**IT**

Choosing a collaboration platform

8 questions every IT leader should ask

slack

The next big leap for enterprise collaboration

Software has transformed every business discipline.

But the crucial discipline of *collaboration*— the ways we work together to get things done—is stuck in a rut.

After the initial strides made by email, conferencing and chat apps, progress in collaboration has plateaued. We've got lots more apps to help us, but our work is far more fragmented and high-friction than ever before. And it's clogging up work across the business world.

It's a big problem but it's an even bigger opportunity. Since collaboration is a fundamental part of almost every job and process, improving it delivers real productivity gains across the whole enterprise.

For companies trying to increase agility, better collaboration has become an urgent priority—a way to reduce the organizational drag that kills innovation and responsiveness.

That's what this guide is all about: helping you choose a collaboration hub that helps streamline, automate and accelerate the common activities we all do every day. Tasks like sharing information, swarming around an issue, building consensus, progressing workflows, communicating, updating, alerting, reporting, searching…

As an IT leader, you're in a unique position to drive this change, improving work across the whole business.

No one else sees software use across the entire enterprise. No one better understands the potential locked up in existing software investments. And no one else can drive the move to centralizing collaboration in order to improve work for everyone.

"Somewhere around 20% of a line supervisor's time could be eliminated if you are successful at just getting rid of unnecessary e-communications and unnecessary meetings."

Michael Mankins, partner, Bain & Company

The 8 questions you should ask when choosing a collaboration hub for your company
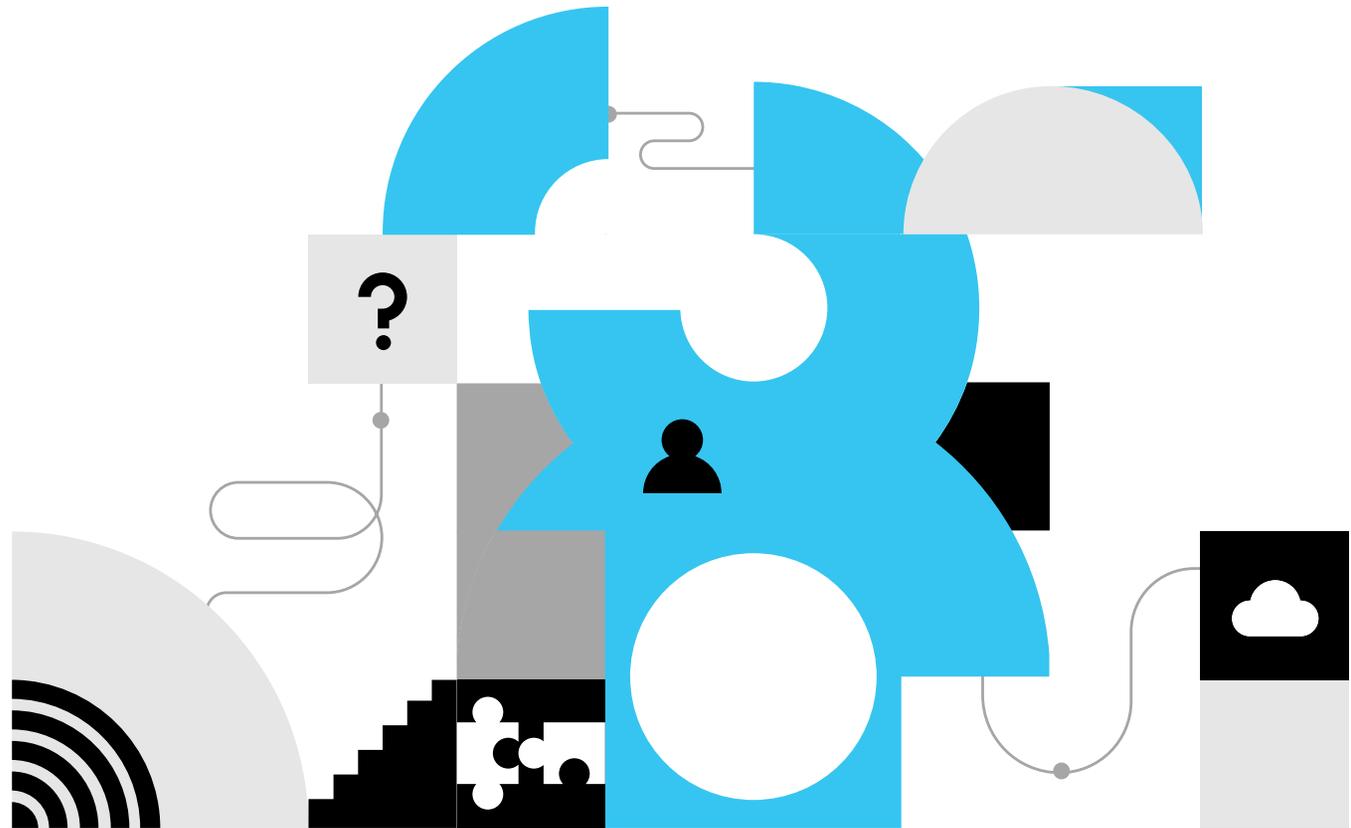
Q1. What is your vision for collaboration and the real impact of improving it?

