

Forbes insights

Why Businesses Need a Collaboration Strategy

IN ASSOCIATION WITH:



TABLE OF CONTENTS




4	INTRODUCTION
4	KEY FINDINGS
5	STRATEGY: ROAD TO COLLABORATION
7	COLLABORATION LANDSCAPE: VARYING NEEDS
9	BEST PRACTICES: RECOGNITION AND KNOWLEDGE
10	ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

INTRODUCTION

Employees are overloaded with information and requests to collaborate. And they struggle when content and messages fly at them from all directions and from too many different systems. As knowledge and service work are becoming more global and cross-functional, and less structured, companies turn to technology to foster collaboration and connect employees and teams. Yet implementing a technology solution without an underlying strategy will not solve the problem, lighten the load for valuable employees, nor deliver the results business leaders seek.

To understand the value of an enterprise collaboration strategy, Forbes Insights is teaming up with Dropbox Business to explain why collaboration efforts go awry and how businesses can build a culture of collaboration to drive value. Research indicates that companies are aware of the need to collaborate, but not always of how to best facilitate that teamwork, and that fostering effective collaboration in a company is a combination of understanding how teams work together and the nature of the work they need to accomplish.

KEY FINDINGS

-  **ROAD TO COLLABORATION.** Companies recognize the need for teamwork, but there is a lot of work to be done to build a truly collaborative workplace.
-  **TEAMS' NEEDS VARY.** Teams form for different reasons and with different goals. Fostering effective collaboration requires understanding the role teamwork plays in a company, the types of projects that require working together and the tools necessary to accomplish the team's goals.
-  **EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION REQUIRES AWARENESS.** Best practices for building a culture of collaboration necessitate awareness of how employees, departments and lines of business work together.

STRATEGY: ROAD TO COLLABORATION

Connectivity and teamwork are critical success drivers in today's business landscape. Companies increasingly recognize the value teams bring to the enterprise: According to Deloitte's "2017 Global Human Capital Trends" report,¹ almost all the companies surveyed (94%) cite agility and collaboration as critical to their success. And they are devoting time to these shared activities.

Some businesses have high levels of collaboration—a 2015 survey revealed that over 90% of knowledge workers collaborate weekly, with 65% collaborating multiple times a day.² Yet, only 14% of executives are completely satisfied with their ability to collaborate and, thus, bring the value of new business opportunities (57%) and increased innovation (48%).³

These statistics show a clear picture of significant levels of working together. But what are they really telling us? One challenge with understanding these numbers is that they measure many different activities, because there are different ways individuals collaborate in team environments. How employees work together can be broken into three main categories:

- 1) Sharing expertise and skills, passing on knowledge or identifying resources for others to consult.
- 2) Using one's own personal time and energy to produce for the team.
- 3) Making introductions and fostering access to one's personal network.

With all this focus on employees working together, companies have not necessarily adapted their approaches to teamwork and collaboration to how individuals work today—with demands for cross-

functional teaming, accommodation of remote workers and outside partners, and the technological environment that serves as the foundation for this pooling of resources.

Some are doing it well. "Four years ago, we created the How We Run behaviors, defining what SAP looks like on its best day," says Jennifer Coleman, change expert at SAP. "We created these with employee input, five principles—embrace differences, stay curious, tell it like it is, keep the promise and build bridges not silos—that are a huge component of teamwork. Human behavior is the backbone of collaboration. You can have all the tools and processes, but people need the desire to work with others and to hear both convergent and divergent ideas."

Even when they recognize the importance of collaboration, many companies are still struggling. The Deloitte survey notes that only 6% of companies report being highly agile, and one in five describe themselves as not agile at all, while a third are actively working to become more adaptable and team-centric.

In addition to the human side of the equation, another part of this challenge is structural: how companies adopt technology solutions.

“

Human behavior is the backbone of collaboration. You can have all the tools and processes, but people need the desire to work with others and to hear both convergent and divergent ideas.”

