Jabra GN

Collaboration or just another meeting?

Perspectives on knowledge worker productivity

GN Making Life Sound Better

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Jabra Speak 710

Collaboration or just another meeting?

Organizations and employees are striving to achieve high levels of productivity – it is a sign of, and key factor in, business success. This booklet examines the challenges knowledge workers and organizations are facing in achieving productivity in the context of culture, work spaces, and technology.

In a bid to improve productivity, organizations have long been deploying new technology, adding collaboration or communication tools to improve communication between employees or with people external to the organization. Collaboration is the fuel that has propelled humankind since the dawn of time. It reflects our innate desire to face issues, solve prob-lems, and improve the world around us. It harnesses the power of many over that of the mere individual. It inspires us to introduce new technologies, achieve medical breakthroughs, improve living conditions in faraway places, and the list goes on.

Productive collaboration is as necessary and important today as ever. Yet, our ability to do it effectively has been replaced by the act of "booking yet another meeting."

Here is Jabra's perspective on a key work-mode to today's knowledge workers: Collaboration.

Collaboration – from the pyramids to the moon landing

Every time you return a call from a co-worker, discuss a project with a colleague, or conduct a teleconference, you're participating in an activity that has been moving civilization forward since the beginning of time. But what is collaboration really – and why is it now more important than ever?

Collaboration is one of those words that can be defined in many ways. In a business context, collaboration is the act of getting people together within an organization, either physically or virtually, to turn problems into solutions.

Vint Cerf, renowned as one of the "fathers of the Internet," explained in a recent interview, "Collaboration, in my view, is multiple people working on the same problem and exchanging ideas."

Collaboration represents all the interactions within an organization that enable people to resolve a specific business issue. In that way it is separated from other, slightly different models of collaboration, such as co-creation and open innovation, in which people work across organizations to accomplish a desired outcome.

Moving us forward
Collaboration is the fuel that has propelled humankind since the dawn of time. It reflects our innate desire to face issues, solve problems, and improve the world around us.

Of course, the way we collaborate is changing at a dizzying pace. Technology lets us break down geographical, temporal, and cultural barriers as never before. We can share information with anyone, anywhere, and in any form – text, voice, video, and more – instantly.

But…
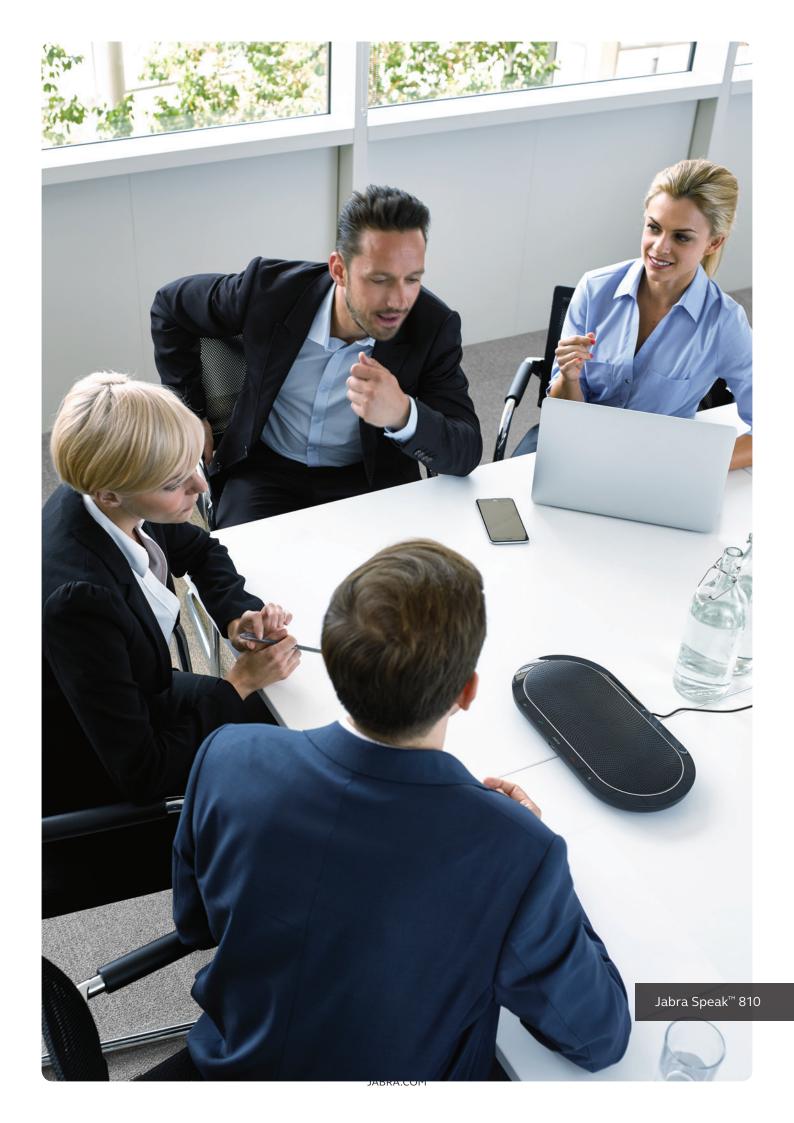
Are We Collaborating or Just Meeting?
Productive collaboration is as necessary and important today as ever. Yet it often seems that our ability to do it effectively has been replaced by the act of "booking yet another meeting." The truth is, we can collaborate so much better than we are currently.