Before you dive into choosing a solution, it pays to step back and ask this framing question: Does your company see collaboration as a simple comms tool or as a strategic investment?

Many companies are still committed to the traditional collaboration trinity: email, meetings and conference calls. A few questions might reveal whether these collaborative methods are evolving with your company:

- What kind of commitment is there to change the way people work?

- What are your company's most strategic priorities? How might collaboration contribute to these?

- Are culture change and employee experience moving up the boardroom agenda?

Strategic collaboration

Goal	Collaboration questions
Becoming more customer-centric	How do customer-facing and internal teams work together? Do feedback loops reach customer support, sales and marketing efficiently?
Improving employee experience	Are HR and business leaders working together to improve onboarding? Are internal engagement metrics visible to all?
Aligning around one vision	How is the vision shared and reinforced? What's the mechanism for collecting bottom-up initiatives? Is there one place where leaders can update everyone?
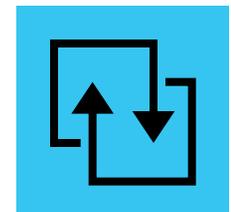
Your choice of collaboration hub will be shaped by the answers to these questions.

If you just want a communication or chat tool, many simple solutions will do. But if you need a centralized hub where the entire organization can bring together all conversations, files, workflows, applications and knowledge into one place…you'll want to raise the bar.

Think about:

- **Think of your collaboration hub as a transformation accelerator** Something that can contribute to your CEO's most important strategic initiatives.

- **Collect as many use cases as you can** In any given department, better collaboration can improve the core processes as well as the admin tasks that need to get done quickly. Collect use cases early to guide your decision. Some examples:

  - **Sales can close more deals**—by spotting hot opportunities sooner and focusing resources more effectively.

  - **Marketing can run campaigns more efficiently**—and pivot faster as results come in.

  - **Engineering can get products to market faster**—reaping the rewards of innovation.
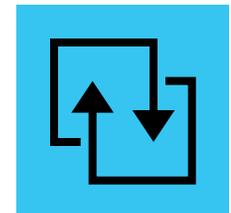
Q2. What are people using right now? (No, really)

Collaboration tools are one of the most common places to find "shadow IT." Teams find their own solutions because existing ones (email, meetings, simple chat…) aren't doing the job.

It's important to find out just how many different collaboration tools, apps and cloud services your people are using (chances are, the answer is dozens).

Include everything from email, chat, messaging and conferencing apps to project management tools, shared drives, cloud file stores, wikis, intranets and knowledge bases.

More importantly, look at what users are actually trying to *do* when they source their own tools. Is it about improving visibility and alignment? Is agility the issue? Speed of response? Including remote team members?

Even before you divide these into meaningful buckets according to their function, the sheer number of different tools tells you a lot and helps you size and scope your opportunity. The big win comes from rationalizing your company's collaboration tools—not just to save money but to increase impact.

Think about:

Analyze the value of centralized collaboration. Why consolidate on one collaboration hub?

- **Network effects**
  The more people use a collaboration tool, the greater its reach, capabilities, usage and overall value.

- **Cross-department teamwork**
  People work across departments and locations without changing software.

- **Less training**
  People learn one tool, once (and get better at it all the time).

- **More valuable knowledge assets**
  Users can search across many teams and workspaces, creating one knowledge store.

- **Easier support and administration**
  So you can use your resources elsewhere.
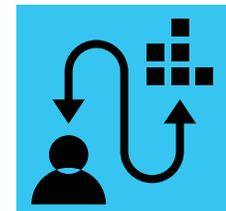
Q3. How many different departments should your collaboration hub support?

