



# Vendor Insight

## SAP StreamWork: a new Collaborative Decision Making environment

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The unstructured and *ad hoc* nature of collaborative, knowledge-centred work often leads to the assumption that this type of activity is beyond management and control; however, in today's business environment this assumption is dangerous. The idea of melding collaborative tools with software tools historically used to support decision-making is gaining ground, and has the potential to help organisations dramatically improve decision-making processes that have sometimes historically been informal and opaque. *SAP StreamWork* plays into this trend: it's a browser-based collaborative work environment that's optimised to provide tools and services that help individuals and teams make business decisions in a structured, transparent way.

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## Summary

**Collaborative tools can help make the decision making process more formal, consistent and transparent**

The unstructured and ad hoc nature of collaborative, knowledge-centred work often leads to the assumption that this type of activity is beyond management and control. However, the ability to audit and track collaborative activity both inside and at the edge of the organisation is becoming increasingly important, as is the ability to report and analyse this data (for example to support e-discovery requirements) as well as enabling the organisation to assess its own performance against its goals.

The idea of melding collaborative tools with software tools historically used to support decision making – particularly Business Intelligence and Analytics tools – is gaining ground in industry, and has the potential to help organisations take decision-making processes that have sometimes historically been informal and opaque, and make them more formal, consistent and transparent.

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**SAP StreamWork provides a SaaS-based collaborative decision-making environment**

*SAP StreamWork* is a browser-based collaborative work environment which is optimised to provide tools and services that help individuals and teams make business decisions in a structured, transparent way. There are many SaaS-based collaborative workspace tools available; where *SAP StreamWork* is different is in its very specific focus on providing collaborative environments that support business decision making in the context of current business applications and processes

*SAP* positions *StreamWork* relative to other available tools by claiming that most collaboration tools and environments are used principally between acts of decision making, separately from where users work, and outside of business processes. By contrast *StreamWork* has the act of driving outcomes and results (decisions) in the context of business processes as its central focus.

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**SAP StreamWork should definitely be explored by SAP customers, particularly customers of SAP BusinessObjects**

*SAP StreamWork* offers an innovative specialised environment for supporting collaborative decision making that you should definitely consider if you're a *SAP BusinessObjects* customer – particularly if you don't have existing investments in social collaboration tools that extend broadly within your organisation. As *SAP* broadens the direct integration points available 'out of the box' to include *SAP CRM*, *SAP BusinessObjects Business Intelligence Platform* and so on, customers of these applications should also definitely take time to explore how *SAP StreamWork* can be used to extend the value of their core application investments.

## Towards collaborative decision making

### Blending collaboration with structured task environments

Over the past five years, as process improvement techniques and technologies have continued to mature and have started to be applied widely in business scenarios driven by 'white collar workers' and 'knowledge workers', the notion of 'process' – and the emphasis of process improvement approaches – have both started to become less scientifically-driven and structured. Industry attention is turning to how collaboration and collaborative technologies might be able to add value to Business Process Management (BPM) tools and technologies, using collaborative technologies to blend structured task execution environments with capabilities that help people share ideas and insights, connect with relevant expertise, and so on.

At the same time, we're also seeing that the business value of specialised collaboration technologies is becoming viewed more and more by organisations in the context of business processes: that is, less as isolated islands of technology loosely associated with ideas of 'team productivity', and more as enablers of efficiency and effectiveness in support of specific business capabilities and objectives.

Whereas historically the technology to support collaboration was either thought of as part of telecoms investment, or it was thought of in terms of specific, isolated applications (think groupware or email), familiarity with the above technologies (offered in both on-premise and hosted forms) is starting to drive awareness of collaboration technology as 'horizontal' enabling infrastructure that's more closely associated with ideas of work efficiency and effectiveness.

It's never been the case that people in organisations "just collaborate" for the fun of doing so; they collaborate on a particular task, activity or process. But until recently, there was no direct connection (particularly in the context of knowledge work) between collaboration software platforms and the IT environments through which business processes were progressed.

