The Rise of Collaborative Communication
A Primer on Workstream Communication and Collaboration

January 2017
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**Introduction: Digital Transformation Makes Collaboration a Must-Have**  
Exhibit 1: Collaboration Across the Extended Enterprise Requires a Multitude of Disconnected Tools  
Exhibit 2: Is Your Organization Ready for the Quad-Generational Workforce?  

**Section II: The Challenges with Traditional Unified Communications**  
Exhibit 3: UC Is Widely Used for Individual-Centric Collaboration  
Exhibit 4: Highlights of Ipsos Workstream Communication and Collaboration Survey  

**Section III: Workstream Communication and Collaboration Fuel Agile Teams**  
Exhibit 5: WCC Is the Next Frontier in Team Collaboration  

**Section IV: What to Look for in a WCC Solution Provider**  

**Section V: Conclusion and Recommendations**  

---

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Zeus Kerravala is the founder and principal analyst with ZK Research. Kerravala provides tactical advice and strategic guidance to help his clients in both the current business climate and the long term. He delivers research and insight to the following constituents: end-user IT and network managers; vendors of IT hardware, software and services; and members of the financial community looking to invest in the companies that he covers.
Introduction: Digital Transformation Makes Collaboration a Must-Have

Digital transformation is creating new product and services opportunities, evolving business processes and enabling companies to dramatically increase revenue while reducing costs by achieving higher levels of efficiency.

In the digital era, sustained market leadership is no longer based on which company has the lowest costs, superior products or the best people. Rather, market leaders will be determined by a company’s ability to recognize shifts in the market landscape and adapt to these trends faster than their competition. This means being able to make the best decision as quickly as possible while involving the right people, regardless of their location.

A digital organization must be an agile one in which teams can quickly come together, make a decision or complete a task and then move on to the next initiative. As companies become more extended and global, the composition of well-networked organizations includes internal workers as well as external participants such as suppliers, partners, vendors and customers. In the digital era, the best companies are dynamic and agile, and they are designed to move with speed to meet the demands of competitive pressures.

To accomplish this, the collaboration tools organizations use must extend outside of the enterprise—from employees to suppliers to customers. To enable workers to collaborate and communicate more effectively, IT organizations have deployed a wide variety of tools (Exhibit 1).
Despite these investments, most companies have yet to realize the full potential of collaboration. This is because unified communications and collaboration (UCC) tools are independently deployed and managed, leaving the bulk of integration management to the user. Conceptually, one would think that adding more collaboration tools makes people more productive, but the opposite can be true. When a wide range of UCC applications are independently selected and adopted by different lines of business, this can create communications silos within different parts of the organization, which can lead to inefficiencies and frustration for the users and for the IT staff that needs to secure and manage them.

Another challenge is involved in becoming a digital organization: Existing workplac-
es and tools were designed with the assumption that all workers collaborate in the same way. This may have been true decades ago, but today’s workforce is transitioning into a quad-generational one (Exhibit 2). The percentage of workers from these four segments—Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials and Generation Z—varies widely by vertical, but this generational mix is a trend that all organizations must address. Based on statistics from Singularity Hub, in aggregate, Millennials currently account for 21% of the workforce, while only 2% are from Generation Z—but within 10 years, those numbers are expected to grow to 35% and 12%, respectively.

For businesses to become agile, digital organizations that leverage the potential of the quad-generational workforce, collaboration is now a must-have. However, it needs to evolve past traditional unified communications (UC) and be extremely intuitive to use from any device.

Section II: The Challenges with Traditional Unified Communications

The need to collaborate better is one reason why UCC is in use or in the testing phase at 70% of organizations today (Exhibit 3). UCC enables individuals to communicate and collaborate with team members using a variety of tools. However, effective team collaboration requires more than just individual-centric...
communication tools. Agile collaboration requires the ability for anyone on the team to initiate real-time conversations with the entire team. Historically, this has been accomplished through in-person meetings, but distributed teams and remote workers have forced businesses to use individual-centric tools such as email, chat and conferencing calls to collaborate. Unfortunately, these tools are ineffective and too slow for agile teams, particularly in the digital era of business, which leads to the following inefficiencies in the workplace:

- **UC ISN’T UNITED** To increase worker productivity, companies have adopted a wide range of collaboration tools from multiple vendors. It’s common to have separate, single point solutions for audio conferencing, web and remote desktop sharing, video and other functions including chat. The ZK Research 2016 Unified Communications Purchase Intention Study found that businesses have an average of five collaboration tools. The study surveyed more than 800 IT respondents who are responsible for UC purchasing across companies of all sizes. The lack of integration across vendors means the user must manually move information between the tools.