> "Collaboration, in my view, is multiple people working on the same problem and exchanging ideas."
>
> – Vint Cerf

How? By not just deploying new tools and technologies but encouraging employees to embrace and use them to their full potential. By finding paths to more productive teamwork. By transforming mindless meetings and e-mail ping-pong into spirited, problem-solving sessions.

We should aim to harness the power of collaboration within the organization to solve problems and improve our world.

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Say goodbye to unproductive meetings!

Meetings are the corporate get-togethers we all love to hate. For every productive one, it seems there's at least one or more that are a complete waste of time. Here's how you can reduce the number of meetings you need to attend.

We've all been there: You agree to attend a meeting, even though its description is somewhat fuzzy. The meeting begins, but it soon becomes clear that it has no agenda and even less focus. It quickly veers off into topics unrelated to the vague description provided earlier.

We're wasting too much time and money
The management consulting firm Bain & Company found that 15% of an organization's collective time is spent in meetings, a number that has steadily increased since 2008. Senior executives spend more than 40% of their time – two full days a week – in meetings with three or more coworkers.

15% of an organization's collective time is spent in meetings...

And many meetings, Bain found, are often scheduled "just because."

All these meetings come with a staggering price. Companies in the U.S. alone waste more than $37 billion in salary costs related to unnecessary meetings, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

To help solve this, here are some things you can do to make sure your business meeting is productive.

Useless meetings costs companies more than **$37 billion** in the U.S. alone.

» **Think hard before you click the "Invite" button.**
Outlook makes it easy – maybe too easy – to send a meeting notice. Before you organize a meeting, ask yourself: Does this absolutely require a meeting? You may find that you can accomplish the goal by making a few phone calls or sending an IM or two.

» **Save "the more the merrier" for parties, not business meetings.**
If you do need to organize a meeting, ask: Which people absolutely need to attend? Invite only those whose presence is vital to resolving the issue at hand.

» **Tell people why they need to attend.**
In your meeting invitation, clearly explain why you're calling the meeting, why an attendee's presence is needed, and what you expect to accomplish. Invite attendees to opt out if they don't feel they can contribute in a meaningful way.

» **Sweat the details.**
Meetings don't run themselves. Conducting a good one means getting the details right: Have a clear meeting agenda. If reading is required, send the materials upfront. Keep the meeting focused and start and end on time. And if participants aren't paying full attention, demand that they do so.

Our time is too valuable to waste on unnecessary, unproductive business meetings.

The secret to productive collaboration

Forget the business books and management gurus. The answer may instead lie in the business practices of a 19th century industrialist, Andrew Carnegie: hire smart people with a variety of perspectives, turn them loose, and get out of the way

The "master minds" vs. the "usual suspects"
We often tackle a business problem by involving people that we know and are comfortable with. Instead of seeking out varying opinions and personalities, we bring in the "usual suspects." Sure, they may have some expertise in the matter at hand. But do they represent the best team possible?

In most cases, we involve people based on the strength of our social ties to them. If we know some-one well or have had a previous relationship, we have what sociologists call "strong social ties" – and are thus more likely to collaborate with them. If we don't know them well, we have "weak social ties" and are less likely to include them.

