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TRANSFORMATIONAL GROWTH LEADERSHIP

From Video Meetings to Connected Intelligence: How Cisco Optimizes Workplace Collaboration with AI and Platform Innovation

Espen Løberg
Vice President & General Manager, Collaboration Devices at Cisco,
in conversation with
Lynda Stadtmueller
Associate Partner and Program Leader, Cloud at Frost & Sullivan

The workplace collaboration landscape is undergoing transformative change. What began as a steady evolution of meeting rooms and conferencing devices has rapidly morphed into an AI-first ecosystem, where video is embedded into daily enterprise workflows. Hybrid work is now the norm, with nearly every meeting including remote participants. Additionally, customer expectations have evolved from simply "getting connected" to asking for more **seamless, equitable, and intelligent meeting experiences.**

In this Transformational Growth Leadership (TGL) conversation, Espen Løberg, Vice President & General Manager, Collaboration Devices at Cisco, speaks with Lynda Stadtmueller, Associate Partner and Program Leader, Cloud at Frost & Sullivan about how he is redefining the future of work, with an innovative business that is at the forefront of **AI-powered collaboration, agentic AI, platform integration,** and **Connected Intelligence.**

> "In a room, the device is one of the smartest participants. It can assist every team get their best work done. There's a massive amount of productivity that will be gained, and creativity sparked, because of agentic AI."
>
> —Espen Løberg, Vice President & General Manager, Collaboration Devices at Cisco

From Push to Pull, The Post-pandemic Transformation

Lynda Stadtmueller: *You've been in the conferencing industry for nearly twenty years. What are the biggest changes you've seen in how people work?*

Espen Løberg: There have been multiple transitions over the past two decades, but the most significant ones happened during and after the pandemic. Before that, video conferencing was largely a push market. Even though the industry was growing steadily, organizations still needed to be convinced of the importance of face-to-face meetings. You had to sell the value of video. That has completely changed. Today, no one questions the importance of video. Customers and their end users are demanding it.

From the end-user perspective, hybrid work has become the norm. Pre-pandemic, remote work ranged from 10% to 50% of workers, but now virtually everyone works from home at least part of the week, even with return-to-office policies averaging three days onsite. As a result, about 98% of meetings are now **video or hybrid meetings.**

Another important evolution is the **simplification of video platforms**. Before the pandemic, it could take eight to ten minutes to start a video meeting, especially if multiple rooms were involved. Now, most meetings start on time or within a minute. Cisco invested early (back in the 2000s) in making meetings simple with innovations like the "one button to push" that let users join meetings instantly. Much of the initial friction has been eliminated.

Today, the focus has shifted from simply getting meetings started to ensuring **equity in hybrid meetings,** making sure everyone is seen and heard clearly, and that the best view of the room is always presented.

Frost & Sullivan's **Transformational Growth Leadership Program** aims to honor visionary business leaders who possess the foresight and leadership acumen to drive positive change within their organizations. The leaders we celebrate hail from diverse sectors and company sizes, yet they all share an unwavering commitment to innovation and excellence.

Collaboration Dynamics: Device Innovation, Interoperability, and User Experience

Lynda Stadtmueller: ***How did the need for collaboration and the evolution of the devices influence each other—did the technology accelerate demand, or did the demand push device innovation?***

Espen Løberg: During the pandemic, meeting room devices for collaboration and conferencing faced a temporary crisis because offices were empty. But when people returned, their expectations had changed dramatically. At home, everyone had their own space and sat close to a microphone. The experience felt equitable.

When employees came back to meeting rooms that hadn't been used for years, there was friction. We had to transform the user experiences to align with what people were accustomed to in apps. That meant becoming fully interoperable with major meeting apps and platforms, while aligning user interfaces in devices.

