

Building a big data collaboration center



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Telepresence, collaboration, and big data technologies are being combined to create a shared space for business insights, decisions.

Many of the world's greatest inventions were not entirely new. Rather, they were the result of existing creations being combined or utilized in new ways. Post-it notes, for example, became an everyday staple by combining paper with low-tack adhesive. And the smartphone megatrend is the result of several pre-existing technologies—phone, camera, email, Internet, and touch—being integrated in a single, handheld appliance.

This invention-by-combination concept is now being applied to big data.

“The problem with big data is that it is so very massive,” says Rachael McBrearty, chief creative for Cisco® Consulting Services. “The sheer amount of data is overwhelming, and it can be difficult to turn all of that raw information into a relatively small number of crucial, actionable insights.”

What's needed is a forum for bringing together all of this data so it can be shared, manipulated, tested, and queried—in a way that makes sense to both data scientists and business executives.

For this reason, Cisco has developed a big data collaboration center, also known as the Collaboration FlexSpace.

“Think of the ‘war rooms’ that have been used for countless military, political, and corporate campaigns, with maps, whiteboards, and

scraps of paper pinned all over the walls,” McBrearty says. “We've created the same thing, but with modern technologies and with big data and decision making in mind.”

A combination of existing technologies

While it's certainly on the bleeding edge of big data innovation, the Collaboration FlexSpace isn't entirely new. It does, however, combine existing technologies in new ways. The collaboration center brings together telepresence and collaboration solutions with a host of data capabilities, from data integration and analytics to visualization and modeling.

According to McBrearty, flexibility and simplicity are hallmarks of the Collaboration FlexSpace. The space can be physical, virtual, or a combination of the two. Teams can set up virtual instances of the space for their particular projects, and save them so they can be visited at any time. And bringing in content sources is easy, with the ability to drag and drop from a desktop application and share with everyone instantly.

“Access to data is just the first step,” says McBrearty. “To derive actionable intelligence, data needs to be shared, visualized, and examined in a synchronous fashion. That's when you start to see trends, gaps, and opportunities.”



Today, data is typically handled in a linear and siloed manner. Analytics are conducted, meetings are held, and findings are presented. But rarely do data scientists and business executives have the opportunity to combine all of their data sources on a virtual wall and explore them in a visual, collaborative way.

“Business decisions are still made largely on experience and gut feel,” McBrearty says. “In a Collaboration FlexSpace, you can test those gut feelings and find fact-based answers to a host of questions.”

Opportunities for retail, crisis management, everyday operations

While the idea of a big data collaboration center is still very new, the retail industry has been an early advocate and adopter.

One prominent retailer has implemented a pair of Collaboration FlexSpaces and uses them to unearth consumer insights, identify trends, and tweak its brick and mortar operations.

The retailer even used the room as a Black Friday control center, monitoring promotions, inventory, sales, and revenue—and making informed adjustments—in real time.

“The ability to follow events and business operations and respond immediately is a game changer,” says McBrearty. “Retailers can tap into point-of-sale, website, social media, and even sensor and video data streams. And the data can be analyzed and dissected based on geography, season, product line, promotion, or a specific store.”

Beyond retail, the Collaboration FlexSpace can be utilized for a variety of purposes. McBrearty says there has been interest in using it for crisis management to ensure a timely, coordinated, and well-educated response. CEOs have expressed a desire to utilize the Collaboration FlexSpace to meet with their top lieutenants and monitor the health of business operations. And the oil and gas industry may soon use the rooms to oversee remote, offshore rigs and tap into real-time data feeds to fine-tune drilling activities.

“The beauty of the Collaboration FlexSpace is its adaptability,” says McBrearty. “Any number of data sources can be pulled in, and the data can be analyzed and manipulated in countless ways. Even the room layout and the tools used within the room can be easily modified to suit a particular need or function.”

Create your own big data “war room”

Have lots of data but no way to combine, visualize, and capitalize on it? Build a Collaboration FlexSpace to monitor operations in real time, unearth business insights, and make better, more informed decisions.

Learn more by calling 1-800-553-6387, selecting option 1, and requesting an appointment with a Cisco Collaboration FlexSpace expert.

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