bring a set of mindfulness experiences and science-backed meditations into Teams.

Microsoft Research studies have found that “the reflection typically done during daily commute time can increase productivity by 12-15 per cent.” So, look out in the first half of 2021 for a new Microsoft Teams feature that lets you schedule a virtual commute at the start and end of your day.

Time for coffee

Support for a distributed workforce should also extend to the social implications of remote working. It can be isolating to work from home, so it is important to create opportunities for the whole team to virtually get together. This might be through brainstorming sessions with Microsoft Whiteboard, or daily check-ins over a virtual coffee.

Employees can be encouraged to make better decisions about how and when they collaborate by using MyAnalytics in Microsoft 365.

This gives users personal feedback on how they're spending their time and offers tips to help them work smarter. A weekly average section shows an estimate of how much time they've spent in meetings, email, chats, and calls, measuring this as a percentage of their work week.

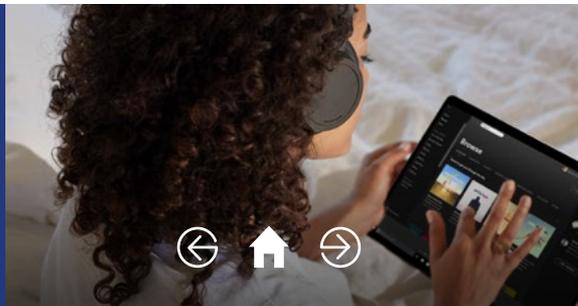
Monitoring mental health

A tool like MyAnalytics is particularly useful in the current distributed workplace. In a Human Factors Labs study,¹ Microsoft found that remote collaboration is more mentally challenging than in-person collaboration. A second study found that overwork and stress were significantly higher in video meetings than in non-meeting collaboration work like writing emails.

Microsoft's focus on making meetings work better has seen the launch of a new meeting option in Teams called Together Mode. This uses artificial intelligence (AI) segmentation technology to digitally place participants in a shared background so that they feel more connected and reduce meeting fatigue.

At Computacenter, we help organisations understand and implement tools like these to ensure a smooth adoption and answer any employee concerns about their impact on ways of working.

¹ <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/microsoft-365/blog/2020/07/08/future-work-good-challenging-unknown/>



COLLABORATING BEYOND THE ENTERPRISE



Microsoft 365 and Teams offer an amazing way for groups of people – wherever they are – to work effectively together and 'get stuff done'. We make sure our customers get the most out of these tools through the education needed to accelerate adoption.



The urgent working-from-home imperative has accelerated the shift to smarter, more cost-effective means of collaboration, while creating a need for new ways to interact with external partners.

So far, we have looked at the impact on employees of the shift to a hybrid at-home and more traditional working model – from offices and shops, to factories and front line services. But what about external collaboration? If you're cutting the volume of face-to-face meetings and are deploying a collaboration platform, how do you interact with partners, customers and suppliers who may not be on the same platform as you? You may need to supplement your collaboration platform with bridging technology to allow different systems to work together. At Computacenter, we're using bridging software to connect our own Microsoft Teams video conferencing technology with a single solution in the same workflow as our meeting room systems, and mobile, desktop and web users.

This any-to-any collaboration is very much an expectation of employees in the digital workplace. Just as people make social calls between iPhones and Android phones, so they expect to collaborate on any device and between platforms at work.

Collaboration etiquette

Whether you are on a call with a colleague or an external party, the surge in virtual collaboration as a result of Covid-19 has brought collaboration etiquette to the fore. But what do we mean by etiquette? Surely, by now we all know how to behave on a video call. In the first instance, it could simply be basic good habits, such as putting your microphone on mute if you're not speaking to remove background noise. Or switching off video if there's something distracting going on in the background.

But etiquette is also about understanding more strategically sensitive issues, such as those relating to sharing data. Is the data confidential? Is it appropriate to share? And do the tools support secure data sharing?

We help organisations respond to these questions of etiquette by configuring the tools and policies in the right way to ensure they are secure, protected and consistent with any applicable regulations.





The key is to identify the best tools to make work work – whatever and wherever that work is. Microsoft 365 has a range of collaboration tools to enable people to collaborate in the way their user personas require, from enterprise chat tool Yammer, to Teams and services like SharePoint.



