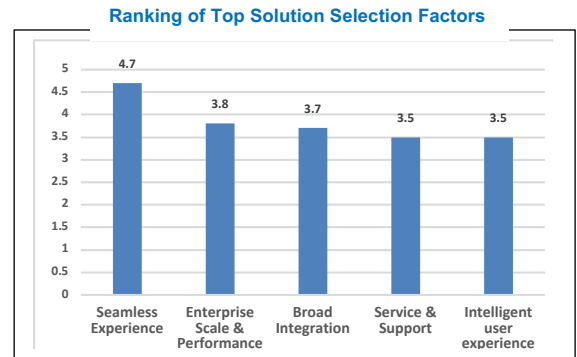# Enterprise Collaboration Platform Buyers' Guide

Five Factors to Consider When Selecting an Enterprise Communication and Collaboration Platform

Empowering your teams with the right collaboration platform is more than just a convenience—it's the critical difference between a business that's agile and efficient and one that is hampered by lack of performance, speed, and effective teamwork. The way we work has evolved, and efficient collaboration is an absolute necessity. The modern enterprise needs to dynamically support workers who live and work anywhere, across any device, and using any platform.

Many different collaboration platforms are available in the market today. Therefore, deciding which platform will best facilitate company and employee needs, performance, and agility is critical. To help create an enterprise collaboration platform selection guide, Apprize360 interviewed enterprise decision-makers responsible for selecting and using collaboration tools across their entire organization. The interviews focused on the enterprises' current and emerging collaboration requirements, vendor evaluation and decision criteria used, and post-deployment experience with Cisco Webex, Microsoft Teams, RingCentral, and Zoom. Based on the interviews and the rankings by the research participants, Apprize360 identified five common selection factors that buyers used to consider an enterprise collaboration platform. In order of importance, these selection factors are:

1. <u>Seamless user experience in and out of the enterprise</u>: Does the platform enable seamless collaboration for employees, partners, customers, and guests?

2. <u>Enterprise scale and reliability:</u> Is the platform secure, compliant, and trusted, and can it handle the complex needs of the enterprise, including role-based user access?

3. <u>Broad integration with third-party productivity tools, hardware, and platforms</u>: Does the platform support integration with mobile and in-office devices, applications, and platforms?

4. <u>Support and success for the customer and end-user experience</u>: Does the vendor support your needs and ensure your success?

Ranking of Top Solution Selection Factors

5. <u>Intelligent user experience and automation</u>: Does the platform offer an intelligent experience, provide automated workflow and audience engagement features, and support "smart work" for maximum productivity?

If your organization is considering an enterprise collaboration platform, you may want to incorporate these selection factors into your evaluation to identify the vendor that best meets your organization's needs and requirements:

1. **Seamless user experience in and out of the enterprise?** *Is the platform optimized to quickly and easily enable all users within an organization or guests to access the platform and have a seamless experience?*

The user experience of enterprise collaboration platforms is critical for adoption. A total of 85% of those interviewed in this study agreed that "ease of use" perceived by an employee directly correlates to adopting a collaboration platform. Additionally, 90% of the interviewees reported that the collaboration platform's external customer and guest user experience has either positively or negatively impacted their company's brand. Therefore, an enterprise collaboration platform must be optimized for all users' experiences to avoid fragmented use of solutions internally. The specific capabilities that the interviewees reported as critical to a seamless user experience include:

Ranking of Seamless User Experience

0=lowest rank, 5 = highest rank

- <u>Ease of use:</u> Ability for employees, customers, and guests to quickly join a meeting as well as allow meeting hosts to manage sessions, including launching breakout spaces.
- <u>Visual appearance</u>: Ease of navigation for employees, customers, and guests.
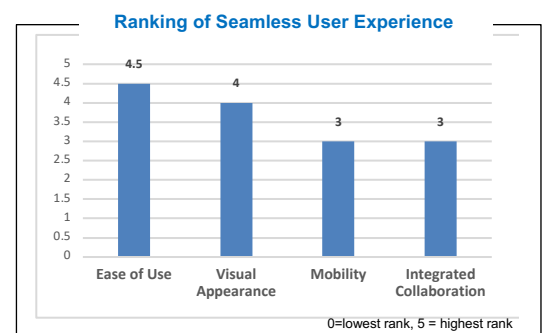
- **Mobility:** Effortless ability to join a meeting or event from a mobile device, room/personal video devices, or browser.
- **Integrated collaboration:** Ability to support all meeting types and modes of communication, including video meetings, audio calling, messaging, and team collaboration.