### Management and control for consistency and transparency

The unstructured and *ad hoc* nature of collaborative, knowledge-centred work often leads to the assumption that this type of activity is beyond management and control; however, there is increasingly a need to challenge this assumption, particularly given the widening implications of regulatory compliance, for example. Similarly, where collaborative activity takes place at the edge of an organisation in a B2B context – which has been one of the major drivers for the growth in collaborative strategies within organisations over the last few years – the implications for how information is stored and shared also become relevant from a corporate governance perspective, for example in terms of protecting intellectual property, as well as from a legal compliance standpoint.

The ability to audit and track collaborative activity both inside and at the edge of the organisation is increasingly important, as is the ability to report and analyse this data (for example to support e-discovery requirements) as well as enabling the organisation to assess its own performance against its goals. Being able to tightly integrate collaboration technology into a broader structured work management context is becoming a necessity, not just a nice-to-have.

The idea of melding collaborative tools with software tools historically used to support decision making – particularly Business Intelligence and Analytics tools – is gaining ground in industry, and has the potential to help organisations take decision-making processes that have sometimes historically been informal and opaque, and make them more formal, consistent and transparent.

## SAP StreamWork: aiming to make decisions inclusive, explicit and consistent

### A deliberate departure for SAP

*SAP StreamWork* is a browser-based collaborative work environment which is optimised to provide tools and services that help individuals and teams make business decisions in a structured, transparent way. The *SAP StreamWork* environment's functionality is delivered primarily through a software-as-a-service (SaaS) model; a free-of-charge basic edition provides much of the functionality of the paid-for versions.

If you're familiar with SAP software you'll quickly see that the way that *StreamWork* is presented and provided represents a significant departure for SAP – for a very deliberate purpose. The design goals for *SAP StreamWork* were framed by a simple idea: what could the team do differently to facilitate collaborative processes within and across organisational boundaries? The design team's answer was to follow the design points increasingly commonly associated with today's popular Web-based services: easy to access, intuitive to use, SaaS delivery, availability across traditional PC and mobile device form factors, with no barriers to sign-up (so making viral adoption possible).

SAP delivers *SAP StreamWork* updates monthly. Integration with third-party offerings is facilitated through implementation of the OpenSocial API standard, and SAP encourages third parties to deliver add-ons to *SAP StreamWork* using OpenSocial. *SAP StreamWork* supports OpenID for user authentication, meaning that new users can login to *SAP StreamWork* using an existing Google Apps account; the basic edition is also available directly from within the Google Apps marketplace.

### Inside SAP StreamWork

There are many SaaS-based collaborative workspace tools available; where *SAP StreamWork* is different is in its very specific focus on providing collaborative environments that support results-oriented work and business decision-making in the context of the applications and business processes in which people carry out tasks.

SAP positions *SAP StreamWork* relative to other available tools by claiming that most collaboration tools and environments are used principally *between* acts of decision-making – and separately from where users are working and outside of the business process – for example, for pulling together people and resources to discuss issues or opportunities; or providing spaces for sharing and review of documents and other content of various kinds. By contrast *StreamWork* has the act of driving outcomes and results (decisions) in the context of a user's business process as its central focus. SAP's contention is that despite the abundance of data and evidence now available to organisations, too many management decisions are reached by processes that are opaque, closed and informal, and it wants people to use *SAP StreamWork*'s collaborative facilities to help make the processes by which decisions are reached inclusive, explicit and consistent – and through this, traceable and auditable.

The *SAP StreamWork* environment combines four main collaboration environment concepts for users:

- The **Activities** view shows all current Activities for the logged-in user, each of which is a container for collaborative work. Anyone can create an activity; anyone can be invited to participate in an activity by the activity creator.
- **Methods** (also known as **business tools**) are components that can be quickly added into an Activity by its creator in order to provide structure to collaborative work on a task, decision or project. A range of pre-built methods is available from SAP, including:
  - Information containers – document collections (hosted within *SAP StreamWork*), maps, videos, tables.
  - Decisioning tools – pro/con analysis, polling, priority ranking, weighted decision making.