CTO CONSIDERATIONS

Investing in a new collaboration platform will have an impact on your network and existing systems.

When you are choosing and deploying a new platform, there are some important technology considerations to bear in mind beyond your employee needs and business outcomes. You might be transitioning from largely voice telephony to video calls and sharing video presentations over the network. This will change the demands on the network. Is it up to the task? Can it support a seamless collaboration experience from both within and outside your office space?

These questions must be part of the planning for new ways of collaborating. Video calling and digital collaboration impact the network, which makes migrating to cloud-based, scalable solutions such as Microsoft 365 and Teams an important strategic choice. Further, does the collaboration platform form part of broader business plans to integrate with customer-facing channels? At Computacenter,

for example, we're using Teams in our Service Desk offering to enable some customers to chat directly to an agent.

These are just some of the implications for IT leaders in terms of their choice of platform and tools for enabling the business to serve others, as well as to support a distributed workforce.

Making work work

By assuring your network, you'll gain the underpinning strength to support a wide range of collaboration models. And while we are largely talking about a new, hybrid workforce here, let's not forget the collaboration needs of hundreds and thousands of people still working where they've always worked – in shops, on hospital wards, in logistics organisations, on industrial sites, and more. At Computacenter, we know that collaboration means different things to different organisations and sectors. Our persona-based approach to collaboration helps our customers identify the different use cases and the best tools from the Microsoft suite.

Your space

Another consideration when you're upgrading or replacing your collaboration platform is the physical space in which the technology is deployed. How are your physical rooms and collaboration spaces used? Will the collaboration tools you've selected integrate with your legacy investments? What's the most appropriate equipment to deliver a great employee experience?

We help our customers answer these questions in a Workspace Assessment. Your room might be a huddle space, a small focus room, or a meeting room. It could be a contact centre or perhaps multiple classrooms. Each need to be equipped with the right technology to keep people engaged and connected with colleagues, customers, partners and the business outside the room.



COLLABORATING TODAY – AND TOMORROW

Remote and hybrid working is here to stay. But it's a moving picture. What's good today is likely to be managed and governed differently over the long term.

Many organisations moved quickly to deploy new collaboration tools early in the Covid-19 pandemic. Others are now in catch-up mode as this new way of working becomes a permanent feature. For all organisations, compliance and management of data in this collaborative landscape will need to be constantly monitored.

The complete Microsoft 365 security model is a good place to start. This enables data to be controlled across disparate groups as they collaborate from the core to the edge of the enterprise.

Collaborating for success

Seamless collaboration across disparate business functions and geographies drives business success. It makes innovation part of business as usual, with teams sharing ideas and information in real time, regardless of where they're working.

This requires scalable platforms and agile processes. It needs the right tools, for the right people, at the right time.

We work with Microsoft to ensure that organisations and their employees have what they need to improve collaboration and transform the meeting experience. We train people and facilitate cultural change. We manage policies and maintain equipment. Keeping the many faces of work collaborating, day in, day out.



Finding answers

IT and business leaders must work together to ask – and answer – a set of important questions that will guide the adoption and productive use of enterprise collaboration tools:

Do you understand how people work, how they use technology and tools, and what is or isn't effective?

How have ways of collaboration changed since the beginning of the year?

Do people have the right technology to be able to work with each other effectively, regardless of where they are?

Do you use several collaboration or conferencing tools in your business?

Do people understand which tool is best for each situation – what guidance are they given about how to use them effectively and get real value?

If you've deployed new collaboration tools since the beginning of the year, can you measure how successfully they are being used?

What happens to the collaboration sites, chats and content created today 3, 5 or 7 years from now?



GET IN TOUCH

For more information about Computacenter's partnership with Microsoft and how it helps to accelerate business in a hybrid IT landscape, please contact your Computacenter Account Manager, call 01707 631000 or email enquiries@computacenter.com.

Visit our website to find out more about how Digital Me solutions from Computacenter are already helping to empower, equip and assist our customers' teams.

Learn more [here](#)

About Computacenter

Computacenter is a leading independent technology partner, trusted by large corporate and public sector organisations. We help our customers to source, transform and manage their IT infrastructure to deliver digital transformation, enabling users and their business. Computacenter is a public company quoted on the London FTSE 250 (CCC.L) and employs over 16,000 people worldwide.

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