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## **Key Questions to Ask When Considering Collaboration Solutions**

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*This IDC Analyst Connection accompanies the IDC Vendor Spotlight entitled "Maximize Your Collaboration Investment by Choosing the Right Services Approach," and identifies four key questions that enterprises have to ask their internal organization and ICT suppliers as they evaluate collaboration solutions.*

**Q. How can my organization migrate from our current, fractured communications environment to an integrated collaboration solution? What are the requirements?**

A. Migration to collaboration is a process that businesses can do over time to solve specific business challenges. IDC recommends moving forward with collaboration strategically by leveraging existing and new technology assets.

Few organizations want their IT departments to be dealing with the costs and limited control involved in assembling a collection of collaboration products and services. This is especially true when the technology is not only new, but also expensive, complex, and with a potential impact that goes beyond communications. Services players can act as a single point of contact for the enterprise and resolve issues (ranging from licensing to network and application integration) by interacting with desktop players and traditional voice vendors, and benefiting from the drive toward hosted and managed solutions.

The following key questions must be asked before embarking on a collaboration solutions deployment:

- Is the network prepared for advanced IP communications, including messaging and presence?
- Is the network ready to support advanced technology features such as audio, Web, and videoconferencing, and even telepresence?
- Can the network support mobile employees and provide them with the information they require on any device anywhere?
- Do our employees, partners, and customers leverage social media and other collaborative software tools to grow our business?
- What is the return on investment (ROI) for making the capital outlay for on-premises equipment versus hosted, managed, or SaaS solutions?
- What type of collaboration strategy should I consider to align to my business initiatives?

**Q. Who will manage it? What attributes should an enterprise look for in services organizations (SI, SP, regional VAR, vendor) for collaboration? What are the main differences between them? Can we use our own internal team instead of an outside services organization?**

A. Collaboration services lends itself naturally to a multivendor environment, bringing together various technologies for voice and video, hardware and software, and desktop and network, as well as the associated deployment skill sets. Therefore IDC recommends using a third-party services organization with expertise in collaboration rather than over-taxing the resources of an enterprise's IT team. When evaluating a services firm (SI, SP, regional VAR, or a vendor's services organization) enterprises should look for the following attributes:

- Proven methodologies for evaluating, designing, and deploying collaboration solutions
- Certification with the appropriate broad spectrum of collaboration suppliers — hardware, software, desktop, video, and voice
- Capabilities to have business transformation conversations with multiple decision makers at various levels within an organization
- Global coverage and worldwide services support

IDC believes that one of the most challenging skills associated with a successful collaboration deployment is that of managing business transformation. Collaboration is a services-led engagement, solving business issues and challenges, and bringing technology through as a result of in-depth business focused conversations. Collaboration services are able to solve these challenges, enabling an organization to communicate and collaborate in new ways.

Services organizations will approach a collaboration solution in a variety of ways based on their expertise — voice-centric, desktop-centric, or network-centric — all varied approaches to this solution. Enterprises must evaluate their service provider's approach, technical expertise, and established methodologies to understand which firm will provide optimum results for their investment. Most importantly, the services firm must demonstrate that it understands the business and the complexities of migrating to a collaborative solution.

**Q. Where are most enterprises today in their adoption of collaboration? How can services help accelerate and navigate adoption and change management issues?**

A. IDC's annual WAN manager surveys (polling the opinions of CIOs in the U.S. and Europe) show that these executives see collaboration as one of the key drivers for network spending today — 33% of companies in the U.S. said they are using collaboration today, compared with 17% in Europe. A further 54% of U.S. companies (50% in Europe) plan to use collaboration in the future.

Services can help enterprises manage the transformation toward becoming collaborative enterprises. In order for organizations to successfully incorporate collaboration solutions, services that help prepare, plan, deploy, and optimize technology investments can dramatically reduce costs, mitigate risk, and deliver high performance.

Enterprises should look toward services delivered by suppliers and their service organizations along with their designated and certified channel partners, global systems integrators, and service providers, with proven methodologies and best practices for designing, deploying, and supporting collaborative solutions. Services organizations provide collaborative solutions from a variety of different technology perspectives.

Telephony, IP networking, software, or business transformation consulting are all essential components for successful collaboration deployments.

Interestingly, most of the major suppliers that are interested in capturing share in this market are looking to the indirect channel, rather than direct sales. In part this may be because collaboration touches so many adjacent technologies that partners are already selling, combined with the overall shift toward indirect sales.

**Q. When considering integrating new collaboration solutions in our organization, which internal teams must be engaged? How can we best align roles and responsibilities for a smooth migration?**

A. The transformative nature of collaboration solutions challenge the way in which enterprises conduct business, so the decision-making and integration process of bringing in collaboration can become very complex. As such, services firms are expert at bringing together disparate business leaders and stakeholders to bring the solution successfully to fruition.

Services firms will conduct C-level discussions prior to a technology conversation to understand business challenges such as cost savings, productivity gains, and increased geographical collaboration, and to decide on the appropriate roadmap to build. Additionally, services firms have defined methodologies that will engage with multiple business unit leaders and stakeholders as well as IT leaders to gain input and guidance for planning and design of collaborative solutions. Collaboration solutions can be disruptive, and services firms can provide the necessary training and support infrastructure to make the transition to collaborative solutions work smoothly for employees, partners, and customers.

IDC believes that because collaboration is so transformational for enterprises, organizations from the top down must truly believe in the promise of what collaboration can deliver in order for the migration to collaboration to be successful throughout the enterprise.

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