Collaboration with a Capital C
An Overview of SMART Technologies' Collaboration Leadership Summit
Executive Summary

Every company, of every size, in every corner of the globe collaborates on one level or another. At one end of the spectrum lies tactical communication and coordination between people, teams, partners and customers. However, the other end of the spectrum is reserved for those who have established the tools, process and culture, and optimized their environment for Collaboration - those who are Collaborating with a “big C”.

As an industry, we’ve spent the last 10 years focusing on the technology side of the Collaboration discussion. This is not surprising, as we’ve experienced a tsunami of new solutions that promise to bring virtual teams together, increase productivity, and drive results. The focus during this time has been on the tactical benefits of Collaboration solutions, with success defined through volume-based metrics and cost savings analysis. The best-in-class Collaborators, however, are actively shifting their focus, placing a greater emphasis on the way end-users naturally collaborate, and fostering the evolution of Collaboration from a tactical point-solution to a broad concept of how work gets done.

This paper is the first in a series of publications that explore the insights gathered from the SMART Technologies Collaboration Council. Each of the upcoming papers in this series will dive deep into key findings, providing the Council’s thoughts, opinions, and best practices.
Overview

In Late February 2014, SMART Technologies assembled an elite group of Collaboration experts from a range of the world’s most successful companies with a single mission: discuss Collaboration (with a big C) in the enterprise – what is working, what is challenging, and where is Collaboration heading?

Over the course of two days, this group of professionals had the opportunity to share best practices, insights, challenges and innovations. Wainhouse Research was invited to participate, providing a view of Collaboration through an Analyst’s lens and with a mission to document the key themes resulting from this summit.

The Groundwork

In the months leading up to the summit, SMART Technologies conducted an independent study to better understand the current state of Collaboration in today’s enterprise and the benefits and impacts associated with good and bad Collaboration. This study gathered feedback from over 1500 participants from around the world, creating a massive database on Collaboration practices and outcomes.

The results of the survey show that each enterprise falls into one of 5 stages of Collaboration Maturity:

1. **Unsupported** – There is no collaboration strategy in place and these organizations have little technology available to support team work.

2. **Not Integrated** – These organizations are experimenting with technology, but do not have a collaboration strategy. They’re implementing technology for which there’s little integration between other systems and business processes.

3. **Integrated** – These organizations believe in collaboration, so they implement solutions that integrate hardware, software and other systems. However, these collaboration environments are not available to everyone and collaborative processes have not been well-defined.

4. **Collaborative** – Collaboration is enhanced by the power of technology, process and people. Teams are enabled to collaborate effectively. However, the culture of the organization has not yet shifted to fully embrace collaboration across all areas.

5. **Optimized** – These organizations have transformed the way they work with a complete implementation of solutions, services and processes. They have created a range of informal, structured, formal and dispersed collaboration environments to optimize the value received from collaboration.

This survey data provides a key observation into the general state of Collaboration:

> The majority of organizations are early in the maturity spectrum, with little to no support or integration across their collaborative solutions.
In addition, each participant was asked to quantify the perceived value their Collaboration environment has on various aspects of their operations - everything from travel cost reduction to customer experience, innovation to risk reduction. The results provide an important insight into the benefits that are associated with great Collaboration:

**Those organizations that combine technology, services and best practices are achieving incremental value across a range of business outcomes.**

Interestingly, travel costs - the concrete original pillar of most Collaboration business cases - received the lowest incremental values, while more subjective benefits relating to efficiencies received the highest, illustrating that, today, speed carries more weight than cost, a hallmark sign that Collaboration has turned the corner from a hardware-centered plug-in and is becoming a more complex culture-centric initiative.
The Panelists

Summit participants were hand-chosen based on their company’s track record as expert Collaborators, and care was taken to bring a diverse group of big thinkers together. The resulting council represented companies from the very small to the very large, across industry verticals, and across geographies.

It is important to note that each panelist completed the same Collaboration assessment administered in the study, and, as a group, were shown to over-index on Collaboration Strategy, outscoring the top performance cluster from the original sample by 10% and were also 50% higher than the database average. For this reason, the panelists’ views on what it takes to Collaborate well and the related challenges in front of great Collaboration are especially pertinent.

Key Observations

When discussing a topic as big as Collaboration with a capital C, it is critical to establish a baseline understanding of what Collaboration really entails. To this end, Dr. Renate Fruchter, Director of Stanford’s Project Based Learning Laboratory offered this salient point: we must understand the fundamental differences between communication, coordination and Collaboration:

- Communication – a one way delivery of information
- Coordination – communication intended to drive an outcome
- Collaboration – a group of people working together to create something of value

In fact, it is not uncommon for an enterprise to confuse communication and coordination with Collaboration, expecting that the flurry of information being exchanged must be driving business value. However, the largest business value is consistently driven by those organizations that understand and reinforce effective Collaboration.
“Collaboration” has become synonymous with “work.” We measure our productivity by the number of meetings we have, not by outcomes.

