

Précis

Thoughts on IT in Business



Collaborate or Die

Editorial Panel

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Collaborate or Die

While the injunction to “collaborate or die” might seem a rather extreme line for *Précis* to take, we have no doubt that it’s a topic being addressed in most organisations.

Should one fail to plan for collaboration, the best result will be an environment filled with a myriad of systems and devices that duplicate functionality, do not integrate, and leave users frustrated. At worst, organisations will fail to attract and retain key employee talent, find that their competitors are more agile, and ultimately that their customers choose to do business with others.

This is the context against which we review the landscape of unified communications and collaboration (UC&C).

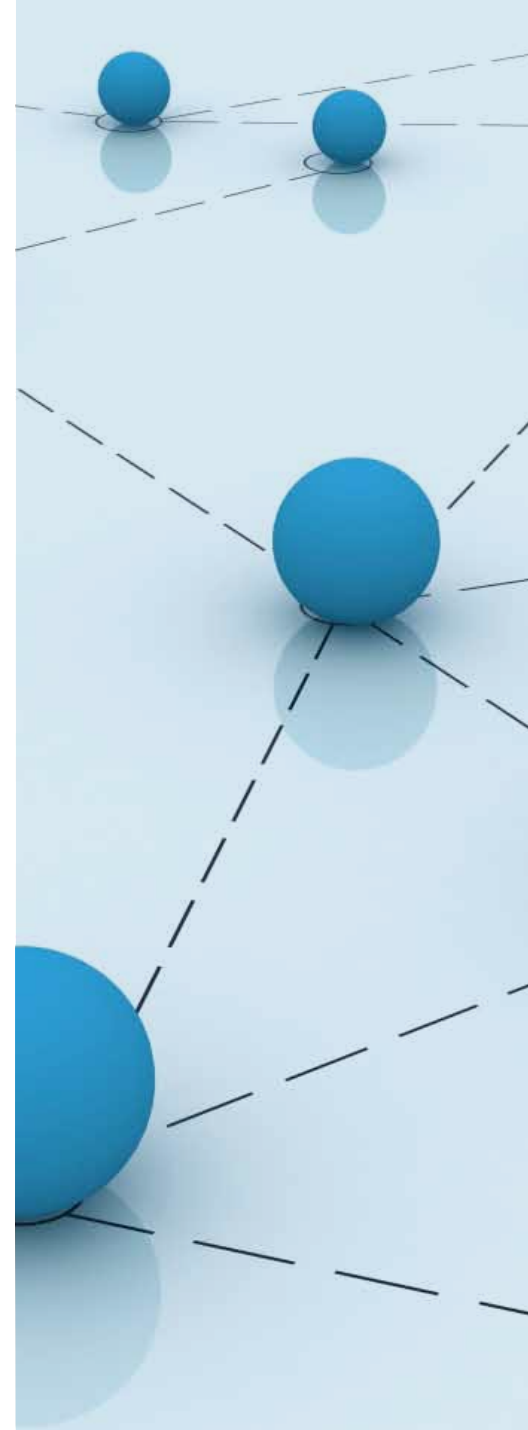
In this issue, we look at aggregating technologies and service providers. We consider video and its unique IT management requirements. Jeydev Chiba of Vodacom gives us his views on collaboration and we share the fabulous success of Parsons Brinckerhoff Australia-Pacific, which achieved a return on their collaboration investment in less than 60 days.

With this astounding success as an example, perhaps we should challenge readers to remarkable returns rather than a slow decline from a lack of collaboration. Either way, it’s surely a topic for collaborative debate in your organisation.

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The Best of Old and New

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There's a tendency to think that, because collaboration receives much media focus and seemingly swallows vast amounts of research dollars, it must be a new aspect of business and social organisation models.

While it is a prominent feature of today's business models that depend so highly on the knowledge worker, it is an age old survival requirement: the joint planning and execution of strategies to hunt and cultivate agricultural crops are prime examples of collaborative behaviours, requiring sharing of information and group decisions.

And while technological enablement of business processes is decades rather than eons old, many of the underlying technologies that support collaboration are not new. However, as is usual with technology in general, people are constantly finding new ways to apply it.

Often the latent possibilities in technology make themselves apparent only once the specific use for which it was designed has been bedded down. In the wider context of other technologies, other functionality, and other business strategies, these possibilities are revealed. An example is the application of databases to knowledge management applications.



Often the latent possibilities in technology make themselves apparent only once the specific use for which it was designed has been bedded down.

However, the proliferation of new devices, the integration of them into existing systems, and the management of service delivery across a multitude of devices, is creating challenges for IT departments. Yet, before addressing these issues, the question arises as to which of the new devices to allow into the organisation and which to ignore.

Dimension Data unified communications and collaboration business development manager, Gavin Hill, advises that each new device must prove itself in terms of the additional capability it offers to the organisation. “The organisational priority must be to provide a consistent experience across the various devices. IT can take a leading role here, working with the business to formulate standards and policies. Technology manufacturers must also come to the party: to some extent, a consistent experience depends on how much the many disparate communications and collaboration technology manufacturers are prepared to work towards industry standards. Where that’s not happening, it’s best to work through systems integrators who have a track record of providing positive user experience.”

An additional pressure is the fact that employees have access to consumer-based collaboration technologies and will often try to use them within the organisation, leading to a range of increased business risks in non-compliance, security vulnerabilities, and data leakage.

The thigh bone is connected to the hip bone

“There is, in fact, a very large ecosystem within which collaboration functions – and it includes social trends as much as it does different types of technologies,” says Peter Menadue, Dimension Data’s group general manager for Microsoft Solutions.

“We tend to think of advanced technologies such as web-sharing, video conferencing, iPhones and iPads as collaboration technologies and forget that something as ubiquitous and long established as the desktop productivity suite, in most cases Microsoft® Office®, is where most people originate the information on which other people work. In that context, Office® is a piece of collaboration technology.

Collaboration technology is
anything that contributes to
the process of connecting
people with content.



“As is the ordinary old phone that’s been sitting on desks for generations, and document management systems. And, of course, without a database, where would we store information and be able to access it from?”

“In the end, collaboration technology is anything that contributes to the process of connecting people with content. What’s new is the fact that we now see such technology as part of an ecosystem and are making the cultural shift towards expecting a unified capability from all the parts.”

To achieve that unified capability, silos of technology must be made aware of one another so that information and control of information can operate equally successfully in all spheres of the ecosystem.

As Hill says: “A telephone directory and login and password information are usually housed in different parts of an IT infrastructure. Actually, there is no reason for them to be separated. Also, there’s no reason why one shouldn’t be able to view Presence information from Microsoft® Word™ or Microsoft® Excel®. And why shouldn’t one be able to capture a video call or telephone conversation and publish it

on a portal where it can be searched for by others who need the information?

“In other words, what everyone is realising is that work is an activity and not a place, and that we need to focus on enabling the activity, not the place.”

