


Breaking barriers:

How today's conferencing  
tools remove silos and  
optimize productivity





Introduction:

# The origins and effects of workplace silos

For many of today's professionals, working remotely or on the go is more than just the norm: It is an engine of improved productivity and engagement. The most engaged employees are often the ones with the greatest levels of control over where and how they work.

One Stanford study even found remote workers were 13 percent more productive than their in-office colleagues.

At least one in ten U.S. workers now regularly works from home, and many more do so from branch offices or while traveling. Gallup has documented the acceleration of these trends in recent years. Modern collaboration tools such as video conferencing, VoIP, and business messaging have been instrumental to workers' increased capacity to succeed regardless of their physical locations.

This ability to operate from virtually anywhere – whether an employee's home, a public venue, or a company branch – has become both an important employment benefit and a practical necessity at organizations with widely distributed operations that require tight coordination between teams.



The size, culture, and technology of an organization can all influence the formation of silos within it.

A 2015 AfterCollege survey even found that 68 percent of college graduates were more likely to accept a job offer if they had the option to work remotely, and a growing number of firms are equipped to accommodate these preferences. At the same time, geographic dispersion and differences in management structure between offices can create silos that separate an organization's departments and isolate their respective decision-making processes – yielding negative effects on everyone's productivity.

Mobile and remote work initiatives, while substantial presence in many workplaces, are held back by key disadvantages in supporting tools and processes compared to traditional offices. Organizational silos contribute to this divide, although their overall impact extends far beyond companies with a modest to high share of remote and mobile workers.

The size, culture, and technology of an organization can all influence the formation of silos within it. Silos are not intrinsically undesirable, and may in some cases exist for sensible reasons such as grouping together individuals with related expertise. However, more often than not, silos amplify the common challenges to effective teamwork in a firm:

- ▶ According to a 2015 PricewaterhouseCoopers report, "Reimagining Operations," much more work occurs within silos than across multiple synchronized business teams: More than half (55 percent) of companies allow each department to make its own decisions, compared to only 36 percent that identify cross-functional capabilities toward which everyone works.
- ▶ Respondents to the survey also indicated that even hyper-efficient processes performed within silos were less ideal than organization-wide collaboration. In other

words, it is not possible to build a better mousetrap, at least when it comes to optimizing silo-based work. Each team will be on its own page, which is a substantial drag on interorganizational communication and responsiveness to change.

- ▶ The transformative DevOps movement in software development gained traction by aiming to break down the traditional barriers between programmers (“dev”) and IT operations staff (“ops”). While initially limited to this specific scope, in practice its benefits have included broad boosts to team collaboration and productivity at organizations adopting it. These gains were the direct results of removing silos that had forced teams to operate in isolation from each other, such as Team A working alone for months on a project and Team B then having to greenlight it on a short timetable.
- ▶ The DevOps example illustrates the need for both better processes and technologies to truly evolve beyond company silos. For an organization as a whole, this combination might include workflows designed to minimize redundant steps when onboarding a new client, planning a marketing campaign, or closing the books each month in the accounting department. All of these activities would in turn be supported by collaboration tools with intuitive options for voice, video, and chat.

The specific communications solutions that underpin effective collaboration include crystal-clear video conferencing, HD voice calling, and intuitive messaging. These capabilities should be securely supported in the cloud, scalable to numerous workers at multiple sites, and – most of all – easy to use. As such, they will offer real advantages over existing tools and become fresh sources of increased productivity by supporting improved coordination between un-siloed teams.



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Raising the bar for  
teamwork:

# What is necessary for better collaboration?

Video conferencing in particular reveals the significant upside of upgrading to better collaboration technologies, along with the specific conditions that must be met for successful deployments.

In 2016, Frost & Sullivan estimated that the market for video conferencing infrastructure and endpoints would climb to \$2.9 billion by 2020, with the strongest growth coming from the installation of additional devices within the millions of meeting spaces and company huddle rooms worldwide. However, relatively few of these locations were video-enabled at the end of 2015, often for reasons of upgrade cost, not to mention challenges in delivering acceptable user experiences.