There's nothing wrong with inviting familiar colleagues to join in on the problem solving. But by focusing only on strong social ties, we miss out on the differing perspectives and critical expertise those with weak ties can offer. These insights could be the difference between a successful business idea and a failed one.

Creating a Better Collaborative Culture
So how do you foster productive collaboration with "master minds" and not just the "usual suspects"?

Here are a few suggestions:

> » **Identify the problem.**
> Take a hard look at the problem you need to address and determine the specific knowledge you will require to resolve it.
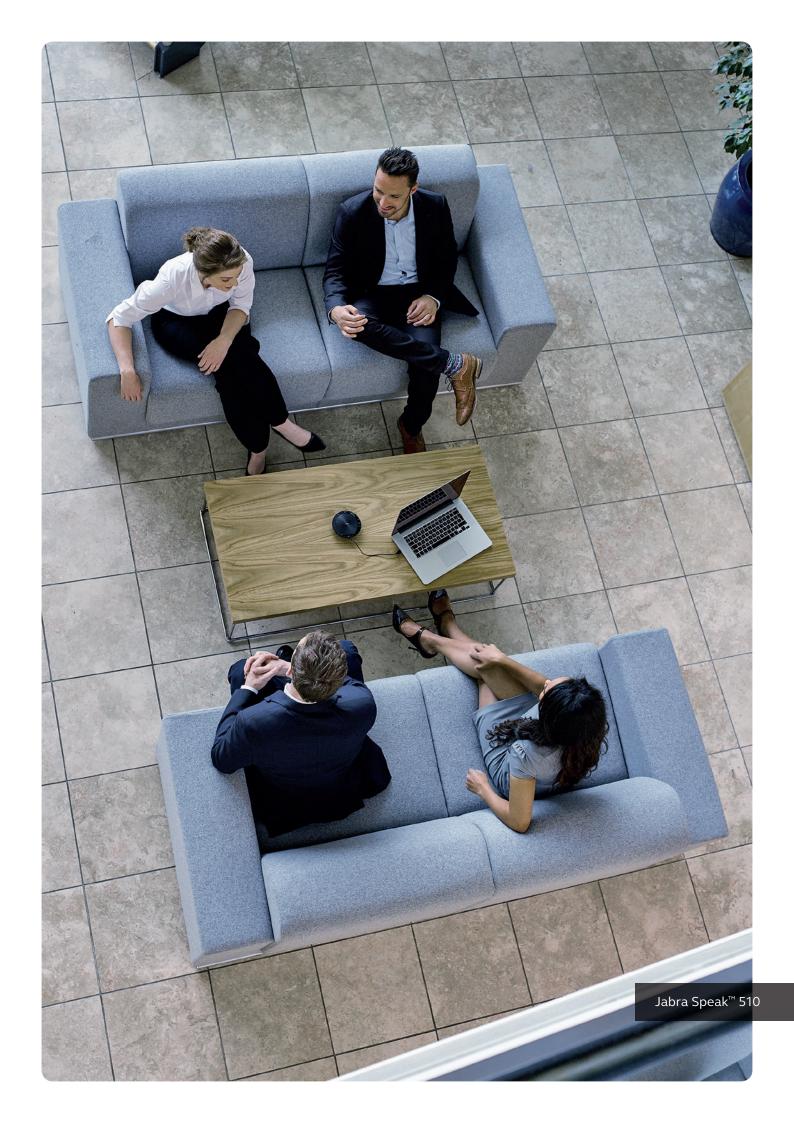
> » **Cast a wide net.**
> Based on your assessment, begin reaching out in your network to address the issue you've identified. Ignore job titles and instead focus on recruiting workers with the skills and competencies to solve problems. Strive for as wide an array of backgrounds, job responsibilities and tenure at the organization as possible.

> » **Get recommendations.**
> The previous suggestion raises an obvious issue: How to identify those weak ties who may nevertheless be critical to your team? The answer is to request recommendations from colleagues. Don't be afraid to ask, fx., "Can you recommend a marketing person with finance experience?"
>
> The next time you're put in charge of resolving a business problem, take a page from one of the wealthiest men in history. It probably won't make you a billionaire, but it could make you a hero around the office.

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Groupthink kills collaboration!