Collaboration is a social activity

One way of doing this is to standardise communications technologies on Internet protocols, such as session initiation protocol (SIP), so that interoperability can be taken for granted. Another way is to find ways in the workplace to provide the types of communication functionality offered by Skype, Microsoft® MSN®, GoogleTalk, and video.

“Organisations do need to find ways to support the way people expect to live and work,” Hill says. “The difficulty is that consumer technologies are not always appropriate for enterprise environments, where the use of technology has to be controlled according to strict usage policies, and where quality, security and reliability are commercially critical considerations.”

Vendors are working on making consumerised technologies fit enterprise requirements. Cisco’s Intercompany Media Exchange (IME), for example, permits companies to communicate over the Internet, cutting costs without sacrificing security or quality.

“Adapting to the workplace the collaboration functionality that people are already using – and like to use – at home, helps retain the high end talent in an organisation that tends to be an early adopter of technology,” Hill says. “That said, there’s no financial sense in adding new infrastructure to suit only a few users. Better to have a plan for cost-effectively incubating what seem to be promising technologies while incorporating technologies that have already proved that they’ll be around for the long-term.

“Besides, there is so much research being done on ways to incorporate Internet usage into the enterprise that your organisation doesn’t need to turn itself into a guinea pig.”

Unified is the natural state

Menadue believes that, in the end, the ‘U’ in UC&C (unified communications and collaboration) will become unnecessary, because access to information will appear to be seamless. “In the meantime, there are still a lot of moving parts underneath the attempts at seamlessness. One has to be aware of where the technology transition points and boundaries are and manage them appropriately so as to deliver the appearance of seamlessness.”

One of the major boundaries is the consistency and ubiquity of the network. Within networks and at the points where they connect with others, there are differences of, for instance, bandwidth, security, cost and availability. The user of the network has to select a medium or set of media based on those parameters. That’s the start of the complexity of management.

It then escalates into the proliferation of end points and devices, all of which are evolving incredibly fast. Hill expects that still more devices will insert themselves into the fabric of connectivity and collaboration before some level of consolidation kicks in.

“We may eventually see a smart phone that has enough processing power and storage to become the brain of the laptop, and also plug into a home TV and become the media centre – and be the navigation device in the car.

“But people are still not going to squeeze in around a laptop to see the finals of a global sports competition. They’re going to want to use the device that best suits their purpose. This means that integrating and managing – unifying – the various underlying technologies will have to be someone’s job for a very long time. Someone has to work out where, for a particular organisation, the technology transition points and boundaries are, what the best technology options are for addressing them, and then be able to implement them.

“Because that involves managing not just multiple technologies but multiple vendors and service providers, it’s a job best done by system integrators or aggregators.”

The Tablet – Should Every Employee have One?

One of the challenges of unified communications and collaboration is the transition between devices – making sure that the communication or infrastructure is always there and collaboration activities are seamlessly passed between one device and another.

Mobility has made this challenge even bigger, with communications technology needing to be portable (therefore small enough), self-managing (smart), always on (ubiquitous), and user friendly (operated by touch or voice) but still be large enough (in terms of screen size) to be video friendly and have the necessary processing power.

The tablet delivers all those capabilities, filling the gap between the laptop and the smart phone. In the process, it makes the user experience of collaboration progressively more seamless.

The latest tablet to come to market is Cisco's Cius. The benefits of using a Cisco tablet to organisations are that it integrates effortlessly into all the other Cisco technology that is likely to be in use in the organisation – simply because there's Cisco technology in just about every network.

The Cius has many features similar to the iPad. Crucially, it features Cisco's network-centric unified

communications and collaboration platform. Tools include the WebEx Collaboration Cloud; Cisco TelePresence for real-time collaboration; and Cisco Quad collaboration to integrate business applications with social networking tools, such as VoIP, instant messaging, video, and calendars.

The Cius also has dual cameras – one forward-facing, with zoom functions; and one high resolution, rear-facing camera for 640x480 video and still image captures. Insurance adjustors can film damaged sites; real estate agents can shoot footage of properties; sales staff can video meetings and conferences; and buyers can show store management the new spring line as it's displayed in a fashion show.

The Cius comes standard with a virtual desktop client application, so it can perform as a thin client, able to access applications through the Cloud.

For business, this promises lower cost, continuous availability, and more efficiency and flexibility. Software upgrades and patches can be deployed to one server only, rather than individual machines, so employees always have the latest versions. Tablets can travel anywhere and the Cloud follows, so applications are always available.

More devices
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before some
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consolidation
kicks in.



Collaboration is, Essentially, an Exercise in Integration

When you strip it down to its component parts, collaboration at a business level is the integration of a number of different people functioning within their disciplines in concert with others in the same or related disciplines.

While people can – and very often do – collaborate with one another voluntarily, in an organisational environment it is necessary to ensure that they are collaborating towards a common purpose or end result as defined by the organisation.

This, in turn, means managing the behaviour of collaboration. It means ensuring that all the processes and activities are optimised to provide the desired level and amount of collaboration.

While the act of collaboration between one or more individuals is in itself an exercise in integration, it is necessary at a management level to integrate all collaborative efforts within the organisation, in order to focus the intention of those

collaborating and to avoid the waste of effort and resources. Exactly the same principle applies to the technologies that enable collaboration.

No collaboration on collaboration

According to Dimension Data's general manager for Converged Communications, Craig Levieux, most organisations are exploiting the uniquely collaborative characteristics and potential of information and communication technology (ICT) at some level. "But, most organisations are using collaborative technologies in silos – and very often without the involvement of the IT department!

"For example, human resources will buy WebEx to facilitate conference calls and lower travelling costs. Exco will acquire video conferencing capabilities, and marketing will opt for Presence as their way of getting campaigns designed and signed off quickly.

"Many of these collaborative capabilities were not acquired as part of a strategic plan. Therefore, such collaboration is happening in unrelated pockets. As a consequence, the benefits of the collaboration activities are limited to specific departments or aspects of the business. This means that the return on investment in the technologies is equally limited. The business is nearly as operationally fragmented as it was before ICT opened up collaborative possibilities."

In other words, there's no collaboration on collaboration technologies. Specifically, there's no collaboration on an

Many of these collaborative capabilities were not acquired as part of a strategic plan. Therefore, such collaboration is happening in unrelated pockets.

organisational collaboration strategy. There's no unified view, so there's no unified collaboration; and, usually, there's no unified communications to support the unified collaboration. "As with all other parts of an organisation's operations, the best way to get the very considerable benefits of collaboration in your business model is to step back for a moment and decide what the organisation wants to achieve through collaboration," says Dave D'Aprano, Dimension Data's national solutions and services director in Australia.

"The ideal way to do that is to ask existing and potential users of collaboration technologies what they want to be able to do and then find a way to deliver, in an integrated way, on all their expectations."

The experience is everything

Remember the days when an organisation would spend its IT budget on what management had decided the IT priorities would be?

Jon Farrell, Dimension Data enterprise architect in Australia, points out that these days most IT-savvy employees have more collaborative capabilities at home than they do at work – and will find ways to get what they have at home into the workplace, even if it means routing work information via their private connectivity options.

