smileguide 17

Tips for collaboration success

Making your workforce more connected, productive and happy.

May 2017
Tips for Collaboration Success
Making your workforce more connected, productive and happy

Collaboration is not something that happens simply because the technology and tools are there. In fact, there’s a general consensus that in many cases there are too many tools available and workers are struggling with collaboration tool overload resulting in confusion and frustration. Workers don’t want to open another window, or launch another app on their device. They want their lives simplified.

In this guide we look at what we mean by collaboration, why it is a key success factor in digital workplaces, the benefits it brings to the organisation and how the right technology supports, and can help to boost, collaborative behaviour.

Tip 1:
Collaboration is not about technology
It’s about a culture that unlocks capability and potential.

Report author:
Alison Boothby is a freelance business writer specialising in change, engagement and topical workplace issues.
What do we mean by collaboration?

The process of connecting the right people with the right information at the right time in order to make the right business decisions is not a new concept of course. But in today’s knowledge economy and an increasingly global business landscape, collaboration can improve employee productivity, drive innovation, empower employees, enhance motivation and sharpen competitive edge. For many organisations that could be the difference between success and failure.

When technology is introduced that offers so much more than merely the ability of workers within a company to work together simultaneously on a particular task via file sharing and co-authoring, a whole new ecosystem opens up offering improved workflow process, real-time communication, more user-generated and data-driven content and a much more personal and relevant user experience. The end result is an organisation that is more quickly able to respond to industry and economic changes, better able to capture the collective knowledge and expertise of its employees, and retain and leverage that knowledge to innovate ahead of their competitors. This is what we now mean by collaboration.

Maximo Castagno, Chief Product Officer at Beezy says: “The evolution of collaboration is quickly changing the business landscape, and delivering on the promises of the digital workplace – it has become clear that good collaboration is not just nice-to-have: it is now business-critical. Companies are looking for innovative ways to build intelligence into their internal systems. As we continue to innovate to extend and enhance the Microsoft stack, we are focusing more and more on how we can add intelligence to SharePoint to help our customers better collaborate and communicate. It’s not only the technology, the way employees want, and expect, to receive communications has changed. They no longer want or respond well to a one-way distribution of information, but are looking for communications that enable them to respond, provide feedback, and share with their peers.”

Tip 2: Innovate quickly and iterate

Innovate again. Learn from mistakes – don’t penalise failure.
Collaboration at the heart of success

‘Positive, effective and efficient collaboration practices should be incorporated into the workplace through technology, processes and organisational culture’ - goals which, according to a new study on collaboration by Oxford Economics and SAP, companies have not yet mastered. The research, which surveyed more than 4000 people in 21 countries, focused on the things that top performing organisations did right to be defined as ‘Digital Winners’. The four key findings were:

* Fostering an across the board willingness between employees to share information and expertise
* Encouraging managers to lead by example
* Enabling decision-making closer to the point of impact via flatter organisational structures and
* Nurturing global workforces to generate wider perspectives.

Speed, access to information, ideation and innovation are all cornerstones of today’s successful organisation. The research tells us: “Doing business successfully requires companies to stave off new and established competitors, rethink products and services, and streamline processes - and collaboration is at the heart of all these initiatives.”

Tip 3: Allow people to be social

Social is the glue that sticks your organisation together. Collaboration doesn’t have to be formal.
Creating the right culture

In most organisations the idea of a successful collaborative culture is gaining traction with the rapidly changing workforce demographic and increased globalisation accelerating the rate of progress. It is well documented and backed up by research studies such as PwC’s NextGen: A Global Generational Study that Millennials value greater flexibility, appreciation and team collaboration at work. Accelerating the integration of technology into the workplace, enabling workers to harness technology in ways that give them more flexibility and increases efficiency is an absolute must for Millennials and Gen Z—they expect to have access to the best tools for collaboration and execution. This digitally native and tech savvy workforce have been quick to get on board with tools that take the friction out of working, helping them get their jobs done, often outside the formal governance of an IT department. The tools they choose offer a friendly and simple user experience resembling those they use in everyday life like Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat etc.

