

# Bridging the Gap Between Engineering, Product, and other Business Units

# Introduction

In many companies, there's often not just a communication gap, but a gaping chasm, between engineering and everyone else in the business. That has a massive impact throughout the company: [A study from SIS International Research](#) found that the average employee spends nearly 40% of their time clarifying poor communications and following up on requests for information. In a company of 100 people, that could translate into productivity losses worth \$530,000 per year.

So what can we do to address this gap and give our employees the tools and framework to proactively collaborate and openly communicate? This ebook will help showcase why these communication problems occur, and offer strategies that your team can use to solve them and get the whole organization to speak the same language.

# Why does the gap occur?

Often, it can feel like technical teams are speaking another language that other teams don't understand. They know specialized programming languages and terminology that may not translate well to departments like product, finance, sales or marketing. They may communicate well internally, but have difficulty translating that knowledge into formats that other teams can easily digest.

**Consider whether any of these problems impact your company's ability to communicate:**

- **Business units don't talk to each other**

Often, individual business units exist in siloes, and don't often communicate about recent updates to their strategy or roadblocks that are stopping them from meeting certain goals. When that's the case, other units may be left in the dark about important initiatives that can impact their own business objectives.

- **Teams don't have the time to share updates as they happen**

Some businesses plan regular cross-team meetings, but even so, a lot of crucial information can slip through the cracks. Developers often become aware of bugs or roadblocks mid-way through the development cycle and don't have the time to provide regular updates to outside teams. As a result, your other business units may be left in the dark about updates that could have a big impact on expected features or time frames for delivery.

**Other business units don't have the subject-matter expertise to**

- **understand the issues**

Sometimes, your development team may provide an update, but the message may not be clear if employees on other teams lack the subject-matter expertise to understand its relevance, and none of the developers have the time to clearly explain the situation.

**Middlemen are muddling the message**

- In some cases, a point person may be responsible for summarizing the engineering team's latest updates and relaying the information to other team leaders. But what if the point person doesn't grasp the nuances of the information in the first place, or they get lost in translation as they're passed down from team member to team member?

**A deluge of too much information**

- In some cases, the problem isn't getting enough information, but receiving too much information, with no way to prioritize or determine what's actually relevant. Other teams may find themselves getting bogged down in the details without understanding the big picture, leading to lack of clarity around what the goals are.

**Cross-team collaboration doesn't always go smoothly, and when it fails, | there can be unforeseen consequences.**

# What problems does it cause?

When there's not clear communication from engineering to the product, sales, marketing, customer service, and other customer-facing teams, things can fall apart quickly. A well-run, efficient organization relies on consistent information and knowledge sharing across all departments; information gaps and miscommunications can muddy the waters and lead to numerous problems.

**Here are a few common pitfalls when communications between teams aren't clear:**

- **Difficulty planning and executing strategic initiatives**

When the product development roadmap isn't clear or keeps changing, it becomes difficult for other teams to build out their own strategic initiatives as well. For instance, your mobile team had anticipated adding a new product integration in Q2—but this requires a change to another team's API to execute. If the other team hasn't prioritized this or isn't aware of its importance, the issue can sit in the ticket queue for weeks or months, delaying the rollout.

- **Problems with meeting SLAs for customers**

If one team is managing a service-level agreement (SLA) for a big customer, they may have issues come up that could require additional engineering work from other teams to manage integrations or customize features. If the teams haven't communicated well, there may be delays that mean the customer's not receiving the agreed-upon services on time.

- **Customer service pitfalls**

Is there a bug in the new integration with a certain software tool? If your engineering team hasn't addressed it with your customer service team and given them details on when a fix will be available, they'll be stuck without any script to use to reassure angry or confused customers. Failure to keep your customer-facing teams up to date on bugs, feature delays, or updates to the product roadmap mean that your customer service teams don't have the tools they need to do their job properly.

- **Lost productivity when looking for information**

When employees don't have quick access to the information they need, it can seriously impact company productivity. Employees can spend hours each week trying to track down the proper contact for a piece of information they need, and subject-matter experts who have the right information may be pulled out of their work and asked to repeat the same information over and over. A study from UC Irvine found that it takes the average information worker 23 minutes to regain concentration after being distracted from a task.

- **A general disconnect throughout the organization**

Failure to properly communicate information from engineering to other departments can result in a general sense of disengagement among employees. When team members aren't being kept up to date on important news, they feel that they aren't being valued as true collaborators. This may lead to lower engagement and lower retention.

**These are big problems—but with a good strategy and the right processes in place, your organization can get on the same page and learn how to talk to each other.**



# How do we bridge the communication gap?

The key to better communication across the enterprise doesn't always mean more communication—the focus is on delivering the right information in the right format, and ensuring that it's available to all team members at all times. When technical knowledge needs to be dispersed to a variety of different teams, you need to make sure that each team is getting the information in the right format and context for them. And when employees need to request information, they should be able to access it without having to keep knocking on doors waiting to be routed to a specific subject-matter expert.

**Here are a few strategies to put in place to help close the communication gap between your business units:**

- **Hold weekly cross-functional meetings**

Rather than holding cross-team meetings only when there are important announcements to share, schedule in weekly “stand up” meetings with stakeholders from different business units, in which they each can share what they're currently working on, discuss upcoming goals, any roadblocks in their way, and ask questions of the other team members. Record the meeting so that each team can view it later, and appoint a representative to take notes in a running agenda document throughout the meeting, including tagging relevant stakeholders in projects under discussion. The meeting notes and recordings can be shared in a centralized archive.

- Consider making these asynchronous when you can. Stakeholders add their updates in a single location where everyone can see the details and ask questions or get clarification. It solves the problem of meeting fatigue, organically captures the decisions and progress, and brings people to come to the project later up to speed quickly.