- Work coordination tools – agenda setting, responsibility matrices, milestone planning and communication, task prioritisation.
- Discussion and brainstorming tools (mind-mapping).
- Analysis tools – cost/benefit analysis, product portfolio analysis, SWOT analysis, stakeholder analysis, PICK (possible, implement, challenge, kill) analysis, kivi/radar charts.
- **A People** view shows each logged-in *StreamWork* user the collection of other users with whom they collaborate on Activities, and also allows users to explore the networks of those people and invite them to collaborate on an Activity, or follow them (see **Feeds** below).
- **A Feeds** view shows status updates from everyone the logged-in user is currently collaborating with. The view can easily be filtered to focus just on particular types of event (Activities' status updates, peoples' status updates, decision updates, and so on) and it's also straightforward to add events from other people by 'following' them.

Figure 1 provides a screenshot of *StreamWork*'s Activity work canvas view.

As well as the Methods provided by SAP, a growing number of partners is also using SAP *StreamWork*'s open APIs to build extensions that can be seamlessly added into a SAP *StreamWork* activity. At the time of writing partners include Google Docs, Box.net (providing a container for documents managed by the Box service), Cisco WebEx (providing the ability to launch a meeting from within *StreamWork*), Evernote (providing the ability to make and access notes from within Activities), and Scribd (providing the ability to render documents directly within Activities).

Beyond partner content, SAP is also showcasing integration of one of its other SaaS-based offerings – SAP *BusinessObjects BI OnDemand* – with SAP *StreamWork*. Anyone with a *BI OnDemand* account can quickly send a dataset or visualisation from *BI OnDemand* directly to an existing *StreamWork* Activity, or have *StreamWork* create a new Activity around the *BI OnDemand* content being sent. Additionally, users can upload a spreadsheet directly into SAP *StreamWork* and open it in *BI OnDemand* to browse, search, or create visualisations, and then save the work back into the SAP *StreamWork* activity. This integration is a crucial element of SAP's collaborative decision making proposition.

Importantly from a work management point of view, SAP *StreamWork* supports the concept of templates for Activities. A number of simple templates are provided by default; but it's also easy to take an existing Activity and convert it into a template for reuse by all team or organisation members. This means that as people get used to collaborative decision-making using SAP *StreamWork*, they can use collections of Methods and information that have been proven to deliver sound decisions as the basis for future decisions – making continuous improvement in the process of decision-making possible.

Figure 1: The StreamWork activity work canvas

SAP StreamWork's activity canvas provides a collaborative space where information and decision-making tools can be brought together and worked on transparently.

## Three editions; SaaS and “hybrid” deployment options

SAP StreamWork is offered in three editions:

- The **basic edition** is free, and provides limited resources (allowing five open Activities at any one time, 250MB of data storage, and one year's retention of closed Activities) to customers to help them learn about, evaluate and (hopefully) evangelise the system to others. It's a completely web-based, SaaS-delivered system.
- The **professional edition** enables customers to set up their own organisational management model with delegated administration capabilities, and also integrate notifications from external systems into SAP StreamWork activity feeds. Up to 100 open activities can be maintained at any one time, 5GB of data can be stored, and closed activities are retained for two years. Like the basic edition it's a completely web-based, SaaS-delivered system.
- The **enterprise edition** extends the SaaS system into a 'hybrid' configuration – adding a secure enterprise connectivity gateway that links SAP StreamWork with a customer's own IT estate. The gateway facilitates synchronisation of a SAP StreamWork organisational model with an internal LDAP-compliant directory or ActiveDirectory instance, and also provides a secure link for enterprise application integration with a SAP StreamWork instance. Up to 200 open activities can be maintained at any one time, 10GB of data can be stored, and closed activities are retained for three years.

The pricing model for professional and enterprise editions is per-user-per-month (PUPM). The professional edition currently costs EUR 9 PUPM; the enterprise edition currently costs EUR 15 PUPM. Volume discounts for large user populations are available from SAP.

## Strategy and future developments

Although SAP can't give detailed figures regarding the number of customers using *SAP StreamWork*, it will say that the environment is "now being used by thousands of companies of every size worldwide". As an indication of the breadth of use, SAP made *StreamWork* available in seven new languages in July 2011: German, Spanish, French, Portuguese, Chinese, Russian, and Japanese.

## A general platform, but scenario-specific purpose too

SAP's aim with *SAP StreamWork* is to "make social collaboration tools ready for the enterprise" – and through this, find new ways to get SAP technology in front of individuals who aren't currently part of its core SAP application user base. In this way, *SAP StreamWork* plays a similar strategic role to *NetWeaver BPM*: it's about extending SAP's footprint out into business areas and scenarios where industry-standard approaches and processes aren't applicable.

