

PART ONE

People

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CHAPTER ONE

Collaboration and Teamwork

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IMAGINE FOR A MOMENT a professional sports team walking onto the field of an athletic competition. Its team members are confused about the strategy for the game and who is playing what role. During the game, communication and coordination errors occur. Not surprisingly, the team loses. Now consider this same team suffers from a systemic failure to effectively learn from its mistakes. It consistently fails to recognize the root causes of its performance problems and invest adequately in improvements necessary to achieve better outcomes. This chronically losing team, unable to effectively and efficiently harness its individual talents as a cohesive unit, loses again and again to far better prepared competitors. Not a pretty picture—and yet this scenario can be observed in businesses and information technology (IT) organizations where words such as collaboration and teamwork are inscribed onto corporate values cards but do not consistently come alive in day-to-day actions. The good news is there are actions a chief information officer (CIO) can take to help the company and the information technology (IT) organization achieve higher performance by creating a culture of collaboration and teamwork.

In this chapter, we discuss warning signs and underlying causes, issues, risks, and opportunities for cultivating a culture of teamwork and collaboration consistent with a high-performing IT organization, including:

- Signs, symptoms, and root causes of teamwork and collaboration problems
- The role and importance of the CIO in modeling the way

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- How the entire IT leadership team is critical to teamwork
- How to develop effective teamwork skills throughout IT
- How to recruit for people skills
- How to set clear direction
- How to communicate effectively

■ SIGNS, SYMPTOMS, AND ROOT CAUSES

Problems with collaboration and teamwork reveal themselves in various ways. But a major red flag is an infestation of organizational silos. These are individual functional areas, or departments, operating too independently—to the detriment of critical business processes that, by their nature, must cross functional boundaries. Well-intended but isolated employees operating in silos focus on achieving their individual unit's goals at the expense of other internal groups and ultimately the company's customers and shareholders. As the functions consume people's time and other corporate resources to accomplish the tasks du jour, not necessarily in alignment with the priorities of other areas, tensions inevitably arise. When these tensions erupt in an unhealthy way, such as overheated arguments, passive-aggressive avoidance, or other inappropriate behavior, the spirit of collaboration across groups suffers. This can easily send the organization into a dysfunctional cycle, eroding the capability of functional units to work together as a cross-functional team in an optimally productive way.

Silos can exist within IT and across the organization at companies large and small, for-profit and not-for-profit, at the local, regional, and headquarters levels. Amid these silos, teamwork still can exist—and when it does, it is great—but it might be present only in pockets or for fleeting moments. For example, it might be evident within the software development team but not the operations group. It might exist for a period of time during a company crisis or during a mission-critical project bringing together people of different disciplines to achieve a clearly defined goal by a given date.

Detecting the presence of silos is simple. Listen to what IT employees say about their work environment. They might complain about constantly being bombarded by an endless stream of projects, requests, and issues thrown over the wall by business customers or colleagues from other IT areas. Employees also might point to conflicting priorities and not having enough resources to get all their work done. Poor requirements or constantly changing requirements are frequent complaints of IT organizations but can also be a sign of chronic issues in IT's ability to partner with the business. Territorial behavior—us versus them—and absence of trust across team boundaries are other signs of silos.

Issues with collaboration and teamwork may be caused by having the wrong people on the team or the right people in the wrong positions. Other possible root causes include leadership, skills development, recruiting, clarity, and communication.

■ MODELING THE WAY

As a CIO, you set an example for the IT organization. In fact, you are a role model for the whole company, because your influence extends far beyond the boundaries of the

organization chart. Every word you speak in public or private, every action taken, every message written in e-mail, and every blog entry will be scrutinized closely by others not only on the IT team but also around the company and even possibly by external stakeholders such as suppliers, auditors, and customers. Facing intense scrutiny is common for leaders from all walks of life, whether corporate executives, politicians, religious leaders, or star athletes.

