

# The New Town Hall: Engage with Employees to Accelerate Innovation

**Ron Ricci**  
VP Marketing, Customer  
Engagements, Cisco.

**Adrena Vaquilar**  
Sr. Manager Cisco Advanced  
Services, Collaboration, Cisco.



Watch This Short Video About Collaboration



## What You Will Learn

Today's business leaders need a way to engage more deeply with employees. The new town hall model fosters engagement, deeper understanding, and collaboration.

In this white paper, you will learn the following:

- Why workplace flexibility and portability are creating the need for new communication requirements
- How the power of the new town hall meeting can be used to get faster buy-in and understanding of company strategies
- Which best practices you can apply for creating an effective new town hall meeting
- How to overcome the challenges of deploying collaboration in the cloud

## Collaborating in the Portable Workplace

Is the workplace even an actual place anymore? As visionary enterprises take steps to embrace a workforce of perpetually connected, multitasking, mobile workers, they are turning the concept of the office into something more flexible and portable. Increasingly, the office is something you take with you wherever it makes sense for you to work at the moment—whether that's in a shared flex space within corporate headquarters, a work hub in a remote location, an airplane, or at home.

We're no longer exchanging ideas around the water cooler on a regular basis. We're sharing them through social media or videoconferences. Today, we're coming together to collaborate in a more fluid and natural way than ever before. So why are many organizations still stuck using outmoded methods of communication?

As the concepts of workplace and collaboration have changed, so have the requirements for effective and engaging communications. One important example of this change is the company “town hall” meeting, where executives relay important information about company strategy. The town halls of today need to incorporate collaboration in the cloud, social media, and other simultaneous ways of delivering information while fostering conversations with employees wherever they are. In a world where fast time to market and rapid innovation are disciplines every company needs to master, engaging employees on their terms to garner buy-in and improve understanding is nothing short of an organizational imperative.

Read on for insight into how industry leaders are starting to use a new town hall model of communications to achieve the agility and innovation they need to set their enterprises apart from the competition.

## Fixing the Employee Engagement Problem

Did you know that globally, 4 out of 10 workers are not engaged? That is, they don’t feel motivated or emotionally connected to their jobs.<sup>1</sup> In the United States, the news is far worse: 70 percent of the U.S. workforce are unhappy and not engaged in their jobs.<sup>2</sup>

A report on employee engagement by global consulting firm BlessingWhite indicates that one of the top drivers of engagement is “clarity on the organization’s priorities.”<sup>3</sup> Could it be that our outdated methods of corporate communication are partly responsible for decreased employee engagement?

Consider the old town hall method of aligning the organization around what is important. With this technique, the focus is on conveying the “what” of the strategy. We now know that this one-way mode of communication misses the opportunity to engage employees with why a new strategy is important. When there’s no understanding of why something is important, it takes longer for workers to support a new initiative. It lengthens the time required to execute the new strategy, and it reduces the chances that it will succeed.

That’s where the new town hall model comes in: it allows today’s leaders to foster understanding, mobilize their teams, and get to opportunities faster. What does the new town hall entail? It’s a combination of a New England-style public meeting, a cloud-based collaboration, and a social media conversation. Its purpose is to make more effective communications possible across all the portable “workplaces” and technologies that employees have come to rely on.

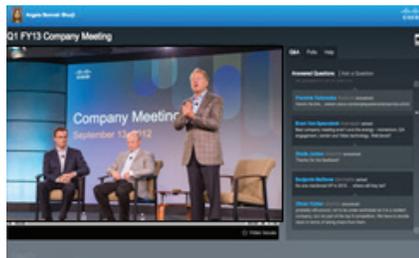
---

1. *How the Best Places to Work Are Nailing Employee Engagement*, Sylvia Vorhauser-Smith, Forbes.com, August 14, 2013.

2. *State of the American Workplace*, Gallup, 2013.

3. *Employee Engagement Research Report Update*, BlessingWhite, January 2013.

Cisco Company Meeting in New Town Hall Style



## Adapting Communications to the New Workplace Culture

The new town-hall-style meetings dramatically shift the way you communicate with your entire team. For instance, a major pharmaceutical company uses the town hall format to introduce newly developed drugs to its sales force around the globe, with employees using desktops, tablets, and mobile phones to actively participate. Another example is an oil-and-gas conglomerate that now holds its annual symposium in the new town hall format to expand its reach and invite deeper engagement.

However, the new town hall represents more than a change in format or technology. It requires a cultural shift as well, a new way of thinking about the role of communications in engaging employees across the enterprise.

### Leading the Way to Increased Employee Engagement

Cisco is the perfect example of today's fluid and flexible workplace environment:

- 41 percent of Cisco employees work outside of the United States
- 52 percent work in a different location than their managers
- 50 percent collaborate with people in different time zones
- 89 percent telecommute at least once a week
- 47 percent are classified as mobile workers
- 6 percent work in a fully remote manner

That's why Cisco adopted the new town hall model: to allow executives to better connect, engage, and collaborate with Cisco workers wherever they happen to be working. A recent company meeting included a live, in-room experience, 8000 online attendees around the world, 7 Cisco TelePresence® sites, 82 digital signs with live video, 5 online polls, 450 online questions, and video and mobile collaboration.