- **REMOTE MEETINGS ARE INEFFECTIVE** Conducting a meeting with remote participants often requires logging into an
audio bridge, a web-conferencing system and a video solution. Within the conference room, a computer needs to be connected to a display, or content must be loaded onto an in-room PC. Each one of these tasks adds inefficiency to the meeting. ZK Research interviews with large enterprises revealed that on average, the first 15 minutes of every meeting are wasted setting up the technology. This is why, according to a recent Ipsos survey (see Exhibit 4 for survey highlights), 53% of workers believe having more effective meetings would increase productivity.

WORKERS HAVE AN OVERLY HIGH RELIANCE ON EMAIL Although there are many ways to communicate, email has become a de facto standard for most workers. The chronological nature of email makes it inefficient, as workers need to process each one individually and correlate it to a workstream. Also, all emails have the same priority, as workers are unable to assign priorities or relate emails to specific projects. A recent McKinsey study found that the task of managing email now consumes 28% of a worker’s day. And interestingly, about a third of workers feel too much email is hurting their productivity, according to Ipsos.

COMMUNICATIONS TOOLS EXIST IN SILOS Each generation of workers has a preferred communications tool. Baby Boomers tend to prefer voice, while Generation
X relies on email, and Millennials and Generation Z favor messaging. These communications silos make it difficult for workers of different generations to communicate effectively. The Ipsos survey found that 73% of workers who use traditional UC are somewhat or very interested in having their companies combine all of their favorite communications tools into one solution. Of this group, 83% believe that having communications tools fully integrated into office productivity applications would be valuable.

**LARGE AMOUNTS OF TIME ARE SPENT MANAGING COMMUNICATIONS** The siloed nature of communications tools causes workers to spend large amounts of time looking for information and managing communications. In fact, the Ipsos study revealed that 51% of workers who use unified communications think they could save up to 20% of their time if their communications and collaboration tools were integrated, while 22% believe they could save 30%.

In the digital era, where decisions need to be made faster, workers must be able to collaborate more effectively. This requires a new communications tool—one that is designed to make agile teams more productive.
Among those who do not have an integrated communications platform at work, a majority (51%) think that they could save up to 20% of their time by having all of their communications/collaboration tools integrated together, while one in five (22%) believe that they could save up to 30% of their time thanks to such a platform.

Ipsos Workstream Communication and Collaboration Survey
Section III: Workstream Communication and Collaboration Fuel Agile Teams

Workstream communication and collaboration (WCC) solutions, also known as team collaboration solutions, are designed to promote an ongoing dialogue among team members by providing a forum for conversations. Collaboration requires that teams be agile and able to interact with every other team member easily, quickly and possibly even simultaneously. This includes using both real-time and non-real-time communication modes. Also, WCC organizes the information as a workstream, which could be a project, an individual chat or a group conversation. This is a much more efficient organizing principle than a tool such as email, which sorts information chronologically.

As the modern workplace becomes increasingly dynamic and distributed, the process of enabling effective communications and collaboration will become more complex given the number of places where people work and the range of devices they use. Also, although communications and collaboration are distinct processes, the lines between them have been blurred.

These trends are driving the evolution of UC to WCC, which is enabled by the integration of cloud applications and collaboration features centered on team messaging to bring business value to all types of organizations in new ways. Instant messaging has been available for well over a decade, but those closed, proprietary solutions cannot support file sharing and other communications functionality.
Conversely, WCC messaging involves an open platform and incorporates all of the functions that teams require for effective meetings. These functions include asynchronous and real-time communications, document sharing, calendaring, task management, note taking and other features that will lead to increased efficiency and productivity (Exhibit 5).

WCC’s structure is significantly different from that of traditional UC. With WCC, messages are organized by workstreams or threads, which could consist of projects, discussions or other initiatives. For teams, this is a much more logical structure than sorting information chrono-

Exhibit 5: WCC Is the Next Frontier in Team Collaboration

With WCC, messages are organized by workstreams or threads, which could consist of projects, discussions or other initiatives.
logically, such as with email. With this structure, workers can quickly find information and interact with others while understanding the context of the team’s initiative.

Another major difference with WCC is that it has been designed for a mobile-centric, cloud-first world. Traditional UC relies heavily on premises-based infrastructure and is optimized for PCs or desktop telephones. With UC, workers would look up information in one collaboration tool and manually enter it into another. For example, if an individual sends an email containing his or her phone number, the recipient would manually enter that number into a desktop phone to call the sender.