"We've all heard about dealers doing transactions on their Blackberries rather than through the company system, because it's faster that way and they can grab the big wins that motivate their business lives.

"All of us have heard these stories in relation to fraud and data theft. But the vast majority of non-authorized collaboration that employees engage in takes place because the employee gets the job done better that way and gets frustrated and demotivated waiting for the organisation to get up to speed on the functionality freely available to consumers on the Internet.

"The point is not to find ways to stop employees functioning simply because they're ahead of the organisation on technology, but to find ways to harness that innovative spirit

The challenge in delivering a superb experience lies in the ability of an organisation to integrate collaboration activities by integrating collaboration technologies.



and enthusiasm for collaboration without creating security problems for the organisation.

"The most effective way to do that is to deliver a superb collaborative experience for users, so that they're not tempted, innocently or otherwise, to circumvent the organisation's systems."

Does everyone see the same future?

The challenge in delivering a superb experience lies in the ability of an organisation to integrate collaboration activities by integrating collaboration technologies. An obvious place to start is for IT departments to be more collaborative with the business.

As D'Aprano says: "How can an IT department provide the right guidance on a collaborative strategy for the business if it doesn't know how the business wants to collaborate? Do the engineers want something different from marketing? If so, how does what they want differ? Is it possible to use the same platform to deliver on both requirements? Is it possible

to unify the technologies? Do we have the platforms, skills and applications internally to deliver that level of unification or do we have to go outside the business? If so, what providers do we use and how many of them are we going to need? If there are a number of them, how do we integrate what they do with what we do?

“By the same token, it’s essential that the IT department stays abreast of collaboration technologies so as to be able to make recommendations to the organisation, even if it’s not considering a unified collaboration option right now. Sometimes, the organisation needs a push in the right strategic direction – and the IT department should know more about the technology options than both the Exco and the end users.” (For an example of an IT department working in close collaboration with the business and, as a consequence, delivering extraordinary business benefits, see the Parsons Brinkerhoff case study on page 26)

It’s vital that the organisation does not lock itself, either deliberately or by default, into a given cloud provider – because user demands change over time and some cloud services won’t integrate with others.

For many organisations, this is where the crunch comes. “There are two imperatives when it comes to unified collaboration,” Leveux says. “The first is that all the stakeholders have to agree on what the future looks like. The second is that IT has to become much more relevant to the business in the light of that future.

“Becoming and staying relevant takes time and resources. Time and resources in addition to those invested in ensuring that collaboration providers, whether they’re internal to the business, in the Cloud, or a combination of both, are providing the experience that enables end users to work together most easily to give the business the results it needs.

“Also, most collaboration vendors and Cloud providers simply aren’t going to manage collaboration all the way down to the end user. That’s up to the organisation.”

D’Aprano cautions: “However, the organisation probably has many providers. For the organisation to spend time and money managing them all in a coherent way is wasteful. At the same time, it’s vital that the organisation does not lock itself, either deliberately or by default, into a given Cloud provider – because user demands change over time and some Cloud services won’t integrate with others.

“For all these reasons, it’s far more cost effective – and managerially far more effective in terms of holding someone responsible for keeping the organisation continuously collaborating in an optimised way – to use a systems integrator or services aggregator.”

Integration and aggregation always being the point, because collaboration, by definition, is the act of ‘working together’, of bringing one or more elements of activity into alignment with others. Using a systems integrator or services aggregator gives you a single point from which collaboration can be both launched and coherently managed going forward.

This Could be You – No PBX, No Infrastructure, No Maintenance

Effective unified collaboration depends on unified communications. Unified communications depends on voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) technologies that enable an organisation to communicate via voice, data, and video over wired and wireless connections, locally and internationally.

More than that, it depends on the ability to rapidly provision whatever network – locally, regionally, or globally – for a continuously expanding range and combination of structured and unstructured content, driven by end-user demand and innovation.

It means already having the ability to do now what you haven't imagined you might want to do.

Currently, very few organisations in the world are equipped with both the technology and the skills to provide such an integrated capability from a single platform.

Which is why telecommunications carriers and operators globally are taking an interest in applications such as Broadsoft's BroadWorks.

This type of system gives telecommunications operators a single, fully integrated VoIP application platform on which to host PBX, IP Centrex, mobile PBX, business trunking, and residential broadband services with the kind of reliability, redundancy, scalability, and built-in regulatory capabilities that most organisations simply cannot provide for themselves.

As Kervin Pillay, operations manager at Internet Solutions (a division of Dimension Data), says, "The end user doesn't know – and doesn't care – about what part of his collaboration capacity is in the Cloud, on premise, or a combination of the two.

"At the same time, organisations are realising that achieving a complete, unified communications solution is virtually impossible from the basis of a bespoke system.

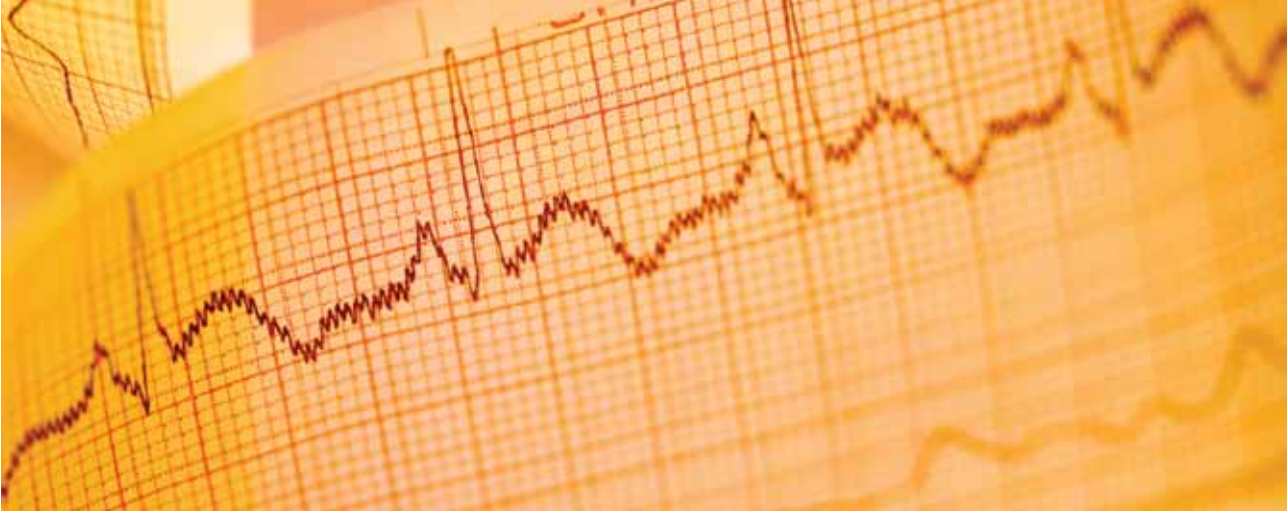
"Therefore, globally, organisations are looking to offload the inflexibility and the capex burden of running their own telecommunications infrastructure and move to an opex model in which all they need is a telephone on the desk or the desktop and access to services from the Cloud.