Ironically, the rapid adoption of these stand alone social tools has perpetuated one of the biggest challenges in the enterprise, namely that there is little or no integration between these tools, information resides in silos making search ineffective with no centralised single experience. The resulting confusion of what tool to use when, and where to find what has, over time, created the friction these tools were designed to negate!

In response, Jay Greene writing in The Wall Street Journal says: “Makers of collaboration apps and services are trying to simplify things for customers, tweaking their offerings to enable people to do more work within their suite of products, so there is less of a need to jump around.” Market challengers - the likes of Slack and Workplace by Facebook - are good examples here where users can access a variety of apps and services via deep links within the core collaboration product.

About the NextGen study

This global study of PwC’s workforce is not its first foray into assessing the attitudes of this new generation of employees. In 2008, the firm began digging deeper into an observed shift in thinking among younger employees in Millennials at Work; Reshaping the Workplace. The NextGen study was designed to further explore that early thinking, and represents the largest research project of its kind.

NextGen was a multi-year undertaking that included input from one in four of the 180,000 employees of PwC firms—at all levels of seniority, across every service that PwC offers throughout its global network of member firms. Working with the University of Southern California and the London Business School, PwC sought to clearly identify Millennials’ attitudes and aspirations and how they aligned with PwC’s workplace culture and expectations. In other words, PwC wanted to better understand this new generation of individuals entering the workforce.

To pinpoint and compare the findings between Millennials and non-Millennials, a sub-set of employees at the same career stage (9,120 Millennials and 4,030 non-Millennials at the Senior Associate and Manager levels) was culled from the larger research for additional analysis.

The data was collected between 2011 and 2012 and subsequently was compiled and analyzed.
Tip 4: Automate and optimise routine tasks

There are already powerful tools like Office Graph and Delve to help.

Where are we now?

It has been fascinating to witness the evolution of collaboration and communication technology over the last 5-7 years, especially as the cloud begins to permeate every aspect of the enterprise. Where intranets are concerned, we have made a notable shift from document and knowledge-centric systems that centrally store our information assets, to cloud-distributed conversation-centric tools that provide a consumer-like experience for your workforce - transforming the way people work by making organisations more connected, productive and happy.

Like it or not, SharePoint has a stranglehold on the intranet market. For many, SharePoint is the monster we love to hate, frequently poorly deployed and underutilised by the workforce. Gartner suggested back in 2014 that some 75% of company intranets are on SharePoint but more than 50% of these are stalled, struggling or abandoned.

However, a 2016 report from ZDNet found that Microsoft SharePoint is still the most used platform for intranets, portals, and digital collaboration in medium to large enterprises today. Some 200,000 organisations worldwide are part of the SharePoint ecosystem with user numbers increasing significantly with the growth of SharePoint online and Office 365.

So, while some Microsoft SharePoint products are nothing short of marvellous - rich with features that support the business and engage employees, anchored by predictable navigation, supported by a smart search, and with page layouts that make employees want to scan all the content - we also know that this is not always the case. And this is where clever companies like Beezy and Nintex come in: not only do they understand the power and capabilities of SharePoint and Office 365, they are able to deliver a great user experience. Beezy’s take on it is this: “The Microsoft stack is the most fertile ground on which to build an intelligent digital workplace. We combine all its rich features with a consumer-like user experience that requires no training and is a delight to use.”
What does a modern collaborative organisation look like?

It is worth pointing out that organisations that fail at in-person collaboration will not solve their problems with technology. If anything, technology will further exacerbate the problems.

An intelligent workplace - a truly collaborative business - understands the need to break down barriers and hierarchies; it has the ability to identify expertise, and the systems in place to generate, capture and share knowledge and know-how. When planning your collaboration strategy, consider these four aspects of your business:

* **Collaboration** - An intelligent workplace puts teams on the same page at the speed of light regardless of where they are located.
* **Communication** - An intelligent workplace delivers corporate information to the right audience and generates engagement.
* **Knowledge Management** - An intelligent workplace captures knowledge as people get their work done and re-surfaces it at the right time and in the right context.
* **Processes** - An intelligent workplace connects and automates the different tools that employees are using and speeds up their daily routines.