2. **Enterprise-scale and reliability:** *Is the platform optimized for the needs of the enterprise? Is the platform secure, compliant, and trusted, and can it handle the complex needs of the enterprise, including advanced role-based user access? Does the platform dynamically optimize audio and video performances to ensure an optimal experience?*

Enterprise-scale is more than just making sure the user has a high-performing, optimal experience without platform latency or poor video and audio quality. Enterprise-scale also refers to supporting the often complex needs of organizations with thousands of users, including user management, security, and operational reporting. The features that the interviewees indicated to be important in creating an enterprise-scalable collaboration platform include:

Ranking of Top Enterprise Scale Factors

0=lowest rank, 5 = highest rank

- **Audio & video quality:** Platform stability and reliability with high-performing audio and video quality.
- **Overall security:** Security that protects privacy, sensitive information and ensures that only authorized people are participating in events.
- **Analytics & reporting:** Detailed reporting on user insights, performance analytics, and operational metrics.
- **Service management:** One place to manage the enterprise collaboration suite, including all users, applications and devices.
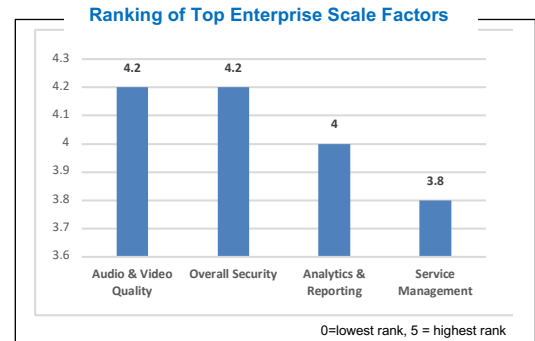
3. **Broad integration with third-party productivity tools, hardware, and platforms:** *Does the platform support bi-directional integration with third-party applications, platforms, and hardware devices? Does the vendor's platform support an immersive and integrated experience with the enterprise's key productivity applications, file storage systems, room and personal conferencing hardware, and mobile devices?*

The modern enterprise needs to support enterprise collaboration across any device or environment with bi-directional integration with critical business applications, such as Office365 and Google Workspace. Many enterprises also want to optimize on-site conference and meeting rooms to support hybrid work, requiring integration with phones, conferencing hardware, and video-based meeting devices. As one CIO from a Fortune 500 company reported, "*It [the collaboration solution] just needs to work and be consistent regardless of if we are meeting on a laptop, over a mobile device, in a conference, or all of the above.*" The other capabilities that the research participants identified as critical for this selection factor include:

Ranking of Top Integrations

0=lowest rank, 5 = highest rank

- **Office 365 and Google integration:** Full integration with Microsoft Office suite, cloud storage platforms, project & work management platforms.
- **Device integration:** Deeply integrated experience for phones and personal room and huddle video devices.
- **Open platform:** Open to 3rd parties with APIs, SDKs, and widgets for bi-directional integration with any application.
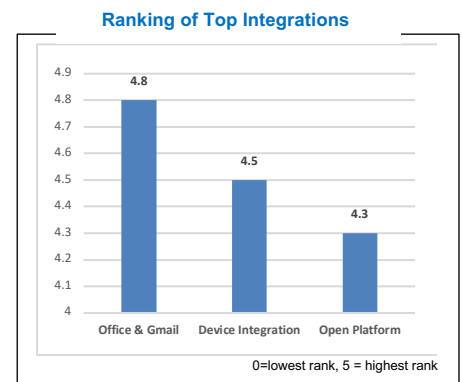
4. **Support and success for customer and end-user adoption:** *Does the vendor offer support and customer success to ensure the success of users, guests, and the company?*

Technology purchase decisions should focus not only on features and functionality. The enterprise interviewees in the research cited a top decision factor they incorporated into their evaluation of an enterprise collaboration solution: service and support. For example, one director of IT from a large international financial services institution told Apprize360, "*The collaboration technology is paramount, but it is worthless if we cannot get the training that our different users need and the support that our IT teams need to deploy the platform effectively throughout the organization.*" The interviewees highlighted three support areas that are critical to enterprises:

