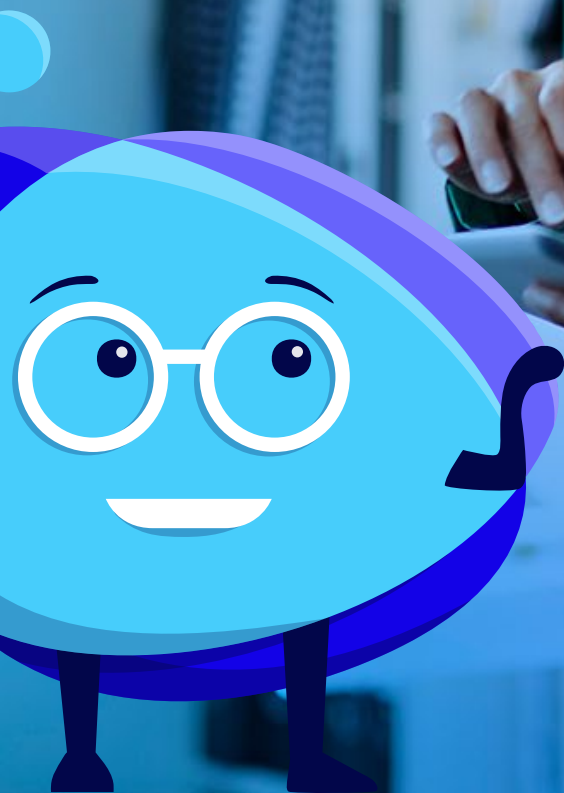


HOW TO ENABLE SEAMLESS COLLABORATION IN YOUR ORGANIZATION



iManage

Making knowledge work

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Your people, their talents, and the knowledge they possess are your organization's most valuable assets. But in many organizations, the ability to seamlessly share knowledge and have people work together to make the most of their skills and experience is restricted.

In the post-COVID age of hybrid work, where time is split equally between the home and the office, ensuring collaborative working has been elevated in importance. But several challenges – including legacy technology, complex document management, and knowledge silos – lie in the way.

Many organizations have also taken stringent security measures to protect sensitive information from falling into the wrong hands. This, of course, is essential. But it can further hinder access to knowledge that your workers can benefit from.

The challenge, in this instance, is striking the right balance between protecting information and making it easily accessible to those who need it. To this end,

content should be secured and governed according to defined business rules, but in a way that doesn't restrict or hinder the end user. Otherwise, they will simply circumvent any measures you put in place.

In this paper, we'll discuss the most common obstacles to collaboration that organizations must overcome and show how you can create the pathways that enable people to work together and share their knowledge seamlessly.



[Queens University of Charlotte](#)



THE BENEFITS OF SEAMLESS COLLABORATION



Truly seamless collaborative working can be a superpower for your organization.

With easy access to the right information and people within your organization, teams can perform more efficiently and intelligently, put knowledge to work, and deliver better business outcomes.

In fact, the simple act of collaborating on tasks and sharing ideas is valued at \$1,660 per employee per year. And the quality of improvements made as a result of workplace collaboration are valued at \$2,527 per employee. In addition, companies that promote collaborative working environments are five times more likely to be high performers than companies with fewer employee collaboration initiatives. [Deloitte](#)

The benefits, then, are clear. But where does this value come from?

Quite simply, every individual in an organization has knowledge and experience that can benefit others. But it's rarely shared, instead existing in people's minds as tacit knowledge or in silos that other employees aren't aware of.

By transforming this personal know-how into institutional knowledge and making people more accessible to each other, you can elevate your entire business performance.



Happier, more productive employees

The ability to collaborate also has a huge impact on the employee experience.


By making knowledge work more efficient, reducing the time people spend searching for content, and providing pathways for people to communicate ideas, questions, or suggestions, you allow them to share their talents and deliver their best work.

This helps to optimize remote and hybrid working practices and can attract and help retain a generation of talent that's used to technology providing efficiencies in their everyday lives.