Workers set the bar high for video. They have become accustomed to the seamless on-demand viewing available from platforms such as Netflix and the growing availability of mobile apps with video chat and recording features. Accordingly, they expect similar reliability from their workplace collaboration suites. Tools that do not meet these standards won't be used frequently enough to justify their upfront and ongoing costs.



In a digital world overflowing with intuitive apps capable of performing complex tasks, platforms for voice, video and chat should be no different.

Plus, if not appealing to end users, those tools will also be left behind in favor of less efficient yet widely available alternatives or unapproved shadow IT services. Landline phones are still supplied to workers at much higher rates than mobile devices, while a Skyhigh Networks investigation once estimated the ratio of shadow to approved IT apps at 10 to 1.

These options, despite their disadvantages, will fill the gap left by collaboration tools that do not align with the needs of teams who operate from separate locations, across different time zones, and through multiple communications channels.

In this context, an effective set of collaboration solutions must fulfill essential requirements to ensure a better meeting experience, including criteria for:

- ▶ **Service quality:** Substandard video and audio quality during conferences can lead to thousands of unproductive hours at a company over the course of a year. It also discourages future use of video for meetings. Conferencing systems must offer lifelike video and crisp audio so that every meeting feels as real as possible, even for attendees who are far away or in-transit.
- ▶ **Usability:** In a digital world overflowing with intuitive apps capable of performing complex tasks, platforms for voice, video and chat should be no different. They must enable meetings of all kinds from a single solution enhanced by straightforward controls for hosting, joining, and making adjustments along the way.
- ▶ **Context:** Collaboration platforms should not be afterthoughts that are tacked on to existing processes with minimal guidance on how what occurs inside them

fits into other conversations around the organization. Integrations between applications – for instance, a connection between a conferencing solution and another program for collaborative white boarding and messaging – helps prevent the rise of additional silos between collaboration utilities themselves.

- ▶ **Security:** The stakes for secure communications are higher than ever. The rise in the number of devices connecting to enterprise systems and the growing sophistication of threats such as ransomware and corporate spyware demand collaboration solutions with multiple layers of protection for sensitive data.

Implementing a comprehensive, thoroughly integrated set of tools is the best way to eliminate silos at both the technical and organizational levels. This solution also extends in unique ways to benefit IT, leverage existing investments and seamlessly integrate into other tools. As a result, **Cisco Webex Meetings** now combines the functionalities once divided between video conferencing, calling, messaging, and file sharing. It offers a unified experience for all meetings and simplifies collaboration for teams with anytime/anywhere working styles. Silos can become things of the past, sparking a shift toward a truly collaborative workplace.



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Life after silos:

# Charting the productivity gains from transformative conferencing solutions



The central drawbacks of workplace silos are inadequate information sharing, ad hoc decision-making, and limited operational visibility. Today's conferencing tools reduce all of these risks by enabling simpler, more effective connections across teams and business units. Let's take a look at some of the specific productivity-boosting features when conferencing with a multifaceted video solution.





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## A unified experience for all virtual meetings

Silos are often reinforced by territorial mentalities, which lead to the use of disparate and incompatible tools by teams trying to accomplish the same tasks. In contrast, a post-silo organization will benefit from standardization on a common platform combining everything it needs to facilitate meetings.

Cisco Webex Meetings makes meetings easy to join and manage for members of all teams in an organization. Instead of needing to consult a complex manual to understand how the solution works, or worrying if additional plugins, extensions, and other software need to be downloaded, individual users can take advantage of a simple one-button experience for joining or scheduling.

Moreover, there are many accommodations for easy participation. A mobile worker might choose to dial in from a smartphone over public switched telephone network (PSTN), or join from a web browser on a laptop. In both instances, there are no barriers to starting a meeting, and no time is lost navigating complex menus or installing extra tools. All actions lead to one platform and ensure team members are on the same page and can join/schedule without hesitation and with no restrictions on their locations or chosen devices.