With WCC, all forms of collaboration are fully integrated, so two people could be interacting via messaging and then easily promote the conversation to a voice call when needed. Then, just as easily, they could add a third person or more to the conversation and quickly establish an online meeting or conference call, while also sharing a document with all participants. WCC seamlessly integrates all modalities of communications and collaboration tools, making it simple for workers to interact with their teams regardless of where team members are and what device they are using. This makes it ideal for meeting the needs of the quad-generational workforce, which is frequently working from different offices or on the go from airports, hotels and other remote locations.

Organizations that adopt WCC will realize the following benefits:

- **IMPROVED WORKER EFFICIENCY**  WCC makes collaborating more efficient, as it becomes a simple application for everyone in a team to use and enables quick
decision making. Because WCC organizes communications by workstream, workers do not need to search multiple applications for related information. A proof point of this comes from the Ipsos study, which found that 80% of workers believe WCC makes them more efficient and productive. Other strong proof points from the study that highlight the value of WCC include the following:

- 42% of respondents reported **savings of up two hours** using WCC versus email, and 16% saved more than three hours.
- 33% of respondents claimed to get **one to two hours of their time back** during the day; 28% got **two to three hours back** and 30% saved more than three hours.

**MORE EFFICIENT MEETINGS**  With WCC, workers are constantly collaborating and are always notified of new comments, messages or changes to content. This enables team members to stay current on project-related information between meetings so that when meetings are held, it’s not necessary to review old information. Also, because WCC is multimodal in nature, it can be used for remote workers to actively participate in meetings.
REDUCTION OF EMAIL  As reported earlier in this paper, workers spend an inordinate amount of time managing email. One reason for this is because it remains one of the few cross-platform tools available to workers. Email certainly has its place and is ideally suited for large group messages to which an immediate response is not required. WCC provides a better platform for time-sensitive messages, as everyone to whom the message is relevant will be immediately notified and can take action—which reduces workers’ dependency on email. ZK Research conducted a number of interviews with WCC users and found that some of these workers saw a reduction in email of up to 70%.

GREATER TRANSPARENCY  When teams work together, it’s important to have transparency across the various tasks associated with the project. This includes understanding who makes updates to a certain document or which person was responsible for certain data points. When information is scattered across multiple systems, having such transparency is next to impossible. With WCC, sessions, documents and conversations are tracked, providing full transparency into all team activities.

FASTER CONTEXTUAL SEARCH  The speed at which companies work in the digital era requires that workers be able to locate the right information and people quickly.
Often, the process of finding a document or an email or notes from a meeting can be onerous. WCC ties content to users and meetings and stores it in a common location so that when a search is performed, all relevant information can be found quickly and easily—enabling faster and easier collaboration among workers.

**IMPROVED REMOTE WORKER CAPABILITIES** The integrated aspect of WCC gives users a single tool to use when working remotely. Now, instead of having to continually switch between tools while on the go, workers know that all their contacts, communications tools and content can be accessed through the WCC applications. In fact, the Ipsos study found that 82% of workers want their IT departments to provide better tools and support for them to work remotely.

**SECTION IV: What to Look for in a WCC Solution Provider**

The WCC market is still emerging, as vendors are at various stages of development—making it challenging to compare and contrast them. The following are the essential features that a WCC solution must have to meet the needs of agile teams and digital organizations:

**CLOUD DELIVERED** Competitive advantage is achieved when a business can harness the power of teams—including people who are in the office but also employees who are on the road or working from home or even at another organization.
cloud-delivered solution assures that any individual can be part of the collaborative session regardless of their location or device.

**OFFERS UC AND WCC** Although WCC is the next frontier for collaboration, workers still need traditional UC, as it is useful for ad hoc individual conversations. The combination of UC and WCC enables workers to be agile whether they are working on individual tasks or as part of a team. According to the Ipsos survey, eight out of ten respondents (83%) believe that having a fully integrated set of communications tools (i.e., phone, text, meetings, messaging) in a single, open platform would be valuable.

**SECURE COMMUNICATIONS** Most WCC solutions are cloud based, so businesses should inquire about encryption for both data transport and storage as well as the provider’s access to encrypted content. Some solutions are available for premises-based deployments. Regardless, security and encryption will become increasingly critical as the amount of stored data increases.