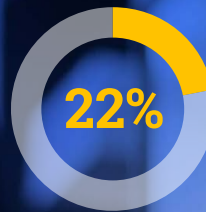
It may surprise you that this level of convenience isn't just a nice-to-have. Many of today's employees see both collaboration tools and a willingness to embrace innovation as key requirements in the companies they choose to work for.

Why? Firstly, they want their work lives to be as easy and frustration-free as possible. But also because willingness to invest in new ideas reflects a willingness to listen to employees and improve practices.

By making collaboration easier, you can add thousands of dollars of value, develop higher-performing individuals, foster greater customer and employee satisfaction, and create an organization that runs seamlessly.



So why isn't everyone working in collaborative environments?



of employees who work for collaborative companies are more likely to believe that their employer cares about their morale

Deloitte



THE CHALLENGE IN GETTING IT RIGHT

There's no single answer as to what makes collaboration so hard – and therefore no silver-bullet solution to solve all your difficulties. That's why it's important to investigate the specific challenges your organization faces.

That said, there are some common denominators that we see time and time again that place barriers between companies and successful, collaborative knowledge work.



A breakdown in communication

Communication is often a problem in large organizations, especially those that operate across numerous time zones and language barriers.

As a general rule, when it comes to communicating, people tend to use the tools that come most naturally to them – and in many organizations there are *lots* of these tools. Between Microsoft Teams, email, Slack, Zoom, and whatever other internal communication channels exist, finding the right point of contact can be a challenge in itself.

And that's *if* you know who the right person to contact is. Sometimes, identifying the best person to reach out to with a problem or idea can be incredibly difficult. Yet there is no shortage of expertise to tap into.

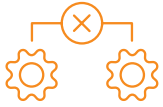
There are two challenges here that must be overcome: establishing who has what expertise and knowledge and then finding a way to disseminate that knowledge across the organization.

The latter is a challenge with significant time pressure attached, too, as a generation of workers nears retirement and threatens to take their accrued knowledge out of the door with them.



of respondents cited "poor communication" as a top stressor at work in a report on workplace stress in the United States and the United Kingdom.

[Write](#)



Mismatched technology

One of the other issues we commonly see is investment in the wrong areas. This is often most present in organizations with a genuine desire to make collaboration happen, but not enough understanding of how to enable it.

It's important to remember that the software, tools, and solutions you choose to enable collaboration must be suited to the *specific* needs of your employees.

It sounds like an obvious thing to say, but often investment is made because there's a new tool on the market, and not because it promises to solve the most pressing pain points your employees have.

This can lead to bigger problems than just inefficient working and wasted expenditure. In this instance, it's not uncommon to see employees find their own workarounds to problems and introduce their own tools and solutions.

This can result in security issues, for one. But it can also create an incredibly complex IT landscape and, ironically, create further silos.



Document disarray

The way files and documents are organized and shared within an organization can be another barrier to collaborative working, and the bigger and older the organization the larger this challenge tends to be.

Often matters and documents are stored because they need to exist somewhere, but little thought is given to how easy they are for people to retrieve. If the systems you have make it painstaking to find the right files or information, people will lose valuable time searching for what they need, or sending emails in the hopes the right people are around to answer their questions. They will also, once again, revert to their own methods – like saving files to their desktop where they know they can find them next time. Even if this means those files may only be accessible to themselves.

The upshot of this is that it can create further silos of information, which in turn makes it even more difficult to find past examples of work. As a result, efforts are duplicated when work is started from scratch, and employees miss out on institutional knowledge that could improve their output.

It can be a major time-sink, and incredibly frustrating for those who know the information they need is out there somewhere – but have no idea where.

The perfect time for change

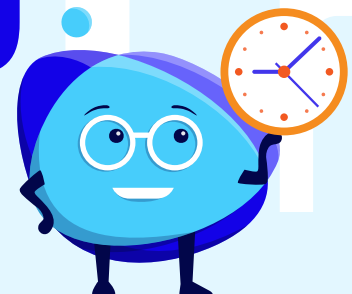
To ensure meaningful collaboration, each of these barriers must be addressed and removed.