## Multiple integrations with common applications

Having consolidated communications platforms is ideal, especially with the numerous collaboration channels available. Still, a collaboration suite should not itself be a silo, cut off from other vital applications throughout the organization.

Properly implemented integrations help curb formation of silos and support cross-functional collaboration. By running conferences through Webex Meetings, it is now simple to pull in data from other services including calendars, learning management systems, and other meeting platforms.

Meetings can even be listed across different interfaces with a single button to join, along with unified participant lists, lobbies, and controls. Through these advanced features, a well-integrated collaboration solution can become a hub for conversations and decision-making for the entire organization.

## Fewer distractions and higher engagement during meetings

Compared to conference calls, video conferences within a modern conferencing solution should facilitate more productive interactions. Traditional conference calls are characterized by disjointed experiences – such as calling in through one solution but using a wholly different one for screen sharing. Multitasking by participants decreases focus and can further strain the connections between mobile and remote teams.

Video-centric meetings fuel higher engagement among employees. For example, they provide geographically dispersed teams with powerful tools for approximating the experience of an in-office meeting. This lifelike aspect is unique to video conferencing. High-quality video and audio, accessible from intuitive interfaces, are pivotal resources driving the relatively high engagement rates of remote teams.

According to a comparison of remote and in-office employee workflows published in Harvard Business Review, one of the key drivers of higher productivity among remote workers is



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their adept usage of specific tools such as video conferencing, instant messaging, voice, and email. For optimal results, these solutions must be easy to use in the first place. Cisco Webex can further boost the productivity of teams in all locations by enabling the high-quality, real-time communications they require when meeting with colleagues and customers.

## Secure infrastructure for peace of mind

The power of cutting-edge conferencing tools is not lost on originators of cyberattacks. Data transmitted during a video conference or teleconference is often sensitive, necessitating security at multiple levels. With the right protections in place, conferencing solutions provide a safe digital communications experience optimized for today's complex security challenges.

Multiple encryption standards can be supported in Webex Meetings, with the option for end-to-end (E2E) encryption available for the highest requirements. E2E limits the knowledge of the encryption key to only a meeting's host and its attendees, and as such it limits possible exposure of conversation details.

Beyond encryption, meetings are also secured at the physical and platform levels. Key defenses within data centers prevent unauthorized access, while administrators retain numerous options for creating, verifying, and locking/unlocking individual accounts for meetings.

A collaboration solution that is both easy to use and highly secure has the added advantage of reducing reliance on less safe shadow IT and consumer-grade tools. Removing silos in an organization isn't just a road to improved productivity – it's also the ticket to safer communications for everyone.



# Achieving stronger connections and better productivity with conferencing tools

Silos are barriers to more effective collaboration, and conferencing tools help remove them. When you use Cisco Webex Meetings, with its converged feature set for holding easy-to-schedule and consistently productive meetings, you are building stronger connections between the different parts of your organization and freeing teams from limits on their potential.

The solution is simplified yet comprehensive. Webex Meetings offers a streamlined experience the entire organization can enjoy. As more workers spend at least a portion of their company time outside a main office, it's essential they have access to a single platform allowing them to conveniently schedule, join, and control meetings from any location or device. Webex Meetings was designed to make this possible.

Ongoing improvements in cloud computing, networking, and mobile device capabilities will only increase the importance of becoming an agile organization with scalable collaboration tools. The new possibilities in Webex Meetings, from picture-perfect video conferencing to collaborative workplaces in the cloud, give your teams everything they need to work together productively and creatively.

Cisco Webex is more than just a place for meetings—it's an open platform for teams. Webex delivers a full suite of secure services for calling, meeting, and team collaboration. For more information on how Webex services increase productivity, reduce costs, and secure collaboration across your organization, visit [www.Webex.com](http://www.Webex.com).

# Cisco Webex

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