The Year of Collaboration:

5 Tips to Help Organizations Use Collaboration Tools to Achieve 2018 Goals

Collaboration tools are not only changing how employees communicate, they're changing the very way organizations think about the modern workforce. As programs like Microsoft Teams, SharePoint, Slack, G Suite and others become more pervasive across today's businesses, it isn't just CIOs and visionaries who recognize the possibilities that reside in these programs. Executives from all lines of business are beginning to take note of the revolutionary potential. It's becoming clearer that those who don't keep pace will be left behind. Monsanto CEO and Chairman Hugh Grant notes in a Forbes article, "At Monsanto, collaboration is our competitive advantage…By marrying extremely talented big data and cloud analytics engineering teams with skilled scientists, the teams created a unique partnership to drive innovative thinking."

According to a research report conducted by MIT Sloan Management Review and Deloitte,

MORE THAN 70%

of managers and executives from digitally maturing companies say their organizations are increasingly organized around cross-functional teams

VERSUS ONLY 28%

of companies at early stages of digital development

These leaders recognize the value in collaboration through digital means, too, as 85 percent of respondents said that being a "digital business" is crucial to the success of their companies, and 39 percent said improving digital strategy and innovation is the way to become more digitally mature.[1]

But, despite the perceived recognition of what collaboration can help businesses achieve, many are still lagging in introducing this digital technology or failing to do so properly. This primarily stems from not having a plan in place that accounts for how significant an impact it will have—especially for the business user.

Collaboration tools can help organizations improve their efficiency, productivity and how business decisions are made. And as an organization with 25-plus years of experience helping companies introduce, adapt, and troubleshoot collaboration tools across their organization, here are five tips we've learned that benefit leaders wanting to rollout or improve their collaboration technologies, and achieve increased adoption and proficient use. Let's make 2018 "The Year of Collaboration."

TIP #1   EXAMINE EXISTING USES

Before deciding to adopt any new collaboration technology, look at the existing tools different departments are already effectively using and decide if they could be deployed company-wide. Not only will this help organizations understand how the current tools are being used by the workforce and determine what works best for those employees, but it will prevent an organization from investing in unnecessary or duplicative technologies. For example, if some business units are using OneDrive, while others are leveraging DropBox to store and share files and messages, doesn't it make financial and logistical sense to deploy one of them universally, rather than considering a new collaboration technology, or paying for both? (Hint: yes.) And if parts of the

organization are using multiple collaboration tools, take the time to research each and decide which should be eliminated and which should become the company's universally used tool.

TIP #2 OFFER MULTIPLE LEARNING OPTIONS OFTEN

This may seem like an obvious concept, but it's often overlooked by organizations offering collaboration tools—aside from simply making sure collaborative technology works, employees must have the information, resources and skills to ensure they are effectively using it and experiencing a positive impact on their day-to-day productivity. That means providing educational resources and/or making software coaching constantly available for employees with questions, issues or concerns. Just as importantly, those resources should take into consideration employees' disparate learning styles and modalities by offering multiple ways of learning. For example, one employee may learn best in a classroom setting, while another may absorb more from short, task-specific videos, tutorials, self-guided learning, or e-learning courses. Offering multiple avenues and opportunities for learning helps ensure employees can always get their questions answered quickly and easily, and continue learning at their own pace.

TIP #3 EMPLOY THE K.I.S.S. PRINCIPLE

The U.S. Navy's "Keep It Simple, Stupid" principle is a smart way to go about introducing any new technology—especially collaboration tools that need to be universally adopted. One way to do that is by putting an earnest effort on communicating the value the technology will provide, and the impact it will have for business users. Communications should be simple, short and free of technical jargon. You should also strive to send communications frequently and in multiple formats that cater to your organizational culture. For example, if your employees are overloaded with emails, try using posters, intranet ads or internal social media to communicate the benefits of the new technology and how it will help the employee achieve peak performance relative to their role. By simplifying your communications and focusing on the employee, you will see better adoption rates and buy-in from business users to leverage the technology the way it was intended.

TIP #4 CLARIFY AND INTEGRATE

While offering training on skill development is important, if a workforce doesn't know why they should be using SharePoint versus Teams in the first place, how likely is it they'll have a question about how to use it? As critical as it is to not overload end-users with too many tools, organizations also need to educate employees on how the collaboration technology will benefit them every day and which ones they should be using for which purpose. This is the first step in getting a workforce to embrace collaboration as a true work benefit and integrate it into their daily lives. Without it, employees will ignore the new tools they're given and revert to their old habits.

TIP #5 LEAD BY EXAMPLE

For collaboration to flourish, it takes strategic leadership and buy-in. Whether you are an executive, team leader, or supervisor, you must lead by example to impact, influence and inspire the organization to collaborate. Show, don't tell, by setting unified goals, promoting a reward structure that emphasizes cooperation and collective success, utilizing collaborative technologies yourself, and working within a team setting to demonstrate what success can look like.

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According to industry analysts, collaboration "is hot and will stay hot."[2] With the right technology, the right rollout plan and a leadership team who embraces technology as a solution rather than a hinderance, collaboration can help achieve greater business success in 2018.

1 https://sloanreview.mit.edu/projects/achieving-digital-maturity/

2 https://www.computerworld.com/article/3243087/enterprise-applications/collaboration-trends-2018-expect-microsoft-teams-to-gain-momentum-as-enterprises-embrace-group-chat.html

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