Communication must be simple. As must finding the right documents, resources, and people to work with. But often, the task of migrating legacy technology and managing organizational change can make transformation a daunting prospect.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, collaboration understandably suffered. Prior to the outbreak, employees spent 43% of their workweek collaborating. During 2020, that number fell to just 27%. [Gensler](#)

However, with remote and hybrid working the new normal, most organizations have been forced to introduce tools to enable some level of collaborative working. This forced change may represent an important first step on this journey and provide the perfect opportunity for you to further your investments in this area. It may even have highlighted the improvements that are possible and the inefficiencies that still exist within your organization.

The good news is, there has perhaps never been a better time to implement change.



A TWO-STAGE APPROACH TO IMPLEMENTING CHANGE

To secure the benefits of collaboration, you need to implement tools and technologies that simplify knowledge and co-working – but that’s only one part of the battle.

You also need to establish a culture of collaboration. The best tools in the world aren’t worth anything if your people aren’t willing to use them or don’t fully understand their value.

As with all major change initiatives, this must be led from the top down. It’s the oldest rule in management – don’t ask others to do anything you wouldn’t do yourself. But how should leaders implement this change?

Identify the problem

Perhaps the biggest barrier we see in tackling these issues is failing to recognize there’s a problem to begin with.



With this in mind, the first step is not only acknowledging that there’s an issue, but identifying exactly *what* it is – where do the bottlenecks lie? What are your employees’ biggest frustrations?

The only way to find the answers to these questions is to truly listen to your employees. It’s vital you give them an opportunity to share their challenges and ideas. And to do this effectively, you should provide numerous and varied opportunities to have people voice their feedback. This is important, because while some employees may be vocal about their concerns, others may prefer to provide feedback anonymously.

By catering to all types of people, and creating a culture where everyone can share their issues and ideas for improvement, you’re far more likely to gain a clear picture of what your workforce really needs.



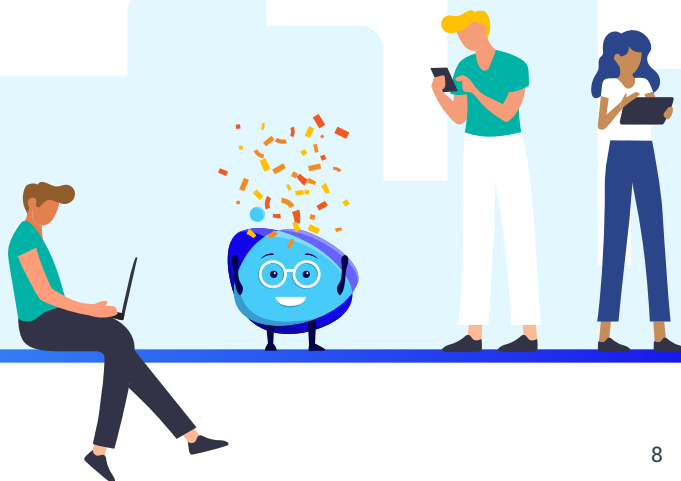
Find the quick wins

It’s also vitally important to remember that not everything has to happen at once. There’s a presumption that enabling collaboration and knowledge sharing is a huge investment. But it doesn’t have to be.

You need to start by identifying the quick wins. Not just in terms of the tools and processes that are easiest to fix, but also the people that are most likely to adopt them. This is important, because although change must happen from the top down, it also has to be embraced from the bottom up.

In large organizations with employees that span generations, there will inevitably be some resistance to change. Statistics show that 41% of employees over the age of 55 are more likely to prefer working on their own compared to employees aged 25 to 34. On the other hand, 33% of the younger generation also said they preferred to work alone, which means your efforts to sell collaboration should target employees of all ages. [Techradar](#)

So, start with those that are eager to adopt new things. And when they work – make sure everyone in the organization knows about it. Once people see how easy things can be, you will find that change management becomes a whole lot easier.



FOUR STEPS TO DEMOCRATIZE KNOWLEDGE AND SIMPLIFY COLLABORATION



When considering the tools and solutions needed to enable collaboration, it's important to think about the different ways you want your people to work together. In general, there are four key actions that can lead to better collaborative working and significant productivity improvements.

#1 Simplify document management and co-authoring

To enable co-working, it's essential that you provide easy access to the right documents and resources – all while maintaining the integrity of security processes.

