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Don't Suffer in Silos: Technology Breaks Down Walls

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Encourage cross-department collaboration with the right technology.

Large organizations have a tendency to suffer from silos, walls that silently build up between departments. These silos can lower employee productivity and work satisfaction. Technology offers options that can help break down those silos and encourage cross-department collaboration, even across time zones and geographic areas.

Technology Tools That Work

Ron Ashkenas, managing partner of Schaffer Consulting and author of [The Boundaryless Organization](#), has worked with multiple organizations that have successfully used technology to increase collaboration and employee productivity and satisfaction. These are some of the tools he suggests.

1. Virtual brainstorming boards. Also called idea jams, these asynchronous brainstorming tools allow employees in any location to share their ideas and be inspired by their colleagues—some researchers have even found that [online brainstorming can be more effective](#) than in-person sessions. These can be hosted using specialized tools that feel like a “social media approach to brainstorming” or as an interactive document shared on the organization intranet.

2. Shared home screens. IT staff can push out a shared opening screen to every employee when he or she logs into a workstation. While screens subsequent to the opening screen are customized to the employee locations, upon login everyone would see “the same home page image with the same key messages and key metrics so that no matter where you were in the world, you felt like you were part of the same company trying to accomplish the same things,” he says.

3. Live conferences. When information needs to be shared across an enterprise, prevent an organization-wide game of telephone by giving a live web conference rather than a memo to be shared by managers and functional leads. In addition to ensuring that the message stays consistent, allowing chat and questions helps build a relationship between senior leaders and employees across all offices. These can be presented live and recorded for people who are on vacation or otherwise unavailable at the time the session is offered.

Of course, even the best technology tools won't break down silos without human intervention. Technology must be well-managed and combined with coaching and a clearly communicated organizational goal to increase communication and collaboration. As Ashkenas says, incorporate “high-touch to go along with the high-tech.” [Tweet this!](#)

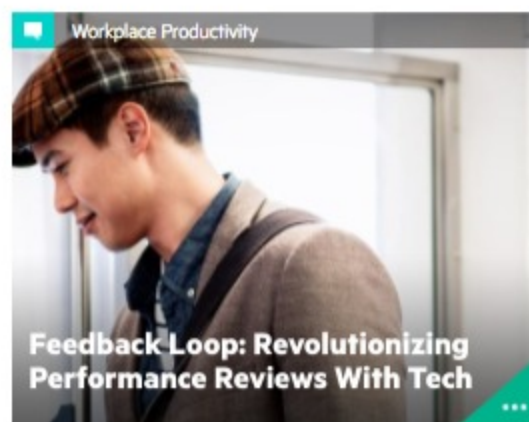
Tips to Improve Outcomes

Combine the suggested technology tools with in-person meetings when possible to increase camaraderie and build relationships. When crossing cultures, Ashkenas suggests being sensitive to time zones, holidays, and cultural norms throughout the organization so that employees aren't asked to attend web conferences or meetings at disadvantageous times. Ashkenas also offers one further way to use technology to increase collaboration and improve employee efficiency: by providing shared services throughout the enterprise. For example, a dedicated department could schedule appointments, complete secondary research, or even create presentations so that employees could focus on their own expertise.

Technology has opened up new ways to help employees work together, improving communication and productivity, no matter how large and widespread the organization is. The key is finding, deploying, and managing the right tools for the organization.

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