

# Effective Enterprise Collaboration Grows Your Bottom Line

**Business Case: The Enterprise Collaboration Playbook**

by TJ Keitt and Liz Witherspoon

January 16, 2018

## Why Read This Report

Business leaders often turn to application development and delivery (AD&D) pros for tools to make the business more collaborative. And AD&D pros oblige, deploying a portfolio of collaboration technologies to facilitate communications and knowledge exchanges. But does this improve collaboration? And does this help the business thrive? This report helps AD&D pros link improvements in collaboration to employee- and customer-oriented metrics.

This is an update of a previously published report; Forrester reviews and revises it periodically for continued relevance and accuracy.

## Key Takeaways

### **Linking Collaboration Technology To Business Effectiveness Is Challenging**

AD&D pros struggle to attribute operational and customer experience (CX) improvements to collaboration tools because a range of process, management, and structural factors also contribute.

### **Forrester's Total Economic Impact (TEI™) Model Can Help Make This Link**

Our TEI methodology accounts for environmental factors that may temper some of the benefits a business gets from deploying collaboration technology. This allows for a more believable ROI assessment.

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### Related Research Documents

[Assess The Capabilities And Impact Of Your Enterprise Collaboration Toolkit](#)

[Organizing For Success In Collaboration](#)

[Knowing The Enterprise Collaboration Landscape Is Essential To Digital Transformation](#)



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## Improving Collaboration Improves The Business' Performance

Forrester projects that in the US alone, businesses will invest \$28 billion in collaboration technologies in 2017 (see Figure 1).<sup>1</sup> Global software decision makers see these tools as essential: 82% say their businesses have already implemented or will implement these technologies.<sup>2</sup> What's driving this? AD&D pros and business leaders believe collaboration tools will help:

- › **Engage the workforce, fostering process ownership and loyalty.** Employees who are engaged in their work improve operations. And they are more likely to remain employees for the long term, reducing the brain drain that can affect service quality and delivery. US restaurant chain Red Robin, for example, deployed microblogging technology Yammer to its restaurant staff. Red Robin encouraged employees to use Yammer to submit ideas for process enhancements, helping the company revamp its training. The company partly attributed its 9% reduction in employee churn to giving staff this influence.<sup>3</sup>
- › **Empower employees to solve business problems.** For customer-facing employees, feeling like they can address issues is a top driver of workers' loyalty.<sup>4</sup> This can shorten the time-to-resolve-an-issue and ensure the issue is fully addressed the first time. Life-science instrument manufacturer BioTek deployed messaging application Zinc to its field service force in 2015. The app enables field technicians to submit questions, allowing an internal expert to answer and decreasing dependence on the support center. This system helps BioTek curtail repeat customer visits — which costs the company \$1,500 per call.
- › **Improve customers' experiences and loyalty.** Engaged workers improve customer satisfaction by 10% and lifts sales by 20%.<sup>5</sup> When you empower employees to collaborate on customers' problems, you increase the odds of delivering client value. Executives at California-based sporting goods store Mike's Bikes see providing good bicycle maintenance experiences as a key to growing the business. One way they provide good service is by allowing all technicians to talk to each other on Zinc. This helps ensure proper fixes by letting techs query colleagues for potential solutions and the tools necessary to make repairs.

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**FIGURE 1** Enterprise Collaboration Tools Benefit Employees And Customers**AD&D Pros Have A Difficult Time Making This Connection**

It is challenging to prove these technology investments are having the desired effects on the business because it is:

- › **Hard to create sophisticated metrics.** Most companies we spoke to could rattle off the utilization statistics for collaboration tools: number of logins, number of conversations, and more. But those stats alone don't indicate improvement of employee experience, operational efficiency, or customer experience. The business sponsors of these technologies make anecdotal links. Ben Bump, assistant director at Wyoming Office of Lands and Investments, told us: "All revenues are up, and the only change in operation was the implementation of our platform. While the value of Salesforce's Chatter is hard for us to measure, we have to believe some portion of the revenue increase is attributable to the technology."
- › **Hard to create dedicated measurement programs.** Confounding AD&D pros' efforts to evaluate business value are the number of existing employee surveys in their businesses. Most companies have extant employee engagement or business technology satisfaction surveys, making it impractical to institute separate surveys that assess how collaboration tools affect employees' effectiveness. Some companies we talked to are carving out space in existing surveys; trivago, for example, included a section on business applications in its recent employee survey. However, because these surveys mostly gauge employees' sentiments, it can be difficult connecting those sentiments to process improvements or enhanced CX.

