

The journey to successful enterprise collaboration

Description

Implementing a mobile collaboration strategy may give your organisation a huge boost in morale and productivity, but it's not easy to achieve.

There is no doubt that effective collaboration in the workplace is beneficial across the board. Having mobile tools that "live in the cloud" allows you to share information, dial into a video conference or quickly get in contact with whoever you need are all key to a happy and productive workforce.

While it seems like an easy win, experts shared their advice and lessons learned on the journey, showing that implementing cloud solutions is not as straightforward as it looks.

Steve Mellors, collaboration programme manager at the Wellcome Trust, warned that the cloud "isn't the pill that's going to cure everything".

He said that although moving to the cloud and implementing new collaboration tools could create a better work environment, the organisation had to be ready for it.

"You need to understand that when you go to the cloud, there is always going to be part of your infrastructure for the short term, or maybe the long term, that is still going to be on premise," he said, adding that if you are hoping that moving to the cloud will solve all your problems, "you'll have an unpleasant journey".

"It's not that if you have poor infrastructure it's not going to work, it's just going to take you some time," said Mellors. "There are things you need to sort out, especially if this poor infrastructure has led to an unhappy workforce and your customers have issues, you have infrastructure issues and you are pinning all your hopes on a new dream."

Mellors pointed out that the saying "if you build it, they will come" does not work in reality. "You could put the best infrastructure up there and it won't be used," he said. "People will always find a way around it if they're not incentivised, if there's no desire and there's nothing in it for them."

Traditionally, IT has a poor history with this. The IT team will fiddle with stuff over the weekend, users come in on Monday morning and everything has changed.

"They've had no communication or engagement," said Mellors. "They got no desire to have this new stuff thrust upon them."

Just because people use apps such as Facebook, Dropbox and Skype in their personal lives, it doesn't mean it's an easy journey to implement Microsoft SharePoint and expect everyone to use it right away, he said.

The difference between users embracing mobile tools in their personal life and in their work life is something Laura Bennett, head of digital collaboration at the Parliamentary Digital Service, has also experienced. The digital service covers all MPs and peers, as well as all the staff connected to Parliament and constituency offices.

“That adds up to a user base of upwards of 9,000 people across the country, working out of 650 locations,” said Bennett. “Collaboration and mobility are therefore key.”

Bennett explained that an MP will have a personal phone and a parliamentary iPad. But the MP may also use the phone for work purposes, and this blurs the lines between what is a work device and what is a personal device.

This means that the digital service will support the users, not the device, she said. Despite that, the applications delivered on the iPad by the digital service are often more complicated because they are sometimes bespoke systems and fundamental to the MP’s job.

How much patience a person has when, for example, Facebook changes its user interface “won’t be reflected in the same way when we deliver small changes to the work iPad,” said Bennett.

“Consumer expectations do not necessarily equal consumer behaviours, by which I mean expectations of uptime, warning of changes and the depth of support is not the same for corporate as they are for consumers,” she added.

The Parliamentary Digital Service began its transition to Office 365 in 2013, but at the same time it also rolled out Office 2013. Because messages to staff were poorly delivered, this meant users now correlate Office 365 with Office 2013 and don’t see a difference.

“As far they were concerned, that’s what we delivered them,” she said. “They didn’t see the Microsoft Exchange migration and didn’t notice it was any different. They were still using Outlook to access it and it didn’t make any difference to them. The only change they saw was the client though which they accessed it on their desktop.”

As the service is revisiting its Office 365 project, it is filling in the gaps that were left the first time around.

“We are using the lessons learnt to change the way we are engaging with people throughout this project,” said Bennett.

The service has employed a growing team of user engagement specialists. “These people are trained in change management and are there to focus on user needs,” she said. “They are six months in, and have spent this time doing some detailed discovery across our entire estate.”

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1. Blog

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