Some of the biggest blunders in history – both corporate and otherwise – can be attributed to the concept of groupthink. Along with new research on the topic come practical new tips for keeping it out of your decision making processes.

Bad decisions are often brought on by the concept of groupthink. That's what happens when otherwise intelligent individuals feel pressured to conform to the views expressed by influencers. Members hesitate to voice concerns for fear of being ridiculed, and, in the absence of dissent, assume all others approve of the decisions being made.

When you consider how many collaborative decisions a company makes every day, the potential for some, or many, to become infected with groupthink

is staggering. This could distort the depicted benefits of the collaborative movement!

New Research – and Reasons to Be Wary
So how do we avoid the scourge of groupthink in our collaborative decisions? In a book called Wiser: Getting Beyond Groupthink to Make Groups Smarter, professor Cass Sunstein of Harvard University provides a few insights:

» **Focus on the right things.**
Make certain that the team focuses on answering the right question. Before finalizing your decision, go back and review the original problem you tried to solve.

» **Don't speak; listen!**
Strong-willed opinion leaders are too often the cause of groupthink. During group discussions people should devote at least 80% of their time listening and observing and just 20% to speaking.

» **Encourage other perspectives.**
The group must adopt a mindset that strongly encourages team members to express a diversity of perspectives, especially principled dissent.

» **Don't rely on just "some" of the information.**
When gathering information to make a decision, be sure you consult all relevant sources and share all data collected with the group.
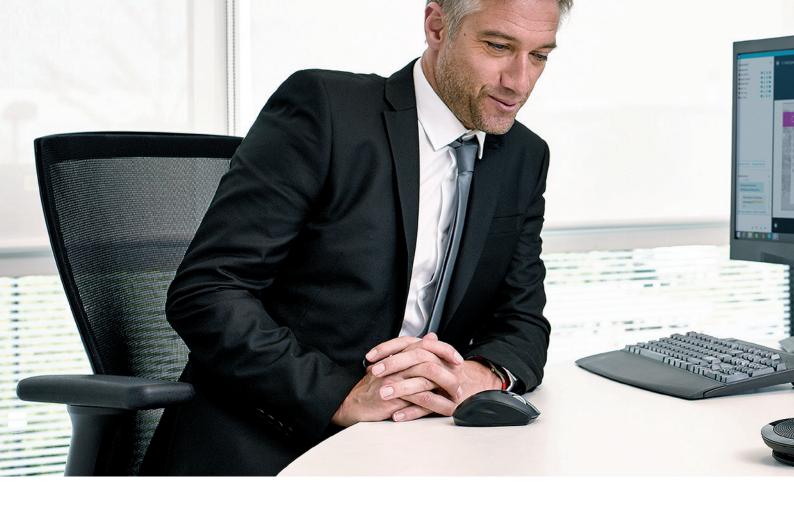
» **Divide tasks based on expertise.**
When dividing up duties, assign tasks to those best-qualified based on their knowledge, experience, and judgment.

» **Seek out disagreement.**
Use a "devil's advocate" approach when scrutinizing each option you're studying. When you've settled on one, appoint one or more team members or bring in an independent "red team" to challenge your decision.

Let's face it: Decisions made on group level are never easy. And they're even less so when it has been overtaken by groupthink. Knowing what groupthink is and how to avoid it can help us meet the potential of the collective and increase the productivity of collaboration.

"Got a minute?"

With all the great communication and collaboration tools in today's workplace, you'd think we could share knowledge and information more efficiently. Instead, our day is punctuated by untimely interruptions and requests for information from coworkers. It's time to take our time back.

"Got a minute?" Those may be the three most frightening words in the workplace today. Often, the number of interruptions and requests for information don't leave us enough time to do our jobs.

It would be easy to blame the technology for this, but that would be misguided. Some of the explanation lies in our current organizational structures. Flatter organizational charts that are meant to drive quicker decision making are pushing the need for alignment and coordination to all levels of the company. And when you toss in the "need-it-now" mindset that comes with having to make snap decisions, you have a recipe for inefficient collaboration.

Half of Your Workday…Gone!
This inefficiency comes at a steep cost. In one study, employees claimed that time lost to interruptions accounted for **40% to 60% of their day.** That's between 3 and 5 hours every day! Factor in the loss of momentum caused by the initial distraction, and the time needed to restart, and you're talking serious time and money. Interruptions also zap morale and damage job performance. In a recent Jabra survey,

> "Got a minute?" Those may be the **three most frightening** words in the workplace today.

