Executive Summary

- At its Collaboration Summit, Cisco announced a plethora of new and improved collaboration products. For the first time, Cisco entered the hosted email and enterprise social software markets.
- Cisco’s new offerings receive good grades against the 7 Pillars and 4 Foundations models for assessing collaboration technology for teams and organizations.
- The announcements and intended directions, along with Cisco’s market presence, have the potential to make Cisco into a major collaboration player.
- Challenges remain for Cisco, especially in proving that it can execute on its ideas for enhanced collaboration, and in upgrading the capabilities of its business partners.
- Organizations evaluating new collaboration technology should add Cisco’s current and announced capabilities to its evaluation set.

Cisco on Collaboration

Cisco hosted a major strategy conference in California during the second week of November 2009. At its “Collaboration Summit”, Cisco unveiled an enhanced scope of product and service capabilities in the collaboration arena, encompassing a variety of product enhancements along with new product announcements. In sum, these announcements hold the potential to elevate Cisco to being a major player in the enterprise collaboration technology space.

What Was Announced

Cisco announced a plethora of enhanced and new collaboration technology offerings:

- **Cisco WebEx Mail.** Cisco announced its entry into the hosted email services market, with WebEx Mail. The upcoming service offers full native support for Microsoft Outlook, including email, tasks, calendaring, and notes.
- **Cisco Pulse.** A collaboration auto-discovery engine for tracking what people are working on, interested in, and sharing with other people. Pulse assigns key words (tags) to
enterprise content, and makes it searchable and discoverable by other people. Pulse is able to examine video files within the enterprise, and index these for easy access, as well as email traffic.

- **Cisco Unified Presence.** An enterprise presence server, in an appliance form factor. Supports federation and integration with other enterprise presence and instant messaging platforms, through both XMPP and SIP/SIMPLE standards support. This offering is based on the Jabber acquisition. Supports integration of presence capabilities into business and web applications.

- **Cisco Enterprise Collaboration Platform ("ECP").** A collaboration platform for enterprise customers, offering team spaces, community forums, people profiles, a corporate people directory, and other social networking tools (e.g., a wiki). Due to Cisco's current strengths in voice and video communications, these are fully integrated, as you would expect. Available in limited beta.

- **Cisco Show and Share.** An on-premises system for recording video clips and publishing them for other people to review, tag, and share. Show and Share can be used for many purposes, such as training, briefings, news announcements, and more.

- **Cisco Unified Communications 8.** An update to Cisco's unified communications platform, with new federated presence capabilities, enhanced mobile device support, and more. Version 8 supports a variety of deployment models, including a hybrid on-premise and cloud option.

- **Cisco Intercompany Media Engine.** New network infrastructure to support streamlined cross-enterprise collaboration. The system enables business partners, suppliers and customers—all external entities—to become a virtual part of the enterprise network. For example, customers can be assigned short dialing codes for telephony service.

- **Cisco TelePresence Directory.** A directory of organizations and places where Cisco TelePresence equipment is deployed, to create opportunities for TelePresence-based interaction between people. Cisco is hosting the directory. While the directory will not solve the problem of cross-enterprise TelePresence connectivity, it's a good step in the right direction.

The Intercompany Media Engine and TelePresence Directory are good examples of where Cisco is attacking the technical and human problems of enhanced collaboration in parallel. The Intercompany Media Engine overcomes traditional technical problems around moving beyond email for cross-enterprise collaboration, and the Directory acts as a signal to people about who has enhanced collaboration capabilities available. One reason why we all keep reverting to email is that it's ubiquitous—it works across organizations, due to standardized protocol support. In developing the IME, Cisco is laying an architectural foundation to support enhanced forms of collaboration between organizations.

### 7 Pillars and 4 Foundations

Collaboration technology offered by vendors can be analyzed through a number of frameworks, thus helping organizations make informed decisions about what vendors have on offer. The 7 Pillars framework is used when analyzing technology for team collaboration, and the 4 Foundations framework is used when analyzing technology for organizational collaboration.

From the perspective of the 7 Pillars framework, Cisco earns the following high-level grades:

- **Pillar 1 (shared access to team data) ... PASS, due to support for team spaces in the forthcoming Enterprise Collaboration Platform.**
• **Pillar 2 (location independence)** … UNKNOWN.Securing a pass requires mobile device support in the Enterprise Collaboration Platform, and ideally for offline support to team space data when there is no network connection.

• **Pillar 3 (joint editing and review)** … PASS, through Cisco WebEx and Cisco MeetingPlace web conferencing.