To check both of these boxes, you need to make it quick and easy for your people to set up shared folders where permissions can be quickly amended to suit different use cases. And, once your employees can access the documents they need, you must ensure that it is easy to work collaboratively within them.

Many of us are familiar with juggling Word documents and navigating a sea of tracked changes. But software that promises real-time document collaboration, along with robust version histories, can help your people to work smarter while providing a clear audit trail of activities.

Granting everyone the ability to see the status of ongoing work and manage and review project progress can also see huge efficiency improvements. As can being able to work from any device and any location. Quite simply, it's about putting everyone on the same page at the same time.

#2 Make it easy to find the right content quickly

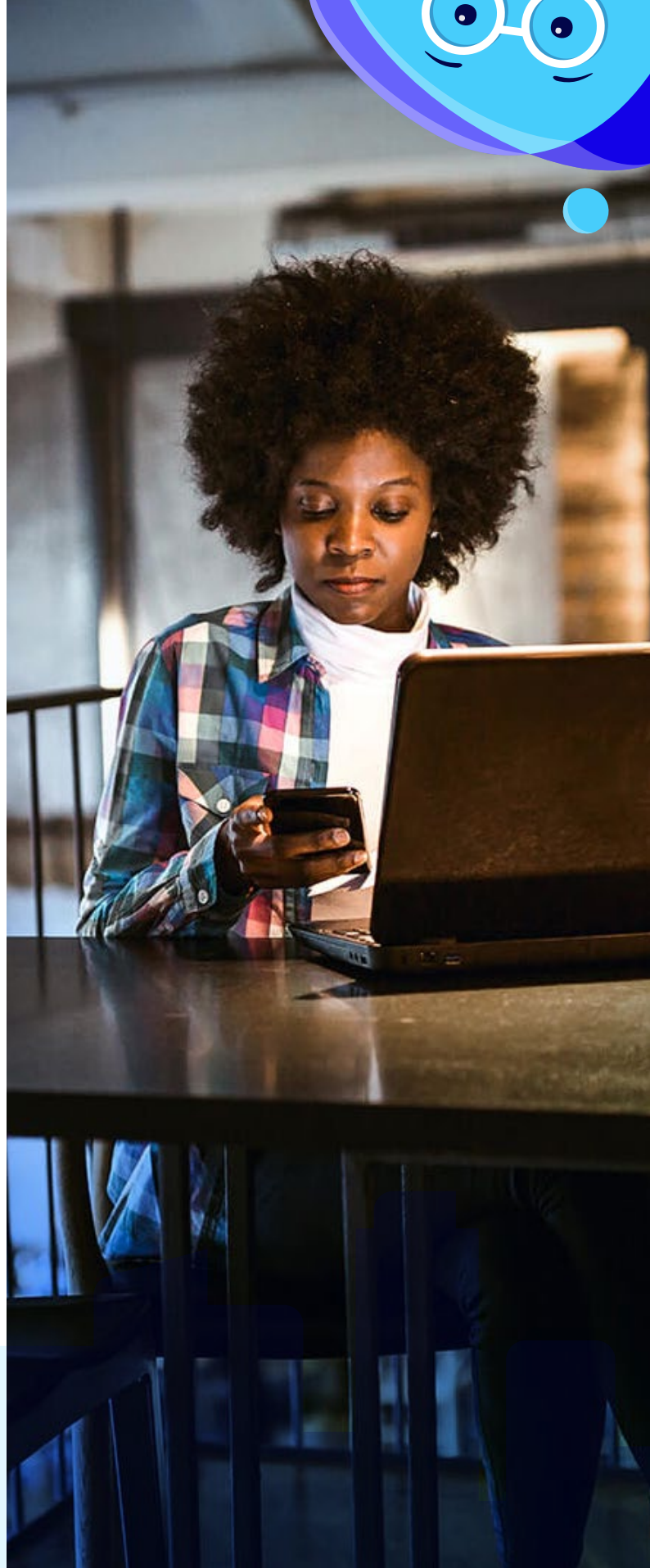
Providing access to work that has previously been conducted is vital to prevent duplicate efforts and wasted time among employees.