Ranking of Importance of Services

0=lowest rank, 5 = highest rank

- Technical support: Highly responsive global support available via email, live chat, and telephone, and locally on-site when needed.
- User training: Comprehensive and easy-to-access training and documentation with help integrated into the platform.
- Customer success: Enterprise customer success personnel who understand the needs of the organization and support deployment and ongoing adoption.
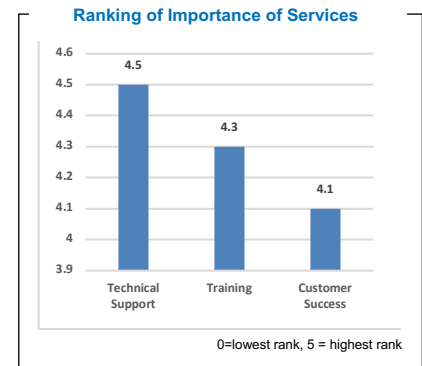
5. **Intelligent user experience and automation:** *Does the solution enable an intelligent user experience? Does the solution support "smart work," including features that increase engagement and productivity -- such as whiteboarding, digital assistants, facial recognition, and automatic noise canceling?*

Collaboration platforms should also support "smart features" to increase audience engagement and worker productivity and encourage platform adoption to avoid fragmented tool use. Enterprise collaboration platforms should leverage machine learning capabilities to optimize the user experience for added engagement and create automation to reduce repetitive or menial tasks and keep users focused on productive work. The intelligent capabilities that the interviewed enterprise buyers highlighted for increased worker effectiveness include:


Ranking of Top Experience Features

0=lowest rank, 5 = highest rank

- Event controls: Superior presentation and event experience controls, such as slide and live image management, access to slides, and ability to transfer slide advancement to co-hosts.
- Real-time collaboration: Support for real-time collaboration, including interactive whiteboarding.
- Audience engagement: Two-way audience engagement features, such as reactions, voting and polling, annotation, and multiple presenters.
- Check-in experience: Meeting rooms with attendee check-in and virtual signage.
- Workflow intelligence: Intelligent workflow tools to enhance productivity and user experiences, such as digital assistants and bots, support for automated device pairing, noise cancellation, facial recognition, and speaker tracking.
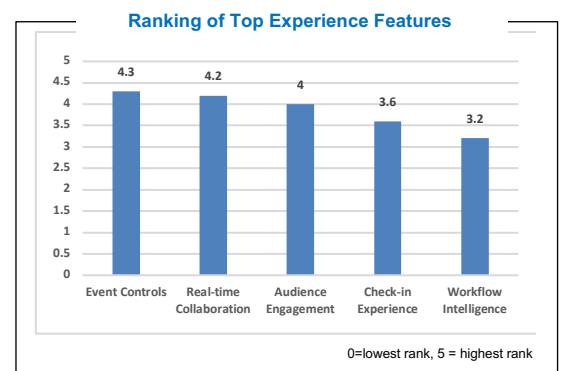
Study Findings

To better determine how the top enterprise communication and collaboration solutions ranked against the five key selection criteria, Apprize360 interviewed current enterprise decision-makers and users of Webex, RingCentral, Zoom, and Microsoft Teams. The interviewees were asked to rate each solution according to the five criteria outlined above and describe the collaboration requirements they were solving, their reasons for vendor selection, and post-selection perceived strengths and weaknesses of the solution. Ratings were conducted using a five-point scale with "0" as a feature not supported by a vendor and "5" as a feature with the greatest support by a vendor. Apprize360 analyzed all the interviews, ratings and rankings and displayed those findings by each of the five selection factors.

1. **Seamless user experience in and out of the enterprise:** Based on the interviews with Webex decision-makers, the Webex user experience was reported to be superior to other solutions evaluated. The interviewed users of other platforms expressed concerns and frustration over the lack of a consistent and seamless user experience of the respective platforms they currently used. Up to 90% of the Webex decision-makers agreed that Webex best supported their user experience expectations. Other specific findings that drove Webex leadership ranking in this category include:

