Executive Summary

Who Shares Wins

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Those who share, win

In a prescient quote over 40 years ago, Fred Smith of FedEx said, “The information about the package is as important as the package itself.” We are moving inexorably towards an era where information is the primary currency. Everything from missiles to dishwashers to cars is software-defined and software-controlled. Knowledge, information and intellectual property rule.

This era is also defined by change – in the nature of the firm, work, society, industries and business models. Increasingly we see exciting, more open models, with more adaptation and agility. We also see employees bringing value through their communities – BYOC (bring your own community).

Hence information, ideas, transactions and processes need to be shared ever more widely, quickly and seamlessly across internal functional silos, companies, industries and societies; on a personal and an organizational level, in predictable and unpredictable ways, structured and unstructured. For the next 20 years at least, the ability to collaborate and share broadly across functional, corporate and societal boundaries, minimizing the friction and maximizing the outcomes, will differentiate the winners. The figure below indicates that the deeper the collaborative and sharing capability, the bigger the prize.

Diane Schwarz, CIO of Textron (a $13.4 billion, 35,000 employee conglomerate), talked to us about a pan-organization competitive innovation initiative built on collaborative working. In the full report, we discuss the nature of collaboration and sharing initiatives, including references to a number of real-world success and failure examples.

The collaboration and sharing landscape is littered with failures

Despite cooperation sounding like a ‘no brainer’ good idea, it is certainly not trivial to achieve. There are many examples of failure to collaborate or share successfully. As illustrated in the figure below, some of the barriers are systemic, unavoidable challenges to collaboration, whilst others are common mistakes often made in collaboration initiatives.
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(Hence we hear the few success examples over and over again)

In a recent vendor study of technology leaders, the #1 reason for collaboration projects was to *increase individual productivity*

Systemic barriers adapted and extended from Morten Hansen, *Collaboration*

But sharing isn’t easy, and failure examples are much more common than success cases

The systemic barriers include:

- The search barrier – the challenge of finding the person/information/capability you are looking for, which also leads to search bias, the tendency to work with known entities.

- Transfer barriers point to the cost of interacting with others different from yourself – different professions, organizational silos, cultures, values, norms, languages, etc.

- Not invented here speaks for itself – the reluctance of individuals to take on ideas or knowledge that they didn’t create.

- Hoarding refers to the belief that ‘information/knowledge is power’, which creates a reluctance to share.

- Lack of trust is an issue in all collaboration. It can take many forms, including issues of confidentiality, fairness and reliability.

- Collaborative inertia is also a challenge, since collaboration is a team sport; no-one can play alone and quality depends on the lowest common denominator.

As well as these systemic barriers, we see continually repeated mistakes in collaboration initiatives. These include lack of clear goals, over-focus on tools, a ‘build it and they will come approach’ (i.e. making collaboration very separate from existing work practices and processes), failure to integrate collaboration with everything else that is going on (in particular, reward systems), and ‘tool fatigue’ from too many tools and channels.

In the full report, we highlight success practices that avoid or ameliorate these barriers to sharing and collaboration.
Winners set collaboration up for success by establishing the What, Where and Why

- **The What.** The worst place to be regarding clarity around collaboration and sharing is to have no definition. At best this creates confusion, demotivation and lack of action. At worst it creates a series of misdirected, value-destroying, strategically misaligned investments and activities. It is particularly helpful to distinguish between the three types of collaborative activity: supporting individual productivity by reducing search and transfer barriers, using synergistic teams to increase overall productivity, and encouraging sharing groups and communities to discover, develop and realize new forms of value.

- **The Where.** Collaboration and/or sharing can benefit every aspect of business, but it is helpful to have a prioritized list of focus areas. Four common transactional collaboration areas are: projects and programmes, operations and service delivery, ecosystem relationships, and decision-making bodies. Two further areas more focused on sharing in general are innovation activities and communities.

- **The Why.** The question is one of value: what will you get out of it? This should drive how much and how you collaborate. There are typically four forms of value from collaboration and sharing: improved operations, increased employee engagement, more innovation, and better engagement across ecosystems.

Clarity about the What, the Where and the Why sounds simple, but they are the real basis for collaborative success, rather than (for example) starting with a discussion of which tools to deploy.
The value is realized through behaviour-based leadership

Perhaps the most frequent mistake that collaboration initiatives have suffered from is the ‘build it and they will come’ approach – creating a separate collaboration capability that participants are expected to engage with, separate from their existing activities, and maybe using very different tools, language and approach. This is compounded by not creating the imperatives or incentives for such capabilities to be used. Think of a SharePoint implementation, languishing unused in the corporate stack.

There are three key levers to avoiding this issue. First, try to embed collaboration in what people do day-to-day, in terms of location (where it is), tool (what it is) and connection to activity (contextualization). Don’t make them go somewhere else to use it.

Second, look to change habits and behaviours. Habit is a more powerful driver than most of us realize. You want collaboration to become a habit, even an addiction. Originating at MIT, the ‘habit loop’ illustrated above is a reinforcing cycle that builds habits based on three elements: cue, routine and reward. The emerging discipline of digital anthropology can inform our approach here. High technology companies such as Intel have had anthropologists on their staff for some time.

Third, ensure your incentives, rewards and recognition support collaboration rather than conflict with it. In many organizations, there is a desire for sharing and teamwork, but the incentive systems reward individual behaviours and create competition. Wherever people are graded ‘on a curve’ (i.e. only a certain percentage can get high ratings), there is an incentive to compete rather than collaborate – perversely even when ‘collaborative behaviour’ is one of the success metrics.

Six key questions
The full report contains much more detail around collaborative success and failure. But before embarking on any significant collaborative initiatives, you should consider the following six questions:

1. **What?** Do you have a clear, shared understanding of what collaboration/sharing means for your enterprise/stakeholders?
2. **Where?** Have you identified the locations where collaboration can create the most value?
3. **Why?** Are you clear on the types and amount of value you are looking to create?
4. **Tools?** Have you got a good, evolving set of tools that consider participants’ needs and preferences?
5. **Close to home?** Are you embedding collaboration in what people do (rather than making them go elsewhere to collaborate), and using behavioural techniques to make it a habit?
6. **Bottom-up?** Are you encouraging and learning from grassroots collaboration, and creating and jumping on opportunistic moments to show people the power of collaboration?
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