

Team collaboration in hybrid work environments: The ultimate guide

Enhance collaboration in your teams
- no matter where they work from



The power of collaboration

Teamwork makes the dream work, right? There is no denying that when teams work together to achieve a common goal, their impact can be huge.

However, we live in exciting times when the only constant is the change itself. Organizations started seeing all the advantages of remote workforce. Even those that weren't persuaded are now pivoting towards hybrid work models due to their many benefits.

Since global competition in many industries is tougher than ever, **companies are increasingly looking into improving their employees' productivity, innovation, and quality of their work.** Not surprisingly, they discovered that collaboration lies at the heart of their business success.

The power of collaboration can hardly be ignored. Here are some of its biggest benefits.

Benefit #1: Better performance

Studies are continuously showing that team collaboration improves workers' performance. According to research,¹ people that work collaboratively stick to their tasks 64% longer than their solitary counterparts, while also reporting higher engagement and lower fatigue.

Moreover, another study found² that **companies promoting collaborative work are five times more likely to be high performing.**

Benefit #2: Improved innovation

Innovation rarely occurs in vacuum. On the other hand, when people collaborate, they are exposed to other people's ideas and ways of thinking. Approaching a single challenge from multiple points of view ensures a better understanding and solution to the problem.

Therefore, it is no wonder that **collaborative businesses are 70% more likely to innovate³ than businesses that do not collaborate.**

Benefit #3: Enhanced focus

Collaboration helps team members to stay aligned. When a team is working together on a project, **team members indirectly keep reminding each other of the ultimate goal.**

On the other hand, lack of alignment within a team - that stems from lack of collaboration - can negatively impact the outcome of a project according to 97% of employees and executives.⁴

Benefit #4: Higher employee engagement

Employee engagement persists to be one of the greatest challenges companies face. Namely, the majority of employees are disengaged in their work, which has consequences on productivity, customer satisfaction, and more.

However, **when employees collaborate, they are compelled to get engaged in a way.** They have to talk to each other, deliver their work on time, and do their tasks. For disengaged employees, it could be hard to deliver at first, but team dynamics prompt them to get engaged.

This is also why, when collaboration is encouraged, employees are 20% more satisfied and 34% happier with their workplaces.⁵

Benefit #5: Increased profits

All the direct and indirect benefits of collaboration in the workplace lead to higher chances of business success and increased profits. More engagement, better focus, improved productivity and innovative solutions all sum up to higher revenue at the end of the year.

According to research, organizations that collaborate are two times more likely to beat their competitors, more likely to increase their profit, and 60% less likely to see decline in profitability.⁶



The hybrid challenge

Remote work was increasingly popular even before the pandemic. From 2005 to 2017, the number of remote employees increased by 159% in the US.⁷

During the pandemic, 61% of the total US workforce⁸ was working remotely. This mass work-from-home experiment has proven to employees and business alike that switching to remote work is indeed possible.

More than that - remote work is attractive. **Majority of people that work remotely want to keep working remotely at least some of the time.** On the other hand, companies have noticed an increase in productivity, customer satisfaction, employee engagement, and diversity and inclusion since the beginning of the pandemic.⁹

Now, most companies say they will embrace the hybrid work model - meaning, their employees will have the ability to work both remote and on-site. Despite the many benefits of hybrid work, it does not come without its challenges.

The conundrum is the following: **organizations want their employees to collaborate efficiently in order to be at the top of their game.** At the same time, they want to reap the benefits of hybrid work environments - which range from finding talent more easily to improved productivity.

How can companies mitigate the biggest challenges that hybrid teams face when collaborating?

Challenge #1: Cybersecurity

Security is one of the most important aspects of digital workplaces. Nobody wants to have their conversations or sensitive information leaked - besides creating a poor professional image, companies can face huge fines from regulatory bodies if they experience security breaches.

