Realizing the Enterprise Collaboration Opportunity

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The past year has presented challenges on a scale unseen for many decades. Around the world, we have seen individuals, organizations and governments face these challenges head-on and adapt to new, different ways of living and working. Throughout all of this, there has been one constant support: technology.

On an individual level, technology has kept us connected while we remain physically separate and provided a wealth of resources to keep us entertained, fit and in touch with those close to us. For businesses of all sizes, technology has been truly indispensable. It has been a lifeline, enabling organizations across all sectors to operate successfully with a remote workforce, facilitated global collaboration between teams and even created new avenues for revenue during challenging economic times.

Now, for the parts of the world that are cautiously emerging from lockdowns, it is time to shift the focus to the future. What is next in the enterprise transformation journey? What needs to happen to ensure that the momentum we've gathered over the past year is not lost as we return to normalcy? And how can we, as a technology industry, ensure innovation and adoption of new technologies continues at pace?

An accelerated transformation journey

While the impact of COVID has been hugely damaging for so many, the upside is that it has acted like an incubator for digital transformation. For organizations across the globe, the pandemic has highlighted the importance of leveraging technology to enable more efficient ways of working. As a result, business leaders are increasingly prioritizing the implementation of these technologies, with a [McKinsey study](#) finding that the most successful organizations during the pandemic reported a range of technology-related capabilities that others lacked.

Now as we look to the next step in this accelerated digital transformation journey, it's likely that a new, more globally connected breed of enterprise solutions will emerge. Instead of each technology working independently, we will begin to see a greater level of interconnectedness between them, which will dramatically enhance their collective impact. These solutions, or applications, must have a level of global reach and scale that directly helps organizations to survive in today's globalized world. It is the next stage in a succession of technologies, including 5G, cloud, mobile edge computing, network virtualization and artificial intelligence (AI) or machine learning (ML).

Collaborating for success

There is a huge opportunity in both the monetization and value creation associated with this new breed of technology. But to realize it will require unprecedented collaboration. Success will only be seen, and the benefits only truly realized, when organizations spanning both the public and private sectors work together in a productive, harmonious way. This includes communication service providers, (CSPs), technology vendors, governments, education systems and customer-facing enterprises. It will mean a different way of working, one that is underpinned by connectivity and prioritizes applications that have potential to scale globally for mass benefit.

One such example is in the medical sector, where there is a sizeable opportunity to invest in this transformation and in the development of a new breed of applications. In practice, this could look like universities delivering remote medical education for students and hospital staff worldwide through augmented or virtual reality (AR/VR). For this to succeed, it would require collaboration between several communication service providers, cloud providers, AR/VR vendors and medical simulation vendors.

The good news is that we are starting to see this collaborative approach become more commonplace. In the UK, projects like [5G-ENCODE](#) are bringing together organizations from across the public and private sector, including the UK government, Zeetta Networks, Telefonica, and the University of Bristol, to develop clear business cases and value propositions for 5G applications in the manufacturing industry. This collaborative consortium is the business model of the future and will be key to unlocking the plethora of benefits that new technologies promise.

Ingredients for success

Demand for these new breeds of enterprise applications is enormous, thereby presenting a significant opportunity for the organizations that can deliver them. But there are barriers to be overcome first, not least the limited availability of human expertise in each of these technologies, and the relative immaturity of technologies as they currently stand today. Any organization looking to offer these services will needto have an innovative, customer-led approach. This means embedding itself in customer needs and ensuring innovation efforts are being actively targeted to solve these issues.

Furthermore, it is critical that this revolution is led by the right people: putting aside competition to work collaboratively with others in the same field is not at the top of the agenda for many CEOs. Finding leaders with the right technical, business and collaboration skills is a challenge, even more so when considering that they must also inspire a collaborative culture across their organization. The businesses that succeed will be the ones able to create solutions that bridge groups with different operational cultures, needs and constraints, all of which will be crucial in the successful development and deployment of these complex applications. Moreover, this bridging expertise must also expand to engineering and support teams, who will need clear guidance about where to land and how to expand with these globalized solutions.

No matter what part of the solution a firm is offering, the businesses in these projects must have this mix of unique skills. The superiority of an organization's products, solutions and technologies is not the only success factor. Rather, it is also dependent on the ability to correlate your offering to address the growing demand to build such applications. It goes without saying that an established network of industry contacts also provides a major competitive advantage. The ability to rapidly find and engage with strategic contacts and resources in both existing and new domains is essential to supercharge collaboration.

For those that can get this right, the reward will be great. The time and financial investment spent in developing skills and solutions will pay back many times over in business development, client retention, and recurring revenues.

Embracing failure to learn fast

The new reality of developing these applications is at the cross-section of many technology industry ecosystems, open-source standards, and open application programming interfaces (APIs). To successfully build on this foundation, a strong pre-existing knowledge of these ecosystems and their level of maturity is key to the effective development of these applications. Given that we are currently in the very early stages of this transformation, and still with so many unknowns ahead of us, the ability to drive progress and adapt quickly, all while failing fast and learning constantly, is essential.

This notion of a dynamic approach is especially important when considering the growing trend of abandoning the traditional request for information (RFI) process in favor of prioritizing cultural fit when selecting vendors, partners, and service providers. The need for a new, more human approach to sales is becoming clear. Companies are increasingly looking for partners that deeply understand their unique needs and aspirations when it comes to business development. When considering this within the context of a new breed of enterprise solutions, it becomes even more important: selling complex solutions that require collaboration and joint innovation cannot be done without trust. The right strategy is essential and demands special talent, technical competence, and credibility as a trusted advisor.

Collaboration for innovation

Innovation doesn't just begin and end with technology; it encompasses people, too. We have all the technologies; the only limitation is a hesitancy to embrace a truly collaborative culture. Today, we are at a turning point in history, a moment where collaboration between the right parties, trust, and a unified focus on the value-add of technology will change the way businesses, governments and educational institutions across the world operate.

The dynamite combination of technology and collaborative working relationships will unlock opportunities on a scale never seen before, empowering organizations worldwide to operate in a more streamlined and efficient way. I urge businesses to act now to ensure they are working with the partners that can support them to realize the benefits that new technologies can bring.

The technologies at play today are paving the way for a more prosperous future, but it is the new breed of hyper-connected solutions that will take us to the next level and open the doors to a brighter future. This is just the beginning.