We've seen that the more people and departments use one collaboration hub, the more transformative it will be.

But simply deploying your hub to many departments isn't enough, even if you try to restrict access to all other tools. Users have to actually use it—from the start and increasingly over time.

When evaluating a collaboration hub, look at how it's used today at other companies.

First, look at how many different departments have chosen it. But also look at how the hub supports work *across* departments.

More and more processes and workflows involve several departments. A new product launch might bring together engineering, sales, support, marketing, legal and corporate comms.

Think about:

- **Consider adoption across all departments and disciplines**
  From IT, software engineering and HR to sales, marketing, customer support, legal, finance, manufacturing and beyond.

- **Think about cross-departmental collaboration**
  Identify processes that include more than one department. How will they work together?

- **Think about scale**
  Can your collaboration hub support tens of thousands of users, with distinct places for different groups projects and topics?

Channels: where work happens
First-generation messaging apps are single-threaded: one flowing feed that combines all topics.

Modern, more *adaptive* collaboration uses channels: dedicated areas that your people create around specific topics, projects or teams.

For cross-departmental collaboration, look for the ability to have shared channels, used by people in different departments.
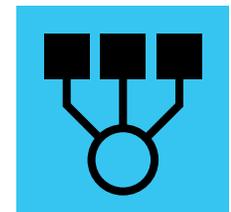
Use cases: look for the sweet spot
Cross-functional use cases—especially anywhere people need to swarm around an issue—are places where the right collaboration hub can make a big difference:

■ A media company live reporting on a breaking news event—using a collaboration hub, reporters, photographers, writers, designers, digital teams, editors all come together to share updates, review work and approve final stories.

■ A construction company uses a collaboration hub to support field workers and help architects, contractors and managers to collaborate on plans, schedule jobs, etc.

■ A telecom company uses a collaboration hub to make decisions based on outage alerts, customer calls and weather reports. Triage channels and alerts keep everyone updated and on the same page.

"The channel serves as a kind of audit trail. We use these incident channels as the root of our analysis for our postmortems and what's great is there's no guesswork, because we have all that history right there."

Thomas Lawless, senior software engineer, IBM
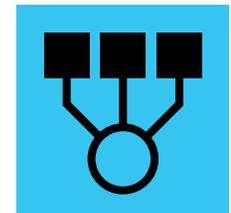
Q4. How will your collaboration hub work with your existing software?

A collaboration tool can't just be another application you add to an already underutilized tech stack. Think about how your teams use data and take action in various applications to get their jobs done. Is that software investment paying off? Can it be better exploited?

A collaboration hub acts like a layer that floats above your existing applications. Instead of trying to code one-to-one integrations between apps, they all just need to integrate with the collaboration hub, where the users are. (Which reduces all that wasteful context switching.)

To make the right choice, take a survey of the main apps used by each department—software like CRM, ERP, HRIS, Marketing Automation, Ticketing…

A collaboration hub can act as the single gathering place where everyone comes to work, accessing and pushing information to their favorite software (which increases the impact and value of that software).

Think about:

- **L**ook at every vendor's app directory
  What off-the-shelf integrations do they already have? Are they the ones your company uses most?

- **Consider the *depth* of integration**
  Simply sending an alert from a software tool into the right collaboration channel is good. But can people also take *action* on that new information, right from within the channel?

- **Ask about custom integrations**
  How easy will it be for your people to create custom apps that integrate your existing software into your collaboration hub. Take their API for a test drive.
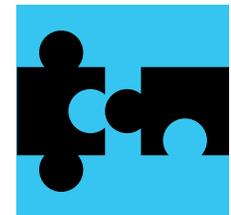
Q5. How will you secure all your collaboration hub activities?

Committing to business agility means coming to grips with some traditionally risky activities, such as sharing sensitive data, looping in external partners and taking devices outside the office.

To any security professional, moves like this can be highly concerning. Your teams need to be able to share sensitive information with authorized colleagues but the business needs control, compliance and auditability. It shouldn't be a trade-off.

Security can't be an afterthought; it has to be built into every aspect of your collaboration hub.

Think about:

- **Controlling access**
  How will you manage identity and devices? What about single sign-on, user provisioning and enterprise mobility management? Can your hub integrate with the big identity providers such as Okta, ADFS and Microsoft Azure AD?

