Serious Insights

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The Tens—Worst Executive Collaboration Offenses

1 Still Using E-mail In companies that deploy broad and deep collaboration tools, e-mail often remains the primary means of communication. E-mail's biggest advantage is momentum. Executives can go a long way to reversing e-mail's pull by actively using collaboration systems. If a project exists in a collaboration space, don't communicate about it anywhere outside of the collaboration space. If the collaboration space creates e-mail notifications, fine, but those notifications should drive people to the space, not around it.

2 Not tying collaboration to performance If a cultural transformation is important enough to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on software licenses, then it is worth calling out behavior change in individual goals and objectives. Collaboration systems are full of rich metadata that will tell you who is using them, and how often. These aren't the best metrics for recognizing deployment success, but they are a start. If you want people to collaborate online, reward them when you catch them doing it right, and coach them away from bad habits when you see those cropping up.

3 Providing No Guidance Over the course of time, organizations will discover practices that work. Rather than letting those randomly seep into the organization, document and promote them—provide guidance on approach and on expectations.

4 Not integrating Face-to-Face When people meet face-to-face, ensure that the collaboration environment remains the primary repository for agendas, action items and outputs, and the documentation home for outcomes. If face-to-face skirts the collaboration environment, then it reinforces the perception that it doesn't really represent the organization's shared memory.

5 Failing to recognize Cultural Differences People from around the world think and work differently. Executives who don't recognize those differences will create unsustainable expectations. Be open and transparent about collaboration expectations, and be receptive to people asking for clarification, and to those sharing discomfort. Negotiate work practices that work for everyone.

6 Thinking tools will get people together Drop and run. I have heard that too often about IT vendors and about IT departments. Some adventurous, self-motivated leaders may well adopt new collaboration technology and with them, the myths of success that come from anecdotal evidence. More likely than not, organizations will find that most people need more than edicts and technology to effectively use collaboration tools.

7 Not negotiating collaboration with partners Outsourcing contracts and other partnerships inject non-employee workers into projects and other work experiences. If those people choose to use their own tools to get work done, then they will fragment the collaboration culture. Part of any partnership agreement should be a clause that spells out work practices designed to keep employees and partners on the same page, and in the same workspace.

8 Forgetting that employees are consumers Employees use more advanced technology at home than they do at work. Recognize that expertise and embrace it rather than trying to reorient them when they arrive at work. Ask, learn, empower. Worry first about what gets done and when—permit some leeway on the how as long as people share their learning and integrate it back into the environment.

9 Thinking Constraints Really Constrain People And because people are consumers, don't think that a policy about not using Facebook at work will result in people not using Facebook at work. People will turn to their smartphones and update their status, check-in or play Farmville. If however, people feel empowered and are motivated by commitments, they will balance work with distraction, and get work done on-time while perhaps using the technology to help them stay sane—and engaged.

10 Seeking ROI too Early Collaboration is emergent—which means traditional ROI catches at most a fraction of the real benefit. With so many non-technology issues in play, ROI becomes even more meaningless when focused on technology return. If executives want to see returns on collaboration investment, they have to be willing to play first, and then monitor real results.