JENNIFER COLEMAN,
CHANGE EXPERT, SAP

¹ <https://www2.deloitte.com/insights/us/en/focus/human-capital-trends/2017/organization-of-the-future.html>

² Bloom-Feshbach, Alison and Marie Poyet, "The Rise of Digital Team Building," *People + Strategy*, 41: 2, Spring 2018.

³ Transitioning to the future of work and the workplace, Embracing digital culture, tools, and approaches; <https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/pages/human-capital/articles/transitioning-to-the-future-of-work-and-the-workplace.html>



“Too often, companies become wedded to their vendor road maps,” says David Stafford, head of solutions at Dropbox Business. “IT leaders often feel like their collaboration vision and strategy is being prescribed to them. They struggle to establish their independence so that they can really listen to what their employees have already figured out on their own.”

According to McKinsey,⁴ workers spend 28% of the workweek reading and answering email and 19% searching for and gathering information. This leaves them only half the week to do their own role-specific tasks and to communicate and collaborate internally. Yet, is this email communication and searching for information adding value and enabling true collaboration and productivity?

“Companies are used to measuring quantity of email or how many minutes of voice bridges you sat in on during the day to capture the value of collaboration,” says Stafford. “You can’t peer inside those activities to know what was discussed or what workflow those employees were powering. So, where does the work

really get done?”

“We can measure the use of tools,” says SAP’s Coleman. “But that’s not a true measurement of collaborative behavior. We do people surveys and pulse checks along the way. We ask questions to not just understand if we have the right tools to work together but also if we have the right mindset and behaviors.”

Another part of this collaboration picture is how teamwork is valued in the organization. Collaboration is often bottom up, originating from the individuals who look to colleagues for support on particular projects. Encouragement for that teaming and sharing of expertise and resources needs to come from the top. Despite all the focus on the value of working together, many companies still incentivize employees on their individual productivity. That can lead to a reluctance to work collaboratively. When people see that teamwork isn’t rewarded, they’re likely to find it difficult to see a benefit in collaborating.

At Kodiak Cakes, the management team works hard to ensure that leadership is open to collaboration and that the employees are aligned with the brand’s goals. As part of that, they think about collaboration when hiring and recognize teamwork as part of employee performance.

“We’re constantly thinking about how to reward our employees,” says Cameron Smith, Kodiak Cakes’ COO. “We recognize employees for both individual work and for teamwork—through quarterly reviews where we discuss personal goals, what the company is achieving and how an employee is impacting that, and how they work with others on teams.”

At SAP, compensation plans are a mix of team and individual performance. “We’ve gotten away from the traditional performance review process,” says Coleman. “We use a more fluid, continual development, so employees can be rewarded for their own and team accomplishments and adjust course along the way.”

4 The social economy: Unlocking value and productivity through social technologies, Chui, Michael, James Manyika, Jacques Bughim, et al. July 2012 <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/high-tech/our-insights/the-social-economy>

COLLABORATION LANDSCAPE: VARYING NEEDS

There are three pieces of the collaboration diagram: people, workload and tools. To drive true collaboration and the productivity gains that result, it's essential that both management and employees recognize and appreciate the roles of the individuals, the nature of the work that the (unofficial or official) teams need to accomplish and the tools to drive teamwork.

PEOPLE

Companies are struggling to get it right. A frequent challenge to creating a truly collaborative workforce is the distribution of workload. In companies that do support collaborative work, employees tend to lean on their colleagues with known expertise or a track record of successful teaming. When distribution of collaborative work is lopsided or the team is not properly aligned,

“

Not everyone collaborates in the same way. Some people need quiet, thinking time. Some need people connections. Others need more analytics. People have different communication and collaboration styles. It's important to recognize different skills on the team and support them.”

JENNIFER COLEMAN,
CHANGE EXPERT, SAP

this can put significant pressure on the employees who are known to be knowledgeable, capable and willing to help—the super-collaborators—to carry the load.