"They're beginning to see that the cost of hard phones and related servers, with all the upgrades and maintenance involved, is more onerous than increasing the amount of bandwidth they rent from a unified communications provider in order to add extra communications and collaboration capabilities."

Pillay says that many larger organisations must still sweat telecommunications assets bought years ago, but will come to a point sooner rather than later at which their existing infrastructure simply can't deliver the services they need. "It's much easier then to rip and go straight to the Cloud rather than rip and replace with more of your own infrastructure achieving only incremental gains that don't take you far enough into the future."

Smaller companies aren't bothering with bespoke solutions. They're going straight to the Cloud for unified capabilities.

For operators such as Internet Solutions, Broadsoft-type solutions position them to immediately provide unified capabilities to any kind of organisation while being able to expand and enhance their own offerings incrementally as new technology options emerge.



How Do You Manage Your Video Facilities?

The field of unified communications and collaboration (UC&C) covers an enormous span of technologies; technologies which are not only related in some way to each other (otherwise collaboration would not be possible), but which also require some level of specialisation in their deployment and, particularly, in the way they are configured and run, in order to deliver what the organisation needs from them.

Video is the latest case in point. Quite apart from the technological complexities of video, are all the subtleties of more than a hundred years of clever film-making and television production techniques with which the medium is bound. Much as video has been democratised in recent years, with the advent of desktop webcams and the likes of YouTube putting the power of moving visuals into the hands of the man in the street, it nonetheless carries a mystique. As organisations are beginning to realise, it is this quality that makes video such a potent communication tool.

A Gartner Report* states that “by 2015, over 200 million workers globally will run corporate-supplied video conferencing from their desktops. By 2012, 40% of enterprises will adopt a blend of Cloud- and premises-based approaches to meet their UC needs,” and “by 2015, large companies will cut the number of vendors they use to deploy UC solutions by 60%, but they will still need at least three vendors for a full UC solution.”

The indications are clear: video is a must-have. But organisations need help setting it up and maintaining it.

In fact, managed video services may be the fastest way to move from having no video communications element in your UC&C strategy to a full integration so that you can get financial and operational benefits as remarkable as those enjoyed by Parsons Brinkerhoff Australia Pacific (PB A-P). (See the case study on page 23)

As PB A-P proved, deploying video is not a technology issue, it’s a business one. “The business needs to focus on making itself more effective, by whatever means,” says Chris Johnson (CIO). “Video is only one of those means.”

The video highway

Gerard Florian, Dimension Data’s chief technology officer in Australia agrees. “When organisations consider video, they focus first on whether or not they have enough bandwidth. PB A-P proved that, while video does put more demands on bandwidth, you can always prioritise network traffic and schedule video conferences and calls. Bandwidth can be managed. It’s secondary to the outcomes the organisation wants from having video capability.

* Gartner, Inc. *Predicts 2010: Video, Cloud and UC Services Loom Large in Enterprise Communications*, Kathie Hackler et al, December 3, 2009.

“Outcomes are all about deployment and utilisation. Deployment and utilisation are absolutely dependent on the experience users have. If they like what happens when they’re interacting through video, they’ll use it more. If it’s difficult to use, they’ll avoid it.

“Making it simple to use involves a raft of other activities, only a few of which have anything to do with bandwidth.”

The soft side

Florian says organisations forget to train their users, not only on how the video equipment works but also on how to get the best out of it. “There’s a tendency to think that because people have their own digital cameras they have an innate understanding of sound, lighting, composition, and camera angles. That’s rarely true.

“Most people who have used webcams at home put up with bad sound and visuals in exchange for being able to see and hear, however poorly, friends and family. That’s not a training ground for good video use. It certainly doesn’t set the kind of standard that is needed for effective corporate communication via video, where first impressions make all the difference and the inability to convey information, both with a live feed and in person, can make or break a deal.”

This ‘soft skills’ side of video makes it necessary for management of not only the technical but also the human component of visual communications. Measurement and training are crucial to ensuring that the organisation gets as many people as possible to exploit video to the benefit of the organisation.

Also essential are usage policies – such as those PB A-P used to create a collaboration charter.

Chop wood, carry water

Other activities that organisations tend to overlook are the simple but essential hygiene factors: regularly checking that the equipment works, that it’s still in the rooms to which it was allocated, that maintenance is done – and that the batteries in the remote are charged!

Invariably, the CEO’s personal assistant is the one who has to take some harassed action when the video conference has already started and a piece of equipment is found to have failed. Hardly her job! And probably not her area of expertise.

There’s also the question of whether or not video conferencing rooms and other facilities are being under- or over-utilised.

“Having made the investment in video facilities, it’s important for an organisation to know whether it’s getting value out of it,” says Robert Weddepohl, Dimension Data’s general manager for Converged Communications in Australia. “To ensure adequate uptake of video, you need to gather and analyse utilisation stats of the video communications’ environment. This enables you to focus on areas of the business in which uptake is poor as well as ensure there is sufficient capacity planning in place. Remedies needed to facilitate further uptake may include changing room environments or adding training.

“Sometimes an awareness campaign is necessary. Sometimes, you have to change the way you schedule the facilities.

“None of this is work employees have time to do or have the insight to be able to make suggestions about. A managed video service provider does it all as a matter of course, as part of a larger package of services that ensures that you get the most out of your video communication.

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“Much of the value of video communication lies in its ability to give users in different geographic areas the ability to communicate face-to-face. For instance, monitoring and managing multiple dispersed video conferencing units means that an organisation must either have a few dedicated head office people constantly travelling to the regional facilities – thereby obviating the reduction in travel benefits that video provides – or train someone in each region, causing them to take on extra responsibilities.

“Again, a managed video service provider can do the job more effectively and affordably – while giving the organisation a single point of contact when something goes wrong.”

As with everything else in life, you can’t manage or change what you can’t measure. One of the managed video baseline services is the collection, analysis, and reporting on statistics related to everything in the video system, from end points and the availability of rooms, to bandwidth and user competence.

It’s also important to remember that video is not appropriate for every circumstance. If you don’t have the budget for the right lighting and audio for a presentation that could as easily be done by phone, do it by phone.

In the same context, why pay for an extra circuit to do a video call when an international telephone call will cost less and give better quality?

As Florian says: “Always think about how to create the desired user experience within the budget you have. If you don’t have the expertise to do that in-house, get help.”

It doesn’t have to be either/or

For many organisations, a fully managed – or concierge – service seems to be the ideal. The service provider takes over the entire video system and uses remote, automated means to monitor and manage it. In addition, the concierge service provider puts permanent full time resources on the client site to handhold all major video-based meetings – continuously checking and maintaining equipment. Client

why not let
the personal
assistant take
the flack when
the screen
flickers?

employees walk into a room in which everything always works all the time.