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43% of workers cited that interruptions from colleagues are affecting their job performance negatively. Luckily, we can do some things to restore respect for others' "concentration time."

Begin Building a Truly Collaborative Culture
Building a truly collaborative culture begins with establishing trust among coworkers, recognizing that others' time is as valuable as our own, and taking responsibility for our actions.

Practice What You Preach
Another step on the path to a collaborative culture is easy: If you don't want people to interrupt you, don't interrupt them. Be respectful of "do not disturb" statuses or busy lights. With today's option to turn off email notifications, a polite message that says, "I can see you're busy, but I have a request. Please let me know when you have a few minutes to talk" goes a long way.

Block Off Some "Me Time."
Of course, a new culture won't spring up overnight. In the meantime, make a practice of carving out time to devote to important tasks that demand your energy

43% of workers cited that interruptions from colleagues are affecting their job performance negatively.

and attention. Set your presence status to "busy" or "do not disturb." In some cases, you may need to politely explain why you've done so and let would-be interrupters know how and when you will get back to them. Our jobs are stressful enough without the added burden of continual interruptions. Let's take a stand – and take back our time.

A look into the future of collaboration

We've spent plenty of time discussing collaboration in today's workplace. But how will workers collaborate in the years and decades ahead?

It's no secret that we as business professionals collaborate today in ways we never dreamed of just five or 10 years ago. But how might collaboration in the workplace look like in the years ahead?

Four Trends Shaping the Workplace of Tomorrow

Tomorrow's organizations will be transformed by several trends that are already changing today's:

40% of the so-called Millennial generation will work as freelancers before 2020.

» **The "consumerization" of IT.**
No longer beholden to corporate IT departments, employees are free to use their favorite devices at work, providing added flexibility in how they perform their jobs.

» **Decline of location.**
The combination of ubiquitous Internet access, secure wi-fi, and robust videoconferencing makes constant physical presence in the workplace unnecessary, freeing employees to work from anywhere.

» **Globalization of talent.**
No longer bound by physical location, organizations can cast a truly global net for outstanding employees. Similarly, workers enjoy infinitely more choices in prospective employers.

» **A growing freelance economy.**
Workers increasingly abandon the classic employer/employee relation-ship in favor of working when they want and for whom they want. Recent research suggests that 40% of the so-called Millennial generation will work as freelancers before 2020.

At Home in the Freelance Economy.

Knowledge will be the currency of the future, and sharing it quickly and effectively will be vital to company success. So workers will collaborate using only an almost-inconspicuous wearable device that enables them to easily connect with clients, co-workers, business partners, and others.

The new generation will scarcely remember what computer desktops, tablets, or smartphones even were. The future equivalent of documents, spread-sheets, and presentations will be projected into their eyeglasses or as a hologram they can see, manipulate, and collaborate on.

Fast-Moving Corporate Positions

Companies of the future will still need employees, and not everyone will embrace the freelance economy. In an era of increased globalization and even faster speed to market, individuals – not groups – will be the epicenter of value creation. There likely won't be any rigid departments; rather, a loose collection of knowledge workers will bid for projects of interest, perform their duties, and then move on to new challenges.

Sure, no one can accurately predict the future, and it's hard to tell how much of this will come true. We do know that the future will be a place where an ever-increasing need for knowledge and speed will meet the technologies and flexible corporate policies to make business success happen.

Productivity at the office

The time at work paradox
Many organizations have employees that are using non-productive ways of working, yet initiatives that improve productivity are too often achieving the opposite. New technology and office designs are introduced as a positive influence, but are instead detracting from productivity. The challenge is overcoming this paradox to achieve the 'flexible, productive and wise work' that is within reach.

Businesses need a better understanding of human behavior offering elements of autonomy on the individual level and transparency on the collective level, and an acute awareness of when communication methods or a way of working is not delivering the intended benefits.

> Who is responsible for productivity in the modern workplace?