An environment that uses a number of unsupported tools leaves the business nervous about who is sharing what, how they are sharing it and with whom. This lack of trust tends to lead to an increase in restrictions and company rules, lowering adoption rates of the platforms that are provided. It is important to understand that different teams have different collaboration and communication needs, and yet our organisations tend to treat everyone the same. While it is ideal to deliver the features and user experience that employees want and need, it needs to be done in a managed way - or organisations will find themselves repeating history, managing many disparate tools and data silos, and constantly fighting administrative, compliance, and governance fires. Organisations need to find a balance in their collaboration strategies and understand why some of their teams stray. Spending the time to fully understand the behaviours you wish to encourage and support across the organisation is essential. You then select the technology that makes this effective and efficient – there is little point trying to retro-fit a technology platform: adoption will suffer and no one will love it. Let’s look at ZF, for example.

**Tip 5:**

*Don’t force-fit technology*

Technology is there to serve you. Make sure it helps people get work done. If it doesn’t. They won’t use it.
Don’t force-fit the technology

ZF Friedrichshafen, a global leader in driveline and chassis technology as well as active and passive safety technology, spent nearly two years laying the foundations for their new generation intranet – the first major step on the way to a digital workplace that will increase efficiency, agility and flexibility at a global scale, while fostering a transparent and open culture.

After a thorough evaluation of the leading collaboration software solutions, they chose Beezy. Daniel Pfeiffer, responsible for the functional part of the project, explained: “We believe that usability and simplicity are crucial for the success of a modern platform for internal communication and collaboration. The great overall user experience of Beezy will make it easy for our employees to adopt the new platform, and to make it part of their daily work life.”

Two years ago ZF acquired another company, doubling its workforce, along with a new CIO, and new heads of HR and IC, all of whom had experience of social intranets. Now with 135,000 employees in more than 200 locations, this huge change was to be the catalyst to forge ahead with a new social, collaborative intranet replacing countless knowledge sharing platforms and at least three different corporate intranets; it is a complex landscape.

Daniel Pfeiffer told us: “We need to be able to work together internationally on some very complex engineering projects and although culturally we are pretty good at collaborating, many projects have been siloed in the past because it is just too difficult to know who else could help. As an organisation, we sometimes just don’t know what we know. Our corporate structures and our ways of measuring success are rooted in business units, divisions and locations which do not naturally support knowledge sharing on a wider basis. For collaboration to happen across all locations and functional areas, it is a change process for sure. In choosing Beezy we have made a conscious trade-off between complex functionality and a great user experience. But Beezy offered the most user-friendly and customisable solution for us that requires little training in its use. We can put our energies into the ongoing training, communication and campaigns required to build the right collaboration behaviours in our people. It’s a change in mindset.”

For collaboration to be successful, it needs to be led - not just announced and left unexamined. When collaboration disintegrates into analysis paralysis, or an excuse for abdicating all responsibility for decisions, it becomes an obstruction and a waste of time. The four cornerstones of successful collaboration are certainly upheld by the case study examples in this guide.

Tip 6:
Stop looking for another hammer

There are lots of stand-alone tools to do all sorts of jobs, but they create more silos. Think holistically. A one-stop-shop for your working day.

“usability and simplicity are crucial for the success of a modern platform”
Characteristics of a collaborative organisation

1. **Empower employees**: It’s all about empowering your employees - creating a more agile and inclusive culture, putting employees at the heart of the organisation and creating an amazing and intelligent place to work.

2. **More targeted communications**: Employees don’t need to participate in every discussion, but they need to know what is relevant to them, and why. Without context, they’ll lack the information needed to add business value.

3. **Company alignment**: Give people a shared sense of purpose, aligning strategy and goals. It builds trust and improves productivity.