- **Build out common use cases**

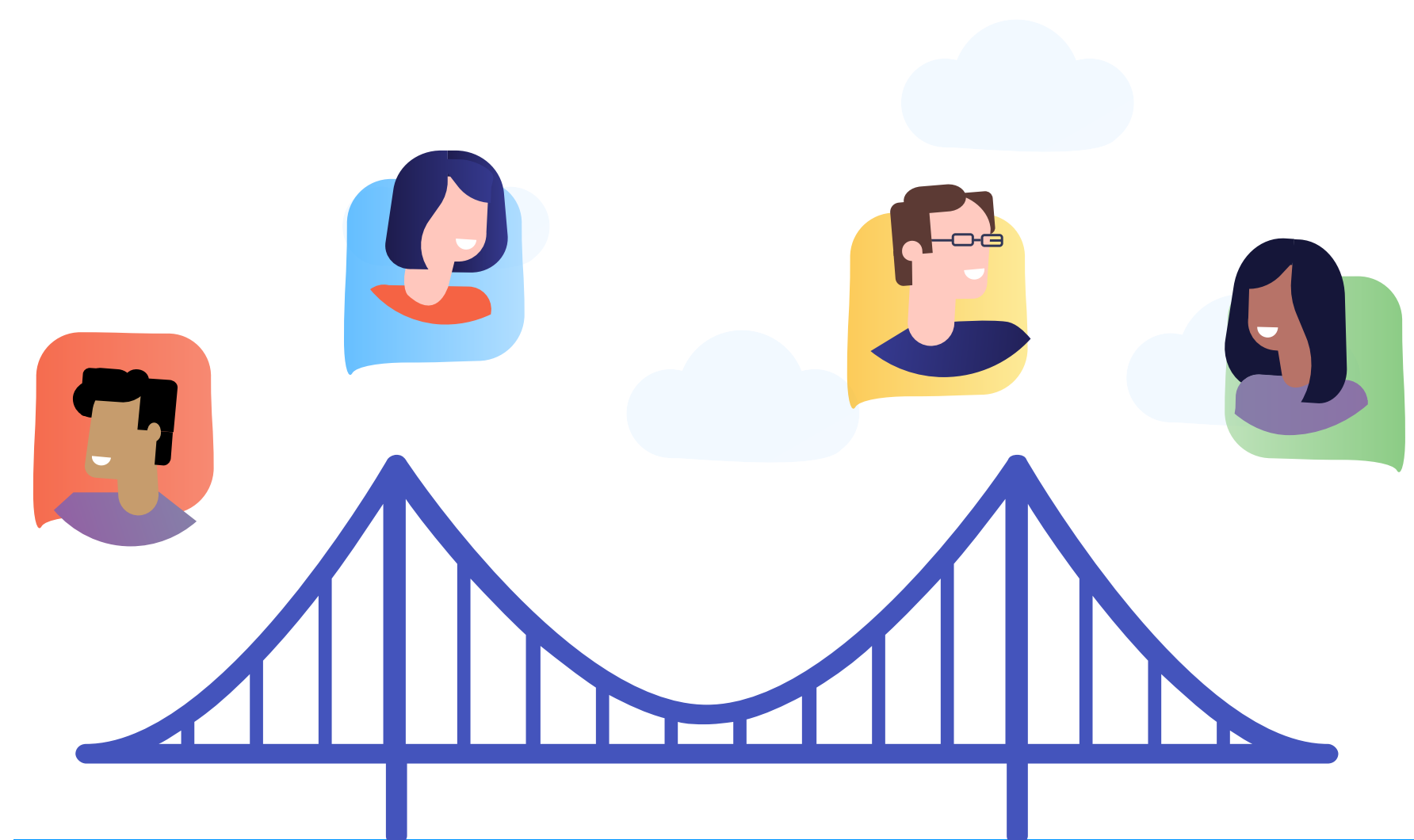
Each team has its own innate understanding of challenges that might come up around the product and how it's used. Encourage team members from each business unit to share their commonly-asked questions or common issues that might arise, and then get them to collaborate on building out each use case with members of the engineering team. These resources can be shared widely and easily accessible for whenever they're needed.

- **Make documentation easy to find**

Keep all technical documentation, FAQs, and other useful resources in a centralized repository that's searchable and tagged by technology used and other relevant keywords. Make sure the documentation includes versioning so that any team member can see the most recent updates made to the documents and track what's changed.

- **Use a knowledge sharing and collaboration platform to enable seamless cross-team collaboration and discussion**

Encouraging teams from all departments to participate in a knowledge sharing platform can make it easy for everyone to participate in asynchronous cross-team collaboration and discussion. We know that digital collaboration is all everyone is talking about right now. What tool will solve the problem of keeping people connected, engaged, and productive? And you may be focused on keeping your teams collaborating real-time (synchronously) via whiteboards, in chat, in meetings, over email. The downside of all this synchronous collaboration is that everything is fast, fleeting, and silo'd - if you miss the moment, you miss out. When collaboration is based on who is available at the time, knowledge is shared or retained by a small group and hidden from others. You need a solution that's not reliant on people's in-the-moment availability. You need a platform built for asynchronous work.



# About Stack Overflow for Teams

The future of enterprise asynchronous collaboration,  
from a company that's perfected it over 12 years

Stack Overflow revolutionized large scale asynchronous collaboration and knowledge sharing 12 years ago and Stack Overflow for Teams is doing the same for asynchronous collaboration and knowledge sharing within companies every single day.

Companies use Stack Overflow for Teams to enable their developers and technologists to easily turn to their own teammates - asynchronously collaborating and sharing knowledge on the systems and technology specific to their company.



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