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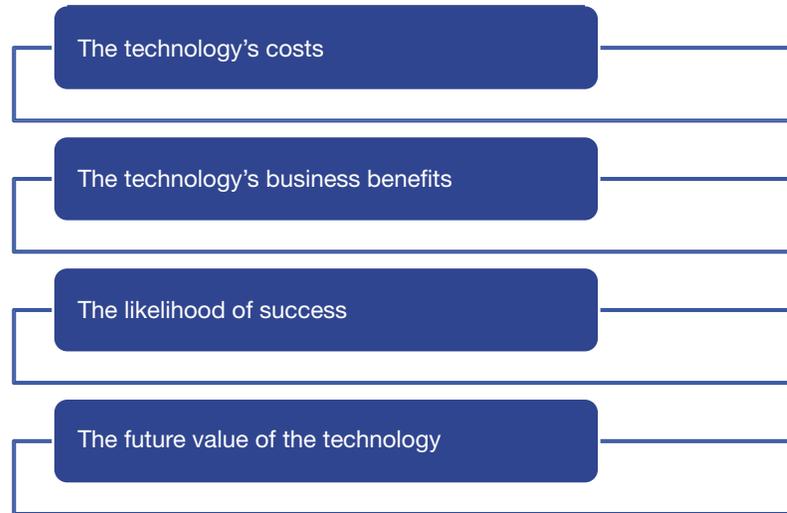
- › **Hard to attribute improvements to collaboration tech.** Every business leader we spoke to for this report demurred when asked to directly connect the introduction of collaboration technology to improvements in business operations or CX. For example, Sean Jordan, BioTek's service director, noted that over the same time period as the company had Zinc deployed, the company saw its Net Promoter Score rise 11 points.<sup>6</sup> But he was quick to note, "We instituted a number of process changes that may have contributed to this increase."

**Use A Four-Part Framework To Organize Collaboration Tech's Benefits**

If companies are to realize its promise, AD&D pros must help their technology organizations express collaboration technology's organizational benefits. This business case should spell out four categories of benefits (see Figure 2):

1. **The costs associated with implementing the tools.** AD&D pros need to spell out for decision makers the initial outlays for software, implementation, and change management. They must also estimate the ongoing costs of managing and maintaining the collaboration technologies. These costs are easiest to compile because they involve well-known inputs, such as the costs of a license, professional services, and administrators' salaries and benefits.
2. **The business benefits of enhanced collaboration.** Even before they select a specific technology, AD&D pros need to work with business leaders to identify what business goals the tools will help them achieve. These should be specific measurable priorities. For example, Tan Tock Seng Hospital in Singapore deployed Facebook Workplace to keep employees connected beyond the hospital. The tool allows an increasing number of mobile hospital staffers to tap the broader workforce, facilitating discussions, collaborative decision making, and best practice sharing.
3. **The likelihood that the technology will improve collaboration.** To create a credible business case, AD&D pros need to estimate the technology's effect on collaboration, accounting for product, process, personnel, and other business changes. They also need to identify challenges that could interfere with realizing the full potential of the tools, such as a key executive backer of the project leaving the company. To properly account for these potential issues, AD&D pros will need to consult with business leaders, change management experts, and other internal experts to provide insights to help determine these estimates.
4. **The future value that the technology will provide.** Investing in these evolving collaboration technologies early sets the business up to reap the rewards that will come later as the technology improves. For example, a Y Combinator startup called Niles is developing a chat assistant that can sit in a Slack group and answer questions. The company says that as the bot has more interactions with employees, it refines its ability to interject answers to common questions without being directly asked.<sup>7</sup>

