



Vibrant Conversations™

Unleash the Potential of Your Virtual Teams

Today's Virtual Team Challenges:

- Communications barriers
- Distractions and interruptions
- Language and cultural differences
- Establishing relationships and trust
- Lack of engagement
- Frustration with poor quality connections
- Too much multi-tasking
- Disjointed communications tools
- Time zone inconveniences
- Difficulty reaching people

“Teams are finding themselves mired in a maddening reality of fragmented and incomplete communications options – that are often disconnected from the way business is actually conducted.”

Today's team environment is broken, does this scenario sound familiar?

It's the weekly product launch team call. Ten people from six countries faithfully dial into the audio conference and pop open the web collaboration session so they can see slides.

Jane, the project lead is sitting at a conference table at their Boston office with two other colleagues, who are whispering a side conversation about another project. In the interest of expedience, she immediately begins talking thru a speakerphone that sits on the conference room table – but most on the call can barely hear her.

Late in Munich, Frank is distracted by colleagues circling their shared office, and battling to keep up with the English language, concerned that he may have misunderstood an important update. In Spain, Julio struggles to hear and view slides on his mobile phone from the airport.

Simone, the Chinese marketing manager is putting her son to bed and will have to

leave the call early. Michael the British PR manager rolls his eyes at the last minute changes – but no one sees. In Sao Paolo, Maria, a mild mannered web designer, is trying to make an important point, but can't get a word in edgewise. The marketing agency needs to be consulted immediately before deciding on the final launch event date, but Andy the key contact person is travelling and can't be reached. Jane gives up trying to reach him, to avoid delaying the meeting.

Frantically typing, Jane is trying to capture important feedback and comments from the team, while trying to keep everyone engaged and the meeting on track. Suddenly someone knocks and opens the conference room door and informs Jane and the others that the room has been reserved by someone else, and they must find another room.

What's wrong with this picture?

Why virtual teams aren't thriving

It's natural to assume that face-to-face meetings are always the ideal situation. Everyone in the same room at the same time – where the familiar presence of those you trust as teammates, and the nuances of body language, can be fully embraced.

But the reality is that the world is now mobile, global, distributed and virtual. Teams are spread out everywhere - at the coffee shop, branch office, the library, their home, visiting customers, at headquarters... sometimes all of the above in a single day! Travel is far less prevalent. Face-to-face just isn't always possible, nor does it always make sense.

According to a Harvard Business Review study of Project Management Best Practices in Global 500 Enterprises¹, face-to-face meetings and interaction in

the work place is declining rapidly – and instead many teams are working virtually.

Our recent global research study² shows that the vast majority of organizations rely on virtual teams in remote, distributed offices, but less than half of them find it as productive as face-to-face teamwork.

Virtual teams struggle with staying on top of all the communications and information that comes their way, while remaining in control of project tasks and activities. This problem compounds when they have too many tools available to communicate with, and when done over a variety of media and devices. A high percentage of distributed teams still use email, phone calls, and audio conferencing as their primary modes of communication – none of which are interconnected.

Yet the give and take of knowledge and information is so vital to successful team output

In fact, a study by MIT's Human Dynamics Laboratory³ suggests that the "vibrancy" of conversation is the most significant predictor of team success - more than all other factors combined.

Alex "Sandy" Pentland, professor at MIT and Director of the laboratory, created a simple device that hangs around someone's neck like a badge. It reads the way a team communicates without looking at the content of communication - tone of voice, body language, gesturing, and other exchanges amongst team members. Using the tracking devices, they compared patterns of communication relative to team success. The data confirmed consistently that the more robust the team's communication, the more likely that team was to be successful. "In fact, we've found patterns of communication to be the most important predictor of a team's success. Not only that, but they are as significant as all the other factors - individual intelligence, personality, skill, and the substance of discussions - combined."

Not only does vibrant communications point to team success. It's also a key indicator of company performance. A study by Towers Watson⁴ on communications ROI, found that companies that are highly effective communicators had 47 percent higher total returns to shareholders, compared

with firms that are the least effective communicators.

The question that naturally follows then is this: with all the communications tools we use today, why aren't we having more Vibrant Conversations™?

It's hard to expect teams to reach their full potential in an environment where communications are so disjointed. Where employees become easily overwhelmed, frustrated, and distracted and spend more time trying to communicate, rather than actually doing the communicating.⁵

Conversations amongst team members start to diminish or they don't happen naturally. People use email when they really should be having a phone conversation. Teams join web collaboration sessions and only one person does the collaborating. Frenzied workers find themselves calling every device because they want to reach someone immediately, or, conversely, not answering the phone because they don't want to be interrupted. Most teams just don't have established best practices on how or when to use these disconnected tools.