4. **Encourage conversation**: Actively encourage team conversations in context to the work they do. You’ll discover less time focused on deciding what to do and more time simply doing it!

5. **Build Trust**: Colleagues have to get to know each other first before they will trust them to collaborate so encourage non-work groups (charity events, sports etc) where people can meet virtually for the first time.

6. **Generate engagement**: Help employees to have fun while they work. Motivated employees are more engaged, engaged employees inspire positive behaviour, positive behaviour drives happiness - and happiness equals a more aligned and productive workforce!

7. **Promote transparency**: The more your employees are aware of “what’s going on”, the more their effort will be in sync with your business objectives. Transparency works both ways; giving employees a stronger voice will, in turn, lead to a more energised culture and increased innovation, which means more ideas, improved quality, and better performance.

8. **Break down silos**: Great things happen when you break down barriers and hierarchies. Help your workforce to work differently - to be more open, to break down the cultural and information silos, and to promote collaboration and sharing of knowledge so you can be truly innovative.

9. **Recognise talent**: Provide recognition and feedback to reward and encourage the right behaviours, enabling you to identify and recognise skills, helping you acquire & retain talent.

10. **Embrace new technologies**: Don’t fear the future. Smart technologies and bots can optimise and automate routine tasks and build efficiency.
How to give employees what they like

Technology has certainly helped to lead the way in changing how we communicate in our corporate world but the most important thing about improving collaboration in the workplace is to understand how your people communicate, interact and get their work done, summed up by Stanley Awuku, Internal Digital Experience Manager at Vodafone: “Never take it out of the user experience because you can too easily get caught up in the technology. Technology bombards you with nitty-gritty details where you can lose sight of what you are doing. You must always make sure that what you’re developing is for the benefit of the user and that it delivers some true business value.”

Vodafone’s social collaboration story started back in 2010 with the desire to bring external social communication behaviours used in the wider world into the company to increase knowledge sharing. At the time, Vodafone Circle, built with Beezy, connected an entire workforce of more than 100,000 employees. Every Vodafone employee, no matter who they were or where they worked around the globe, had an integrated social workplace to connect, find, collaborate and share in a simple and seamless way.

“At the beginning it was a hard sell to get employees to embrace the new behaviours from how they were communicating before, which was mainly email and instant messaging such as Lync,” Stanley Awuku told us, “but over time they seemed to like the benefits of being able to reach the masses using one place and getting feedback from people at the same time. The fact that we could remove some of those communication barriers was a good thing.”

Backed by CEO Vittorio Colao, who used it himself to run a digital townhall, Circle had great impact. “It was a good feeling for staff in such a huge organisation that they were talking to the CEO: ‘Oh wow! I can actually talk to the CEO.’”

Vodafone Circle, like all Beezy sites, worked on communities. Stanley Awuku again: “SharePoint always allowed you to create project sites, but what was missing was the ability to freely share. People used Circle to get those conversations going and by using hashtags they could see what had been discussed in the past on that subject. Everything was referenced and archived. No knowledge got lost. Circle was great for keeping people updated on the projects they were working on. Beezy’s user interface is simple to use and it hid the complexities of SharePoint while making the most of its strengths, with great document management and great search.”

Vodafone found there was a need to govern community creation to ensure the number was manageable, and have since applied this to Yammer.

Tip 7: Understand WHY before you decide on the WHAT

Find out what the governance, compliance and security limitations are.
Making it easy

There’s a reason why the most popular sites – Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn – share common functionalities such as the newsfeed, activity cards and a single place to post updates. Whatever device we are logged into, most people tend to begin their days poring over one or more newsfeeds to get up to date on latest developments, see who is doing what and responding to and joining in conversations. Once logged in, the newsfeed becomes dynamic, personalised and relevant based on your own profile, your network and the communities, groups and interests you are part of and your own activity. Based on your interactions and activities, this stream of content is continuously refreshed enabling you to discover and interact with people and content that you may otherwise have missed altogether. It keeps your finger on the pulse. And it’s second nature to all but a few. These collaborative behaviours already prevail in our personal lives and we need the technology to help us replicate them in our corporate worlds.