Jabra's philosophy on 'New Ways of Working' is the idea of organizing work towards realizing people's full potential. Jabra wants to advocate for managers and employees alike to make a conscious choice of work-modes depending on task whether collaboration, concentration, conversation or communication:

- **Concentration** is about making good decisions by turning information into knowledge
- **Communication** is transference of knowledge independent of time and location
- **Collaboration** is the most powerful tool to turn complex problems into valuable solutions. Bring new knowledge into play with colleagues or business partners
- **Conversations** between two people, who genuinely listen to understand and talk to impact behaviour, is the most effective tool to elevate the value of human interactions

Organizations should continually ask themselves: Who is responsible for productivity in the modern workplace? How do we enable better productivity in the modern workplace? How do we measure the impact of better productivity?

Join the "New Ways of Working" Initiative
Jabra's New Ways of Working initiative is a joint initiative that involves everybody who is struggling with changes in how we work, how we organise work and how we motivate employees and colleagues to be part of the journey. It advocates a reflection on how to best design work for improving the four Cs; concentration, conversation, communication and collaboration, and in turn becoming more innovative, productive, and successful.
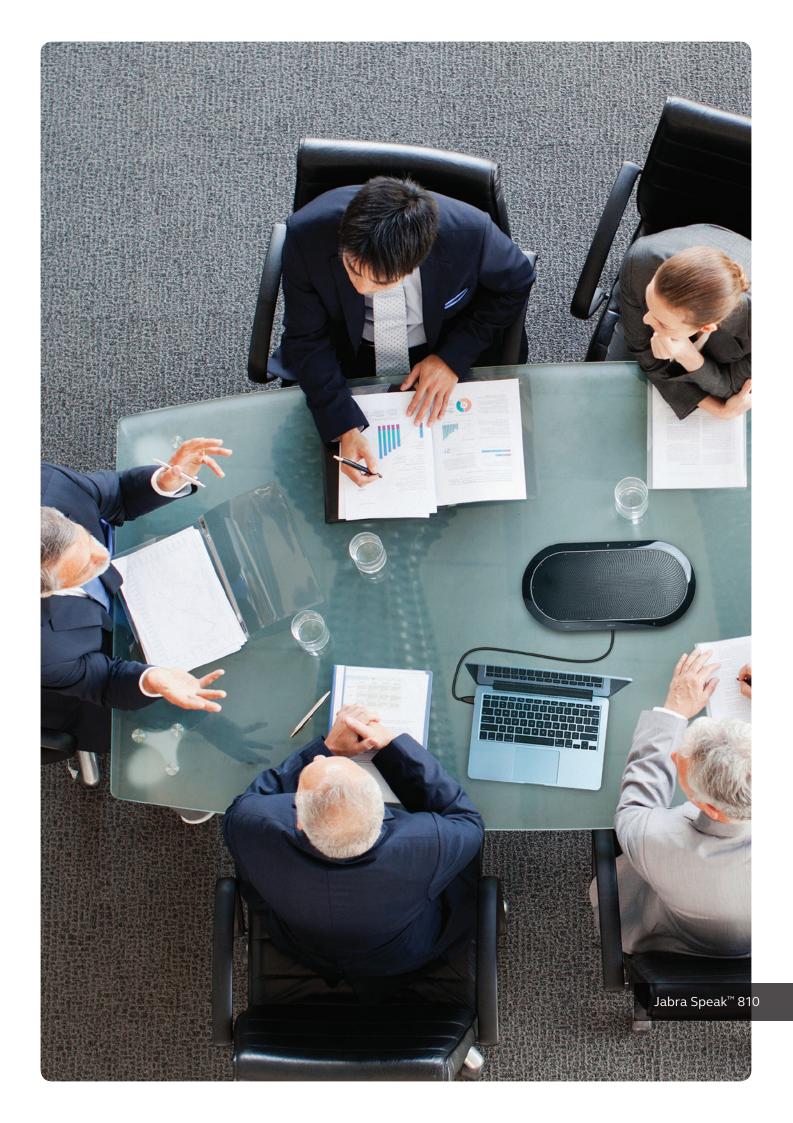
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How Jabra meets the challenges
A lot of issues with today's working environment are about two common factors: sound and technology, as this research also shows. At Jabra we work specifically with audio and unified communications solutions that improve the modern work space and enable individuals to hear more, do more, and be more. The modern challenges are reflected in the products that we take to market.

If you are interested in learning more, please go to: jabra.com/speak or jabra.com/office

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