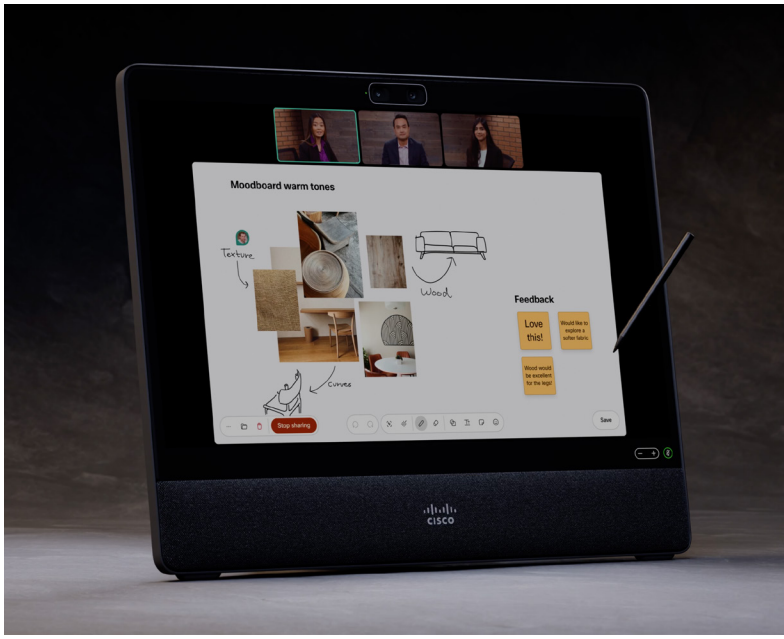
There was uncertainty at first—would people return to meeting rooms or stay at their desks with laptop-based meetings? But human nature prevailed. People wanted to socialize and co-create. As organizations reinvested in meeting spaces, collaboration devices became essential again because nearly every meeting included remote participants. Cisco had an advantage. Many customers had already invested in our devices, and because those devices were future-proof, we could rapidly enhance them with AI-based user experiences for post-pandemic needs, like using device intelligence to frame participants or removing background noise.

Customer Strategy: End Users and Owners

Espen Løberg: It also became clear that a meeting room without a collaboration device was useless, because every meeting was a video meeting. The focus turned to scaling meeting room deployments, which reignited business growth. We've had a clear strategy of serving two users: the **end user** in the room and **the owner** responsible for deployment and operations.

- **For end users,** expectations center around being easy to use and equitable meeting experiences on any platform.
- **For owners,** typically IT or service teams, the focus is different. Before the pandemic, IT administrators were often driven by feature expansion. Post-pandemic, the emphasis has moved toward operational excellence.

Organizations now manage thousands of meeting rooms globally and need to scale without adding IT staff. It's less about adding new features and more about delivering scale, quality, and reliability. Customers expect uniform experiences across deployments and seamless interoperability.



Tracking Customer Priorities and Needs: Building Trust Through Continuous Feedback

Lynda Stadtmueller: *How do you want customers to perceive Cisco, and how do you incorporate their feedback into your product plans?*

Espen Løberg: We want customers to see us as their trusted partner and to view our collaboration devices and platforms as part of a broader critical AI infrastructure portfolio, built for today's needs and ready for future-proofing tomorrow's spaces.

Customer feedback and partnerships are central to how we operate. We study customer workflows, industries, and physical workspaces, and don't begin building a device or feature without customer sponsors guiding discovery and validation. Working with global enterprises, governments, and leading tech companies—where collaboration is mission-critical and expectations are extremely high—keeps us on our toes.

Cisco is also its own "customer zero." It operates one of the world's largest cloud-based video deployments internally, generating feedback from tens of thousands of employees and IT teams before products reach external customers. Engineers use the devices themselves daily, creating a multi-layered feedback loop at massive scale.

For instance, at Cisco's Oslo headquarters, more than 200 global customers visited in a single quarter to engage directly with engineers, building trust, accountability, and deep partnerships. The same model extends across our channel partners, advisory boards, and virtual communities with thousands of organizations. Combined with daily internal software builds and structured rollout cycles, it forms a disciplined, continuous feedback loop.