Vendor Ranking of User Experience
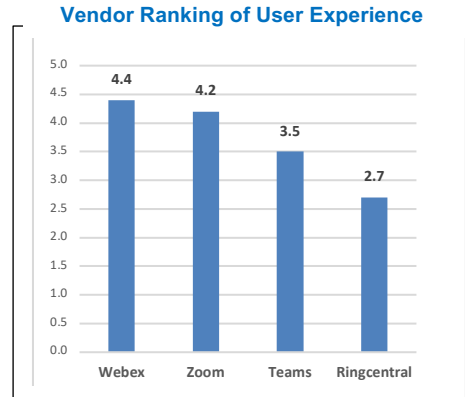
   - Guest experience: The guest experience drove significant perceptions and feedback from the research participants. Up to 90% of Microsoft Teams buyers reported a poor to an extremely poor experience for guests joining a Teams event from a browser link, subjecting guests to excessive steps and wait times before being allowed to join the meeting. The Teams users also reported that Microsoft guests also lose access to their corporate services and are subject to limited features determined by Microsoft's guest policy.

   - Breakout sessions: Webex's ability concerning breakout room management capabilities, including the ability to shuffle session participants, was frequently reported to be a primary strength. Another Webex strength reported was the ability for both event hosts and co-hosts to split the responsibility of managing the breakout sessions through advanced session host controls. The Webex "post-meeting summary space" is a newer feature highlighted due to its ability to automatically place event materials for viewing or accessing, thus reducing attendee confusion over where event materials are located.

   - "Always on" collaboration: The Webex app supports continuous collaboration before and after meetings, supporting chat messaging, two-way whiteboarding, file sharing, and personalized communication workspaces.

   - Session management: Zoom users expressed frustration with poor slide management features that are standard with Webex, including discussion group access to slides and the ability to transfer slide advancement to a guest or promoted co-host.

2. **Enterprise scale and reliability***:* Webex scored highest on audio and video quality and overall platform performance. Webex was consistently reported to have the highest video clarity without lag and superior audio quality among the solutions evaluated. According to a director of digital communications from a major international pharmaceutical company, the company has experienced frequent Microsoft Teams performance issues with meetings. "*When we have many people in a single [Microsoft] Teams meeting or a lot of meetings being hosted simultaneously, Teams often 'glitches' with screen freezes and poor audio. It can really inhibit the flow and effectiveness of a meeting.*"

Another feature that the users highlighted as a Webex differentiator and contributed to part of the discussion of enterprise-scale was the Webex Control Hub. The Webex Control Hub is more than an administrative dashboard; it is a complete console for user management, device administration, security controls, analytics, and reporting. Webex Control Hub also allows administrators to view licenses across all services across the organization. The Webex Control Hub features that the interviewees highlighted as especially critical were:


Vendor Ranking of Scale
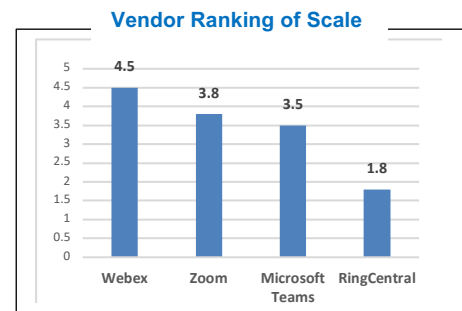
   - User provisioning: Can add and remove users via manual entry, CSV upload, or automatically with the Webex Directory Connector, which synchronizes users from an organization's Active Directory.

   - Role-based access: The Webex Control Hub supports eight different role-based access assignments, and the various permission levels allow for a highly configurable security access strategy. For the buyers who evaluated Microsoft Teams, many reported encountering challenges regarding permissions setting when meeting with external customers.

   - Security: IT administrators focused on advanced platform security reported that Webex provides solid end-to-end encryption, compliance visibility, and privacy controls. Webex provides user identity and access authentication and management of devices and browsers with customized security controls, including idle timeout, device PIN enforcement, and remote wipe of Webex content.

   - Workspace location and floorplan summary: Users can visualize their organization's workspace both

geographically and locally via the Webex Control Hub. This makes it easier and faster to locate Webex-optimized conferencing rooms.

- Analytics: One of the strongest enterprise features that the Webex users highlighted is Webex Control Hub's robust analytics capabilities. Webex offers real-time analytics on meetings, messaging, devices, and calling, with key performance indicators such as audio and video quality and a total number of events, calls, messaging, and video sessions. Analytics allows admins to quickly gain important insights, such as "average daily active users," total number of active workspaces, and total daily meetings, as well as create on-the-fly data analysis, pivoting on different services and metrics.