In this new reality, one thing is clear: today's virtual teams are struggling to reach their full potential.

How Virtual Are We?

According to a Harvard Business Review study of Project Management Best Practices in Global 500 Enterprises¹, face-to-face meetings are declining rapidly:

- Fewer than 4% of work teams ever meet physically as a whole
- Only 17% have individual team members meet in person
- 66% of teams include members from at least three time zones
- 48% of teams include external contractors, agencies, counsel, outsourcers and other third parties

“Vibrant Conversations™”

- A completely new approach that weaves together multichannel communications in a fluid, immersive manner, offering a more effective way to collaborate.
- A way to work much smarter, be better prepared and a way that helps you access and share the right information, with the right person, at the right time, and in the right way.

Activity Streams - A new way of looking at communications

A fluid, open, ongoing stream of information that lets you focus on the conversations and content that matters, and delivers crucial context when you need it most. All media and events including social discussions, voice, video, web, calendaring, mail, tasks, and notifications, are blended together into an intuitive activity stream, rather than a set of distinct and disparate communications tools.

Our approach – a better way to collaborate

We believe the tools you use for communicating should feel like second-nature, should learn from the way you work, and be self-aware and adapt to your prevailing situation and needs - automatically.

They should help stimulate your conversations by delivering contextually relevant information, intuitively and in real-time. The more stimulating the conversation - the more productive it becomes. They should also consider your

employees' needs - both personal and professional and enable them to stay abreast of the people and topics that matter most, and keep the conversation going, over virtually any communications channel. Using virtually any device.

And lastly, they should unlock the potential of knowledge-centric employees by offering an environment that enables fast and fluid communication, internally and externally - while ensuring accuracy, efficiency and security.

Now, imagine a world where...

- Information and knowledge flows across your teams in ways simply not possible before, delivering a richer user experience and further improving responsiveness and business agility.
- All the tools you use every day, including email, blogs, social media, community forums, and beyond, are blended together into an intuitive activity stream, rather than a set of distinct and disparate communications tools.
- Meetings are transformed into a seamless textual, voice, video & web sharing experience, with contextual information about meeting topics, previous meetings, or latest topic messages automatically available to everyone on the team.
- You can use free wifi, host meetings, share documents, see your colleagues' reactions and gestures, automatically receive meeting minutes, respond to social communities, and have immediate access to key resources and information - all while sitting in a coffee shop.
- Launching and participating in visual collaboration is deeply embedded into your tools, and as easy and natural as it is to place a phone call or send an instant message, creating more intimacy between you and the rest of your team.
- Knowledge doesn't remain locked in traditional email folders; instead it can be shared and searchable, even after an employee has left your team or your company, so you can leverage and maintain their legacy of contributions.
- You can just “say it” rather than write it down, enabling you to post video and voice status updates to the activity stream of a project, greatly increasing depth of information and sharing amongst teams, while saving you a lot of time.
- Transcription technology based on speech recognition and analytics, converts voice and video conferences to searchable and tagged text, auto-generating meeting minutes and actions, and allocating them to individual team members.
- You never have to work around the confines of conference room availability or meeting interruptions. Where everyone that's relevant has secure access to the meeting, can be seen from wherever they're working, and can arrive or leave when they need to. And the door can be “locked” as needed, easily adding or blocking new participants - always protecting information and confidentiality.

How to enable your teams to be highly effective communicators

With Vibrant Conversations™ you can re-create the immediacy and immersive nature of face-to-face teaming, but with far richer content and access to experts and information, through technology-enabled collaboration tools, plus a lot more.

You can break through the limitations of the conventional “walled” meeting room by fluidly including those who are mobile, off-site, in other countries or even continents - tapping the collective skills, knowledge, expertise and authority of the greater community.

What makes a conversation vibrant?

Here's what we mean...

Multichannel

Vibrant Conversations™ are expressive and reflect the richness of content inherent in modern multichannel, hyper-connected communications. Our research² shows that 90% of information workers reported weekly desk phone, email and calendar use; 50% reported mobile phone and IM/text use; and 33% reported social networks use.

Your teams communicate more naturally when they have easy access to the best suited media and simple yet powerful

Fluid

Vibrant Conversations™ lead to human interactions that deliver a fluid and rich dialog or conversation stream, include all media, and allow you to easily and intuitively add people and visual content to the discussion.

