

How to set up online collaboration in corporations

by Jay Cross, Internet Time Group

Start right away

Collaboration is about building relationships that foster ideas, intentions, and interests. Coworkers learn and inspire one another. They build on each another's ideas. Small groups of them can move mountains. A collaborative enterprise with shared values and common purpose can change the world. Why wait?

People working together create much more value than the same people working in isolation. Working with others also boosts morale, for it's more fulfilling emotionally. Until recently, collaboration was not easy, especially when distance was involved. People didn't have access to the information they needed and couldn't figure out who was the right person to contact.

Those barriers are fading fast. Software and networks that support collaboration are readily available and cheap, too. Workers complain about silos; social networks walk through silo walls.

Companies are losing customers disgusted with unhelpful help desks, phone labyrinths, and not understanding what's going on. The web's transparency and self-service are the cure.

Senior management wants to see organization-wide innovation. Building communities that value authenticity, courage, and taking risks are a step toward getting there.

Today's web offers an embarrassment of riches. Online collaboration improves operations, supports strategy, and creates a limber enterprise. Organizations have so many choices, it's hard to figure out where to begin.

What's in it for you?

Pick an area that resonates with what your organization needs to accomplish:

- Speed the flow of information through the organization
- Improve customer service
- Slash bureaucracy
- Unleash the power of collective intelligence
- Create a nerve center for corporate news and market intelligence
- Make all corporate know-how accessible 24/7
- Recruit best candidates for new positions and make them productive quickly
- Replace training classes with informal, hands-on learning
- Open the process of innovation to all employees
- Help workers build strong, supportive relationships
- Enable managers to assess the status and direction of projects
- Empower all employees to contribute ideas and feel part of the team
- Better relationships with customers, prospects, recruits, partners, suppliers

Start with something easy

Fast, free, industrial-strength web software makes it easy to prototype. You need not be a programmer to try it. Don't obsess. Do something.

- * Participants have a shared need.
- * It's easy for participants to see what's in it for them.
- * The information involved is not controversial.
- * A sound business case can be made.
- * Stand-alone implementation is feasible
- * The project will make a good example when seeking support for other projects.

Best practices with social software

- Keep it simple
- Keep it flexible
- Do it yourself (blog/wiki) or you won't understand it
- Be innovative, ever alert to productivity improvements
- Be open to new ways of doing things
- Release early and release often. Just do it
- Promotion is important. Remind people where to look
- Focus on the function rather than on the tools
- Provide step-by-step how-to guides
- Provide the opportunity to celebrate small successes
- Give people time to practice using the software

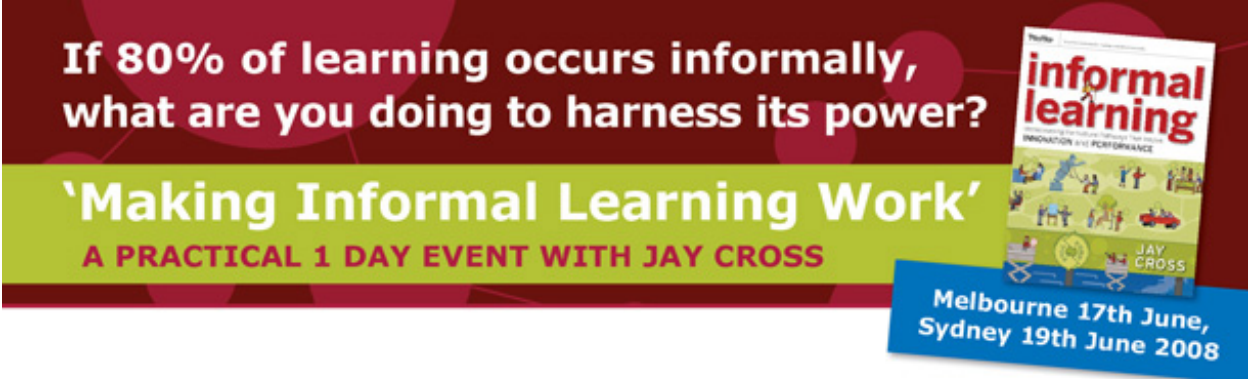
Challenge the project champion

- What is the goal of the collaboration?
- What's the current situation?
- What do you expect things to look like after the project?
- How will this be accomplished?
- What is the business benefit? (In business terms).
- How do you quantify the size of the benefit?
- Who's going to take part?
- What might go wrong?
- Is this a one-time project or an on-going process?
- Do we have sponsorship higher up?
- Who will participate on the team?
- If it's a one-timer, when will it be completed? What is the kill date?

Sustain momentum

As the organization's use of collaborative software crosses the chasm from specialty item to important business process, focus shifts to keeping collaboration alive, disseminating lessons learned, and informally benchmarking performance.

- Dismantle roadblocks to collaboration.
- Make the goal and ground rules clear at the outset
- Structure the initial framework to fit the task
- Make the online environment attracting and inviting
- Pre-load templates, background info, defaults
- Provide emotional support for newcomers
- Delegate responsibility for keeping the ball rolling to the team
- Rely on self-regulation
- Don't micromanage
- Market the service: publicity, seed with enthusiasts, contests
- Incentives to get things ramped up
- Report results at least quarterly



**If 80% of learning occurs informally,
what are you doing to harness its power?**

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More information on the events in Australia:
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