

The Question is no Longer Whether or not to Improve Collaboration, it is **“HOW”** to improve it

The research and data only serve to confirm and reinforce what many have intuitively already known all along, improved sharing of and access to information, paired with better and more frequent collaboration and communication, will lead to better results, faster.

Such a simple and matter of fact statement, yet most organizations wrestle with how to do so, as from the outset no one seems to know who is responsible for, or for that matter, who **“owns”** collaboration.

The two crucial building blocks are the organizations’ **“information”** on one hand, and their **“culture”** on the other. If the two are not intertwined, there will be no collaboration, as it is not just about a small group of people working closely together.....**collaborating**.....but also about whether or not the individual group can access the collective experience and knowledge of other groups or even the entire organization.

Fear of what could happen if valuable information fell into the wrong hands has resulted in access and security policies which have been written erring on safe side, with no regard for the lost opportunity cost of not having had the information available to others. The challenge of building a truly collaborative organization lies in finding a delicate balance between **security & access** on one hand and **openness & trust** on the other. **Governance**, security & access policies around information must be written with a focus on the business process for which the information will be used, providing the greatest freedom for openness and trust, without compromising security. We live in a world where to one person a piece of information may seem worthless and trivial, but to another it may be critical and change the decision and course of action. How do we create an environment where people can access this?

An organization striving to improve its **“collaborative performance”** must also accept and buy into that a group or collective decision will **always be better** than that of a single individual. Because everybody is expected to do more with less resource, more quickly, and with everybody being busy, the tendency is to have a series of **“one on one”** conversations to gather input in order to make a decision.

The better decision would have been the result of the entire group, speaking together, whether it be by means of face to face, by telephone or via web-conference. Here again, a delicate balance must be sought between soliciting the opinions of others and keep the size of the group down to a manageable and productive number. Often the case can be made for many more to participate, but this often results in a lengthy process and at times paralysis. Many are now regular users of Skype and FaceTime. It is time they transition to secure, enterprise web-conferencing applications, which can be saved and even made searchable, adding to the organization’s collective knowledge base.

The question now begs to be asked; where does this journey to a new world of openness, trust, shared information and frequent group communication start? People look to their **leaders** as examples. How frequently do the leaders solicit input, involve and ask others? How open are they with information and participate in discussion? All behavior which contributes to what is now termed the level of **“employee engagement”**.

This term is increasingly tied to another term which is very popular – **“social enterprise”** or **E2.0**. This does not refer to brand Facebook pages and Twitter activity. These are part of the social marketing campaigns and are separate from what is termed as **“social enterprise”**. These are the company internal industrial strength, secure social platforms, such as Jive, Moxiesoft, Yammer, IBM Connections and Socialtext. These serve as platforms where employees can post questions, engage in debate and others answer and contribute their experience, knowledge and share resources.

Software tools and applications have arrived on the scene and are seen as the path toward better collaboration. Without knowing how well the organization collaborate and without a strategy, these tools often are stand alone (and costly) and never reach their true level of possible contribution. The collaboration strategy, must be anchored into the business strategy and business processes. The **Collabogence Assessment** framework and methodology is driven off of actual behavior on multiple dimensions (driven off of current tool usage). It highlights individual as well as intra-team collaboration and how well business processes work and tools are used. The tools available are numerous:

<i>Repositories/Content Mgmt</i>	<i>Email & Unified Com.</i>
<i>Knowledge & Project Mgmt</i>	<i>Web-conf & telepresence</i>
<i>Bus. Process and workflow</i>	<i>EIM & Enterprise search</i>
<i>E2.0 Soc. Media & communities</i>	<i>CRM</i>

Although companies have many of these tools, they often are underutilized. Data confirms most people are stuck in **face to face** and **email** modes. They need a path to finding a way toward more sharing, easier access, more frequent & open (group) debate, and generally better **collaboration**.

In a first step, select 10 teams which would benefit of improved collaboration, not only within each team, but teams which would benefit from sharing amongst each other. The **Assessment**, which takes 6 to 8 weeks to complete and is based primarily off of tool user data with limited face to face time detracting people from their tasks at hand. The findings are the basis upon which, together with your people, that the collaboration strategy and implementation plan are built (*incl. tool roadmap and training*). Using the framework and the data assessment, there is a simple framework to measure the progress as the teams move forward. Progress will determine the extent of applicability to other parts of the organization.

--Collabogence is an advisory firm focused on improving collaborative activity and performance, including the use of technology, especially in virtual/remote global teams and collaborating across the firewall with customers, partners and suppliers.

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