This kind of environment can put these employees in a position where they're less likely to produce individually or be able to focus their time on teams that are truly mission critical and best use their expertise. Also, teams are not always officially chosen by management to accomplish a task, with members chosen for their specific skills and contributions. Many working groups develop organically, based on factors like existing relationships or who is available in the moment to meet a deadline. This can result in lopsided teams, as well, and becomes self-sustaining—individuals don't learn other tasks to be able to more evenly carry the load as part of the next group, nor do they identify different employees who could contribute on future projects.

“There are pockets of imbalanced workload for sure,” says SAP's Coleman. “Our personal networks are important, and it's a hard habit to break. You don't know what or who you don't know. We're training ourselves to ask questions about who else knows information like this, how to leverage the network to expand the network. For example, we have an internal tool with employee profiles. I search it to find people interested in the same things I am to build my network and do my job better. It's a way to bring together communities of thought, to meet people you don't know and balance the workload.”

WORKLOAD

Employees in many organizations have made it clear they will collaborate when they need to, even if not as part of a formal team created by management or aligned to a specific project. To encourage effective teamwork, companies must then provide the tools that enable those employees to work together.

To do this, it's essential to identify what the work itself looks like:

- Volume of work available
- Types of projects that require teamwork
- Which departments or individuals originate projects or team activities
- Expectations about deadlines and project deliverables
- What types of projects particular teams develop

or are brought together to address.

This information enables a company to see the full picture of its current collaborative environment to better understand what tools it needs to foster collaboration and build high-performing teams with the optimal mix of skill sets, experience level and team members.

A particular challenge that many companies face when it comes to enabling effective collaboration is the distribution of data throughout the company. In many organizations, there is no central location for data, it's dispersed throughout locations and the departments that typically use it. Employees will do whatever they need to do and seek their own solutions to finding and using data. This can result in use of disparate data sets to conduct the same types of business or a potential risk to security and data privacy, depending on the industry and type of information involved.

TOOLS

There are dozens of tools available to encourage working together within each category of collaboration tools: content sharing, social media, communications and messaging, project management, and file sharing. In some cases, employees are already collaborating and creating their own systems for doing so. Because the workforce is so technically literate, when employees are dissatisfied with the tools the enterprise makes available, they may take the situation into their own hands and use their own tools, often without IT's knowledge or approval. These creative problem solvers face pressure to improve processes and their own performance, and are IT savvy from their own experience as consumers—they will figure out their own way.

In fact, letting employees choose their own tools may be preferred, as bottom-up collaboration is quite productive. These teams may well have adapted to use the most effective tool for the situation. If all the team members agree and are using a particular tool productively, dictation from above—the IT department or management—to use different products can slow down the pace of the work and reduce productivity. This does create a challenge when it comes to IT, as coordinated implementation and having their hands on all technology tools deployed throughout the

organization is paramount.

"People haven't gone too far astray with using their own tools," says Brandon Porras, director of marketing at Kodiak Cakes. "Our creative team decided to use a program that wasn't already approved. They went forward and deployed it to the whole department. We don't punish people for being innovative and solving problems. So, when a tool works well for a certain team, we fold it in and make it work."

In general, collaboration needs are similar across companies, though some industries may have stronger needs in particular aspects of the three C's: communication, content and coordination. Content and coordination needs are like those in the media industry who need to transfer and share files without any restrictions on file size; or companies who need to enable central management of certain files and provide access to individuals who may not have specialized software to view the data. Other industries, such as higher education, or large, geographically dispersed enterprises, may lean more heavily on communication tools to enable collaboration and conversation on a global scale.

“

We are seeing a strong emergence of innovation across the whole field of collaboration solutions, across the three C's: communication, content and coordination.

Companies adopting modern tools in these areas list messaging solutions, project management tools, more info mood boards and jam boards.”