So what does it take to become a Collaborative enterprise? The council established early on that it is not as simple as deploying the best technologies. On the contrary, many of the key observations are technology-independent, and transcend verticals, geographies, and company size.

Culture is key - An enterprise’s culture was pointed to repeatedly as the primary factor behind positive, negative, and nascent Collaboration. The most successful collaborative enterprises start by establishing a highly collaborative culture, one that reinforces the importance of free-flowing information, rewards collaborative behavior, and places a key focus on the end user. Strong leadership is perhaps the most important factor in establishing a collaborative culture.

Empathy is required - Those organizations who are succeeding often point to empathy as a key element within their culture – empathy between IT teams and end users, empathy between executives and employees, and empathy between the business and its customers. As empathy grows in practice, a level of trust grows within the organization. And once a level of trust has been established, the organization can truly become Collaborative with a big C.

Success criteria is shifting - Many are changing the way they define successful Collaboration - shifting from counting transactions to monitoring for specific business outcome. A number of Council members noted they view their company’s profitability as the key variable to monitor in terms of Collaboration success, which is very different from counting audio conferencing minutes, or IM transactions.

IT is hard-pressed to “keep up” - The fundamental technologies supporting enterprise Collaboration are increasingly “software-based”, enabling an explosion of new solutions and allowing all solutions to iterate faster and faster. At the same time, users are more advanced than ever, bringing both devices and applications into the workplace. These factors combine to create a perfect storm for many IT teams who find it harder and harder to meet – much less anticipate – their users’ needs.

Strategic gaps are common - As shown in the SMART survey, most enterprises lack a cohesive strategy around Collaboration. While many companies focus on collaborative technologies, creating extensive roadmaps around their Collaboration infrastructure, it is rare for an enterprise to combine technology, services, and culture elements into an organized strategy.

As a result, a proliferation of technology often drives volumes and volumes of Collaboration. However, a key message delivered by the Collaboration Council: more Collaboration has no direct correlation to better Collaboration. In fact, more Collaboration can become noise, actually reducing a company’s overall productivity.

Collaboration Fatigue is common - Today’s average end user has access to a great array of communication tools. From text-based email and instant messaging, to audio and video conferencing, to advanced interactive display technologies, there are very few barriers restricting a constant stream of information and interaction. A common side effect stemming from this proliferation of technology is Collaboration Fatigue. This fatigue can be felt across the enterprise, but hits the end user hardest. Examples of this fatigue include:

- **Volume Fatigue** - It appears that many end users have a love/hate relationship with the volume of information they are receiving, usually pointing to more tactical solutions like email, instant messaging and audio conferencing as the primary culprits. Oddly enough, it is not uncommon for a user voice the benefits of a given technology in the same breath as their frustrations.
— **Technology Fatigue** – When technology becomes an obstacle, the end user suffers. Ask these questions: How complicated is your collaboration environment? What services require special training? What tools require unique scheduling or support processes? Are there tools that cause frequent delays for the end user? The more the user needs to think, plan or do in order to use a given collaboration technology, the less time they spend actually collaborating!

— **Workflow Fatigue** – To compound the issue, new technologies have a tendency to require unique workflows. Most users consider themselves scheduling masters when it comes to pulling together a group audio conference: “I know how to schedule people, what audio bridge information to add, and I’m comfortable starting, joining, and managing my audio conference.” However, add a video room to the mix and things can get complicated quickly: “Do I need to schedule the room differently? Do I schedule a video bridge? Do I schedule support? How do I start the video call? What if I have audio-only participants?” The more a collaborative solution deviates from a known workflow, the greater the burden on the end user just to engage the technology. As a result, those solutions are used less frequently and experience more issues.
About SMART, the sponsor of this paper

SMART Technologies Inc. is a leading provider of technology solutions that enable inspired collaboration in schools and workplaces around the world by turning group work into a highly interactive, engaging and productive experience. SMART delivers integrated solutions of hardware, software and services designed for superior performance and ease of use, and remains a world leader in interactive displays.

About Wainhouse Research

Wainhouse Research, www.wainhouse.com, is an independent analyst firm that focuses on critical issues in the Unified Communications and Collaboration (UC&C). The company conducts multi-client and custom research studies, consults with end users on key implementation issues, publishes white papers and market statistics, and delivers public and private seminars as well as speaker presentations at industry group meetings.

About the Author

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