The subject of teamwork is nothing new. The output of organizations large and small is driven by collective effort. Core values that solidify team performance – trust, commitment, engagement, communication, accountability and results – are unchanged. However, the environment that surrounds and influences team performance has now changed immensely.

We are now virtual, mobile, distributed, social, and we bring our own devices to work. At the same time, the proliferation of disparate communications has created a complex, fragmented and overwhelming mess – in many cases hindering collaboration and productivity, rather than enabling it.

In our new study, we set out to discover and measure the untapped performance potential of today’s virtual teams – and uncovered some very compelling findings in the process.

Methodology

Siemens Enterprise Communications designed and executed the research survey via the Web during September and October 2012 – generating responses from nine countries including North America, Latin America and Western Europe. Respondent sample size was captured at n=320, generating statistically significant findings at a 95% confidence level within +/- 5% interval, with a 99.7% completion rate among respondents.
Key Findings

Finding #1:
79% of respondents always or frequently work in distributed teams, but only 44% find it as productive as face-to-face teamwork – and only 8% have a formal system to measure and manage team performance.

“"I work in a culture where we have the majority of our meetings via audio and web conferencing“”

“We need to focus on the benefits of mobility and the transformation of how we need to do our work in the future”

“It's simple, teamwork is built on trust; trust is inherent to the emotional, human side of each of us”

– Survey respondents

Our recent global research study shows that while the vast majority of organizations rely on remote, distributed and mobile team members today – a smaller minority report having sufficient tools to enable effective team collaboration and coherent information sharing. And even fewer have formal training strategies to ensure productivity with the tools they do have, or a means to measure and manage teamwork in the enterprise.
Finding #2:

43% of users feel frustrated and overwhelmed by team collaboration and communication technologies that they work with.

“What is obvious to the technologist may not be understood by the occasional user”

“Nothing is more frustrating than having to rely on a technology that hinders our communication”

“I feel a team should be stationed as a whole in one site”

– Survey respondents

This finding shows that more than 4 in 10 users ‘always or frequently’ feel frustrated or overwhelmed by the complexity of disconnected communications technologies, and only about half of respondents experience success in establishing trust and maintaining fluid dialog among team members within today’s new ‘virtualized’ landscape using the tools they have.
Finding #3:

“Traditional” technologies like email (93%), phone calls (89%) and conference calls (79%) are still the most common tools used to support distributed teams – while 72% would find teamwork easier if collaboration included video, but only 34% use it.

“"We need to know about the wide variety of choices and be skilled at using various methods and when to use each type.”

“Teams use a variety of [ways] to communicate and they all need to be able to share information”

“"We have not kept pace with technology investments. We are concerned about lagging behind!””

– Survey respondents

Despite the advances and promise of richer collaboration technologies like web conferencing, shared workspaces, private social networks and video conferencing, the traditional means of email, phone and conference calls still get used most often among virtual team members. When asked if being able to see the remote team member via video would be beneficial, almost three-quarters said ‘yes’ but only about one-third actually use video conferencing now.
Finding #4:

75% find their team members more likely to get distracted during ‘virtual’ meetings, and 34% find remote team members often ‘loafing’ – not doing their share

“We need a way to replicate the little hallway meetings that take place between local team members to the remote members”

“Making communication a little more personal makes for a better team”

“Everyone wants to be a part of a team but no one wants to do teamwork”

– Survey respondents

With the communication tools currently being used most often, the teaming elements that bond – trust, commitment and engagement – seem to suffer. Clearly there is potential to do better in terms of engagement of team members and real and/or perceived equity in terms of member contribution to team goals and outcomes.
Key Insights And Recommendations

In the words of leading teamwork guru and author Patrick Lencioni, “Teamwork remains the one sustainable competitive advantage that’s always been largely untapped”.

We strongly believe now is the time for enterprises to revisit the untapped potential of team performance – to effectively look at team collaboration as a corporate asset.

Our study results show that the nature of work lifestyles and team collaboration has fundamentally changed, forever. With these new trends and technologies, both challenges and opportunities emerge.

Clearly there is an opportunity to improve the connectedness of virtual team members. Because we have so many communication options, the opportunity to connect and flourish is better than ever. Harnessing these capabilities into a set of integrated and harmonized tools is an opportunity to dramatically improve the output of a team. The need is to overcome the physical distances between mobile and virtual team members, improve engagement and enable productive conversations and dialog – while removing complexity.

At the same time, most enterprises are still relying most often on traditional tools – phone calls, conference calls and email – to drive team collaboration among those who cannot communicate face-to-face. A huge untapped potential for richer conversations, productive dialog and information sharing clearly exists.

Our goal as an enterprise communications vendor is to deliver fully integrated communications solutions that synchronize technologies, harmonize the user experience, weave communications directly into the way businesses operate and empower employees and teams.

The focus is on enabling the ‘anywhere worker’ who believes that work is a thing that gets done, not a place to go – and expects the tools they use to be easy and intuitive, and basically just work. It is about embracing ‘enterprise-caliber’ consumer technology in the communications mix. The focus is shifting to the user: usability, mobility, productivity and collaboration.

The result is a more competitive enterprise. One that amplifies collective effort and dramatically improves business performance.
Siemens Enterprise Communications is a leading global provider of unified communications (UC) solutions and network infrastructure for enterprises of all sizes. Leveraging 160 years of experience, we deliver innovation and quality to the world’s most successful companies, backed by a world-class services portfolio which includes international multi-vendor managed and outsourcing capabilities.

Our OpenScape communications solutions provide a seamless and efficient collaboration experience – on any device – which amplifies collective effort and dramatically improves business performance.

Together, our global team of UC experts and service professionals set the standards for a rich communications experience that empowers teams to deliver better results.

Siemens Enterprise Communications is a joint venture of The Gores Group and Siemens AG, and includes Enterasys Networks, a provider of network infrastructure and security solutions, creating a complementary and complete enterprise communications solutions portfolio.

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