In many companies, thousands upon thousands of documents are stored without much thought to what use they can be later down the line. So how can you remedy this?

The key here is to take the gold-standard examples of work that is often repeated and make them instantly accessible and easily searchable – by task, matter, client, or project – to everyone that may need them. This will save your people valuable hours and give them more time to focus on the most rewarding parts of the job.

Metadata, tagging, and search tools can play a big part in making it easier to identify useful documents and resources. Advanced tools in this area provide powerful Google-like search capabilities that allow every user to find the right piece of content with pinpoint accuracy.

Again, being able to access documents from any location, while still ensuring security, can be a major enabler of collaborative working.



#3 Connect people to the right experts

Similar cataloging can be used to find the people within your organization who have specific areas of expertise. Finding a way to identify who these people are, and making it easy to reach out to them, is vital to creating institutional knowledge.

One consideration here is that not everyone will want to ask questions directly. For new hires especially, the fear of asking the wrong thing or asking things they think they should already know can be a barrier to collaboration and idea-sharing. And, of course, with a distributed workforce, the right people may not be on hand to answer those questions anyway. A searchable knowledge base and the ability to anonymously ask questions can add real value in these instances.

There are also some cases where established employees aren't willing to readily share information, often because of the effort involved. This process should therefore be made as simple as possible. Ideally, it should be automated, with examples of meaningful work automatically filed in a way that makes it accessible to others.

In instances where your experienced team members do have to take time out of their day to help others, they should be remunerated in some way, and time should be allocated for this in their working schedule.

#4 Improve communication

Workplace collaboration has been shown to improve productivity, and online communication tools can be vital in enabling people to share concepts, ideas, suggestions, and questions. But they can also lead to distractions. These largely come in the form of personal conversations on the job and incoming requests that take away from current tasks and projects. In fact, 40% of employees wish that companies would enforce stricter rules around the use of online collaboration tools at work. [Zippia](#)

With that in mind, there are two considerations here: Is there a way to reduce the number of channels people use to communicate, so time isn't spent flicking between various channels? And how can you ensure that these channels are used efficiently, to add value rather than introduce distractions?

Adding capabilities like contextual search, saved conversation threads, document previews, and co-authoring can all make a meaningful difference to the role communication channels play in enabling collaboration.

The very best solutions in this space provide one-click access to important documents, emails, or messages within the chat channels you already use, so multiple versions don't proliferate, and content is saved in a secure and governed resource.

Sound like a lot? It doesn't have to be.

All of these things require investment and thought – but not every change has to be huge and sweeping.

Ideally, these capabilities will be integrated with the tools you already use, to simplify change management and adoption. But it's not always about adding new capabilities, either. Even simple things, like having a universally accessible diagram of where everyone sits in the office, can make it clear that people are open to talking and help create a more collaborative culture.

Ultimately, the needs of your organization will be specific. So, think about what it is you really require. What adds the most value?

Take this as your starting point and work from there.

By using social technologies, companies can raise the productivity of knowledge workers by 20 to 25%.

[McKinsey](#)



WHAT NEXT?

Enabling collaboration across your organization can lead to profound benefits and productivity improvements – and the good news is, it doesn't have to be complicated.

At iManage we're dedicated to Making Knowledge Work™. We help organizations across a range of industries to eliminate friction, make better, faster decisions, and create truly collaborative working cultures.

Our artificial intelligence and powerful document and email management create connections across data, systems, and people. And everything we do is underpinned by advanced, need-to-know security.

To learn more about how we can help you overcome your collaboration challenges, visit www.imanage.com.



About iManage™

Dedicated to Making Knowledge Work™, iManage provides an intelligent, cloud-native, secure knowledge work platform that enables organizations to uncover and activate the knowledge that exists inside their business content and communications. Advanced AI and powerful document and email management create connections across data, systems, and people while leveraging the context of content to fuel deep insights, business decisions, and collaboration. Underpinned by best-of-breed security workflows and governance, iManage has become the industry standard – continually innovating to solve complex professional challenges and enabling better business outcomes for more than a million professionals across 80+ countries.