This can be more expensive than the client’s use of video justifies, in which case organisations opt for a more narrowly defined service based on their particular requirements. The service provider assists in this way for a short period, usually six months, providing staff for certain pre-agreed video conferences and monitoring only those facilities deemed most important by the organisation. As the client becomes more comfortable with the technology, so the service provider scales back its assistance.

“One of the cultural problems with video that we have seen as both a concierge and managed video provider is that the IT department usually avoids having anything to do with the video system,” Florian says. “Historically, it’s been a high end activity, located in the boardroom and presided over by the CEO’s personal assistant.

“Also, strictly speaking, video technology hasn’t been IT based. Many IT departments don’t know how to fix a malfunction. In those circumstances, why not let the personal assistant take the flack when the screen flickers?”

“We like to use our concierge service as a way of showing the IT department that video isn’t the enemy and that there are automated management tools that take the stress out of running such a high profile facility for the organisation.”



We are gradually integrating our systems into our parent company, Vodafone, so as to leverage their global platform and, in time, their global applications.

Collaboration is Becoming a Business Imperative

Précis recently spoke to Jaydev Chiba, managing executive enterprise IT and infrastructure, Vodacom South Africa, for his thoughts on collaboration; how the concept of collaboration is changing business models and the kinds of collaboration technologies that will have the greatest influence on those business models.

What is your role at Vodacom South Africa?

My responsibilities include managing Vodacom's internal infrastructure, from the back end data centres and all the network equipment, to storage. I'm also responsible for all the internal desktop facilities, email, Internet and intranet access, and certain of the corporate applications such as human resources, maintenance, facilities management, some financial applications and IT security, as well as identity and password management and regulatory compliance. I oversee all the company's collaboration tools, whether they are video or audio conferencing or the Microsoft suite of collaboration applications.

I take care of the growing technology interface between ourselves and Vodafone. We are gradually integrating our systems into theirs so as to leverage their global platform and, in time, their global applications.

It sounds like an onerous job, but I have very good people working with me. After twelve years, we've refined our management processes to a fine art.

What is your view of “collaboration as a business imperative” – both today and in the future?

In simple terms, it means that a company needs to enable its people, suppliers, and partners to work together so that defined business goals can be achieved speedily and efficiently. Today's enterprises have many people from various companies who have to 'collaborate'. Our contractors, business partners, and even our customers are active participants in defining and delivering products and services. There was a time when we could get all these people around a table to make sure all inputs were considered. Today, however, we operate in a global environment, with stakeholders in different parts of the world.

At Vodacom, for instance, we regularly need to meet and collaborate with our Vodafone colleagues in Europe and Africa. Using collaboration tools to cut decision-making time, improve productivity, and address business challenges, in such very different geographies, has become imperative.

While CIOs have to be innovative about solving the technical challenges of putting appropriate collaboration tools in place, they also have to consider the impact of those tools on people and organisational culture.

How has the need for effective collaboration changed business models? Your thoughts on what this means to today's CIO and business leadership team...

It goes without saying that we need to begin with internal collaboration. In the future, we expect inter-company collaboration to become a core working practice. In our case, for instance, we foresee a scenario in which we sell other companies' products through our distribution channels and vice versa.

Also, while CIOs have to be innovative about solving the technical challenges of putting appropriate collaboration tools in place, they also have to consider the impact of those tools on people and organisational culture. 'Working from home' and 'telecommuting' are technically feasible concepts, but they create challenges related to managing people who aren't on site. We therefore need to come up with a way to manage deliverables, not time.

In addition, electronic collaboration creates new business risk. Ensuring that our intellectual capital is protected can no longer be achieved purely through the creation of policies. We have to put down systems that ensure that information is classified and, if necessary, encrypted or protected in other ways.

Then there's the issue of some people resisting change and not feeling comfortable with 'bleeding edge' technologies. We need to make sure that the benefits are clear so they are able to accept and adopt new ways of working together.

For other people, especially the 'Facebook generation', using collaboration tools is second nature. We need to embrace the opportunities created by consumer collaboration technologies to enhance our customers' experience. Why phone a call centre when, for instance, Vodacom responds to (and resolves) customer problems on Twitter? Even our CEO is active on Twitter!

What do you see as the challenges and opportunities that exist from a business and IT perspective in terms of fostering effective collaboration?

One of the challenges is recognising what form of collaboration works best for which business problem. I may use Microsoft® Lync™ (formerly Microsoft® Office® Communicator®) to make a video call to a colleague and perhaps even share an application on my desktop. To have a meeting with my colleagues in Vodafone, I may need a multi-party video conference. Members of a project may want to publish a document on Microsoft® SharePoint® and get people to comment on it by using discussion forums. The proliferation of technologies will increase complexity and support costs.

We need a clear unified communication and collaboration (UC&C) strategy that is aimed at adding value to our business, not just at deploying the latest technology.

On the other side of that coin are the opportunities created by all the new devices that will populate the workplace of the future. There are massive productivity gains to be had by harnessing technology to improve collaboration.

How is Vodacom interpreting and addressing these challenges and opportunities in terms of the products and services it provides?

We've seen significant growth in data consumption and this is largely driven by social media applications like Facebook, Twitter and MXit. As a consequence, we've made a considerable investment in our networks to enable data-driven products. We've also been selling laptop and datacard bundles to increase the uptake of data services in an affordable way. As we deploy more high-speed data capabilities, we expect to see continued increase in the adoption of media-rich products.

Another opportunity can be unlocked by making smart phones available to the masses. This is becoming a real possibility as the cost of some smart phones starts to come down.

One of the challenges is recognising what form of collaboration works best for which business problem.

What have been Vodacom's own business collaboration needs in the past few years?

We have a unified communications strategy that aims at leveraging collaboration technologies. We have been early adopters and have been refining the usage of the technologies so that we can be sure of always delivering relevant products and services to our corporate customers.

While the introduction many years ago of video conferencing enabled us to gain real savings in terms of not having to fly around the country and the world to attend meetings, it had limited benefits in terms of collaboration. We also needed to work together on documents and specifications, calling for a document management capability. The need to be able to gather and collate feedback on documentation has resulted in discussion forums. We found that some interactions were more immediate and less formal, so we looked at instant messaging. More recently, we've looked at blogs and microblogs as ways for people to work together. We now also have personal video conferencing and desktop sharing capabilities through Microsoft® Lync™.

What technologies have you selected as a means to address your collaboration needs? How have you implemented technologies aimed at enhancing collaboration and in what ways do you see your own collaboration initiatives evolving over time?

We decided on a number of complementary technologies so as to provide a more holistic collaborative environment.

These include our base products of mobile handsets and notebooks with 3G capability coupled with Microsoft technologies (Exchange, SharePoint, Lync), Polycom and Tandberg (AV/VC and audio/video bridging) appliances, and Cisco IP telephony to facilitate a more complete collaboration experience by taking a step closer to achieving unified communications. We also plan to add social networking solutions to further enhance our capabilities. Our goal is to leverage all the technologies to which we have access and to integrate them into a single, cohesive unified communications service that will facilitate seamless collaboration between individuals and teams irrespective of where they are.