From a user experience perspective, this means that switching between all forms

Plus, teams thrive on relevant content and information. Through Vibrant Conversations™, contextual and visual/graphical information is seamlessly provided to enable easier information sharing, faster decision making and impromptu real-time collaboration.

With Vibrant Conversations™ you can enable your employees to be highly effective communicators, regardless of where they happen to be working - creating the level of energy, engagement, and exploration needed to have business interactions that thrive and improve your bottom line.

features. For example, you might start a conversation by sending an instant message, which escalates to a shared document, then to a phone call, which escalates from individual to group-based conversations, while enabling or disabling your video where appropriate.

Your conversations can stay small or go big, while providing the appropriate level of depth and control needed to complete the task.

of media and applications is seamless, intuitive, and instantaneous. This fluidity hides the technology behind the human dialogue creating conversations that are both efficient and productive, leading to greater team output and faster decision making.

Our global research study² shows:

- Only 13% of respondents strongly agree they have the technology they need to build trust and commitment without face-to-face meetings
- 75% believe that team members are more likely to be distracted during virtual meetings
- 55% agree it's difficult to keep everyone on their teams engaged and communicating freely
- 75% of respondents agree that it's easier to collaborate when you can see the others in the group
- Only 42% felt well trained in best practices of communication.

Siemens Enterprise Communications global research conducted September/October 2012. Sample size n=320, 95% confidence level within +/- 5.44% margin of error.

“People still make the intelligent business decisions and solve problems. Technology is the enabler.”

“It seems almost absurd that how we communicate is more important than what we communicate.” ⁴

“Today’s technologies have the potential to enable a very different level of business performance, but only when accompanied by a thoughtful redesign of the way your business is done.” ⁶

Immersive

Vibrant Conversations™ stimulate and inspire. Whether it is with video, audio, a shared document, or a person from your social network, you are surrounded by the experience, immersed into the conversation, while still having all the relevant information within your view and in a way that fits your work style.

Immersive means that your conversations are just as vivid and interactive as a face-to-face conversation, and often times even more so. Having all of the information and tools within your view enhances the quality of communication and decision-making, significantly beyond face-to-face meetings, where participants can’t readily access information or colleagues.

Visual

High definition video that can be launched with a click from any device brings Vibrant Conversations™ to life, and eliminates geographic separation between people. Our global research study² shows that 72% of survey respondents agree it’s easier to collaborate with colleagues in other places, when you can see them, however only 34% of people actually use video.

offices, making the technology hugely difficult to access.

With Vibrant Conversations™ video is so easy that it feels invisible, it can be augmented to any conversation, and be accessible to everyone from any device based on their “video availability”. Launching and participating in visual conversations is as seamless and intuitive as it is for voice and instant messaging communications. The ability to look at each other, anytime, from anywhere, leads to deeper bonds and trust, making team interactions more vibrant and personal.

Gone are the days of dreadfully difficult video, when the burden of use and low quality far outweighed its value to a conversation. And gone are the days where video resources were scantily deployed in a few conference rooms and executive

Contextual

Intelligent, context-driven and automated, Vibrant Conversations™ enable spontaneous access to crucial people and information, when you need it most.

within the context of the account and workflow, allowing a sales person to instantly reach out to a client, team member, or product specialist, for an instant message consultation or to bring them into an impromptu conversation to review a contract or discuss a proposal. This empowers teams to bring in collective intelligence - be it through people, social channels, data, or other media - accessible for all to see, ensuring the richest perspective on any topic, and making each conversation more meaningful and productive.

For example, to enrich the meeting experience, contextual information about a meeting topic, previous meetings, or latest topic messages is automatically available to meeting participants, providing teams a seamless textual, voice, video & web sharing experience accessible from wherever they are working.

Or to drive sales efficiencies, the availability of key people is displayed

Crystal Clear

Crystal clear means your virtual experience is indistinguishable from being face to face. It's critical that the quality of communication makes it seem like everyone is in the same room, with no lag or jitter, grainy video or crackling voices. The experience must connect you in the highest definition, crystal clear audio, web and video streams - nothing less.

Now let's take a look at that weekly product launch meeting...

It's the weekly product launch team call. Ten people from six countries faithfully access the "activity stream" where they can all clearly see each other, hear each other, exchange textual messages, and share documents via a high-definition audio, web and video stream, in real-time. All the relevant information from previous meetings and the latest topics are automatically visible to everyone on the team.