Given an ever-present corporate magnifying glass, CIOs should consider what example they are setting in interactions with bosses, peers, direct reports, customers, and employees. Reflect on your day-to-day behaviors and their consistency with values of teamwork and collaboration. Look in the mirror, and solicit candid, unvarnished feedback from trusted colleagues. Participate in a 360-degree review. Objectively compare your leadership skills with those of a respected peer or other executive within the company or elsewhere. Examine your strengths and weaknesses of character, leadership style, and interpersonal communications, and identify one or several personal improvement goals for the next 12 months. Determine specific, time-phased actions to drive improvement, and follow through: Take the planned actions, achieve results, evaluate outcomes, and consider the value from further improvement in a particular dimension of performance.

An orientation to continual self-improvement is well worth the investment of time and energy. The example you set is among the most powerful tools in influencing the IT organization to achieve peak performance in satisfying IT's customers. Conversely, if your actions do not mirror the values and principles of a collaborative culture, your performance as a leader is, simply put, unacceptable—and the efficiency and effectiveness of the IT team will suffer.

THE IT LEADERSHIP TEAM IS CRITICAL TO SUCCESS

Besides modeling teamwork and collaboration themselves, CIOs ultimately are accountable also for the outcomes, actions, and behavior of the IT management team. If a CIO's direct reports behave badly, this can have a negative ripple effect down through the ranks of their respective organizations as well as across functions. Given the scope and magnitude of the influence of these senior leaders, among the most important tasks of the CIO is selecting the right people for these key positions. These heads of such functional areas as applications, infrastructure, and project management office (PMO) will make—or break—the success of the overall IT operation.

If the senior IT leaders cannot get along with each other and their customers, then Houston, we have a problem. The majority of IT work in most companies demands that people work together toward a common goal, whether it is sustaining day-to-day operational processes or executing projects large and small. For many activities, IT employees must possess more than sharp technical and business skills; interpersonal communications skills also are critical to lubricate relationships and achieve efficient coordination within and across teams.

Newly hired or promoted CIOs who have inherited senior managers behaving badly would be wise not to let these behavioral issues fester. They must confront the situation

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head-on. These senior managers must either step up their performance or move on to some other, more suitable role.

As a CIO, you should hold each manager accountable to the values, principles, and standards of the organization and their job role. Where there are gaps between actual and desired performance, openly but privately discuss these issues in a candid, clear dialog with management. This is very likely more than a one-time conversation; the dialog should be a routine part of weekly interactions with the manager until there no longer is an issue to discuss. Coach and mentor employees on their interpersonal skills as you would with any other areas where employees need help with performance. Offer formal training, where appropriate. Recognize and reward signs of improvement; clearly point out trouble spots. If the manager does not respond quickly to coaching and counseling, consult with your human resources (HR) partner and take other steps in keeping with the company's policies and procedures related to progressive discipline. At the end of the day, if employees, regardless of their level, still are not performing up to par after being given an opportunity to improve, either terminate them or move them into positions where they can be successful. Ignoring the issue or hoping it will go away is unacceptable.

The farther down in the organization one goes, the greater the risks to accountability. Except in the smallest IT organizations, CIOs do not have direct oversight of every employee. As a CIO, you naturally rely on the IT management team to lead their respective functions effectively. Your direct reports must hold all the managers and everyone else in the IT organization accountable for performance, including being good team players.

You are only as strong as your weakest link. If there are people in your organization whose subpar interpersonal skills are creating unhealthy friction, they are negatively affecting their coworkers and causing errors, rework, delays, failed projects, service disruptions, and so on.

One risk to this chain of accountability is that managers may believe that some of their people are so important to the organization, due to their rare knowledge or special technical skills, that they should be immune from the norms of good teamwork that apply to everyone else. It is okay for them to be lone rangers and behave badly. But when you net out the pros and cons, you typically will find that the damage a person does in not cooperating as a team member outweighs the benefits he or she creates. The return on investment is negative.

Another risk is that of seeing yourself as savior: "Give me enough time, and I will work with this person and help him improve his interpersonal communications or team leadership skills." In the meantime, month after month passes by, and the person continues spreading poison unabated into the business environment, destroying employee morale, productivity, and output results. Customer service and satisfaction suffers; your entire business literally can be harmed by not taking action swiftly enough in a situation like this.

Some managers feel that they must observe all the evidence of poor behavior with their own eyes before drawing any conclusions about a performance issue and taking action to deal with it. They will not trust the observations of others, no matter how clearly articulated. This unwillingness to consider all available evidence, whether directly observed or not, delays the inevitable. It is a form of paralysis analysis.