Balancing Innovation and Growth: Build, Buy, or Partner

Lynda Stadtmueller: *How do you decide whether to build, buy, or partner in terms of new technologies?*

Espen Løberg: It's a combination of all three. Our engineers would prefer to build everything themselves, and in core areas—**video compute, audio processing, and AI workloads**—we build in-house, because that expertise is the foundation of our differentiation.

- In terms of hardware, we partnered with **NVIDIA** more than a decade ago because we anticipated the importance of machine learning in meeting rooms. That partnership continues, and we're now on our fourth generation of NVIDIA compute modules.
- On the software front, **RoomOS** is built on decades of experience, evolving through major transitions—from on-premises to cloud, from basic video to AI-enhanced experiences, and from single-platform environments to native integrations with platform partners like **Microsoft Teams.**
- Partnerships accelerate growth. We've collaborated with **Microsoft** on platform integration, with **Apple** on AirPlay and spatial meetings, and with display manufacturers like **Samsung** for integration.

We also pursue acquisitions when specialized teams leapfrog existing capabilities. Examples include **BabbleLabs** for noise removal and **Ezdubs** for real-time voice-to-voice translation.

Competitive Differentiation: Staying Ahead in a Competitive Ecosystem

Lynda Stadtmueller: *What is your strategy to stay ahead of competitors and what have you learned from your competitors?*

Espen Løberg: We have deep respect for our competitors—this industry is, in many ways, a small family. At the same time, we're extremely disciplined and even a bit paranoid, rigorously testing and evaluating competitive offerings in dedicated labs. While we track competitors closely, staying ahead isn't about reacting to incremental differences. It's about listening carefully to customers and partners and understanding the broader shifts shaping the market.

One differentiator is our platform-first approach. We start with a broad devices portfolio that serves every space in the workplace, and have a common operating system, ensuring consistency across hardware and operating systems. That foundation makes us resilient and able to pivot as the market shifts. We stay in continuous dialogue with strategic partners to anticipate where things are going. At the same time, we build on Cisco's broader architecture—integrating cloud, networking, and security capabilities into the device experience. That full-stack foundation delivers value to both end users and IT owners, and is difficult for competitors to replicate.

Growth Opportunities: Connected Intelligence, People, AI, and Agentic Systems

Lynda Stadtmueller: *What does "connected intelligence" and the idea of AI led innovation mean for your devices business?*

Espen Løberg: Connected intelligence starts with connecting **people to people**, rooted in Cisco's long-standing "distance zero" mission to eliminate the feeling of separation in virtual meetings. Today, it also means connecting **people to AI** and **AI to AI**. AI runs across the entire architecture, from cloud and network to control systems and intelligent, AI edge devices. These IP-connected devices and peripherals act as the last mile of AI infrastructure, extending the network itself. In many cases, users are already interacting with AI agents, whether they realize it or not.

Examples include our **agentic Director,** which automatically selects the best camera view based on meeting dynamics, while **Notetaker** captures notes in both virtual and local meetings. The **Translator Agent** delivers industry-first voice-to-voice translation without relying on transcripts.

For service owners, **Workspace Advisor** creates a 3D digital twin of a room in Control Hub and provides recommendations to optimize the space. Plus new Agent-to-agent integrations now allow service owners to access and analyze workspace data through conversational AI tools.

Together, these capabilities show that connected intelligence is not theoretical. It is already embedded across our meetings, workspaces, and operational workflows today. At its core, this vision is about reducing cognitive load so users can focus on the outcome of a meeting rather than the technology behind it.

Measuring Outcomes and Tracking ROI

Lynda Stadtmueller: *Customers want measurable ROI from AI. How do you demonstrate value in collaboration devices?*

Espen Løberg: We only introduce AI when it delivers tangible outcomes.

- **For service owners,** that often means **faster time to resolution** and **quicker identification of issues**. Our AI-powered workspace tools generate prioritized task lists based on deployment data and provide automated diagnostics to resolve problems efficiently. This enables organizations to manage larger, more complex environments without increasing IT staff, improving overall operational efficiency.
- **For end users,** AI-driven experiences such as the Translator Agent deliver **clear cost and productivity benefits.** Organizations can reduce translation expenses while making language support far more scalable and accessible. Because translation is delivered instantly, across virtually any language, without the need to schedule human interpreters, it improves flexibility, enhances the user experience, and provides measurable ROI.