However, **abruptly switching to a work from home model in 2020 has put businesses' cybersecurity at larger risk than ever before.** In a recent study, 20% of C-level executives in IT and cybersecurity roles said they faced a security breach as a result of a remote worker.¹⁰ More importantly, 24% report they have paid unexpected expenses to address those issues.

How do the security breaches actually happen when employees collaborate in a hybrid environment?

First of all, due to inadequate collaboration tools, **many employees use consumer communication apps for work-related communication.** More specifically, 53% of workers admit doing so.¹¹ However, this is risky since not all consumer communication succumb to the same compliance or security regulations as their workplace counterparts.

Secondly, **employees are using their work equipment for private matters** - with 70% admitting they have engaged in risky online behavior in the previous year, and 17% allowing someone else to use their work equipment.¹² This is a direct violation of most companies' security standards - yet, it is a reality organizations must face.

How to ensure highest cybersecurity standards when collaborating?

Consider an on-premise collaboration solution. The most popular communication platforms such as Slack or MS Teams don't offer on-premise solutions. Even though it was long thought that the cloud is the king, many companies are choosing security-conscious on-premise alternatives to ensure highest security protocols while collaborating.

Be open to open-source. Open-source collaboration solutions are constantly evolving their security practices and can be customized to match your organization's needs for safe collaboration.

Double down on your security policies. Re-introduce your employees to your security policies and encourage a culture of open communication and reporting suspicious activities on their equipment.



Challenge #2: Time and space

When we think of collaboration, we usually envision a physical room full of people that brainstorm. In a hybrid setting, this is hard to achieve, and team members had to learn to collaborate in different ways.

In some organizations, people spend up to 80% of their time answering emails, on the phone, or in meetings.¹³ Not surprisingly, 67% of people believe that spending too much time on calls and meetings is counterproductive.¹⁴

One of the biggest challenges associated with highly collaborative hybrid teams is the collaborative overload. Although overcommunication was praised as a solution to poor company culture, lack of collaboration, and team cohesiveness, it is a solution that only creates other problems.

Therefore, the biggest advantage of hybrid work - flexibility - can pose a significant challenge to collaboration. How do teams collaborate effectively when they don't work in the same space, at the same time, in different time zones and on different continents?

How can you help your teams get used to a different kind of collaboration?

Enable both synchronous and asynchronous communication. Too much of the same can be harmful. Communicating only via video calls can get tedious. Therefore, facilitate the use of asynchronous communication tools like chats, when people can reply to each other when they want to - not in a specific time range.

Set the rules. Collaboration is most effective when there is structure. A manager or leader of the group should, in coordination with other members, set the times for weekly meetings and one on ones. Moreover, everybody should be aware of the importance of delivering their work on time.

Rethink your office architecture. Google recently announced that they will be adopting a hybrid work model. With collaboration in mind, they are redesigning their office spaces to be more inclusive of remote workers.

Provide communication and collaboration training. Collaboration in a hybrid environment takes practice to perfect. Why not seek professional help and assist your employees in collaborating more effectively?

Challenge #3: Digital transformation

Many companies are still missing the mark of digital transformation - despite the need for highly functional digital workplaces. According to data, 28% of organizations view digital transformation as costly, although additional spend on IT resources to deal with the pandemic is appraised at only 5%.¹⁵

In 36% of the cases, digital transformation is being held back by C-level executives and boards of directors.¹⁶

This speaks volumes of the **lack of bottom-up communication and missed opportunities to create collaborative hybrid workplaces.**

Nowadays, every employee is also a consumer. People are used to lean solutions at their fingertips - and they expect the same level of experience in their work. **Without the essential tools to do their work from anywhere and at any time - the whole hybrid project is endangered,** as well as collaboration that needs to take place in it.

In the next section, you can find a list of solutions that provide a smooth collaboration experience in remote and hybrid environments.



Essential tools for hybrid collaboration

What tools should you use to improve your teams' collaboration in a hybrid work environment?