• **Pillar 4 (team-aware calendaring)** … UNKNOWN. Achieving a pass would require integration between calendars in ECP team spaces and the user’s calendar in Cisco WebEx Mail. It’s unlikely that Cisco will deliver this in the first iteration; it isn’t even a member of CalConnect (www.calconnect.org), so calendaring integration appears to be low on its radar.

• **Pillar 5 (social engagement)** … PASS, through Unified Presence for presence and instant messaging, videos in Show and Share, and perhaps the auto-discovery and announcement capabilities in Cisco Pulse.

• **Pillar 6 (team action management)** … UNKNOWN. As with calendaring in Pillar 4, this would require integration between tasks in ECP team spaces and tasks in the user’s task list in Cisco WebEx Mail.

• **Pillar 7 (collaboration auto-discovery)** … PASS, through Cisco Pulse.

With some information not yet disclosed or available resulting in three “unknowns”, four passes on the other aspects is a good showing.

When considering organizational collaboration, Cisco earns the following high-level grades in the 4 Foundations framework:

• **Foundation 1 (summarized expertise)** … PASS, through Cisco Pulse. Pulse will automatically add expertise identifiers to a person’s profile in Cisco ECP.

• **Foundation 2 (correlated knowledge)** … PASS, through Cisco Pulse, which will be able to link items with similar items through its automated tagging and classification engine.

• **Foundation 3 (signaled activity)** … UNKNOWN, but it may be covered through Cisco Pulse or Cisco ECP, depending on the implementation.

• **Foundation 4 (expressed interests)** … PASS, through profiles in Cisco ECP and linkage powered by Cisco Pulse.

As with the 7 Pillars analysis, three out of four is a good showing based on initial information.

**Impact Analysis for Cisco**

Our analysis of the impact of Cisco’s announcements at the Collaboration Summit is as follows:

• **From Surrounding to Core.** Cisco has announced its intended transformation from a provider of surrounding infrastructure and applications, to a provider of core infrastructure and applications for enterprise collaboration. WebEx Mail, Enterprise Collaboration Platform, and Pulse bring it directly into the core arena for collaboration technology. This is the core because these represent the type of collaboration applications that form the core of current knowledge work.

• **Take Your Seat.** Cisco’s announcements earn Cisco the right to take a seat at the enterprise collaboration table. While some of the new products and services remain as announcements or limited betas, and therefore the full execution of the ideas cannot be
examined, the ideas themselves are available for debate and discussion. If Cisco is able to pull off what it has announced, they will become a major force in the collaboration space.

- **From Email Into the Future.** The WebEx Mail announcement is interesting, but not because of the product it represents. Email is a commodity service, and so it’s a boring announcement on its own. Rather, it is what the announcement signals that makes it interesting: that Cisco can take an organization from the dominant form of communication, interaction and collaboration today, and help it with its collaboration transformation. For example, users will be able to migrate an email discussion thread out of WebEx Mail and into Cisco ECP. Users are thus supported through the migration from what they know today (along with its associated pains and frustrations for collaborative work) into a new and enhanced future.

- **Brand Recognition.** Cisco already has brand recognition in the market, with full spectrum coverage. Enterprise organizations know about Cisco, due to network infrastructure. And this ranges down to the retail channel too, with Cisco-branded network infrastructure available for sale. Cisco also has brand name recognition through WebEx, its web conferencing services bureau. Anyone who has attended a web conference over the past year has most likely been exposed to the WebEx or Live Meeting brand.

- **Strong Decision Factor Ratings.** When an organization is evaluating vendors for collaboration technology, product capabilities are only one part of the decision matrix. It is usually the other non-product decision factors that result in vendor elimination from the final decision, such as vendor financial stability, the existence of a business partner network to support organizations, and the scope and scale of the collaboration offerings. As an established vendor, Cisco ranks highly on each of these decision factors.

## Challenges for Cisco

Cisco faces two major challenges in shifting beyond the announcements made at its Collaboration Summit. Cisco must address the first challenge before it earns the right to address the second challenge, but it’s the second challenge that will take longer and be more critical to Cisco’s long run position in the collaboration technology arena.

### From Ideation to Execution

Cisco has to prove that it can deliver the beyond email for collaboration experiences that it has demonstrated and announced. WebEx Mail is highly likely to work and work well, given that it is (a) based on acquired technology that already had a proven track record, and (b) through WebEx, Cisco knows how to deliver and support a global infrastructure for mission-critical collaborative applications. The jury is out on the Enterprise Collaboration Platform and Pulse, but of the two, Pulse is both the more interesting and the more daunting. If it gets Pulse right—at the high-level of collaboration auto-discovery across a heterogeneous collection of source systems, along with effective privacy and confidential controls, and at a low-level of nuanced topics such as opt-out settings—Cisco will score a major coup.