**FIGURE 2** The Four Categories Of Collaboration Technology's Organizational Benefits



## Use The Total Economic Impact Methodology To Show This Link

To concretely connect collaboration technology to business value for business leaders, we leveraged Forrester's TEI methodology. A TEI model for implementing collaboration technologies addresses AD&D pros' needs because it provides four quantitative analysis categories (see Figure 3):

- › **Benefits.** A TEI study identifies and calculates positive business effects — like productivity or revenue gains — over the period of analysis.
- › **Costs.** The TEI methodology measures costs over an analysis period — including hardware, software, and services — alongside personnel costs associated with planning, implementation, and maintenance.
- › **Flexibility.** The TEI methodology accounts for the potential value of future additional investments above the initial outlays.
- › **Risk.** The TEI methodology estimates the likelihood that the benefit and costs estimates will meet original projection, compensating for environmental and technical uncertainty.

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**FIGURE 3** A TEI Model Provides Four Quantitative Analysis Categories**Example: Acme Gadgets Seeks To Improve Business Performance Through Collaboration**

To illustrate how a TEI study can measure the effects of collaboration technology on operational efficiency and customer experience, Forrester synthesized its research findings into a hypothetical composite organization — Acme Gadgets — against which it applied the methodology. Acme Gadgets is a US big-box electronics retailer. We chose to model a retailer for two reasons: The top drivers for retailers in Forrester’s Customer Experience Index (CX Index™) relate to employees having access to information and expertise, and we know retailers like Costco, Chico’s, Lowe’s, and Marks and Spencer have made investments in collaboration technology to enable employees to better serve their customers.<sup>8</sup> Acme Gadgets:

- › **Operates 1,000 store locations across the US.** Acme Gadgets generates 85% of its \$30 billion in revenue from its retail stores. The other 15% of annual sales comes from its installation and support services (5%) and growing eCommerce channel (10%).
- › **Depends on associates and service techs to serve customers.** The Acme retail stores are staffed with 80,000 sales associates, whom 10,000 store and department managers oversee. And because many of the big-ticket items Acme sells — such as appliances, home entertainment systems, and smart home solutions — have extended warranties and require installation, Acme has a 2,000-person-strong service technician force operating out of the retail locations.
- › **Is implementing a suite of collaboration tools to bolster customer service.** Acme’s key priorities in this area are ensuring frontline workers can communicate with support personnel, like product specialists and customer service reps, and that information essential to business operations is easily accessible. Thus, the company has recently acquired a cloud-delivered collaboration tool suite. It will give its 99,000 associates, technicians, managers, and operations and administrative staff access to email, team messaging applications, a knowledge management system, an employee portal, and an enterprisewide social network.

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**Costs: A Three-Year Cash-Flow Analysis**

For this model, we assume Acme Gadgets has three types of costs: licensing, implementation, and administration. Licensing and implementation are startup costs, though in a cloud model, the licensing fees are amortized over the life of the agreement. This leads to varying yearly costs as spending stabilizes post-implementation, resulting in a total three-year present value of around \$21 million. The costs break down as follows (see Figure 4):

- › **Licensing.** Acme has power users and light users of collaboration technology. So the company has acquired two different license types that address these employees' needs. For the smaller number of power users in the workforce — administrators, operations staff, managers, and product specialists — they procured licenses that include robust desktop applications. For the larger group of light users — associates, service technicians, and customer service reps — Acme purchased less expensive licenses for browser-based and mobile-friendly apps. The company pays for all licenses upfront.
- › **Implementation.** The move to the cloud represents a significant change in how Acme provides access to collaboration tools and who in the business has this access. And while the company has a competent technology organization, Forrester's model assumes it will require a systems integrator's expertise to help with planning and executing the migration, integration with legacy systems, license distribution, rollout, and training.
- › **Administration.** After initial implementation, the collaboration platform requires ongoing management. Even though Acme Gadgets is a very large distributed organization and plans to roll out the collaboration platform to nearly all its employees, the model assumes the cloud service only requires two full-time equivalents to manage and run the solution. These employees would oversee the relationship with the collaboration tech provider, provision employees, manage permissions, monitor application performance, provide training, and perform other administrative tasks.