Do you have any advice for organisations as they continue their efforts to master the challenges of effective collaboration?

Finding ways to improve collaboration requires investment in the underlying platforms but, once they are in place, you are well-positioned to leverage opportunities. Today business is all about agility and time-to-market. You need the right information at the right time and you need to speak to or communicate with the right people regardless of where they are in the world. Make careful strategic decisions when choosing your technology partners and make sure they work together with you and understand your business needs.

Don't underestimate the importance of a proper governance and security capability to make sure you don't expose your company's information to the wrong people!

Encouraging adoption of the products also needs to be thought through carefully. What worked for us was to find small communities that had problems we could help solve with our offerings. They soon become our champions driving uptake into the rest of the organisation.

In that context of all of the above, what is your relationship with Dimension Data and how do you see that evolving?

Dimension Data has been Vodacom's partner for many years, helping to implement many of the technologies I've mentioned. Their knowledge and expertise has held us in good stead as we journeyed through the various stages.

Don't underestimate the importance of a proper governance and security capability to make sure you don't expose your company's information to the wrong people!



Service Integration – Mind the Gaps

Considerations for Ensuring Collaboration Among Multiple Suppliers to Better Manage Outcomes

The evolution of outsourcing during the past 20 years has brought both outsourcers and their clients to a point at which collaboration not only on technologies and process but also on business models has become the key requirement – and the key challenge.

For outsourcing to deliver what the business wants and needs, it has to come into line with the overall business trend towards cross-functional and business collaborative delivery. In today's outsourcing context, that means integrating business processes, responsibilities, service level agreements (SLAs), technologies, and outcomes across multiple outsourcing service providers, including, increasingly, Cloud providers.

It's a complex process, for which many organisations have neither the resources nor the appetite. As a consequence, a new step in outsourcing is becoming popular: that of

First-generation outsourcing contracts more often than not failed to achieve their key objectives of reducing business cost and/or improving business performance.

outsourcing the management of outsourcers. Or, more precisely, of outsourcing the management of collaboration among outsourcers.

From rigidity to ultimate pliability

Since it first came into vogue in the early 1990s, IT outsourcing has undergone a steady metamorphosis. In its nascent, first-generation phase, it typically took the form of long-term, monolithic contracts, with the primary motivation on the part of the buyer being cost savings. Usually, the relationship was highly prescriptive and transactional. Providers were able to impose their own standards when it came to terms and conditions, often including service levels that were not reflective of business's requirements of IT – because the IT function was rarely fully aligned with the business. Given these inherent deficiencies, first-generation outsourcing contracts more often than not failed to achieve their key objectives of reducing business cost and/or improving business performance.

Things had to change – and they did in the late 1990s. Second-generation outsourcing focused more on the needs of the business and outcomes-based contracts began to come to the fore. Contracts carefully specified the nature

and level of services to be provided along with performance measures and penalties for non-performance.

The improvements were significant. Even so, CIOs began to realise that single-sourcing partnerships weren't providing enough flexibility in enabling the business to adjust to new market conditions and new business models. They began to move towards a selective best-of-breed approach to outsourcing – only to discover that this presented its own challenges.

As Wayne Yarr, Dimension Data's global managed services specialist, explains: "A lack of the requisite governance in second-generation outsourcing contracts left many organisations with a chaotic blend of service relationships and contracts – because they underestimated not only the need for them to manage vendors but also the type of management skills required. When outsourcing evolved into multisourcing, the complexities were amplified and the need

for an emphasis on collaboration among vendors as well as between vendors and the business became obvious.

"Managing multiple parties such as in-house IT groups, hardware vendors, global IT service providers, software firms, and a host of others in an ad-hoc manner usually results in a tangled web of contracts and increased costs – and a fragmented view of the IT function. If multisourcing isn't approached in a structured way, with a focus on collaboration, the inevitable inconsistency across various IT environments, processes, support tools, and reporting mechanisms that results actually leads to higher costs and greater risk than outsourcing to a single organisation."

The new multisourcing

Today, companies understand that it is possible to derive many of the traditional benefits of outsourcing without losing control of either their assets or strategy – or their ability to react quickly to the requirements of their business. Yes, they

New emerging technologies encourage companies to move towards complex multisourcing service delivery models.

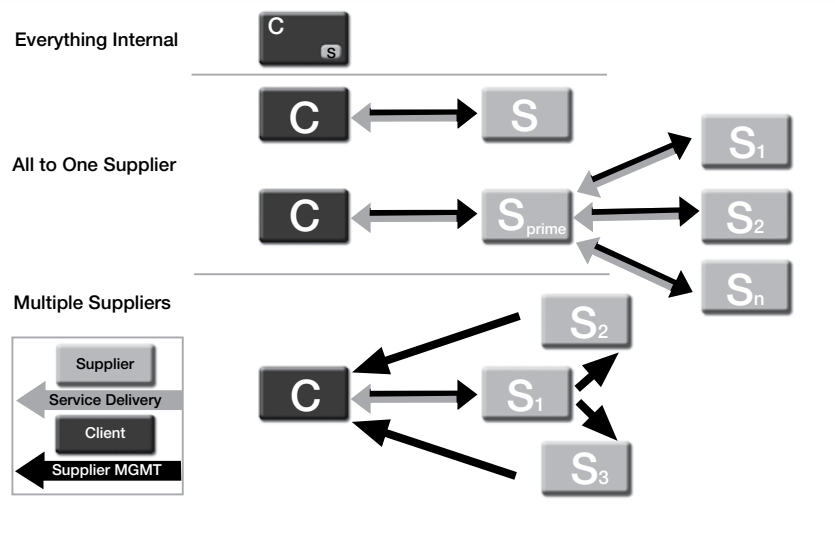


Figure 1: Generations of Service Delivery Models

still want and need outcomes-based contracts but they are demanding greater control over the way in which their providers deliver services.

Enter the third generation of IT outsourcing. Companies are beginning to appreciate how crucial it is to define the right governance framework and the internal roles and responsibilities needed to work with and among the outsourcers as well as defining the requirements and contractual terms to ensure service integration.

However, many organisations cannot justify attaining the requisite level of systems and process maturity in terms of the scale of high-end resources and skills needed.

As a consequence, enterprises entering into third-generation outsourcing are looking to the IT services market for help and are seeking out providers with the industry knowledge and experience to oversee their multiple IT initiatives and

the contracts with the various vendors responsible for accomplishing that work – and also ensure that all parties collaborate around a single vision for the business.

Ways to “skin the cat”

Organisations generally adopt one of three service integration models:

- Model 1: The client assumes the service integration role
- Model 2: The client appoints one of its providers to act as the service integrator
- Model 3: An independent consultant is appointed to oversee the integration but does not itself deliver on any of the IT services.

So how does service integration work? The service integrator, whether it be the client, one of the providers, or the independent consultant, using one or more service management best practice frameworks (for example, ITIL V3, eTOM), assigns activities for each process to different

Each process needs to be broken down on activity level to determine what should be retained in-house, outsourced or where shared responsibilities are required.