- **Securing the data itself**
  All data needs to be encrypted in transit and at rest. Look for enterprise-grade capabilities like Enterprise Key Management and Data Loss Prevention.

- **Governance and certification**
  You need to be able to set retention policies globally and by channel or message type (with global retention, event and audit logs). What about eDiscovery: can you use pre-built connectors to your chosen solution?

Q6. Do you want to loop in collaborators from outside the enterprise?

Work used to happen almost entirely in-house. Today, it's increasingly distributed across remote workers, suppliers, contract workers, consultants and outsourcers.

If your teams can't include all these outside contributors in your collaborative work, they'll always be context-shifting in and out of email, phone calls and other messaging tools.

That increases friction and slows work down.

As no company is an island, you need a collaboration hub that can include outside participants without compromising security.

Think about:

- **How easy is it to include outside contributors in the conversation?** Will you be forcing people back to email to connect with suppliers and contractors?

- **How will you control guest access?** Can you invite guests to specific channels without exposing anything sensitive?

- **How will you enforce guest policies?** Is policy administration centralized?
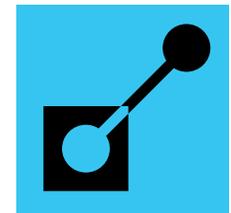
Q7. What do your users really want?

Even the most feature-packed collaboration platform in the world is worthless if your people don't use it.

Most intranet and wiki initiatives fizzled out because they just didn't get user adoption. Companies had to work too hard to train users, and engagement fell off steadily over time.

Your collaboration hub should grow without having to force people to use it. Organic user adoption and daily use multiply the value of your collaboration hub. Simply installing it everywhere does not.

For a lot of companies, this is a culture issue. As the talent wars heat up, employee experience becomes more and more important to attracting and retaining the best people. The right collaboration hub can make a real impact, reducing the friction and frustration of daily work.

Think about:

- **Consider your evolving user base**
  Your collaboration hub will need to support long-serving employees as well as a new, younger workforce that's used to smartphone apps and social media. UX matters.

- **Look for real evidence of user love**
  Do you see hard evidence of growing, spontaneous adoption without IT having to train users and enforce rollouts? Look for evidence that users really are taking advantage of key features like app integrations, search and channel messaging (instead of just direct messages).

Q8. What resources do you have for admin, user training, change management?

Get it right and your collaboration hub usage will scale up fast. You need a hub your team can manage and support easily.

Part of that is about change management. A collaboration hub introduces a new way of working. How will you help your users transition from email and direct messaging to channel-based communications? Will you be able to support new use cases and integrations?

This is where the hidden costs start to add up. User training, support and administration costs can spiral out of control (not to mention the lost opportunity of a tool that just doesn't get fully used).

A centralized collaboration hub should make IT's job easier not harder.

Think about:

- **How easy is the tool to learn?**
  Choose a few people and launch a new workspace. Create new channels. Invite people in. Get a feel for how quickly users will be able to start conversations, share files and search across channels.

- **Look for centralized administration and control**
  While you can delegate some admin to local administrators, you can't leave admin entirely to local teams. Look for a centralized way to manage all workspaces, control security application policy and maintain compliance.

- **Consider the ability to delegate admin tasks**
  How easy is it to let local, departmental admins do things like approve guests or add app integrations?

- **How much help will you get in deployment and user support?**
  Will you be left to design your own deployment or will you get expert help from the vendor? Will anyone be there for rollout, user enablement and learning?
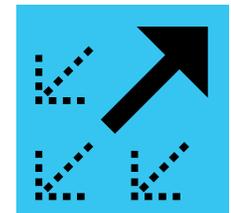
The adaptive collaboration hub

"Collaboration" is kind of a fuzzy word, including everything from email and chat to project management tools for specialized disciplines.