### Lifting Partner Capability

Most Cisco partners know how to sell technology, not enhanced business performance through collaboration. A major upgrade of partner capability will be required to translate Cisco’s
collaboration technology into customer wins against entrenched and upcoming competitors. This will require an investment by Cisco of significant money into partner training and support so that partners can sell the concept and business value of collaboration, along with reasons for why Cisco deserves a place at the table. The outstanding question is how well the partner channel will be able to step up from selling Cisco network gear, and instead sell concepts.

It is not a totally bleak picture, however. There is some evidence that Cisco’s partners will be able to make the transition. For example, Cisco has been offering other collaboration technology for a number of years—WebEx and MeetingPlace for web conferencing, TelePresence for video meetings, and unified communications for enterprise telephony services. These have involved the participation of business partners, and those that have already begun the collaboration journey will find this next step a lot easier.

The new announcements from Cisco will lead to some serious soul searching among partners that have previously committed to both Cisco (for network infrastructure) and Microsoft (for collaboration infrastructure). Partners will need to decide whether to create a new Cisco-focused collaboration practice in parallel to their existing Microsoft practices, or whether to specialize in one or the other.

Impact Analysis for End User Organizations

Cisco’s new product announcements, in combination with its exemplary ratings on the other decision factors, means that end user organizations that are re-evaluating their collaboration strategy should investigate what Cisco has to offer. The biggest challenge that end user organizations will have to overcome, however, is the lack of real-world experiences and guidance on the Cisco platform on the topics of effective use and effective governance. End user organizations that quickly embrace Cisco’s offerings will need to do so with full realization that they are early adopters, and that in blazing the trail will most likely make some false starts and bad human factors and governance decisions. Organizations that do not want to accept this risk should wait for a few years before looking into Cisco’s offerings more seriously, by which time a body of experience and practice will have been developed.

Impact Analysis for Competitors

Cisco’s announcements have the following effects on competitors:

- **Microsoft** ... WebEx Mail is a direct threat to the replacement business for Microsoft Exchange Server. The forthcoming ECP and Pulse offerings will threaten the collaboration-oriented capabilities in SharePoint. Both SharePoint 2007 and 2010 are much more than collaboration though—enterprise search, content management, business processes, and business intelligence—so organizations will not have a clear cut competitive knock out.

- **IBM Lotus** ... WebEx Mail offers no native support for Lotus Notes, so no great threat on that front for IBM Lotus. However, the combination of Pulse, Show and Share, and ECP offer a significant competitive threat to Lotus Connections.

- **Enterprise 2.0 Vendors** ... As a large player entering the enterprise 2.0 market, Cisco is a significant competitive threat to enterprise 2.0 vendors. Cisco has a current support channel (that it must up skill, but that’s easier than creating from scratch), worldwide name recognition, and strong financials.
• **Hosted Collaboration Service Providers** … Cisco’s IME potentially threatens the business model of some hosted collaboration service providers. For example, if the provider focuses on enabling cross-enterprise collaboration because internal systems cannot be accessed from outside the firewall, Cisco IME holds the potential to cause some disruption in this space.

The impact on Microsoft deserves a few more words. Microsoft is a clear target from many of Cisco’s announcements. WebEx Mail supports direct native integration with Outlook 2003, 2007 and 2010, through high fidelity MAPI protocol support. This support is a legacy of the PostPath technology, rather than new technology that Cisco has developed internally. This means that it is theoretically possible to replace Exchange Server with Cisco WebEx Mail, while giving organizations (a) fast migration from in-house to outsourced infrastructure, (b) larger mailboxes for end users, and (c) zero negative user impact. The user experience remains unchanged, apart from users getting a larger mailbox.

**Summary**

In summary:

• Cisco’s announcements and new releases significantly elevate Cisco’s competitive position in the collaboration technology markets.

• Cisco must resolve two outstanding challenges, if it is to capitalize on initial momentum and win customers away from incumbent vendors.

• Organizations re-evaluating their collaboration strategy should consider the latest offerings from Cisco, but realize that a quick embrace of Cisco carries with it some business risks.

**For More Information**

To schedule a private briefing for more information on Cisco’s collaboration strategy and your response to it, please contact Michael Sampson:

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**About Michael Sampson**

Michael Sampson is a Collaboration Strategist focused on improving the performance of distributed teams. He offers independent advisory services to end-user organizations on collaboration strategies. Learn more at www.michaelsampson.net