3. **Broad integration with third-party productivity tools, hardware, and platforms:** Many of the vendors evaluated in this study offered varying types and quality of integrations. Microsoft Teams was a reported leader when integrating with Microsoft technologies and platforms, including Office365 and SharePoint. Webex was also noted for strong Microsoft integration, and also led interview rankings when integrations were required with conferencing hardware, meeting room equipment, and office telephony devices. This included:

Vendor Ranking on Integrations

- Integration with immersive devices: Including telephony devices, whiteboards, smart displays, and cameras.
- File storage: Collaborate live with OneDrive and Box.com documents in Webex and share files from the Webex mobile app.
- Open APIs and SDKs: Open platform with APIs, SDKs, and widgets for bi-directional integration with any application and pre-built integrations with leading SaaS applications.
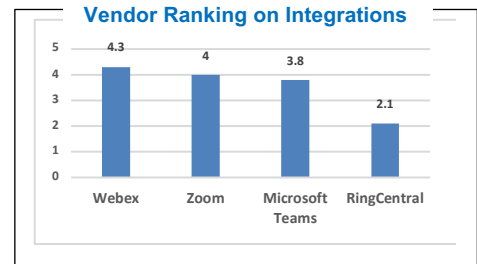
4. **Support and success for the customer and end-user adoption:** Enterprise support requires more than an email or a phone number to contact in case of problems. It requires a team of dedicated, well-experienced staff to provide personalized support via email, live chat, and voice. It also requires locally accessible on-site support if issues cannot be resolved remotely.

Vendor Ranking Service & Support

- Technical support: Webex provides an extensive help center with robust access to support documentation and real-time support via live chat, phone, and email. With its extensive network of local partners, Webex can also provide rapid on-site support when needed.
- Customer success: Webex assigns customer success teams that ensure ongoing adoption and success, discuss best practices, and suppors users and administrators with proactive future planning.
- Training: Webex provides on-demand and frequent live training opportunities across the globe, localized to specific languages and countries.
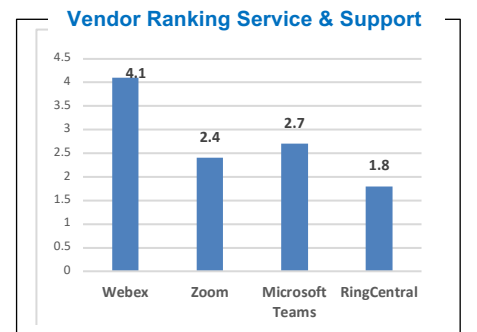
5. **Intelligent user experience and automation:** Webex was noted as the platform that best offers capabilities to increase user productivity by supporting automation, intelligent workspaces, and AI that streamline workflows and tasks and reduce post-meeting work by attendees. The specific Webex features that the users highlighted as strengths were:

