RESEARCH

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Understanding the Advantages of

CISCO WEBEX VS. MICROSOFT TEAMS

WHITE PAPER

Prepared by
Zeus Kerravala

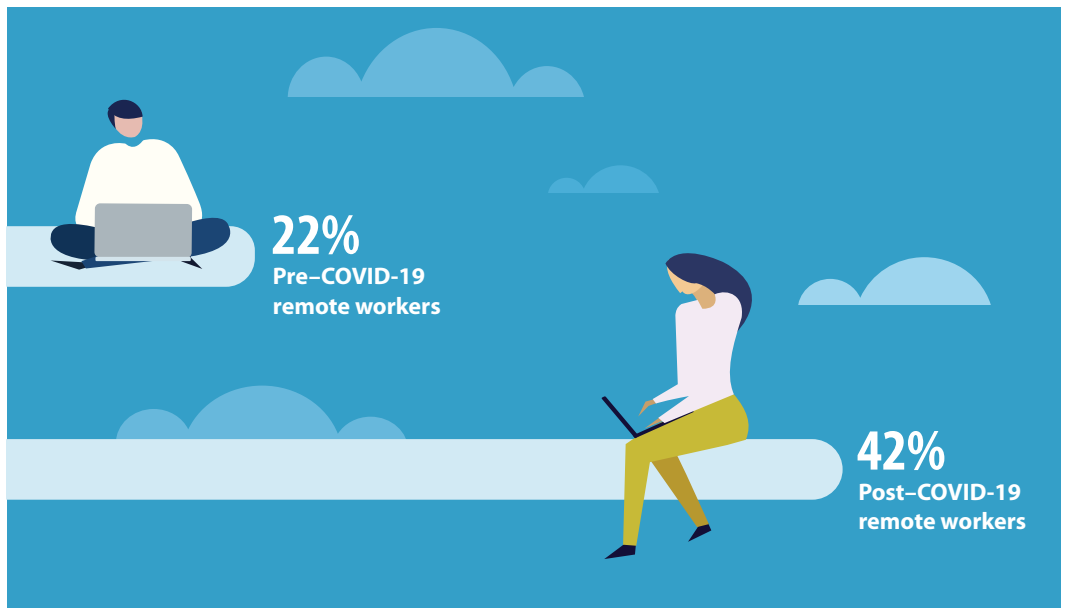## INTRODUCTION: COLLABORATION IS NOW A BUSINESS IMPERATIVE

As the pandemic illustrated in stark detail, remote collaboration is now a requirement for every business. The results of the ZK Research 2020 Work-from-Anywhere Study showed that before the pandemic, 22% of employees worked remotely (Exhibit 1). That figure skyrocketed during the pandemic. But after restrictions ease, ZK Research expects that number to settle at 42%.

As the world gradually gets back to something resembling "normal," the need for collaboration will not recede along with the pandemic. To accommodate a hybrid work environment in which employees work from a corporate location for a day or two and then work remotely for a few more, companies will have to implement collaboration tools that are resilient, flexible, high quality and high capacity.

Collaboration devices—and especially how they integrate into a company's environment and how well they work together—will be the key to success. In addition, user experiences in a corporate setting, on the road and in a remote location will need to be consistent. A vendor that tries to do everything or build a walled garden around devices and access will not be able to serve the broadest assortment of enterprise needs.

In addition, now that collaboration is so pervasive and mission critical across countless industries and enterprise types, the ability for a solution to serve unique use cases that couldn't have been drawn up during the engineering phase will be an important consideration. And with the walls between unified communications as a service (UCaaS) and contact center as a service (CCaaS) coming down, a solution that can work across both without a problem will succeed in unifying two seemingly opposed technologies—one focused in and one focused out.

Exhibit 1: Remote Work Will Continue

22%
Pre–COVID-19
remote workers

42%
Post–COVID-19
remote workers

ZK Research 2020 Work-from-Anywhere Study

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Zeus Kerravala is the founder and principal analyst with ZK Research. Kerravala provides tactical advice and strategic guidance to help his clients in both the current business climate and the long term. He delivers research and insight to the following constituents: end-user IT and network managers; vendors of IT hardware, software and services; and members of the financial community looking to invest in the companies that he covers.

Collaboration requires a global cloud infrastructure that's managed and optimized for real-time communication.

With so much focus on collaboration tools, simple calling often gets shunted aside. But because it remains a mission-critical and universally accepted way to connect with customers, suppliers and co-workers, it should be integrated with a company's collaboration system.

The ability for collaboration tools to take advantage of artificial intelligence (AI) and other intelligent functions—which are maturing and making significant contributions to productivity, user experience and inclusivity—relies on coding specific to the collaboration platform itself, not just recycled generic code.