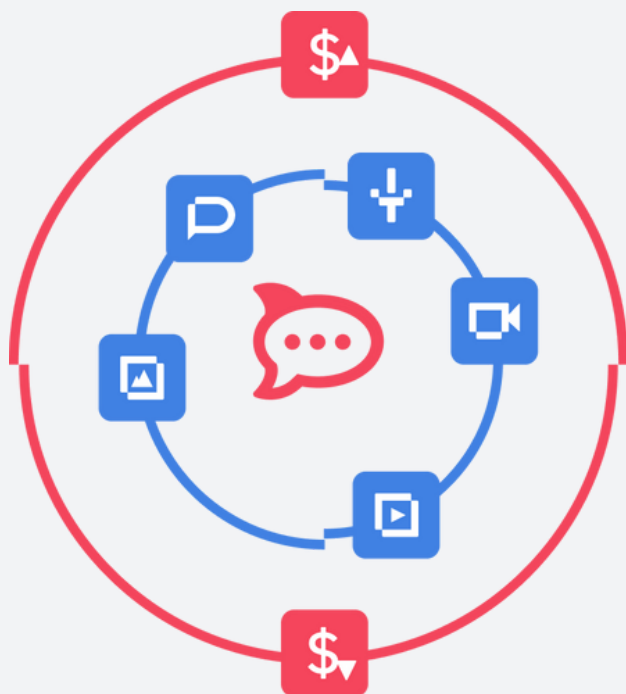


#1: Communication platform

Your go-to solution for seamless collaboration is a comprehensive communication and collaboration platform.

Platforms like **Rocket.Chat** enable workers to easily communicate to each other, to their teams, and to groups of people segregated into channels according to different topics.

Not only that - such an inclusive platform can interact with other apps employees use to avoid app fatigue. That way, you ensure smooth communication and collaboration between your teammates without a hassle.



#2: Project management tools

Teams often need project management tools to stay on the same page. Such solutions enable team members to check their tasks, see others' progress, and get a better understanding of the project status.

Tools like ClickUp or Asana are good examples of such software.

#3: Productivity aids

Both work from home and on-site come with a set of their own distractions. Colleagues interrupting to ask questions, noisy neighbours, smell of coffee in the distance.

However, **effective team collaboration depends on co-dependability**, meaning that everybody has to deliver their work on time.

This is why solutions such as Freedom - an app that blocks distracting websites and apps - or Pomodoro Timer - that helps you count down the time you work - can be great for individuals to stay focused and be more productive.

#4: Knowledge-sharing platforms

Knowledge bases and knowledge-sharing platforms are digital equivalents of the file cabinets and archives in the office. They are **prerequisites for successful online collaboration**, since they enable workers to access information they need to do their jobs.

In order to be most useful, these platforms need to be well organized and easily accessible, as well as searchable, such as Basecamp or Google Drive.

Looking for the right technology

What features should you look for in
your collaboration solutions?

Feature #1: Ease of use

25% of workers say that their company's technology hurts their productivity.¹⁷ Outdated tech tends to frustrate its users. When collaboration tools are easy to use, workers actually use them and don't resort to unauthorized solutions.

Feature #2: Scalability

An easily scalable collaboration solution will save a lot of IT departments' resources. Look for tech that allows for a global footprint and with which you can easily support employees around the world.

Feature #3: Flexibility

In order to achieve best results, you should be able to configure your solution based on specific company needs - such as creating a custom interface to match your organization's brand. Moreover, communication and collaboration solutions you use should support multiple communication mediums.

Feature #4: Accessibility

Workers often need to access their company's resources from multiple locations and devices. Think about mobile, laptop, and desktop accessibility with a consistent feel across devices.

Feature #5: Integrations

Usability research shows that most users rely on four or five main functions of an app. To avoid app fatigue, look for collaboration solutions that support integrations with frequently used and relevant apps.

Feature #6: High security standards

More and more organizations understand that on-premise solutions are not as archaic as believed. On-premise and open-source solutions provide unparalleled security for enterprises that want to ensure collaboration in hybrid environments.