Slack is bringing a new kind of collaboration to the enterprise—we call it the adaptive collaboration hub—that brings people, data and applications together in a single place.
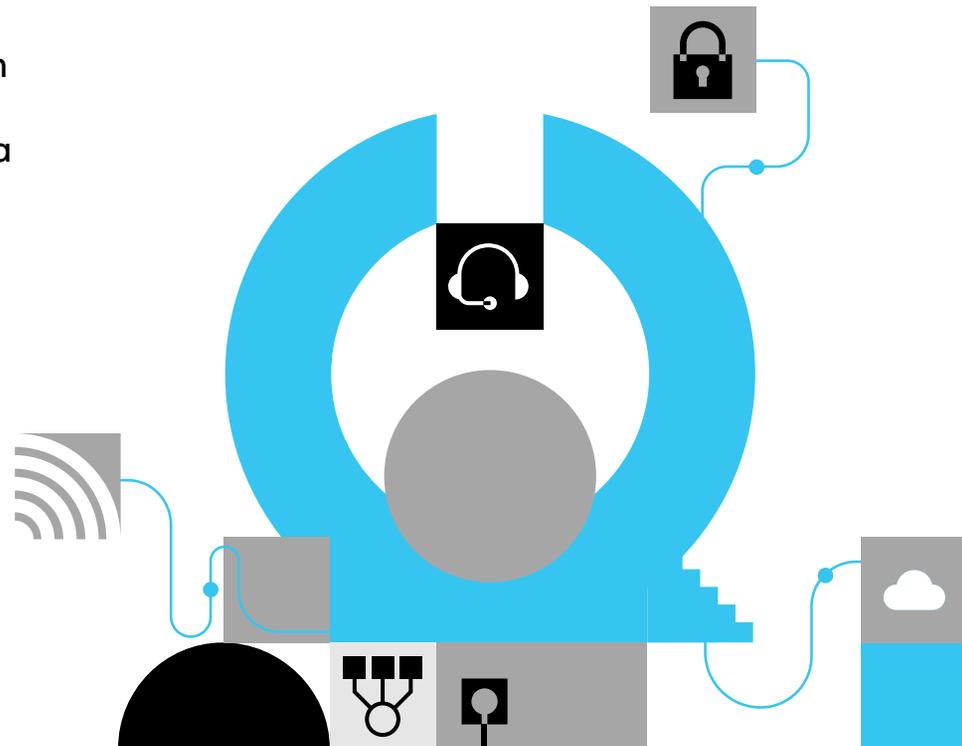
The three core functionalities

1.

Channel-based messaging
Beyond direct, person-to-person messages, channels are important. They let users organize themselves around the projects, topics and teams that shape their work life (as opposed to one big stream of messages about many different topics).

"Slack is like an ongoing meeting. You stop in for the portions that are important to you, and leave the room when you're done. Free to come and go as you please. If someone needs you, they'll call you into the room."

Matthew Taylor, digital production editor, The Times (UK)

2.

A searchable knowledge store
When users can search across the channels and workspaces of their own team and all other teams, knowledge becomes a real asset. The company starts to know what it knows, aligning around a common vision.

"Four months after we launched Slack, someone said, 'I've now had more interaction with the rest of the company than I've had in six years here.'"

Guy Martin, director, open source, Autodesk

3.

An integration layer
The ability to integrate with other apps is a collaboration hub superpower. Your existing apps must be able to send messages and alerts into the hub, triggering action. And people should then be able to actually take action, creating an event in another app (like opening or resolving a support ticket).

"Anytime I've seen a Slack integration I've turned it on. It's provided so much value and helped us save so many extra steps in our process."

Thomas Lawless, senior software engineer, IBM

Note:
These three functions belong together, each increasing the value of the other two.

An important decision

The choice of a centralized collaboration hub for your company can make a big impact on the things that matter most—things like agility, alignment, responsiveness, customer-centricity and speed of innovation.

We hope that the questions outlined here will help shape your decision, introducing you to the new world of collaboration (a big leap from first-generation messaging and conferencing tools).

There aren't many IT decisions that make such a direct and daily impact on everyone in the entire organization.

The right collaboration hub will streamline, automate and accelerate work all over the enterprise, paying dividends in thousands of places.

We're excited by this potential and would welcome the opportunity to talk with you about it.

"Slack has provided the only true cross-company, many-to-many collaboration platform for us."

Guy Martin, director, open source, Autodesk

Learn more

Good Collaboration, Bad Collaboration
Our global survey of knowledge workers

Security at Slack
How we secure our collaboration hub

Slack Enterprise Grid
Our product for large enterprises

We should probably talk.
Schedule time with our team.

REQUEST A DEMO

About Slack

Slack is a layer of the business technology stack that brings together people, data and applications—a single place where people can effectively work together, find important information, and access hundreds of thousands of critical applications and services to do their best work.

From global Fortune 100 companies to corner markets, businesses and teams of all kinds use Slack to bring the right people together with all the right information.

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