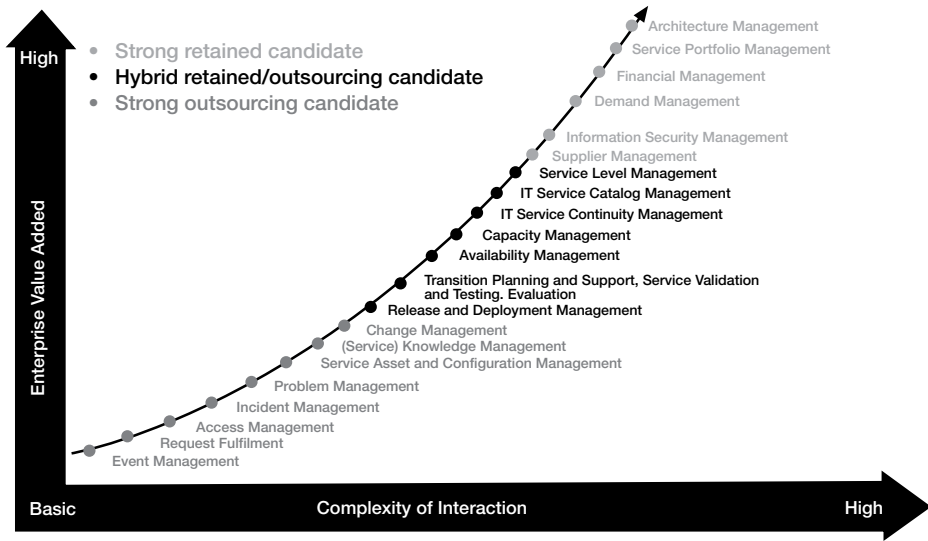


Figure 2: Determining the Right Process Scope

providers within the supplier group. For instance, in the realm of capacity management, several different providers would perform capacity management activities for the relevant technologies within their remit. The service integrator's role is to ensure that the governance overlay – the operating level agreements (OLAs) and SLAs – is being adhered to on a day-to-day basis. Thus, the service integrator provides a unified, collaborative governance framework to manage suppliers, their interactions and accountabilities.

Effective multi-vendor governance and service integration helps companies better oversee their IT environments by:

- Integrating multiple suppliers to better manage outcomes and assess effectiveness
- Leveraging supplier capabilities to ensure business objectives are met
- Enabling competitive advantage by enhancing alignment to the business strategy
- Optimising the potential for business growth by increasing responsiveness to business change
- Transforming the IT cost structure by taking full advantage of economies of scale and standardised services

According to Yarr, for service integration to truly enable collaborative outcomes, assignment of activities must straddle all the organisation's IT service management processes. "Differing levels of accountability need to be assigned to various parties, depending on the business criticality of the process and the providers' specific skill sets.

"For example, for high enterprise value-add processes such as financial management and architecture management, the client will likely perform the lion's share of activities and wish to retain overall accountability. For commodity, basic processes such as event management and incident management, by contrast, the client will probably perform few if any activities.

"Ideally, the organisation's outsource providers should undertake and assume full responsibility for the majority of the day-to-day activities related to these lower-end processes."

Staying in step

Ultimately, the complexity of third-generation outsourcing environments requires that a high order of structure be applied, without grid-locking the process, to ensure that all parties stay in step and are either pro-actively or by dint of astute management contributing to a collaborative end result. A seasoned service integrator has both the means and the motivation to ensure that an organisation's stakeholder group organises itself in a way that achieves its stated objectives. Such structure also creates a clear sense of purpose for each stakeholder group, along with the requisite governance to handle decision making around any issues that may arise.

A seasoned service integrator has both the means and the motivation to ensure that an organisation's stakeholder group organises itself in a way that achieves its stated objectives.

Meeting the Needs of the Collaborative Customer

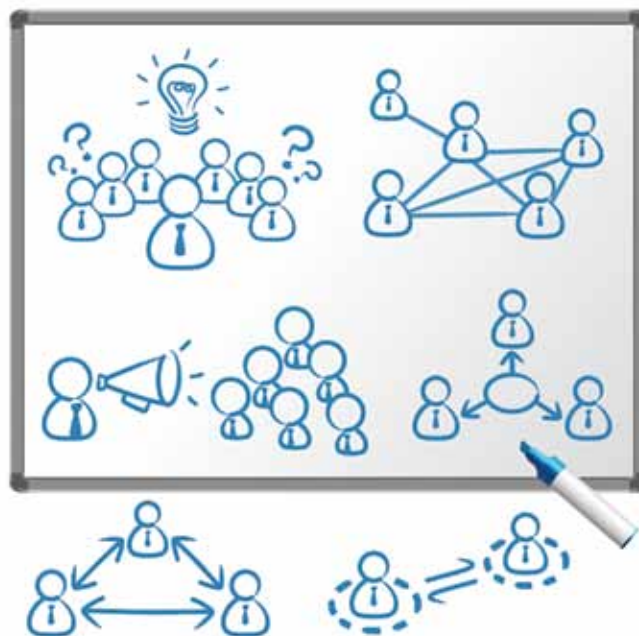
As customers demand more convenient experiences, companies are being pushed to reinvent their customer communication processes. In the drive to become more customer focused, organisations are ensuring their interactions with customers are more collaborative and on customers' terms.

This renewed focus and investment in communication and collaboration means customers will be able to receive information anytime and anywhere, through any channel. Connected customers have already adopted social networks, text messaging, and Cloud-based services as well as video - and expect businesses to provide more than just a professionally answered phone call or well-designed website.

Dimension Data's general manager for Customer Interactive Solutions in Australia, Rob Allman, explains customer awareness influences how different functions and capabilities in a business are viewed. "As a customer, the concept of different channels and brands, different organisations, and a real drive for immediacy creates an expectation of what the business should be doing. This customer revolution means contact centres have to adjust to cope with the challenges of meeting these new demands."

Blurring lines

As the contact centre is a pivotal point of interaction between organisations and their customers, it has a large (if



not the primary) responsibility for the customer relationship. There is, therefore, a move towards consistent and single architectures between companies and their contact centres. Enterprises are also shifting away from batch communication to delivering more personalised content over multiple channels. Traditional silo'd views of customer segments are falling away and there are more crossovers in activity between the front and back office.

"The increasing strategic importance of the contact centre and its reporting values and functions are driving other business areas to show the same level of transparency and accountability to deliver better productivity and service," Allman says.

Changing channels

Customers expect a consistent experience across different media. So companies need to approach process design from a holistic and cross-channel perspective.

As Allman says: "Customers are now viewed in micro segments. This means companies need to understand

not only what they're talking to customers about but also understand what their customers are thinking in the wider world."

Also, although the telephone continues to play a crucial role in customer interactions, these are increasingly triggered by events captured through social websites, email, instant messaging (IM), and websites - with customers often using more than one channel per interaction. Organisations need to use analytics to understand the behaviours of different client segments to determine how to apply the appropriate solution to that specific customer or micro segment.