SAP is clear that *SAP StreamWork* will continue to be offered as a 'horizontal' collaborative decision-making environment (i.e. not specialised for one particular scenario); at the same time though, it will develop specific integrations and extensions with SAP applications so that it can offer customers scenario-specific, decision-making support in a variety of areas on a common foundation.

SAP is also clear that it wants *SAP StreamWork* to be able to add value to its customers' existing application investments, regardless of whether those customers are using SAP's 'traditional' applications, *SAP Business ByDesign*, or individual on demand applications.

## SAP StreamWork as an extension to existing processes, systems

Improving the breadth and simplicity of integration of *StreamWork* with other systems is a high priority for SAP. Today, anyone can quickly have external systems create, provision and populate Activities by sending specially-configured email messages to *SAP StreamWork*; customers of the enterprise edition can also create their own integration adapters to have external systems populate the Feeds view of *SAP StreamWork* with updates. However pre-built integration points with popular business applications and systems are not currently available. Ideally, such integration points will enable customers to have external applications do more than just 'post updates' to *SAP StreamWork* users' feeds – specifically it should be possible to expose application information and capabilities directly within *SAP StreamWork* activities.

SAP is currently working on such integration points for applications within its own portfolio, with the highest priority currently assigned to *SAP Product Lifecycle Management*, *SAP CRM* and *SAP BusinessObjects Strategy Management*. Beyond this, SAP sees integration with *SAP BusinessObjects Business Intelligence Platform* (to support collaborative business intelligence across the enterprise) and *NetWeaver BPM* (making it possible to create and provision *SAP StreamWork* Activities from within structured processes, and pass the results of collaborative decision-making back into a *NetWeaver BPM* process as a natural step).

SAP is also beta-testing using *SAP StreamWork* as the collaboration container for a BPMN tool currently known internally as 'Gravity': here, the process modelling canvas of Gravity is delivered as a Method and therefore easily placed in any *SAP StreamWork* activity for collaborative editing by a team of process or business analysts.

## Enlarging the partner ecosystem

Beyond technical development, SAP's plans for *SAP StreamWork* revolve around enlarging its network of partners to create more of an 'ecosystem' of use for the platform. With a solid foundation platform and set of scenario-specific integrations in play, SAP's next step is to attract many more partners to build integrations with *SAP StreamWork*. Application partner involvement is crucial to its value proposition, because *SAP StreamWork*'s aim (improving the inclusivity, transparency and consistency of decision-making processes) is much easier to achieve if the people making decisions have their favourite information sources and supporting tools to hand in one place. By placing *SAP StreamWork* Activities at the centre of an ecosystem of popular business applications and information sources, SAP clearly believes it can make *SAP StreamWork* the natural 'go to destination' for teams looking to collaborate on decision-making.

## What should you do?

*SAP StreamWork* offers an innovative specialised environment for supporting collaborative decision making that you should definitely consider if you're a SAP customer – particularly if you don't have existing investments in social collaboration tools that extend broadly within your organisation. As SAP broadens the direct integration points available 'out of the box' to include *SAP CRM*, *SAP BusinessObjects Strategy Management* and so on, customers of these applications should also take time to explore how *SAP StreamWork* can be used to extend the value of their core application investments.

You should think of *SAP StreamWork* as complementing other more general-purpose collaboration platforms, rather than acting as such a platform itself: its people-centric collaboration features and capabilities aren't really designed to scale in the way that the capabilities of a more general-purpose social collaboration or community platform are, for example. Given the fact that *SAP StreamWork* is likely to sit alongside other social collaboration or community platforms, we're hoping that over time *SAP StreamWork* will provide more out-of-the-box integration features to facilitate interworking with third-party tools. One example of a welcome feature would be the ability to present Microsoft *SharePoint* document collections within *SAP StreamWork*.

From a pricing perspective, *SAP StreamWork* is more expensive than many SaaS-based general-purpose social collaboration tools available today; but given its specific focus on support for collaborative decision-making and the likely smaller, more focused groups of users that will entail, you should be careful not to place too strong a weighting purely on PUPM pricing when considering an investment.