Do's and don'ts of hybrid collaboration

Quick tips on communication and collaboration in hybrid environments for managers

Do's

Have structure

Have team meetings once or twice per week. Let it be a fixed time slot that everybody has to come prepared to, with a clear agenda.

Have 1 on 1s

Team dynamics rely on individual relationships, too. Try to arrange short one-on-one meetings with all your team members once per week or every other week.

Be open to feedback

Openly ask for feedback. Explain that it is useful to know what things can be improved so you can start working on them.

Dont's

Skip the meetings

Skip the team meetings if there's an emergency, but try to make every one of them to provide consistency.

Rely on group dynamics only

Some people are introverts and will express themselves better in private. Give everybody the opportunity to say what they think.

Be defensive

In case you receive constructive criticism, don't get defensive. Take a breather and think how you can improve your work in the future.

Have working hours

Work whenever you want if you can - but start and finish when you scheduled it. Otherwise, you risk burnout and poor work-life balance.

Talk about non-work stuff

Social interaction works wonders for improving work communication. Meet your coworkers and connect to them on a personal level.

Use multiple communication channels

Collaborate via video, calls, chat, email, and other collaborative tools. Diversify your communication to make it more interesting.

Make it ok to fail

Talk about your failures. Normalize it to have something go wrong - it is the reality we all face. By doing this, you'll create a safe working environment.

Provide meaning

When working on a project, explain why everybody's tasks are important. People need to know how their work fits into the larger picture.

Contact team members outside working hours

Don't pressure people into working overtime. Respect your deadlines and schedule meetings during work hours.

Procrastinate

Set aside time for non-work related topics with your colleagues, and don't leave tasks to be done at the last minute.

Overcommunicate

Quality over quantity! Estimate which information should be shared with whom to avoid overcrowding peoples' inboxes and holding too many meetings.

Provide constructive feedback only

In best functioning teams, workers get five times more praise than criticism. Recognize your colleagues' good work.

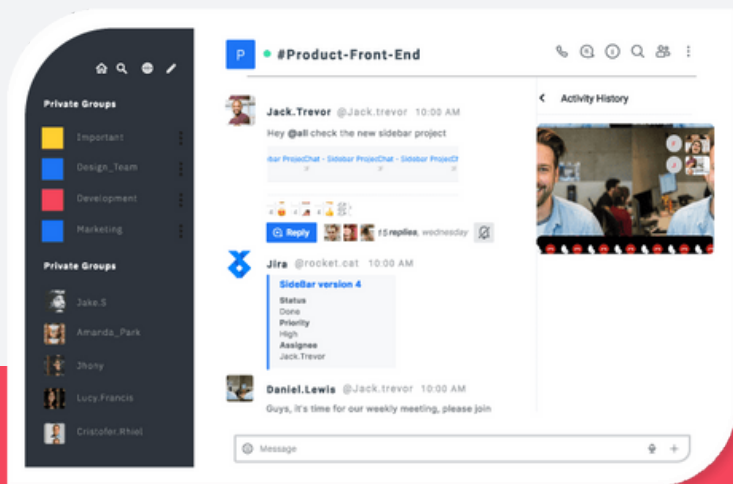
Just assign the tasks

Provide context. Everybody needs to know why they are doing something. Make sure everything you do is aligned with company goals.

About Rocket.Chat

*Bringing data protection into
every conversation*





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In a hybrid work environment, being able to collaborate in real-time while ensuring complete data privacy is a must!

Rocket.Chat is a communications platform that enables real-time conversations between colleagues, with other companies, and with your customers. It does everything other platforms do, **except exposing your data.**

Trusted by 12+ million users in over 150 countries, Rocket.Chat is the worlds' largest true open source communications platform fully customizable for your business.

Reduce operational costs, own your data and improve customer experience by bringing all communications under a single platform.

[Schedule a demo](#)

Sources

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