Collaboration is now at the center of most enterprises, so it requires a global cloud infrastructure that's managed and optimized for real-time communication. Plus, the vendor needs to have a long-term vision of the future and how its collaboration solution fits into the overall digital enterprise without feeling locked into arbitrary standards, licenses or technologies.

Two of the more widely adopted products are Cisco Webex and Microsoft Teams. In this report, ZK Research compares them and—using criteria on the new ways in which we work—evaluates whether the solutions are up to today's challenges.

SECTION II: COMPARING COLLABORATION VENDORS

Selecting a collaboration tool entails more than just finding the solution a company needs; there are multiple dimensions to consider.

Years ago, when collaboration tools were novel, typical evaluation criteria included basic features, such as the ability to share documents, make calls, message other team members and meet using video. Nowadays, those capabilities are table stakes. If a vendor fails to check any of those boxes, companies should disregard them and move along.

ZK Research has evaluated all of the mainstream collaboration tools, including two of the most commonly deployed: Cisco Webex and Microsoft Teams. Based on our evaluation, we believe Cisco Webex to have advantages over Microsoft Teams in several critical areas, including the following:

Seamless collaboration for users inside and outside the company: Every organization conducts business with external participants, such as partners, stakeholders and vendors. Connecting with each one, regardless of location, should be easy and secure from within the collaboration tools.

Integrated software and hardware: Collaboration now happens regardless of location or device—it's about more than just PC-based meetings. Although people still meet in conference rooms, they also participate from the road, use external cameras and use whiteboards. They also start calls on desk phones and then move to mobile phones and/or to laptops. The hardware and software must account for these devices and provide a single, cohesive experience. As people return to work, the use of video will remain heavy, and integrated experiences will maximize worker productivity.

When it comes to collaboration, one size certainly does not fit all.

Enterprise calling: Although many meetings are video based, calling is still a business-critical feature. The experience must be world class and match users' expectations for calling in other environments. Doing just an adequate job with something as fundamental as calling won't be good enough for today's enterprise customers.

Ability to embed in existing applications: Standalone meeting apps are okay for general collaboration. But in today's enterprises, numerous processes require the use of other applications in conjunction with collaboration tools. An isolated application won't make the grade in these use cases; it's far more effective to embed collaboration functions into existing apps. The ability to integrate into applications is critical in specific verticals such as healthcare, government, financial services and education.

A single interface to manage and support users: Users have always been separated by time and distance, scattered in locations around the globe. Now, with workers even more distributed across corporate settings, home offices, remote locations, hotels and other locations, managing collaboration tools is a particularly acute challenge. Having separate management tools creates blind spots that can reduce efficiency and lead to security issues. Therefore, any modern collaboration tool should have a single dashboard to ensure simple management.

A focus on employee and customer experiences: When it comes to collaboration, one size certainly does not fit all. Consider the scale of meetings a company needs: a meeting with three participants is much different from one with 50 or 250. Plus, the needs of the host and the attendees are distinct, so vendors should be able to address these differences. In addition, because some industries have security concerns and must control access, it's important to be able to do so easily. And with a diverse workforce, it's critical to create experiences that are inclusive of all workers.

SECTION III: COMPARING CISCO WEBEX AND MICROSOFT TEAMS

Thinking about the criteria outlined in the previous section, how do Cisco Webex and Microsoft Teams compare? The tables in this section detail each element, including seamless collaboration, integrated software and hardware, enterprise calling, embedding in applications, user support and specialized experiences.

Seamless Collaboration for Users Inside and Outside the Enterprise

	Cisco Webex		Microsoft Teams	
Guest Company Experiences	✓	Architecture enables easy collaboration.	X	Architecture creates silos and complicates collaboration.
Unified Experience	✓	Federated Global Identity architecture assigns a single identity to each email address.	X	Active Directory architecture assigns different identities for guests in each organization.
Functionality	✓	Users retain the functionality associated with their corporate account whether they are internal or external.	X	Guests lose access to their corporate services and can only access a limited set of features.
Security and Privacy	✓	Security is simple to understand and administer, which makes enforcing compliance policies easier.	X	Users who leave a corporate group aren't protected.
Seamless Collaboration	✓	Architecture is built on shared microservices that power all collaboration workloads.	X	Teams is a wrapper around several complicated and legacy solutions.

