

Can workplace evolution help small businesses outcompete enterprises?

With small businesses having bigger opportunities than ever before, the future of work means smaller companies are well placed to push valuable outcomes further and faster than their larger competitors

Despite the Federation of Small Businesses' estimate that smaller companies accounted for 99.3 per cent of all private sector business in the UK at the start of 2018, they have long found themselves trailing their larger counterparts when it comes to the latest business products and solutions. However, significant advancements in technology accessibility and workplace transformation are at last putting small businesses in the driving seat.

According to KPMG's 2018 *Global CEO Outlook* report, agility is the new currency of business. With this principal concern for companies, small businesses now have a competitive advantage. They are more agile by their very nature because everybody knows each other and who to go to in order to get things done quicker.

"Employees in small businesses can make decisions at a different pace and as a result larger companies are trying to mimic this," says Snorre Kjesbu, vice president and general manager, Team Collaboration Devices, at Cisco. "However, being small isn't enough; you then need tools and work methodologies to really enable that speed of innovation and agility.

"Small businesses need to create teams of co-workers, suppliers, partners and customers; not one such team, but teams of teams. And they

need flexible tools that extend the close collaboration experience of a team working in the same location to team members outside the office."

This need for flexible tools is also critical in the growing war for talent. A recent *Future of Work* study by Cisco found that 23 per cent of knowledge workers already have the flexibility to work from a location they choose and another 44 per cent expect to have it in the next three years.

This choice is critical for retaining millennial talent, as well as their juniors now starting to enter the employment market: generation Z. In the *Deloitte Millennial Survey 2018*, only 17 per cent of respondents said they would be willing to stay with their employer for more than five years without the opportunity to work where they choose.

Another potential advantage for small companies is their ability to adopt new tools rapidly. Larger companies have more resources, yet their size and structure can restrict how quickly they can embrace and implement new tools. Smaller firms can be more proactive; nonetheless tools should be both enterprise ready and consumer like.

"Adoption should be easy, and the tools should be fun and simple to use as other technology in your life, but enterprise ready is important so you can take care of security, manageability and scalability," says Mr Kjesbu. "Small businesses need to think about security to protect intellectual property and basic information, and with lean resources, the easier to manage that, the better."

Workspaces can be just as important as tools and huddle spaces are playing an increasingly important role in team collaboration. Frost & Sullivan estimates there are currently about 30 million of these meeting spaces globally and their popularity continues to grow at a double-digit rate. At the same time, according to Dimensional Research, almost half of these informal locations have little or no collaboration technology. And with those that do, 78 per cent of people are frustrated with the current huddle solutions available to them.

"Millennials are used to working in Starbucks. They want their team spaces to have that same informality. But they also need their huddle spaces to be able to share content, communicate with remote participants and co-create, so they require solutions that enable those goals," says Mr Kjesbu.

Cisco's huddle portfolio is particularly suited to small business and



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includes the Webex Board 55 for video, digital whiteboarding and content-sharing. The recently launched Webex Room Kit Mini is also custom made for intimate areas such as huddle spaces, offering the same cameras, microphone and artificial intelligence (AI) capabilities larger enterprises enjoy with bigger meeting-room systems.

AI has typically been reserved for corporates with more resources. No longer. Cisco integrates AI across a wide range of its video end-point portfolio at an affordable price, to block out sounds, during conference calls, such as keyboard tapping and barking dogs, or by placing virtual name tags on people's chests. The embedded AI also makes it much easier for people to arrange and join meetings.

Cisco is now building products that can understand who is in a meeting and then offer relevant, useful and contextual information. Soon such tools will be able to add value to meetings by removing the more mundane, administrative tasks, such as taking actions and providing relevant content. This leaves more space for the creativity that drives forward the work of a business, whatever its size.

Small companies were previously priced out of products that incorporate such innovation. However, Cisco now allows small businesses to subscribe to affordable solutions as a service with tools enabling them to share, communicate and co-create using the latest technology, while creating an intuitive collaboration experience.

"There's no doubt that experience matters," says Mr Kjesbu. "It matters in the way you get work done, but it also matters in how you show up with partners, suppliers and customers. Cisco has developed these solutions – Webex Meetings, Webex Teams and Webex video devices – that you can use as subscriptions. The solutions are also interoperable with other players out there, whether that's Google Hangouts, Microsoft Skype for Business or Zoom. It's really about making sure you have bridges, not islands."



Snorre Kjesbu
Vice President and general manager, Team Collaboration Devices, Cisco

With high-quality video available as a service for small businesses, the script has been flipped on large enterprises. Let the disruption begin.

For more information please visit cisco.com/go/smbmeet



30m
huddle spaces globally

8/10
users are frustrated with availability of huddle space meeting technology

62%
say users request help several times a week to get the technology to work