# How AI and Emerging Technologies Are Transforming Collaboration

**Knowledge workers today** have a rich portfolio of team collaboration tools to help them get their jobs done, starting with email and encompassing texting, file sharing, online chat and message boards, social media and video conferencing. Yet collaboration across these tools can be a frustrating experience, due to the complexity of the technology and lack of integration. The good news: the application of emerging technologies and artificial intelligence (AI) enables more people to connect when and how they need to. And that makes for more productive teams.

## A new wave of intelligent collaboration

In the past, people have had to adapt to collaborative tools, but emerging technologies makes it possible for technology to adapt to people. Just scheduling the right people for a meeting can be challenging when they're spread across different teams and time zones and have conflicting demands on their time. Emerging collaboration tools will help automate how we schedule meetings, book conference rooms, make it easy to share documents and video, and even take notes for everyone—particularly for those remote workers on the go who need to follow up on action items or share documents that could help others involved with the discussion.

"There is a paradigm shift in digital workplace technologies and strategies to make enterprises more conversational and smarter," writes industry analyst Dave Smith. He says there is growing importance being placed on collaboration workflows, information flows, and better user experiences to improve conversational experiences.

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>
> —DAVE SMITH

AI-enhanced chatbots and virtual assistants are already beginning to shape how people become more productive. According to a recent Spiceworks survey, almost a third of surveyed organizations in North America and Europe have users adopting these types of tools, with primary uses being voice-to-text dictation, supporting team collaboration, and managing schedules. These virtual assistants—along with new enterprise collaboration technologies such as facial recognition, transcription services, and enhanced video and screen sharing—are transforming the team collaboration experience.

## More like everyday interactions

People understand how to communicate face-to-face and in team meetings. But increasingly workers are located apart from one another, and teamwork often requires collaboration with contractors, partners, and customers to increase understanding, accelerate decision-making, and bolster productivity. Meeting to plan and share ideas is a fundamental social ritual, but it was traditionally bound up in rigid processes and customs (such as expecting creativity to spontaneously erupt at a scheduled 9 a.m. team meeting).

Collaborative technology has made it possible to share information when the moment is right, and to bring in co-workers and partners from around the world. But the sheer number of collaborative tools and devices can be frustrating, causing problems such as scheduling group meetings and negotiating what tool(s) to use. Once these electronic meetings start, participants have to deal with other distractions, ranging from somebody forgetting to mute off-line noises to difficulties sharing pertinent documents as needed.

However, emerging technologies make electronic collaboration feel more natural. Voice prompts enable users to bypass unnecessary actions. Automatic noise detection and suppression remove unwanted meeting distractions. Facial recognition reminds us how we know others. These added tools may one day make virtual collaboration feel even better than being there.

When cognitive technologies are effectively integrated into workflows, they can directly influence how organizations accomplish tasks, make decisions, create engaging interactions, and generate stronger business outcomes, according to a study by Deloitte. Early stage, "cognitive-active" companies on the front lines are already realizing value from them, Deloitte says.

These enhanced collaboration tools "have the potential to increase efficiency, speed up the discovery of new ideas and lead to improved outcomes for teams that are working together in disparate locations," writes *BizTech* editor Phil Goldstein.

## Making collaboration efficient

It's a fact of life that meetings, whether in-person or virtual, have increased over the past two decades, as organizations seek to collaborate more effectively across their workforce and with customers and partners. Researchers make the case in a *Harvard Business Review* article that time spent by managers and employees in collaborative activities has increased by 50% or more over the past two decades.

Consider too that mobile workers are projected to make up more than 70% of the U.S. workforce by 2020, and companies are increasingly relying on a growing force of freelance contractors. Those forces make it increasingly difficult to fit teams into a physical room, expanding requirements for virtual meetings and other ways to collaborate when needed, wherever they are located.

Future business success will rely on keeping teams connected so that work moves forward, and mobile and remote workers feel fully included. When everyone joins together in the same physical or virtual workspace, conversations keep going, teams develop ideas, and colleagues share information—before, during, and after meetings.

The teams that make things happen are bigger, more diverse, and more distributed than ever. They span multiple time zones and connect using every conceivable device. People don't have time to consult with IT to help them make team connections. They want one simple service that connects people and teams whenever and wherever needed, with whoever needs to participate.

AI and emerging technologies are poised to make this collaboration an easier, more productive, and more enjoyable experience across the workforce.

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