

Collaborate to unlock competitive advantage

 By [Farren Roper](#)

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How companies can use collaboration tools as innovation hacks.

In times of digital disruption, innovation is the key to competitive advantage. I recently read a quote that said, “it is not the big that eat the small, but the fast that eat the slow”. As competitive landscapes increase and product differentiation becomes harder to achieve in the information era, more and more organisations are realising the value of enabling innovation within their workforces.

When it comes to innovation, from conceptualisation of a single idea to go-to-market, there are likely many stakeholders who are required to collaborate and work together. In fact, it has been said that the more people collaborate, the richer the and more unique the idea. In a technology-based environment for example, a business team may conceptualise an idea and would need to work with an engineering team to build the idea into a product and with a wider virtual team for the launch.



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Much has been written about the sharing economy, where organisations are now collaborating in different ways with their customers and even competitors to unlock new markets and generate new revenue streams. Work forces are becoming more and more borderless with people in different locations across the globe or even with contract workers who work from remote locations.

But what enables this type of collaboration? How do companies with different cultures, different work-styles, different time zones across different borders do it? Collaboration tools are the ultimate enabler.

A simple example will suffice... In my role as a marketing leader, I can collaborate with different stakeholders both inside and outside my organisation. When conceptualising a new idea or campaign, I can tap into the intellectual property of marketers across the globe by accessing a cloud based campaign repository tool. One thing I have learned is that working for a multinational, if you think you have a good idea, chances are that someone somewhere in the globe has tried it and learned the lesson. How amazing that I can leverage the ideas and lessons of others? Assuming my idea passes the test of being novel and viable, I can reach out to colleagues across the world through, email, IM voice or video for input into the idea. Taking things one step further, I can collaborate real-time with others by co-authoring a document with people inside and outside my organisation. If I am looking for content to support my idea, through the cloud content is easily discoverable. If I want to set up a virtual team, I can manage the execution of the campaign through email groups. And once the campaign has been executed I can broadcast to my colleagues across the globe on enterprise social to build advocacy for the campaign. It sounds simple and it is. Technology has made my job easier and has made the output of my work richer.

No one-size-fits-all collaboration approach

The important thing to remember when collaborating is that people have different styles and it is never a one-size-fits-all approach. Some people prefer IM to voice, other people prefer video to calling. You want to select a platform which is flexible to any work style. I learned this recently when interviewing for a job in a different location to South Africa. Some interviewers preferred to conduct the interview through Skype voice and another conducted the interview in Skype video. This is an important consideration when dealing with a millennial workforce as they prefer collaboration tools which provide instant gratification and will gravitate towards tools such as social and IM. In America, it is stated that they will constitute up to 60% of the workforce by 2010 and in developing markets and continents they already constitute the bulk of the population so in attracting the future workforce of your organisation, choosing tools which meet the needs of all types of employees (including millennials) is an important consideration.

When it comes to collaboration tools, what's your poison? For me, I prefer to use Office 365 because it comes with a unified communications suite that gives me email, IM, voice and video through Skype, enterprise social and the ability to share and access my documents in the cloud wherever I may be. I also want the assurance that my information is protected by enterprise grade security.

Whatever your choice in tools, it is exciting that we are living in a time when technology has made collaboration easier than ever.

Because of technology the world is now one big innovation playground.

ABOUT FARREN ROPER

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