Fostering a Culture of Innovation

Lynda Stadtmueller: *How do you build a culture that encourages real innovation and risk-taking while preserving Cisco's long-standing DNA of reliability?*

Espen Løberg: At the end of the day, innovation is about teamwork. It's built on a strong culture where everyone is aligned with the mission of delivering distance zero experiences that are easy to use, easy to deploy, and dependable at scale. There is real accountability because customers rely on this technology every day.

We automate testing to the maximum degree so engineers can spend their time innovating instead of repairing what's already built. We actively create space for grassroots ideas through **playtime weeks, demo days,** and **TechZone** where teams showcase and challenge new concepts and ideas. Our leadership sets direction but does not dictate the how.

We encourage bold moves, like partnering early with NVIDIA, shifting from pan-tilt-zoom to fixed-lens cinematic cameras, and pushing an IP-first architecture, all while staying focused on long-term customer outcomes rather than short-term trends.

Reliability remains foundational. With device life cycles of eight to ten years, we innovate continuously on top of stable, scalable platforms.

> "The way to stay ahead over time is less about looking at competitors and more about listening carefully to our customers and partners—and continuously testing that feedback."
>
> —Espen Løberg, Vice President & General Manager, Collaboration Devices at Cisco

The Future of Work: Agentic AI and Immersive Experiences

Lynda Stadtmueller: *What will transform your organization in the next five years?*

Espen Løberg: AI is going to transform everything, and not in some distant future. Even three to six months feels like a long time right now because the changes are happening almost weekly. There is a tremendous sense of urgency in how we rethink the way we build software, and hardware, in an AI-accelerated way.

From where we stand, **agentic AI** is what will really revolutionize the industry in the near term. Building AI assistants is becoming easier and faster, and we see how quickly our own portfolio of AI agents is evolving. These digital assistants, both visible and invisible, will support teams in getting work done. The device in the room is already a smart participant, helping drive productivity and spark creativity.

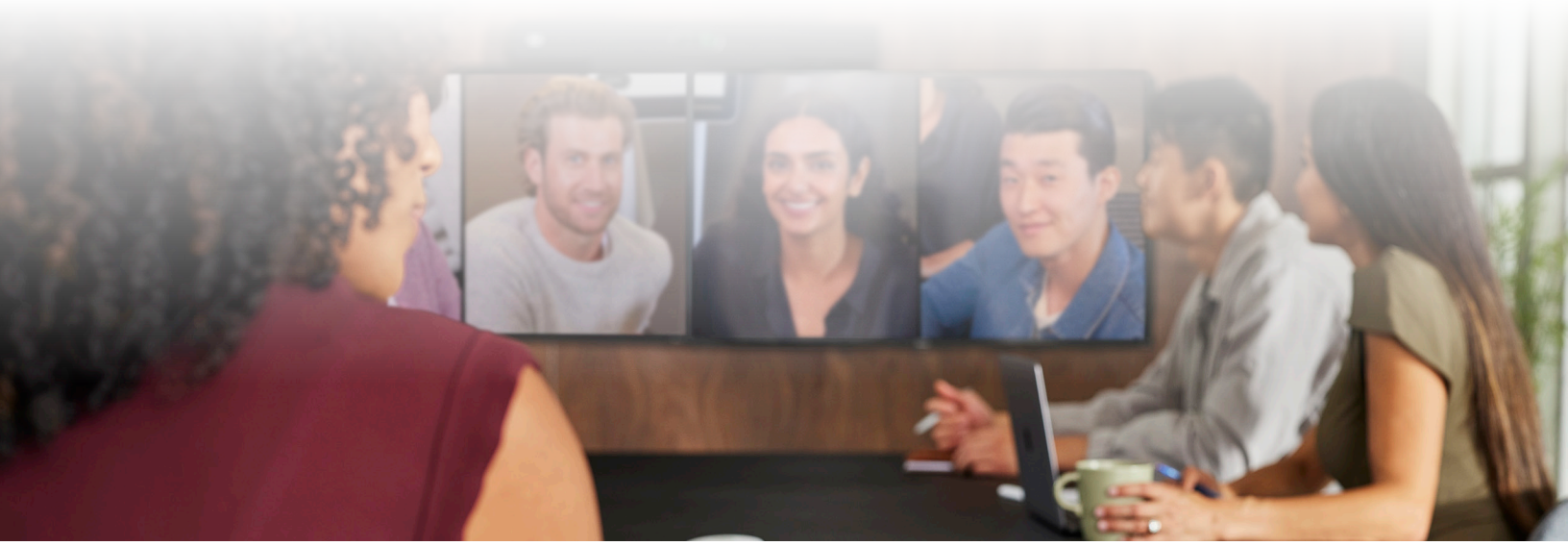
We are moving from the in-room experience toward a **more agentic workplace**, where rooms, networks, and infrastructure are aware of each other. Bringing those data points together unlocks new insights for service owners, HR, and facilities, and improves the overall workplace experience.