Integrated Software and Hardware Experiences

	Cisco Webex		Microsoft Teams	
Immersive Collaboration	✓	Purpose-built collaboration devices combined with Webex software result in safe, secure and effective collaboration.	X	Inconsistent capabilities, which depend on multiple third parties, result in a scattered experience with security blind spots that put users and the business at risk.
Devices	✓	Purpose-built collaboration devices integrate well with Webex software, with a simple design and familiar interfaces that increase adoption.	X	Subtle differences in third-party hardware designs and software features create a barrier to adoption and productivity.
Audio and Video Processing	✓	Advanced audio and video processing both in app and on devices creates an immersive experience with minimal distractions.	X	Advanced audio and video features are not available across devices.
Sharing and Creating	✓	Wireless sharing and evergreen whiteboarding are available in the Webex app and all devices.	X	Sharing is not seamless and is limited to Teams Rooms. Whiteboarding is not pervasive, making it impossible for a user to pick up a thought where they left off.
App Integrations	✓	Support for third-party app integrations is available both in app and on devices.	X	Limited support is provided for in-call third-party web app integrations.
Management	✓	Workplace insights are available with a single dashboard for user, apps and device analytics through the Webex Control Hub.	X	Multiple dashboards are required to manage third-party devices, with limited analytics available for peripherals and physical workplaces.
Resource Management	✓	Tools enable effective use of workplace resources, with room booking, built-in intelligence, IoT sensors and digital signage.	X	Limited support exists for the Cortana assistant across the device portfolio, and there is no built-in support for IoT sensors to track utilization.

Enterprise Calling

	Cisco Webex		Microsoft Teams	
Real-Time Communications	✓	Innovative software and hardware create a holistic solution for customers.	X	Teams focuses on the app to the detriment of the rest of the calling solution and promotes direct routing.
Seamless Calling Experiences	✓	The Webex app integrates with phones, headsets, desks and room devices to create a consistent and intuitive calling experience.	X	Teams lacks fundamental calling features and has inconsistent device integrations.
Single Platform for Calling, Contact Center and Meetings	✓	Calling, meetings and contact center solutions are provided in a common cloud, which results in significant cost savings.	X	Separate platforms are required for meetings and calling, which leads to disjointed experiences.
Sharing and Creating	✓	Simple wireless sharing and evergreen whiteboarding are available both in app and on devices.	X	Sharing is not seamless and is limited to Teams Rooms, with no pervasive whiteboarding.
App Integrations	✓	Significant support is provided for third-party app integrations both in app and on devices.	X	Microsoft devices offer limited support for in-call third-party web app integrations.
Management	✓	The Webex Control Hub is a single dashboard for user, apps and device analytics.	X	Multiple dashboards are required to manage third-party devices, with limited peripheral and physical workplace analytics.

Ability to Embed in Existing Applications

	Cisco Webex		Microsoft Teams	
Bidirectional Integration and Embedding	✓	Integration is possible in both directions: Webex to an app and an app to Webex.	X	Only one-way integration between Teams and an app is possible.
Open APIs	✓	Open APIs across calling, meetings, messaging and devices integrate with any application.	X	All collaboration integrations must happen through Teams.
Embedding	✓	Work is enabled within any business app.	X	Teams can't be embedded into other business apps, including other Microsoft apps.

One Place to Manage and Support Users

	Cisco Webex		Microsoft Teams	
Simple, Centralized Management	✓	A single pane of glass manages all collaboration workloads, including meetings, calling, messaging, contact center and devices.	X	Teams only supports software management, with limited management for devices and no contact center management.
Troubleshooting	✓	Real-time troubleshooting is allowed with an option to drill down into a specific meeting to view key quality, utilization and environmental metrics. Geographic view, flagging of degraded network quality and admin-join capability to look at issues live are also included.	X	Teams does not provide real-time troubleshooting, notification alerts for meetings in progress, or real-time utilization or environmental data.
Analytics	✓	Real-time meeting analytics (refreshed every 10 minutes) recognize adoption trends, improve employee productivity and provide a list of users experiencing poor performance, with a direct link to troubleshoot.	X	Teams provides a 24-hour refresh cycle for historical data analytics but no analytics for peripherals such as headsets and webcams, and device analytics are limited.

Specialized Employee and Customer Experiences				
		Cisco Webex		**Microsoft Teams**
Scale	✓	Event experiences scale up to 100K attendees, and there are many ways for presenters to join and share content.	X	Teams offers limited scale and significantly fewer presenters for an event.
Contact Center	✓	Webex provides a complete cloud contact center solution.	X	Only integrations with third-party contact centers are provided.
Engagement	✓	Engagement and participation are enabled through live polling, reactions and breakout sessions.	X	Very few participation features are available for attendees.

Additional Points About Cisco Webex's Collaboration Leadership

There are a few areas not covered in the preceding tables that also underscore Cisco's leadership:

Price: Cisco's pricing is straightforward, while Microsoft's is not transparent because of the way Microsoft 365 is bundled and the tendency for those costs to creep up.

Product focus: The founding DNA of Cisco was (and always will be) real-time communications and networking. It's where the company's credentials and expertise reside, and that focus shines through in Webex. Microsoft has a different focus—productivity—and that shows in Teams.