Timeliness of action is important. Ideally, leaders want to catch people doing things right so that they can offer sincere praise, recognition, and rewards in a timely manner. But when there are serious problems, effective managers want to find those, too, and fast, and deal with them appropriately. Personnel issues are not like wine; the effects of these problems do not improve with age. These situations do not usually resolve on their own.

DEVELOPING TEAMING SKILLS THROUGHOUT IT

Besides focusing on improving your own skills as a collaborative leader, as CIO, you also are responsible for providing the company with the complete set of skills required to execute IT work aligned with business objectives. This means supporting employees in developing their skills, too. Training employees is not only about making people technically better as technology architects, software developers, network engineers, or systems administrators. It also includes improving their business and interpersonal skills.

One effective strategy is to require employees to annually self-assess their skills and create and implement an individualized development plan to drive self-improvement. This strategy can produce excellent results for a modest investment of time and resources. As part of the annual IT operating plan, establish a written goal that 100 percent of employees have an individual development plan. Make it clear that each individual's plan should include specific, measurable, actionable, realistic, time-phased objectives and the corresponding tasks for attaining those objectives. Hold managers at every level accountable to review, comment on, and sign off on their employees' plans and to monitor progress throughout the year, as part of their ongoing review and discussions with each team member about the entire set of objectives related to the individual's job function and priorities for the year.

Although training is important, management monitoring of performance and one-on-one coaching also are critical tools for improving employee performance. Teamwork problems may not necessarily be caused by gaps in interpersonal communications skills. There may be other root causes at play that should be explored between manager and employee. Deficiencies in business or technical skills, knowledge, or confidence could be at the heart of an employee's performance problems, which might surface as a problem communicating or getting along with others. For instance, a project manager who consistently does a poor job in running meetings can wreak havoc, destroying team efficiency and causing tremendous frustration. This project manager might need basic training or coaching in meeting management: when it is appropriate to call a meeting, creating an agenda, sticking to an agenda, managing difficult people during a meeting, ending a meeting with action items, and using action item logs and follow-up actions to hold people accountable in between meetings. Project managers who routinely schedule status meetings with no agenda involving large groups of people for hours on end may believe they are promoting teamwork when in fact they are frustrating their project team members and robbing the organization of precious productivity.

RECRUITING FOR PEOPLE SKILLS

Make people skills a priority in talent appraisal when recruiting and hiring new employees. One good practice in use among many organizations today is the behavioral interviewing technique. Work with your HR business partner to integrate behavioral interviewing into your standard recruiting process. Train IT management and staff in the process; interview for the presence of skills that are consistent with teamwork and collaboration. After each interview, each participant should write up her observations, conclusions, and recommendations regarding a candidate as input to the hiring manager's evaluation and decision. This front-end attention to screening for people skills will increase the odds of hiring individuals who are ready, willing, and able to work with others as part of a team—saving you downstream headaches of dealing with personnel-related problems that can damage your organization by draining productivity, harming employee morale, increasing cost, hurting quality, and dissatisfying customers.

SETTING CLEAR DIRECTION

Leaders who are unclear in communicating priorities, roles, and assignments will likely (although perhaps unwittingly) send employees off into the wrong direction. Confused, employees will spin their wheels and waste time. Faced with too many goals or a lack of clarity, employees may feel overwhelmed and unable to cope with the sheer volume or ambiguity of work expectations. Marching off into opposite directions, employees may run into barriers across the organization in securing IT and business resources needed to complete their tasks. With priorities colliding, tensions will naturally emerge, stifling collaboration and teamwork and hurting productivity. Of course, some measure of conflict is completely natural and even desirable. In any organization, there can be multiple demands simultaneously competing for the attention of a finite human resource pool. A complete absence of conflict might be a sign of some other serious problem. But a great deal of dysfunctional conflict can be avoided through increased clarity and consistency in establishing expectations and aligning resources efficiently and effectively to priorities.