At the same time, distance zero will move to the next level with **spatial meetings and immersive 3D experiences.** We are already leading here, with dual-camera devices that can produce spatial experiences from virtually any space, with or without glasses. This unlocks more natural depth and presence, and opens entirely new use cases across retail, design, and education.

Closing Reflections: Enabling

Espen Løberg: Ultimately, the future of collaboration will be shaped by how well organizations connect people, AI, and infrastructure into one cohesive experience. The pace of change is accelerating, but the fundamentals remain the same: **simplicity, reliability, and outcome first value propositions.**

By combining AI-based innovation, immersive experiences, and a deeply integrated platform approach, Cisco is positioning collaboration devices not just as meeting tools, but as critical components of enterprise AI infrastructure. The goal remains consistent: reduce distance, remove friction, and help teams do their best work, wherever they are.



Espen Løberg | Vice President & General Manager, Collaboration Devices at Cisco

Since joining **Cisco** through the acquisition of Tandberg in 2010, Espen has played a key role in transforming Cisco's conferencing and collaboration solutions to meet the demands of a rapidly evolving workplace. Today, Espen leads a global team responsible for the end-to-end strategy, development, and delivery of Cisco's industry-leading collaboration devices and software. His portfolio includes innovative video conferencing systems, desk devices, and intelligent peripherals that empower organizations to connect and collaborate seamlessly—whether in the office or working remotely.

Lynda Stadtmueller | Associate Partner and Program Leader, Cloud at Frost & Sullivan

Lynda has been with **Frost & Sullivan** since 2008, covering enterprise network services, digital transformation, hybrid & multi-cloud, and edge-to-cloud network configurations. She is a frequent speaker and contributor to technology publications, with over 40 years of experience in the communications industry. Prior to joining Frost & Sullivan, she served in a number of leadership positions with AT&T and other technology firms.

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Appendix

Frost & Sullivan is fully equipped with actionable intelligence that helps business leaders drive differentiation and innovation in the unified communications and connected work landscape. Our expertise spans transformative megatrends, AI disruption, changing customer expectations, and new business models. We equip ecosystem players to capitalize on latest opportunities through competitive benchmarking, growth forecasts, risk mitigation frameworks, and best-practice guidance.

To know more about growth opportunities, megatrends, companies to action, and best practices in **Communication Endpoints and Devices; Audio and Video Collaboration Tools;** and **Meeting Room Conferencing Devices**, view our latest portfolio of growth analyses on the subject:

- Investment Priorities for the Workplace and Video Conferencing
- Frost Radar™: Meeting Room Video Conferencing Devices
- Global Video Conferencing Devices: Opportunity Assessment, 2030
- Audio Conferencing Devices: Opportunity Assessment, 2024–2031
- Top 10 Growth Opportunities in Cloud Communications and Collaboration Services, 2026

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