**FIGURE 4** Three-Year Total Costs For Acme Gadgets

Ref.	Cost	Initial	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Total	Present value
Ftr	License fees	\$0	\$8,169,000	\$8,169,000	\$8,169,000	\$24,507,000	\$20,315,094
Gtr	Implementation costs	\$357,000	\$0	\$71,400	\$0	\$428,000	\$416,008
Htr	Ongoing solution management	\$0	\$168,000	\$168,000	\$168,000	\$504,000	\$417,791
	Total costs (risk-adjusted)	\$357,000	\$8,337,000	\$8,408,000	\$8,337,000	\$25,439,400	\$21,148,893

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**Benefits: Collaboration Tools Improve Operations, Improving The Customer Experience**

Acme's leadership believes that if it can streamline the processes in which employees work together and share knowledge and expertise, they can improve operations and CX. Our model examines this by looking at three broad categories of benefits: cost savings, improvements to the employee experience, and improvements to the customer experience. The model shows Acme earns a present value of \$48 million in benefits from the improvements to collaboration the technology catalyzes. These benefits include (see Figure 5):

- › **Reduction in licenses for alternative collaboration tools.** Most organizations, including Acme Gadgets, have accrued a collection of collaboration technologies as point solutions to meet specific departmental needs. These tools are frequently superfluous to holistic collaboration tool suites. As a result, Acme expects to reduce 5,000 licenses for one-off collaboration software. These licenses may include applications like document sharing, webconferencing, and team messaging tools. Over three years, Acme will save \$1.4 million in present value in eliminated license costs.
- › **Time and effort savings.** Our model posits that Acme's employees will benefit from more easily finding information and expertise. For example, giving sales associates access to a knowledge base allows them to quickly find product information on their mobile devices, helping them answer customer questions. A team messaging app allows service technicians to communicate with product specialists for guidance on installation issues. And customer service reps can post customers' issues and get help from internal experts. These capabilities can help reduce the 4.5 hours employees spend weekly looking for information by 15%.
- › **Improved time-to-employee-effectiveness.** Another key benefit of the collaboration platform is decreasing the ramp-up time for new employees. As we've seen in examples from Red Robin and Waitrose, giving sales associates and managers access to an internal social network allows them to learn best practices and pose questions about proper store operations.<sup>9</sup> We estimate that Acme can shave 10% off training time by giving employees access to training content, key sales and product information, and institutional knowledge immediately. This results in a present value of \$5.5 million in savings over three years.
- › **Increased employee retention.** Employee attrition can be particularly high in retail. Collaboration technologies can help employees have a clear view as to how their work affects the business and give employees a voice. Matt Adams, Mike's Bikes president, noted employees wanted insight into company performance because feeling "like they are part of something bigger is what makes someone stick around." For Acme Gadgets, we estimated a 30% turnover rate and found that a modest 5% improvement in employee retention could save the company more than \$2.3 million in three years.
- › **Revenue uplift from meeting customers' expectations.** Forrester's CX Index shows that in retail, employees' actions directly affect many drivers of a quality experience. So our model focuses on how collaboration technology ensures frontline employees can meet customers' expectations, like answering their questions and helping them make decisions. For example, a sales associate

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can call up a smartphone's product details when describing its features to a customer. Increased revenue due to improved customer experience drives around a present value of \$10.1 million annually in net new income for Acme Gadgets.