To clarify business priorities, it is important to document them in writing, share the documented priorities with the appropriate employee audiences, and provide specific guidance regarding relative ordering or weights of priorities. When priorities are clear, employees can make better decisions about what to work on day to day. This can improve timeliness and efficiency in resolving critical operational issues, keeping projects moving, and improving customer responsiveness and service. Clear prioritization can empower employees on or close to the front line to make appropriate decisions and resolve more issues on their own, avoiding unnecessary time lags and costly escalations to higher levels of management.

When employees are unclear about their roles and responsibilities and how their roles relate to other people in their groups or other areas, teamwork efficiency is at risk, as people waste time arguing about who is responsible for what. It is worth spending

time writing out job descriptions in consultation with your employees, discussing the content of each role and how it relates to others.

Organization charts are good tools to visually describe on a single page who is responsible for what. A management-only chart can not only show who reports to whom and who owns what function, but can also include a paragraph of text or bullet points that flesh out the key responsibilities of each functional area.

Tables of responsibilities, or RACI charts (an acronym that stands for *responsible, accountable, consulted, informed*), are excellent, simple tools for going beyond a traditional organization chart and further describing roles and responsibilities across an organization, whether company wide, within IT only, or for a particular functional area or project team. There can be more than one R, C, or I on a chart—but only one person should be accountable. This makes the ultimate accountability completely clear.

In a matrix, list on the left axis each of the responsibilities or tasks. Across the top, list the names or job titles of the people involved in the organization, team, or process. At the intersection of each row and column, list whether someone is responsible, accountable, must be consulted, or must be informed, or leave the cell blank if none of these applies. This simple technique of documenting roles and responsibilities is very powerful in clarifying who is responsible for what—and should be a living document to which people can refer from time to time to refresh memories, to orient new people into the organization, and to manage changes to responsibilities over time as the organization structure, process, and/or people change.

A good tool for being clear with employees about priorities is the employee performance review process. When goals, objectives, recognition, and rewards, such as performance appraisal ratings, salary increases, and bonuses, are tied to results produced by silos or individuals within silos, remember that you get what you pay for. Rewarding only silo work may constrain achievement of results to those which silos can produce on their own. To encourage more cross-functional teamwork in support of a critical end-to-end process spanning multiple silos, engineer the rewards system to align with the desired behaviors and outcomes. For example, weight an employee's goals for the year with 50 percent of the review tied to team performance and 50 percent related to individual performance.

A variation is to alter the percentage split based on level in the organization. Senior executives might have 90 percent of their review tied to team goals; middle managers, 50 percent; and individual contributors, 25 percent. This is a good topic for discussion with your HR partner and is an issue that goes beyond the IT area. This is an item for attention at the senior executive level. Creating consistency across the company is important to developing a supportive environment for all the cross-functional processes and to drive high performance toward achievement of corporate goals and objectives.

Informal and formal public recognition of outstanding team performance also will send a powerful signal to the organization. Conversely, if management talks about teamwork but publicly praises or formally rewards only individual performance, leaders are sending mixed messages and employees will surely notice.

One company had an annual all-company recognition program consisting of a handful of awards for outstanding leadership, values in action, and operational

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performance. The program overall was very well received and effectively administered. But the rules called for nominations of individuals only, not teams. In some cases, employees asked if they could nominate teams that produced outstanding results. The answer was no because they did not meet the program criterion.

Best-practice governance, quality, and management frameworks, such as COBIT, ITIL, CMMI, and ISO, when properly deployed, require focused attention on clarity of accountability and excellent teamwork to work effectively. These frameworks can increase value and reduce risk in IT delivery, improving IT/business alignment and customer satisfaction. Some CIOs might be averse to the idea of implementing these kinds of frameworks, believing that they are too process-heavy. Although there are implementation risks, many aspects of these frameworks, when adapted and applied effectively and efficiently to a given IT organization's situation, can be incredibly powerful in improving cross-functional teamwork and organization-wide performance.

These frameworks build on the RACI concept and expand it further in clarifying the what, how, and who of the process. They provide specific, detailed guidance based on the experience of many other IT organizations across a wide array of commonly encountered IT processes.

It is not necessary to implement all of a framework to benefit from it. Nor is it necessary to start at point A and go in order to point Z. Approaches can vary based on the unique business environment and still be successful.