Jane, the project lead is sitting at a conference table at their Boston office with two other colleagues. In the interest of expedience, she immediately opens the activity stream and begins sharing the launch plan, while talking thru her softphone.

It's late in Germany. Frank is distracted by colleagues circling their shared office, so he temporarily disables his video, and through a touch screen gesture, seamlessly swipes the activity stream to his tablet, while he moves to a quieter space, without disrupting the conversation and without anyone ever noticing. In the morning when his mind is fresh, he'll replay the meeting transcript to make sure he's captured everything.

In Spain, from the airport, Julio provides input to Jane's plan via textual messages, and makes notes directly on to the plan, visible to everyone, eliminating the need to keep muting and un-muting his phone. Simone, the Chinese marketing manager updates her status profile and confidently

High Definition is no longer a "special condition", but instead the minimum standard. Users experience a stunningly high quality and truly immersive user experience, while your company's network bandwidth consumption is transparently optimized.

leaves the conversation while she puts her son to bed. When she returns, she replays the last 15 minutes of the conversation transcribed as text, in the background - ensuring she hasn't missed a critical point.

During the review, Jane can see that the British PR manager Michael is gesturing uncomfortably, and pauses to ask if he has any concerns he'd like to share with the team. Michael affirms with a nod and smiles, and his issue is discussed and resolved. In Sao Paolo, Maria, the mild mannered web designer, feels more comfortable sending a text chat to the team, rather than barging into the conversation. She has critical updates to the website design that require an immediate team review and decision. Jane takes notes and adds it to the activity stream.

Jane can see that Andy from the marketing agency, is free to talk even though he is travelling, so she drags his avatar into the audio/video stream, joining him into the conversation. They discuss the launch event dates and promptly reach a decision. Andy leaves the conversation and checks out of his hotel room.

After the meeting, actions and meeting minutes are auto-generated and allocated to each individual team member. Everyone on the team has access to the full meeting transcript containing everyone's written, verbal, and visual feedback.

This story speaks to the power of "Vibrant Conversations™".

Advantages of Vibrant Conversations™

- Easily bring in available, relevant expertise as needed, and only when needed
- Impromptu changes and issues can be addressed in real-time as they come up
- Meet from anywhere, with no travel
- Lowest possible cost in all circumstances, regardless of number of people
- The inevitable virtual text chat is less disruptive than whispered conversations
- Dynamic access and sharing of any relevant content as desired, and on any media or device
- Access to "crowd-sourcing" and social media for outside input and creativity
- Participants can arrive late or leave early with minimal, if any, disruption to the group
- Highly secure, approved-only participants, with no physical distractions

“Team dynamic and output are negatively impacted by people who are not actively engaged in the discussion at hand”.²

How vibrant are your conversations?

Most organizations today rely on virtual teams in remote, distributed offices, and yet the tangible business impact of these teams hasn't reached its full potential.

Virtual teams are struggling. The proliferation of disparate communications tools has created a complex, fragmented and overwhelming mess - in many cases hindering collaboration and productivity, rather than enabling it. All these factors are having a negative impact on team and business performance and your ability to successfully compete.

“Vibrant Conversations™” is our answer to amplify team efforts. It offers a dramatic shift to the way your teams interact today. How they find internal and external expertise, how they make decisions, and how they share ideas and observations more broadly.

Vibrant Conversations™ gives teams a unique advantage, enabling faster problem solving, better informed decisions, and more meaningful, successful outcomes. It breaks through the limitations of the conventional “walled” meeting room and creates the level of engagement teams need to energize relationships, amplify collective effort, and ultimately improve business performance.

So how do you make it happen? For Unify, it begins with bringing together your multiple networks, devices and applications onto a single platform.

Now your teams have a consistent, consumer-like experience across all their communications systems.

They can collaborate instantly, over virtually any communications channel. Using virtually any device. And Vibrant Conversations become a reality.

Footnotes:

- 1 Harvard Business Review study of Project Management Best Practices in Global 500 Enterprises
- 2 Siemens Enterprise Communications original global research, October 2012, n=320
- 3 The New Science of Building Great Teams, Harvard Business Review, April 2012
- 4 Capitalizing on Effective Communications, ROI Study, Towers Watson 2010
- 5 Recovering from Information Overload, McKinsey Quarterly, January 2011
- 6 Collaboration Will Drive the Next Wave of Productivity Gains, HBR blog, May 2012

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