It is no wonder, therefore, that it is precisely these functionalities that are recreated in the likes of the Beezy platform, for when employees are not well informed, they are not engaged, they are not creating content, they are not sharing ideas, and they are not expanding the collective knowledge of the organisation – all of which are fundamental to a successful collaborative environment.

Tip 8: Embrace machine learning and automation

It’s how you will remain efficient and competitive.
Maximising the collaborative potential of a Microsoft/SharePoint environment

A sense of community is at the heart of successful collaborative organisations, something not lost on those, like Beezy, who are innovating in this space. Maximo Castagno explains the rationale behind Beezy: “Communities are at the core of Beezy, enabling teams and individuals to identify and participate in relevant discussions and activities. Anything created within the system is tied to a community, adding context and relevance to everything which improves search and discovery. The Sharebox is Beezy’s unique feature that dramatically improves the process of sharing content and knowledge by stripping out all the complexity of SharePoint. Users don’t have to worry about what is happening ‘behind the scenes’ as it’s all taken care of. They can do their work from one easy to use space. It’s a quick and intuitive way to add all sorts of content to any community or interest group, to ask a question, raise a poll, praise a colleague, write a blog – or even suggest an idea! It’s a fast and efficient way to connect people all over the world with relevant and timely content and ideas – beating the simplicity of email.”

Users don’t have to worry about what is happening ‘behind the scenes’

Tip 9: Collaboration is mostly about TRUST
Give the power to the people; they usually do the right thing.
Into the future

The evolution of collaboration is changing the business landscape. The digital workplace is a promise being fulfilled. But the rate of change shows no sign of abating. To meet the rapid pace of change, the systems and tools we use every day at work must become more intelligent. As companies increasingly move towards solutions that incorporate real time communication and social collaboration capabilities, the trend is also shifting toward more user-generated and data-driven content as a way to pull people into the corporate dialogue. By providing a much more personal and relevant end user experience, employees are more willing and better able to discuss and share ideas, and to collaborate, resulting in organisations that are able to respond quickly to economic changes, better able to tap into the collective knowledge and expertise of the global workforce, and innovate ahead of their competition.

There is plenty of hype around Artificial Intelligence and bots and we can certainly expect to see developments in intelligent search. Whether it’s product recommendations on Amazon, or voice recognition like Siri, learning about a user’s habits, what they are interested in, what they already know, what answers to suggest to them in response to a query, in essence this is all pattern matching or machine learning. It will just get better, enabling quicker and more efficient collaboration.

“Beezy are integrating and utilising Microsoft’s latest cloud offerings, like Graph and the Bot Framework, in an innovative and unique way to offer best in practice collaboration!” suggests Alex Montgomery, IoT & Advanced Analytics Commercial Lead, Microsoft.

And let’s not forget email. Ubiquitous and here to stay, it is still the most commonly used collaboration tool – although we often don’t think of it like that – and while much is written about how overloaded inboxes stall productivity, and how much pain could be avoided should we rid ourselves of it, in reality the goal of effective collaboration is not to reduce email traffic. Reducing email traffic could, of course, be evidence of more efficient collaboration! The evolution of smart email with notifications and integrated activity streams will of course improve how we use email as we compete to win the battle for our colleagues’ attention.

Tip 9: Think seriously about mobile.

Flexibility to access your work needs to be available anytime, any place and anywhere.
Beezy is the intelligent workplace for Microsoft Office 365 and SharePoint. They make collaboration within your organisation easy and relevant. By extending the Microsoft productivity stack, they unify the digital workplace and empower users to communicate, share and collaborate better, whether on-premises, in the cloud and in hybrid environments.

Large customers such as Vodafone, ZF, Transocean and many more can now benefit from the full functionality of their intelligent, modern digital workplace that brings together Collaboration, Communication, Knowledge and Processes.

Learn more at www.beezy.net