

Collaboration and communication in business

[Sociology](#), [Communication](#)



Increasingly, employees are in jobs where interaction is their primary value-adding activity (Laudon & Laudon, p. 90). List and describe collaboration and communication tools that you use regularly. How do they improve your work both in terms of the process and the product? What is the approach that organisations could adopt in relation to these tools to improve organisational performance?

Fortunately (or unfortunately), I have been working with the same organization for the last 19 years. As a result, I have been witness to the evolution of my organization globally in terms of being “tech savvy” towards effective use of communication and collaboration tools. In my opinion, the more the business is facing turbulence in terms of market and/ or competitors, the higher the need emerges for collaboration and communication.

In the good old days of 90's, when we used to do business in countries, with little or insufficient IT infrastructure and capabilities, we used to still manage effectively the customer relationships and profitability of the business through telecommunication links like fax and telephones as well as F2F meetings with the stakeholders involved. Somehow, it appeared to be relatively easier to make business dealings under such circumstances.

Although, it is worth mentioning, that the core value proposition of the products and/ or services during those times were considered by our customers, to be due to the high technology and streamlined product development processes of our company. With the advent of internet as a viable channel of communication and information sharing and the diversification of business into different market segments and geographical

regions, it became imperative for the organization to look for easier ways of communication and collaboration.

Moreover, the decline of experts with know-how or knowledge of the entire value chain of the product/ service, also calls for involvement of experts with specific domain knowledge, who need to communicate and collaborate on a regular basis, within the framework of certain rules. Starting from end nineties, we started using Lotus Notes as one-stop tool for both communication and collaboration. Since this was primarily driven by the operational level, lots of other strategic and operational tools for communication and collaboration were built around this tool. However, due to various reasons like re-organisation, diversification, acquisitions etc, this tool went on to assume a mammoth shape, lost connectivity to more up-to-date state of the art tools and was dragging down the business globally in terms of communication and collaboration. Moreover, the hierarchy of the organization was also responsible for taking a pragmatic approach towards decommissioning of this tool and creating a more flexible IT architecture, which can be agile and can integrate with state of the art tools across the various areas of business like marketing, product development, product delivery, logistics and supply chain and after sales services to customers.

In the last 2 years our organization has moved to MS based office tool suite including tools for communication and collaboration. The legacy systems of LN are getting decommissioned and huge LN DB's were converted and transferred to more easily manageable and accessible DB systems. Right now we are using Passport based tool suites where individual applications

communicate with each other and augment the ongoing, required collaboration among the various entities of the organization.

It is true that most part of the organization is adding value to the communication flow through the effective use of tools, but at the same time, more emphasis is put on sharing and storing key, useful information to be used by anybody in the organization, who may need it, e. g. by creating internal blogs or Wikis with managers motivating and/ or incentivizing information and know-how sharing. Useful collaborative tools like Live Meeting, Telepresence etc can ensure participation from different locations at different time zones, sharing the same level and content of information.

Collaboration, the ability to work together especially in business is raising key concerns for organizations taking on new approaches to improve performance and outcomes. Because leaders are looking for positive signs that acquiring collaboration tools will impact the bottom line, an organization may also need to consider its communication and collaboration practices. According to research and best practices, the combination of several factors may help steer collaboration to achieve business results, through empowerment, culture, and technology.

Some practical examples of each of these factors that are causing collaboration to work in business are mentioned below: Empowering People through Communication and Collaboration Empowerment is a form of approval for individuals and teams to make decisions. Starting with executive collaboration, key leaders of your organization may need to support sharedgoalsfor empowering people if they don't already, through

communication and collaboration. The reality of collaboration for leadership is through empowerment.

By embracing a model of operational coordination across teams and departments, collaboration can basically drive motivation and engagement. In Harvard Business Review's *Aligning Strategy with Technology*, the chapter "Empowered" dives into an example of empowered sales teams to develop sales solutions using video at Black & Decker. Video as a communication form is extremely popular. Because of the complexity of Black & Decker's many different products, the sales staff is able to document challenges in the field and quickly communicate how power tools are used on job sites.

As the authors Josh Bernoff and Ted Schadler pointed out, these useful bits of information also benefit senior management, corporate marketing, and public relations. Bernoff and Schadler use the phrase "highly empowered and resourceful operatives" – dubbed HEROs as characteristic of empowered teams like this example at Black & Decker. In fact, the authors' research study shows a high proportion of information workers, by industry and job type, especially marketing & sales in technical products and services that are empowered to create similar customer solutions.

Creating Value in Collaborative Culture The collaborative culture of an organization stems from its' shared beliefs, values, and business practices. Author and business consultant, Evan Rosen says collaboration is about creating value. In Bloomberg Businessweek, Evan Rosen emphasizes every worker contributes knowledge to the business. Using an example at Dow Chemical, he writes, "The day's sales and inventory numbers are shared

with everybody in the company, including the people doing the heaving lifting on the front lines.

Dow acknowledges that people will do a better job when they know their actions contribute or detract from business results. " Taking a step further, former CEO of Campbell Soup, Doug Conant, is famous for handwritten notes to employees celebrating their contributions. Recognition through these and other high value communication practices further strengthens a collaborative culture. Establishing a Technological Framework for Collaboration Collaboration tools essentially provide a technological framework to enable people and groups to work together.

But adding new collaboration tools into the enterprise does not change things overnight. Where does an organization begin to design a technological framework? A gap analysis of workflows is often necessary and can help in redesigning processes. Furthermore, an organization's specific data, based on activity in the organizational network, including sales, customer services and support, product development, and even external resources, can be collected, analyzed, and better routed to teams.

This social intelligence can help everyone be informed. Tony Zingale, CEO, of Jive Software ' sees change the way work gets done' - referring to the communication and interactivity of social software like Jive. And reports are showing cost efficiencies, speed to market, and greater pool of ideas and innovation through collaboration, which are passed on to the customer through cost savings and better products.