**FIGURE 5** Total Benefits For Acme Gadgets

Ref.	Cost	Initial	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Total	Present value
Atr	Increased operational efficiency — decreased time-to-access-information-and-expertise	\$0	\$6,493,500	\$11,934,000	\$17,199,000	\$35,626,500	\$28,687,855
Btr	Increased revenue due to improved customer experience	\$0	\$0	\$5,542,000	\$7,378,000	\$12,920,000	\$10,123,366
Ctr	Increased operational efficiency — decreased time-to-employee-effectiveness	\$0	\$1,328,670	\$2,319,786	\$3,167,262	\$6,815,718	\$5,504,671
Dtr	Increased employee retention	\$0	\$524,475	\$963,900	\$1,389,150	\$2,877,525	\$2,317,096
Etr	Reduction in licenses for redundant or poorly adopted collaboration software	\$0	\$570,000	\$570,000	\$570,000	\$1,710,000	\$1,417,506
Total benefits (risk-adjusted)		\$0	\$8,916,645	\$21,329,686	\$29,703,412	\$59,949,743	\$48,050,494

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**Risks: The Model Factors In Other Effects On Efficiency And CX**

We recognize that there are many other contributors to Acme Gadget's collaboration improvements beyond the technology. To account for this, we adjusted the model for risk including the following:

- › **Collaboration improvement requires more than technology.** Many factors that can improve collaboration are not solely attributed to the technology. This includes executive-level support, a focus on collaboration as a corporate value, changes to critical business processes, and shifts in management composition. And factors that can impede better collaboration can include management's and staff's resistance to change, difficulty rolling out the technology, and the quality of the information being shared with employees.
- › **The cost to deploy the technology can be higher than expected.** Migrating to the cloud can be complicated as companies try to determine which workloads to move first, how to duplicate key system integrations in the new environment, what training employees need to use the tools effectively, and how to reallocate technology organization staffers who used to manage physical infrastructure. And post-migration, companies may face issues in reconciling licenses as their user base grows. To account for this, we've reduced some of the cost savings related to moving into a cloud environment.

**Outcome: Collaboration Technology Yields A Positive ROI**

Our model shows that collaboration technology deployed to frontline and support personnel can tangibly improve business efficiency and customer experience (see Figure 6). Specifically it shows:

- › **A net benefit of around \$27 million.** The model shows that the benefits of Acme Gadgets' new collaboration tool portfolio — \$48,050,494 — outweighs the costs of acquiring, setting up, and deploying the technologies — \$21,148,893. This results in a net benefit of \$26,901,600.
- › **A risk-adjusted ROI of 127%.** This shows Acme Gadgets made a wise investment in using cloud-delivered collaboration technologies. The lower costs of deploying and managing these tools opens the door for the retailer to realize a high return on its investment.

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**FIGURE 6** Acme Gadgets Cash-Flow Analysis**Cash-flow analysis**

(Risk-adjusted estimates)

	Initial	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Total	Present value
Total costs	(\$357,000)	(\$8,337,000)	(\$8,408,400)	(\$8,337,000)	(\$25,439,400)	(\$21,148,893)
Total benefits	\$0	\$8,916,645	\$21,329,686	\$29,703,412	\$59,949,743	\$48,050,494
Net benefits	(\$357,000)	\$579,645	\$12,921,286	\$21,366,412	\$34,510,343	\$26,901,600
ROI						127%
Payback period (months)						7.4

**Recommendations****Develop Concrete Goals For Deploying Collaboration Technologies**

Before a business invests in expensive collaboration tool sets, it should be clear on what problems the technology will solve. To do this, AD&D pros should:

- › **Identify the roles employees play in business processes.** Talk with business leaders and managers across the organization to understand the role employees play in critical business processes. For instance, in the Acme Gadgets example, an AD&D pro would talk with managers about how sales associates make product recommendations to customers. AD&D pros can gain this insight through in-depth interviews with business leaders as well as through close examination of process maps, service blueprints, and customer journey maps.
- › **Determine how lags in information or expertise impede employee work.** This helps the technologists formulate solutions. A good way to do this is to speak directly to a representative group of workers through either in-depth interviews or focus groups. This will allow AD&D pros to get a firsthand account of what problems exist. These insights can be supplemented with employee journey maps — plots of the steps workers take to perform specific tasks — and questions about personal productivity inserted in employee engagement surveys.