Ranking of Intelligent User Experience

- People insights: Profiling the meeting attendees provides context and increase insights about the attendees in a meeting.
- Webex Assistant: The voice AI-based Webex Assistant can take notes and trigger actions without requiring user interaction that might distract their attention from the meeting. The triggered actions include the ability to join meetings, set up future meetings, and create related meeting tasks
- Facial recognition: AI that supports facial recognition to create attendee name labels.
- Automated meeting experience optimization: AI that enables the cameras to detect the current speaker and provide the best speaker video framing, along with automatic noise suppression and removal of potentially distracting background audio, such as coughing or shuffling papers.
- Webex personal workspace: Individually assigned and secure digital workspace for meetings anytime and posting, sharing, and collaborating on documents and files.
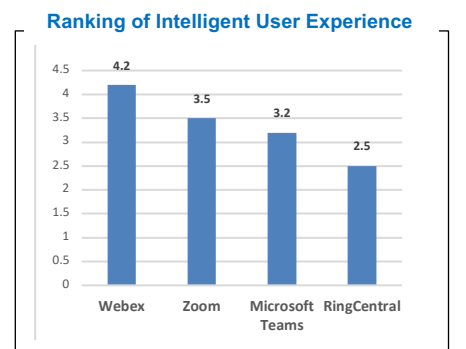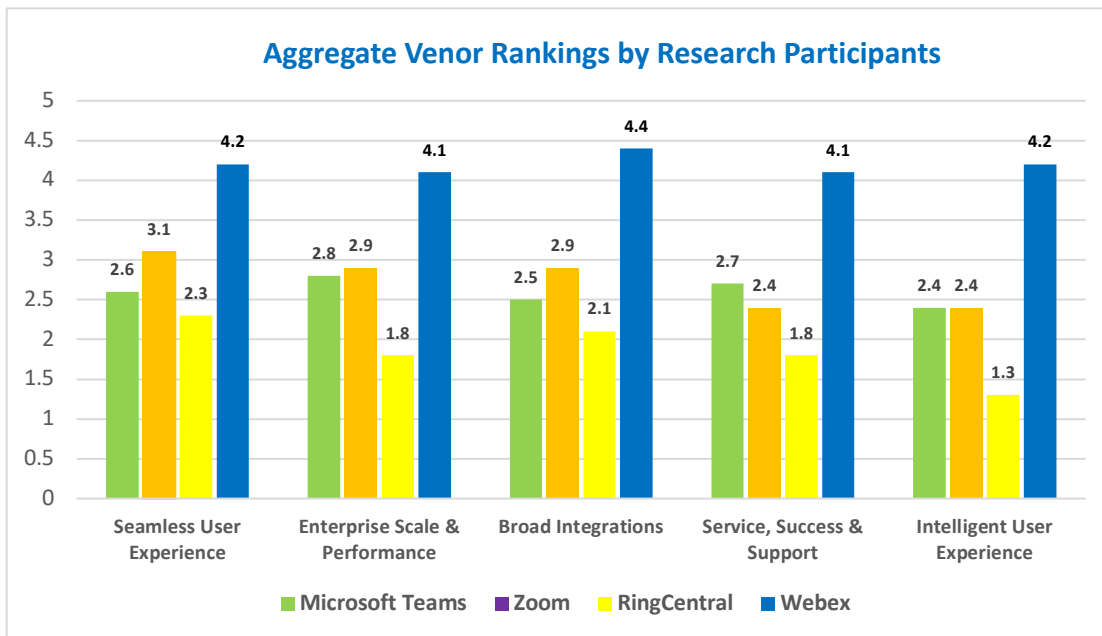
- Appspace integration for digital signage: This integration with Appspace allows enterprise organizations to guide teams and visitors on returning to the workplace, viewing the latest guidelines, town halls, meeting space scheduled, and site-specific instructions.

The interviewees reported that the other platforms they have used in the past or more recently evaluated lacked intelligent user features and automation. The study participants highlighted the following key areas of comparative weaknesses that impacted user experience:

- Zoom: No automated user profiles or dynamic name tags, with limited waiting room customization capabilities. According to the IT director of a large healthcare technology vendor, "*After using Zoom for 24 months, we have discovered that Zoom does not support the same comprehensive meeting controls vs. Webex.*"

- Microsoft Teams: The users pointed out that Teams has basic meeting management features that are limited and favor internal users. According to the head of operations at a large industrial controls manufacturer, "*It is embarrassing to invite guests to a Teams meeting that we are hosting because the external user experience is horrible. There are delays and frequent performance issues that prevent guests from engaging in basic collaboration like file sharing. This is why we are hoping to get out of our Microsoft ELA [enterprise license agreement], so we can move to another platform that better supports our partners, distributors, and outside specialists.*"

- RingCentral: RingCentral utilizes Zoom meeting technology, which has a variable integration with the RingCentral platform. "*The user experience is different between the video technology and RingCentral audio calling, but it is more than that. The integration is fragmented and does not support any intelligent workflow or automation between the Zoom video technology and the RingCentral audio core*", a director of technical operations from a mid-sized domestic pharmaceutical manufacturer told Apprize360.

Conclusion

For organizations seeking an enterprise-scale collaboration platform, Webex fulfills all of the five recommended criteria and delivers a complete, high-performance enterprise collaboration solution. As you can see from the graph below, interviewed decision-makers consistently ranked Webex as the leader across all five vendor selection criteria.

Aggregate Venor Rankings by Research Participants

	Seamless User Experience	Enterprise Scale & Performance	Broad Integrations	Service, Success & Support	Intelligent User Experience
Microsoft Teams	2.6	2.8	2.5	2.7	2.4
Zoom	3.1	2.9	2.9	2.4	2.4
RingCentral	2.3	1.8	2.1	1.8	1.3
Webex	4.2	4.1	4.4	4.1	4.2

The above graph shows vendor composite scores based on detailed evaluation and rankings. The rankings use a five-point scale with five as the highest ranking.