Pedigree: Cisco's expertise in networking and optimization is evident in the quality of Webex's backbone; it was built for real-time communication. In contrast, Microsoft lacks this pedigree.

Security: Cisco's security capabilities were developed in house and built into Webex. By market share, Cisco is the top enterprise security vendor, and it applies that knowledge to Webex— while security has always been an afterthought for Microsoft.

Analytics: Both Cisco and Microsoft have built analytics dashboards and track activity, but they use the data in vastly different ways. With Teams, the data is used to essentially let managers spy on employee activity. In fact, the data is viewed as being so intrusive that ZDNet recently published an article titled "I looked at all the ways Microsoft Teams tracks users, and my head is spinning" that highlights just how little privacy Teams provides to workers. Conversely, Cisco tracks data to provide user feedback on how to work more efficiently. Cisco has always put employee privacy first, and it provides "Personal Insight" that can only be viewed by

the employee. The data can be used to help workers manage their meetings more efficiently and reduce some of the meeting fatigue people are experiencing.

In addition, Cisco Webex's market share is impressive. According to Synergy, in 2020, Cisco had a larger collaboration installed base than any other company (Exhibit 2). With 40.2% of the market, Cisco handily beat Zoom (at 32.8%) and was four times the size of Microsoft (at 10.1%). This gives Cisco a distinct advantage, as its massive customer base provides a continual feedback loop for product updates and enhancements.

It's important to understand that this is not an exhaustive list of all features and functions; Microsoft does have advantages in the area of integration with other Microsoft products. But companies that have requirements around collaborating with external users, integrated hardware and software experiences, enterprise calling, integration with applications, a single management experience, and specialized experiences will find Webex to be the better choice.

SECTION IV: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

After carefully reviewing Cisco Webex and Microsoft Teams, ZK Research found that Teams pales in comparison to Webex with regard to the breadth and depth of capabilities, particularly in the areas noted earlier—even though Teams is a viable product and Microsoft has made advancements to it in recent years.

Exhibit 2: Cisco Webex Has the Largest Collaboration Installed Base
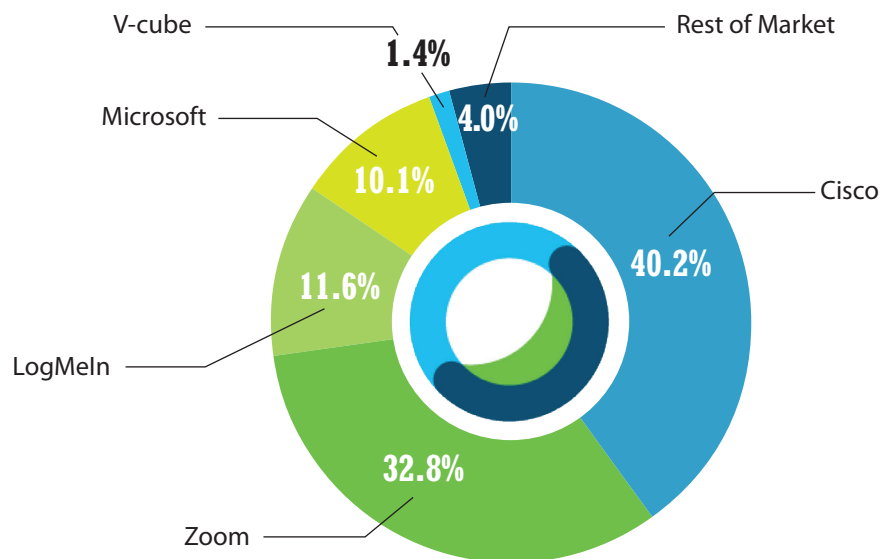
Note: Total does not equal 100% due to rounding.

Synergy and ZK Research, 2020

Because every enterprise's needs are different, ZK Research offers the following recommendations for evaluating collaboration solutions:

- Find a product that enables collaboration with people outside of your organization.
- Look for well-integrated software and hardware.
- Make specialized use cases and adjacent applications—including cloud contact center, large event support and audience engagement—part of the solution.
- Seek a solution that handles fully featured enterprise calling, which is still a business-critical feature.
- Insist on a solution that can easily be embedded into existing applications, which will make collaboration easier and more commonplace.
- Ensure the solution has a single interface to help manage and support your users.
- Consider a solution that can scale to your organization, control access as needed and accommodate a wide range of employee needs.
- Ensure the solution addresses the needs of all workers regardless of their technical aptitude, whether they require accommodations in order to perform their job, or any other factor that may limit inclusiveness.

CONTACT

zeus@zkresearch.com
Cell: 301-775-7447
Office: 978-252-5314