Speaking of important IT processes, requirements management should be evaluated as part of a review of opportunities for performance improvement. Chronically poor requirements are a common problem and can cause a great deal of friction between the business and IT and lead to costly project failures, waste, and rework. Although the business is responsible for providing good requirements, IT is accountable for the requirements management process that extends across functional boundaries and affects the cost, time, scope, risk, and quality of what IT produces.

 **COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY**

Communication is vital to collaboration and teamwork. It would be ideal if all the employees of a company or all the members of a project team were literally sitting in a single room. For a small start-up, this scenario might be practical. But for most companies, situating everyone in a single space is a tall order. A management challenge is to develop and maintain a sense of everyone sitting together in one room regardless of how large and distributed the company becomes. Certain strategies, tools, and practices have been demonstrated to be effective in creating a sense of community despite barriers of time zone, team size, space, language, and culture.

Leverage technology for improving communication and coordination among employees. Conference calls using voice and interactive Web technology are effective, inexpensive tools for improving collaboration across geographic sites. Consider using intranet, wikis, blogs, text, and other Web 2.0 and social media tools.

Standardize on an internal, secure communications tool for chatting, asynchronous or real-time group dialogs, and making visible real-time presence information. Presence

can identify whether a user is on- or off-line, at their computer actively working or temporarily away for the computer (including how many minutes they have been away). Employees can note whether they are busy or not and turn on or off a do-not-disturb symbol. The tool makes it easy to quickly strike up an online, real-time chat between two people or even a team of three or more. PC desktop screens and files can also easily be shared.

Deploy video-conferencing. This technology is not new, but it is usually confined to boardrooms and possibly some conference rooms. If there is a business case and bandwidth is cheap enough, move to desktop video-conferencing. Eventually this capability will be ubiquitous.

Low-tech communications, such as department, management, team, and project meetings, are ways to foster efficient teamwork. Meet with the entire IT department once a month for an hour to provide the team with regular updates on key items worth their attention, such as progress against annual goals and objectives; risk areas needing the team's support; public recognition for exceptional performance of teams and individuals; and questions and answers for key issues on employees' minds. Attendance should be mandatory.

For smaller-size management and work-group meetings, a go-round session where each person has some time to speak is good, but be careful about managing this process. This is not a time for people to go on and on about every activity in their respective area; regurgitating this level of detail is unnecessary, unhelpful, and a time waster. Put a strict time limit on each person's update, perhaps two to three minutes, and ask everyone to focus comments on specific issues, such as key recent accomplishments, upcoming milestones, and—most important—critical issues or risks where help from other team members is needed. One manager focuses his team meetings on what he calls "blocking issues."

Collaborate with IT managers and staff to devise a communications strategy for the department as a whole to support daily operations and again on a project-specific basis to support project related needs. These plans should consider all stakeholders and identify who will send what message to whom when using what medium. Seek help from a corporate communications professional from within your company or, if the function does not exist internally, from outside.

SUMMARY

High-performance IT organizations must have the resources and capabilities for, and consistently demonstrate in practice, high levels of teamwork and collaboration within IT and across the company. Moreover, collaboration can extend beyond the firm's boundaries into the realm of key external stakeholders, such as customers and suppliers. Risks to effective, efficient teamwork and collaboration are readily identifiable and can be eliminated or mitigated. CIOs can easily recognize signs of trouble, such as presence of silos, poor teamwork behaviors, distrust, dysfunctional processes with hand-off problems, and confusion about priorities and roles. As CIO, you must serve as a role model and hold direct reports accountable for strongly supporting a vision of a high-

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performance team throughout the organization in their day-to-day actions as leaders. Leadership can raise the bar for all IT staff by recruiting top talent with people skills and helping employees improve performance through training, professional development, monitoring, and coaching. Leaders also can foster improved teamwork and outcomes by being totally clear about who needs to do what, when, and why, whether for run-the-business operational processes or IT projects. Finally, leaders can create and implement communications plans that will promote a sense of community regardless of how large the organization grows and how diverse the employee population becomes culturally or geographically. Good practices in creating and nurturing teamwork and collaboration exist. CIOs can either reinvent the wheel, or they can learn from and apply proven practices in their organizations, creating increased value to their key stakeholders and customers.