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- › **Make the link between key metrics and customer experience.** AD&D pros must know if the collaboration tools they select are having the desired effect. This will allow them to course-correct if the technology isn't. They should re-engage their business colleagues to understand how employee performance relates to key metrics. For example, Forrester's CX Index shows that specific employee actions in a retail setting affect customer loyalty. Don't worry if you can't attribute 100% of the change in a particular metric to collaboration technology; employing a model like Forrester's TEI will help account for other environmental factors.

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## Supplemental Material

### Online Resources

The online version of this report includes an interactive ROI calculator to assess effective employee collaboration. Click the link at the beginning of this report on Forrester.com to download the calculator.

### Survey Methodology

Forrester Data Global Business Technographics® Software Survey, 2016, was fielded in August and September 2016. This online survey included 3,582 respondents in Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, New Zealand, the UK, and the US from companies with two or more employees.

Forrester Data Business Technographics ensures that the final survey population contains only those with significant involvement in the planning, funding, and purchasing of business and technology products and services. Research Now fielded this survey on behalf of Forrester. Survey respondent incentives include points redeemable for gift certificates.

Please note that the brand questions included in this survey should not be used to measure market share. The purpose of Forrester Data Business Technographics brand questions is to show usage of a brand by a specific target audience at one point in time.

### Companies Interviewed For This Report

We would like to thank the individuals from the following companies who generously gave their time during the research for this report.

BioTek

trivago

Mike's Bikes

Wyoming Office of Lands and Investments

Tan Tock Seng Hospital

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Forrester projects desktop and collaboration application spending to continue to grow in 2018, rising to \$30 billion globally in 2018. See the Forrester report "[Midyear Global Tech Market Outlook For 2017 To 2018.](#)"

<sup>2</sup> We asked global software technology and business decision makers about their plans to adopt collaboration software: 18% said they were planning to implement it within the next 12 months; 40% said they were implementing or had implemented it; and 24% said they were expanding or upgrading their implementation. Source: Forrester Data Global Business Technographics Software Survey, 2016.

To understand how the technology landscape is evolving, see the Forrester report "[Knowing The Enterprise Collaboration Landscape Is Essential To Digital Transformation.](#)"

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- <sup>3</sup> Red Robin called its staff Yammer network Yummiversity and used it as a way to augment its training program. See the Forrester report “[Case Study: Red Robin Builds An Agile Customer-Centric Culture With Yammer.](#)”
- <sup>4</sup> We define a loyal employee as one who is willing to do the following: remain at her company for the foreseeable future, recommend her company’s products/services, and recommend her company as a place to work. Source: Forrester Data Global Business Technographics Applications And Collaboration Workforce Survey, 2016.
- <sup>5</sup> Source: Jim Harter and Annamarie Mann, “The Right Culture: Not Just About Employee Satisfaction,” Gallup News, April 12, 2017 ([http://www.gallup.com/businessjournal/208487/right-culture-not-employee-happiness.aspx?g\\_source=engaged+workers+happy+customers&g\\_medium=search&g\\_campaign=tiles](http://www.gallup.com/businessjournal/208487/right-culture-not-employee-happiness.aspx?g_source=engaged+workers+happy+customers&g_medium=search&g_campaign=tiles)).
- <sup>6</sup> Net Promoter and NPS are registered service marks, and Net Promoter Score is a service mark, of Bain & Company, Satmetrix Systems, and Fred Reichheld.
- <sup>7</sup> Source: Greg Kumparak, “Niles is a Slack bot that learns your team’s questions and answers them so you don’t have to,” TechCrunch, March 17, 2017 (<https://techcrunch.com/2017/03/17/niles-is-a-slack-bot-that-learns-your-teams-questions-and-answers-them-so-you-dont-have-to/>).
- <sup>8</sup> Forrester’s CX Index measures how well a brand’s customer experience strengthens the loyalty of its customers so that it can reap these benefits. See the Forrester report “[The US Customer Experience Index, 2017.](#)”
- <sup>9</sup> UK supermarket chain Waitrose created communities to allow employees across its 350 locations to share insights. To encourage employees to use the communities, one store manager replaced daily briefings and physical notice boards with postings in the community, driving workers to the platform. See the Forrester report “[The Customer Experience Ecosystem Redefined.](#)”

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