Following the guidance and lessons learned from other organizations can help a company ease the transition to a new model of executive communication and avoid common missteps. Here are the top three best practices compiled from multiple companies that have adopted the new town hall format and are now reaping the benefits:

1. Use video and social media behind the firewall. A video-based meeting is critical to build trust, but the community must be able to interact asynchronously in three ways throughout the entire meeting, even while executives are communicating:
  - Chat (such as a Facebook newsfeed, where team members can discuss openly what they are hearing)
  - Question and answer (where an executive can receive an anonymous question and answer the question publicly to the entire team)
  - Polling (such as a short-lived message from Snapchat)

## New Town Hall Format Helps the Bottom Line for Healthcare Company

A major U.S. healthcare organization moved from audio conferencing for large town hall meetings to a live webcasting model to take advantage of the benefits of the new town hall model. In addition to enjoying better engagement with thousands of its workers, the company also saved a significant amount of money because the new format was only a third of the cost of the previous audio-only solution.

2. Embrace a second screen-based communication process:
  - Companies that use the new town hall format encourage team members to watch executives on video while interacting with the social tools available to them.
  - The chat screen encourages people to be curious about what they're hearing or to seek out information from within the community.
  - Executives must be visible in question-and-answer "video windows," answering inquiries personally, with responses everyone can see. Polls help you check in with the audience and gauge understanding.
3. Answer the seven essential questions of engagement to inspire action. Most executives communicate what they want their teams to do. On the receiving end, employees are thinking "Why? Who? How?" Leaders must be able to answer the following questions when communicating decisions to employees:
  - Why is this important? (Give me strategic clarity.)
  - Who made the decision?
  - Who is accountable for the decision?
  - How do I know the accountability system is credible?
  - What process was used to make the decision?
  - What data supported the decision?
  - What trade-offs were considered?

## Achieving the New Town Hall Vision

While the enabling technology is proven and available for enterprises that are ready to move to the new town hall format, it can be challenging for companies to know where to start. A glut of tools and services, a lack of virtual event production experience, communication silos, and other time and knowledge barriers can prevent organizations from taking the next step toward collaboration in the cloud.

A trusted partner can help your enterprise formulate and execute a solid yet visionary collaboration strategy. As the global leader in collaborative events—one of the only vendors to offer integrated virtual event solutions that include both technology and services—Cisco is an ideal partner to help you take advantage of collaboration in the cloud.

First, Cisco leads the industry in the two core technologies that serve as the engine for collaboration: the network foundation and cloud-based software, for everything from small-scale online meetings to full-scale virtual events. Second, Cisco has one of the world's most experienced production services teams. Our professionals represent decades of online event experience, with a proven track record of more than 80,000 online events produced to date.

## Winning Over a Tech-Savvy Audience

Business consulting firm Frost & Sullivan wanted to create a hybrid event that would offer people the opportunity to attend in person or to stream video of the event remotely. Using six webcasts, Frost & Sullivan significantly extended the reach of the event. Even onsite attendees enjoyed the benefits of live webcasts on their tablets and other devices, which allowed them to keep up with multiple topics at the show simultaneously.

Cisco® Event Collaboration Services can help you create the right collaboration strategy for your business, optimize your network for collaboration, integrate a collaboration platform with your infrastructure, and plan and produce your events. With expert services from Cisco, you can meet your business goals for collaboration:

- Increased collaboration and employee engagement
- Mobilize teams to execute faster
- Shorten decision making times
- Lower costs
- Reduced travel
- Eliminate collaboration silos with an integrated collaboration suite

From webcasting for town-hall-type events to online and Cisco WebEx® events, Cisco provides the technology and services that make it easier than ever to realize your company's vision for collaboration.

## Conclusion

The new town hall is a shining example of how leaders can meld culture and operations. By taking advantage of the second screen, social media, and collaboration in the cloud, you can create the kind of meeting experience that boosts engagement with today's workforce, wherever they happen to be working. The result is more agile response, rapid innovation, and greater speed to market—the critical elements of success in any industry.

To take advantage of everything the new town hall and collaboration in the cloud have to offer, turn to an experienced partner with leading technology and expert services. With Cisco, you can create successful new town halls and other collaborative events that foster buy-in, mobilize teams for faster execution, and improve employee engagement. With a wide range of customizable services and award-winning event professionals, Cisco can help you foster conversations and collaboration with employees so you can meet your business goals faster.

## More Information

To learn how your organization can create successful online events such as the new town hall, visit [www.cisco.com/c/en/us/products/conferencing/service-listing.html](http://www.cisco.com/c/en/us/products/conferencing/service-listing.html).



**Americas Headquarters**  
Cisco Systems, Inc.  
San Jose, CA

**Asia Pacific Headquarters**  
Cisco Systems (USA) Pte. Ltd.  
Singapore

**Europe Headquarters**  
Cisco Systems International BV Amsterdam,  
The Netherlands

Cisco has more than 200 offices worldwide. Addresses, phone numbers, and fax numbers are listed on the Cisco Website at [www.cisco.com/go/offices](http://www.cisco.com/go/offices).