

# Collaboration tools will need to engage all workers in the hybrid workplaces of the post-COVID19 future

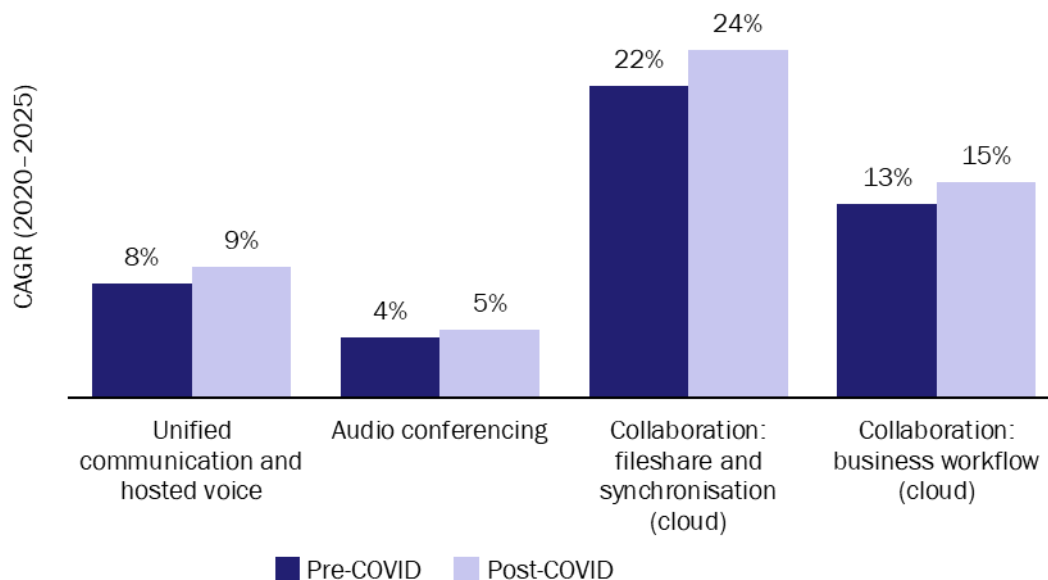
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Kunika Sodhi

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way employees of many organisations work and collaborate. Working from home has become the norm for many and their interactions virtual. Communication and collaboration between employees will need to change again as vaccine programmes are rolled out and more people are able to return to their place of work. However, it is likely that working patterns have changed permanently and that working from home, to some extent, will become the new standard. This will result in a new workforce pattern – the hybrid workplace, where some employees work from home and others return to offices.

Vendors of collaboration solutions will need to adapt their solutions to the demands of this hybrid workforce. The need to connect remote and/or hybrid teams is expected to drive spending on collaboration tools, especially as businesses look to support their remote workforce who will need specialised collaboration solutions and interfaces to feel as engaged as the employees who have gone back to work on site. The need for remote collaboration and conferencing solutions is not going away anytime soon. To account for this trend, we have increased the growth rate forecasts for collaboration solutions in the latest update of our [SMB Technology Forecaster](#) (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Growth in spending on collaboration solutions, worldwide, 2020–2025



Source: Analysys Mason

## Businesses must have robust collaboration tools

Mixing virtual and on-site work streams is harder than it seems. The key challenges associated with a hybrid workplace are:

- Employee isolation. Remote employees may feel left out of the office culture and events because they are less engaged in office meetings and hallway conversations. Remote employees will struggle to build or maintain their social capital in an organisation and will feel at a disadvantage compared to those employees in the office.
- Increased security risks. The risk of cyber-attacks and security breaches increases as employees work and communicate from different locations.

Good collaboration solutions aim to provide a seamless meeting environment for all employees – those who come to work and those who dial in via conference calls. As more businesses adopt the new hybrid model, meeting practices will have to change to cater to both groups of workers so remote workers do not feel left out.

## Collaboration tools must match business needs

Collaboration solutions have evolved rapidly since the onset of the pandemic. For instance, Microsoft has added almost 100 capabilities to its Teams app to streamline work and automate processes to help users before, during, and after a meeting. These capabilities include:

- ‘together mode’, which enables a group meeting experience as if all participants are sitting in the same room.
- customisable meetings to create smaller breakout sessions.
- automatic meeting recordings supplemented with transcripts and detailed notes.

Microsoft has also addressed the hybrid working experience with its new offering Microsoft Teams Rooms, which provides a similar experience as a physical meeting room, bringing video and audio collaboration into meeting rooms while enabling touchless or single-touch meeting launches and seamless content sharing for remote and on-site workers.

In February 2021, Microsoft announced its latest product, Microsoft Viva, “the first employee experience platform to bring tools for employee engagement, learning, wellbeing and knowledge discovery, directly into the flow of people’s work.”<sup>1</sup> Viva is a platform built on Microsoft 365 and will bring together aspects of HR, training and insights based on the user aimed at improving productivity.

Other vendors are also making advancements to bring forward integrated ecosystems that foster productivity. Cisco has made major updates to WebEx such as:

- integrating deep learning and speech science software to address audio challenges related to feedback and voice clarity on calls.
- ensuring security and compliance via features such as data loss prevention, retention, legal hold and e-discovery.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://news.microsoft.com/2021/02/04/microsoft-unveils-new-employee-experience-platform-microsoft-viva-to-help-people-thrive-at-work/>

Vendors of collaboration tools need to provide solutions that enable employee engagement, productivity and data security in a hybrid workplace.