Appendix A displays how interviewed decision-makers ranked all four vendors based on specific features and capabilities.

Appendix A

Apprize360 interviewed buyers and decision-makers of enterprise collaboration platforms to better assess specific feature and functionality rankings to understand buying criteria, vendor perceptions, and specific evaluation of vendor capabilities. The following table contains a comparative assessment of vendor-specific capabilities rated based upon interviews with buyers and decision-makers. Each interviewee was asked to rank and rate vendor features based upon their experience with each platform. Interviews took place from March 15, 2021, through April 15, 2021.

LEGEND

Fully Present	Moderate Functionality (~75%)	Partial Functionality (~50%)	Minor Functionality (~25%)	Feature Absent (0%)
● (green)	◕ (blue)	◑ (yellow)	◔ (red)	○ (empty)

| Categories of Assessment | Cisco Webex | Microsoft | Zoom | RingCentral |
	Webex	Microsoft Teams	Zoom Platform	RingCentral
Seamless User Experience				
Digital End-User Experience ▪ Seamless video meetings, calling, messaging, & collaboration ▪ Unified experience for employees, partners, and customers ▪ Optimized guest experience regardless of how they joined a meeting ▪ Accommodates one-on-one, small group, & large audience meetings	● Fully Present	◕ Moderate	◕ Moderate	◔ Minor
Meeting/Session Management ▪ Dynamic slideware management ▪ Audience management (host promoter, multiple presenters, breakout room)	◕ Moderate	◑ Partial	◑ Partial	◔ Minor
Audience Engagement ▪ Two-way audience interaction, reactions, two-way polling, voting	● Fully Present	◕ Moderate	◕ Moderate	◔ Minor
Native Audio Calling ▪ Native audio calling through VOIP and PTSN	● Fully Present	◔ Minor	◑ Partial	◑ Partial
Enterprise-Scale & Reliability				
Enterprise-scale and Performance ▪ Proven high performance and quality for audio and video collaborations	● Fully Present	◕ Moderate	◕ Moderate	◑ Partial
User Management ▪ Centralized console for license, user, and session management ▪ Business rules for user grouping and user account assignments	● Fully Present	◕ Moderate	◕ Moderate	◑ Partial
Enterprise Security ▪ DLP policies for employees and guests ▪ Federated identity management with configurable guest security	● Fully Present	◕ Moderate	◕ Moderate	◑ Partial
Insights, Analytics, and Reporting ▪ Insights into operational, performance, and user metrics ▪ Analysis of daily and time-based performance KPIs (daily active users, meetings, performance/quality KPIs)	● Fully Present	◕ Moderate	◕ Moderate	◑ Partial
Broad integration with third-party productivity tools, hardware, and platforms				

Categories of Assessment	Cisco Webex	Microsoft	Zoom	RingCentral
	Webex	Microsoft Teams	Zoom Platform	RingCentral
Bi-directional Software and Application Integrations ▪ Integration with office productivity platforms, such as Google Workspace and Office 365, as well as with popular SaaS platforms ▪ Open APIs and SDKs	🟢	◔	◔	◐
Hardware Device Integrations ▪ Immersive experience with hardware devices (Telephony devices, whiteboards, Smart TVs, and cameras)	🟢	◐	◐	◐
Support and success for the customer and end-user experience				
Service and Support Offerings ▪ Proven ability to support and service customers with technical issues and need for best practices with on-demand and live training ▪ Diverse options for customer success programs to encourage adoption and best-practices	◔	◑	◐	◕ (red)
Intelligent User Experience and Automation				
Intelligent User Experience and Automation ▪ Workflow and automation (within the collaboration platform and within third-party applications) ▪ Advanced intuitive experiences (dynamic video layout, noise cancellation, facial recognition, gesture recognition) ▪ Support for "smart" hybrid work (whiteboarding, digital signage, room reservations, safe return-to-work support)	🟢	◕ (red)	◐	◕ (red)

Note: *This assessment was based on interviews with current customers of each solution and was not a statistically significant quantitative study. The opinions, vendor rankings, and reported solution strengths and weaknesses can change without notice based upon newly released vendor features, improved functionality, and additional customer perceptions. This report was commissioned by Webex. Decisions on selecting any software platform should be made using caution and incorporate your own company's specific needs into the evaluation and vendor selection criteria.*