**EASY ADMINISTRATION AND ACTIVE DIRECTORY EXPERIENCE** The WCC solution should integrate with the organization’s Active Directory database to ensure policies and
groups are consistent with organizational structure. Also, the solution should offer an easy-to-use administrative interface so departmental personnel can grant or revoke access.

**INTERORGANIZATIONAL ACCESS** The rich capabilities of UC have largely been restricted to internal users, but teams are increasingly likely to include external users. These participants can be partners, contractors or even customers. Video-conferencing solutions were quick to embrace guest links, but they were only good for a specific meeting. WCC solutions can provide external participants with full-featured functionality, including the ability to participate asynchronously on their own schedule. This can greatly expand the pool of knowledge available to the company.

**CONNECTIVITY TO EXTERNAL STORAGE SOLUTIONS** One key function that WCC provides is the ability to store documents for projects or other tasks. However, most organizations are already using a preferred cloud storage vendor. WCC should interface with all of the major cloud storage solutions to simplify document management.

**OPEN PLATFORM** Many of the more widely deployed UC solutions were built on closed, proprietary technology. This limits interoperability and ecosystem support and is one reason why extending the solution outside of the organization has been a
WCC solutions should be open and based on standards such as WebRTC so they can integrate with popular software-as-a-service (SaaS)-based applications such as Office 365, Google G Suite, Salesforce.com, NetSuite and other CRM, productivity and customer care solutions.

**INTUITIVE SOLUTION**  WCC will be used by a wide variety of users spanning the quad-generational workforce. The solution must be simple and intuitive so workers can start using it without training. This will drive much greater adoption across the company.

**RECORDING CAPABILITIES**  Businesses may want the ability to record interactions between team members, customers, vendors, etc. This can be done for compliance and regulatory purposes or for playing back information for team members who could not attend meetings.

An example of an organization that took advantage of WCC is Hawk Ridge Systems, an engineering services and manufacturing firm that serves companies such as NASA, Boeing, Google, Belkin and Kohler. Samuel Eakin, operations IT lead for the company, was searching for a WCC team to streamline processes and increase efficiency. Eakin’s workforce tried Slack and found it beneficial as a team chat tool, but it lacked many of the features they needed including project management capabilities. He had the budget to purchase Slack subscrip-
tions and add on Asana for project management capabilities. But as an alternative, the decision was made to explore Glip by RingCentral. As an existing RingCentral customer, Eakin learned Glip was included with the company’s RingCentral Office subscription license. Glip has saved Hawk Ridge Systems at least two times the cost compared to adopting both Slack and Asana, while giving Eakin’s workforce seamless WCC capabilities.

SECTION V: Conclusion and Recommendations

The digital business era is transforming businesses faster than ever before. This transition is driving rapid change across enterprise IT, as applications have moved to the cloud and workers are now utilizing mobile first. But one area of technology that has yet to evolve is business collaboration. Traditional UC tools such as chat and email are optimized to enable an individual to communicate with another individual or a group of people. However, they do not enable efficient team-wide collaboration.

In this competitive business environment where new, agile companies are disrupting industries almost overnight, the speed of decision making is a key to sustaining market leadership. Those that can become dynamic, distributed organizations will lead their industries, while those that cannot will rapidly become irrelevant and struggle to survive. WCC can deliver the highest level of team agility, meeting efficiency and rapid decision making.

WCC adoption must be a top initiative for business and IT leaders looking to increase their
agility. However, there will be some challenges to deployment. To help organizations make a smooth transition, ZK Research offers the following recommendations:

START THE WCC DEPLOYMENT WITH A SMALL PILOT GROUP The process of deploying technology company wide is difficult to manage, as organizations encompass a large range of work styles and collaboration preferences in addition to multiple locations. Starting with a small pilot group lets the IT organization study how processes change, collect best practices and then apply them as the deployment grows.

CONSIDER WCC PART OF THE LARGER ORGANIZATIONAL COLLABORATION STRATEGY Many WCC solutions are available today as either standalone products or from UC vendors. Using multiple vendors adds to deployment complexity, as it requires separate licenses and management. As Hawk Ridge systems discovered, a solution such as Slack can actually cost a hefty amount more because it is a siloed technology that requires other paid integrated solutions.

LEVERAGE THE POWER OF THE CLOUD Historically, the on-premises deployment model for collaboration purchases has been dominant. However, these solutions can no longer meet the needs of an organization that is becoming more agile and distributed. The cloud offers massive reach and limitless scale, which are keys to success in the digital era.