DAVID STAFFORD,
HEAD OF SOLUTIONS, DROPBOX BUSINESS



BEST PRACTICES: RECOGNITION AND KNOWLEDGE

True workplace collaboration is about sharing content, expertise and network connections to support the goals of the enterprise. There are several steps companies can take to build a collaborative culture and encourage and support teamwork:

- Create a mandate from the executive suite, with an expectation of end-to-end, cross-functional performance; and create a system that officially recognizes and rewards both teamwork and individual contributions.
- Develop a process that motivates employees to collaborate in both formal and informal teams, with a focus on the work and the specific project goals.
- Forge connections and networking across departments and other organizational boundaries to create a sense of community and develop relationships, which builds trust and ultimately strengthens teams.
- Understand which tools enable collaboration across the three C's: communication, content and coordination. Communication and social tools include email and chat, coordination tools include conferencing applications

and shared whiteboards, and content tools include document storage and sharing.

Key to building a truly collaborative culture is understanding human behavior and how different types of people work together.

"It comes down to behavior," says SAP's Coleman. "Constantly asking: Is there someone else who can help me with this? Who might have a different perspective? Who can add greater insight than what is currently here? Am I inviting the right people to the table? And if we're finding hurdles, asking: What tools and systems can support us in that? It's all about thinking differently to make the best possible outcome for our customers."

"Once we started to understand the why behind collaboration, we got motivated to make the hard decisions," says Joel Clark, CEO at Kodiak Cakes. "Innovation is highly correlated to collaboration. We learned that if we want to continue to innovate like we did when we were a smaller business, we have to talk to each other, our vendors, our customers and have a collaborative culture."

Combining knowledge of human behavior, an understanding of why collaboration benefits the company, and the best solutions and tools to bring people together is the foundation for creating—and executing—a successful collaboration strategy.

“

Collaboration and empowerment are intertwined. Employees need to feel they have ownership of what they are doing. Leadership and employees alike have to check egos at the door to work together for the brand.”

CAMERON SMITH,
COO, KODIAK CAKES

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



Forbes Insights and Dropbox Business would like to thank the following individuals for their time and expertise:

- **Joel Clark**, CEO, Kodiak Cakes
- **Jennifer Coleman**, Change Expert, SAP
- **Brandon Porras**, Director of Marketing, Kodiak Cakes
- **Cameron Smith**, COO, Kodiak Cakes
- **David Stafford**, Head of Solutions, Dropbox Business

Forbes insights

ABOUT FORBES INSIGHTS

Forbes Insights is the strategic research and thought leadership practice of Forbes Media, a global media, branding and technology company whose combined platforms reach nearly 94 million business decision makers worldwide on a monthly basis. By leveraging proprietary databases of senior-level executives in the *Forbes* community, Forbes Insights conducts research on a wide range of topics to position brands as thought leaders and drive stakeholder engagement. Research findings are delivered through a variety of digital, print and live executions, and amplified across *Forbes'* social and media platforms.

EDITORIAL & RESEARCH

Erika Maguire

EXECUTIVE EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

Kasia Wandycz Moreno EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

Hugo S. Moreno EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

Ross Gagnon RESEARCH DIRECTOR

Scott McGrath RESEARCH ANALYST

Manya Chylinski REPORT AUTHOR

Zehava Pasternak DESIGNER

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Casey Zonfrilli

DIRECTOR, ACCOUNT MANAGEMENT

Tori Kreher

PROJECT MANAGER

Brian Lee

PROJECT MANAGER

Kaly Leonoudakis

PROJECT MANAGER

Todd Della Rocca

PROJECT MANAGER

SALES

North America

Brian McLeod VICE PRESIDENT

bmcleod@forbes.com

Matthew Muszala EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

mmuszala@forbes.com

William Thompson DIRECTOR

wthompson@forbes.com

Kimberly Kurata MANAGER

kkurata@forbes.com

Europe

Charles Yardley SVP MANAGING DIRECTOR

cyardley@forbes.com

Asia

Will Adamopoulos

PRESIDENT & PUBLISHER, FORBES ASIA

wadam@forbesasia.com.sg