"We've reached the point at which there is more traffic on social media than any other channel," Allman says. "Interestingly, the people using multiple channels spend more and are better educated, but tend to be a higher churn group. This is why the first step in meeting new customer demands is understanding customers' channel behaviour and then managing it appropriately".

"Emerging channels are also creating different landscapes", adds Martin Dove, Dimension Data's group general manager for Customer Interactive Solutions. "Web channels break down geographical barriers and bring groups together that aren't geographically linked. In emerging countries, the channels being used will create a different landscape. One example is Africa, where low penetration of landlines means customers want mobile access to content - and a different presentation of the same function and capabilities. The behaviours aren't necessarily different, only the device."

There may be things that impact on a specific group that help enrich how organisations interact with and manage those customers. As Allman explains, a proactive approach means using information about niche groups to determine the content and context of why they're contacting the organisation.

"It may then influence how they are routed and how the immediacy of that client is managed. It also means making provision for connections from Facebook and Twitter into

organisations and dealing with them professionally with the correct content knowledge and understanding."

This will influence workforce planning decisions. Customers may use click-to-call or web chat and organisations will have to devise collaboration strategies for those events that aren't bound by traditional channels.

Meeting expectations

To meet customer expectations, businesses have to optimise processes from the front to back office and ensure they are governed by service level agreements (SLAs) and combined with the right knowledge tools, skills, and trained staff.

Organisations should equip their employees to meet increasing customer expectations. Many employees already use tools in their personal lives such as text messaging,

To meet customer expectations, businesses have to optimise processes from the front to back office and ensure they are governed by service level agreements (SLAs) and combined with the right knowledge tools, skills, and trained staff.

instant messaging and social networks, but are unable to use them when responding to customers.

An end-to-end process must place the agent in the centre of the process and build communication around it to define the customer experience. SIP-enabled architectures will become the norm and will allow for greater continuity across channels and for the use of chat, video, and other forms of collaboration.

Dove says that now more than ever, companies need to look at processes from the outside in. “This means offering more channels to solve a single query and offering a more collaborative end-to-end experience.

“By delivering personalised content to any channel the customer prefers, businesses can pave the way for improved customer retention and reduced acquisition costs, while increasing the lifetime value of customers. Given that it is eight times more expensive to acquire a new customer instead of retain an existing one, it is hardly surprising that enterprises are looking for ways to meet these expectations”.

Allman says there is also a connection between what technology vendors are doing and what customers expect. “Organisations are looking internally at how to improve productivity and consistency in the customer experience across all channels. This means working out how to integrate the contact centre using the things that have been successful and extending the principles of routing, information, and visibility end-to-end throughout the organisation.”

Knowledge management and workforce management solutions are being broadened to reflect people’s desire to see disciplines end-to-end. The same applies to quality and performance management, MIS systems and event routing that incorporate self-service and extend the solution from the front to the back office.

Changing solutions are resulting in the emergence of customer collaboration or knowledge groups. By categorising people into skills types and groups, centres

are more able to deal with enquiries effectively. Virtualisation is supporting increased access and putting customers in touch with the right knowledge worker at the right time.

MIS measures are changing to articulate commercial value to the organisation. Net promoter scores (NPS) are now seen as the absolute gold standard. With social media driving NPS, effective customer service will result in a referral. For contact centres, this continuum between cost effectiveness and transformation means investment in areas that transform the customer experience, and will usually result in cost improvements.

Ignore at your peril

Today’s customers expect increased collaboration and an integrated experience. Dove says the changing role of contact centres will see them play a strategic part of a multi-channel experience.

“The percentage of non face-to-face communication is affecting the human agent element and has been changing over the past 10–15 years, with web based channels growing in usage. Where before research showed it was generational behaviours forcing change, the message today is clear – ignore at your peril”.

Allman encourages companies to see restructuring as a means to keeping their customers. “The emergence of multi-channel environments for single transactions will require a cultural change to manage them and companies will have to acknowledge this shift and get the management pillars in place to ensure it works operationally.”

As a general rule, Allman suggests that when looking at basic operational efficiencies, if you can see it and touch it, you can improve it.



Case Study

Collaboration Strategy Pays for Itself in 60 Days

It's not often that you spend 292,000 Australian dollars on technology and, 60 days later, find that you've saved costs in other areas of the business amounting to 750,000 dollars. Parsons Brinckerhoff Australia Pacific (PB A-P) achieved just that by focusing on collaboration, not as a technology option but as a business strategy – indeed, a business necessity.

Company Overview

Founded in 1885 and headquartered in New York City with offices in more than 150 countries, Parsons Brinckerhoff (PB) is a global leader in the development and operation of infrastructure, providing strategic planning, engineering, and program and construction management services to both public and private sector clients in industries as diverse as transportation, power, buildings/facilities, water/wastewater, environmental, and urban/community development.

William Barclay Parsons, the company founder designed New York City's first subway, the IRT, and a 1,000-mile railroad in China, from Hankow to Canton. Both lines are still in use today.

In 1906, Henry M. Brinckerhoff, known for his co-invention of the third rail which revolutionised rapid transit, joined the firm. He designed the network of roads at the 1939 World's Fair in New York.

Being 125 years old means that the company has seen the world go from discrete industrial societies to a technological culture on a global scale. In the process, the design of

Quick Overview

- **Industry:** Business Services
- **Country:** Australia
- **Challenge:** The company's design and consulting teams were spread across multiple cities in the region, often across vast distances, including oceans. Achieving face-to-face collaboration among their 2600 specialists meant that the company's travel costs in terms of airfares, vehicle hire and accommodation were astronomical.
- **Results:** To enhance its collaboration capabilities the company implemented TANDBERG (now Cisco) in-room, fixed unit, high definition video conferencing facilities and combined those with Cisco's WebEx, desktop sharing, low frame rate webcam facilities, and an audio/video bridge. It then incorporated Microsoft® Lync™ (formerly Microsoft® Office® Communicator®), to obtain presence and instant messaging, as well as Microsoft® SharePoint® - thus providing project teams with a space in which they could effectively share ideas, discussions, and documents in either a functional group or project context.

large-scale engineering works has proven to be an intensely human activity fuelled by innovation and vision.

Innovation and vision function most effectively when shared. Today PB management's emphasis on internal collaboration among employees, and external collaboration with suppliers and business partners, enables the firm to see a project through its entire lifecycle, from planning and implementation to operation and maintenance.

Challenge

In 2007, Chris Johnson, PB A-P CIO, was tasked together with other members of the management team with finding technological means to enhance the regional division's collaboration capabilities.

"Our design and consulting teams are spread across multiple cities in the region, often across vast distances, including oceans. One of our design teams in the Philippines, for instance, worked on a project for Brisbane.

"In order to achieve face-to-face collaboration among our 2,600 specialists, our travel costs in terms of airfares, vehicle hire and accommodation were astronomical."

Solution

The company realised that providing its teams with easy to use, intuitive tools to collaborate in real-time, mostly in offices but sometimes on site, was not just a nice to have, it was fundamental to its ability to continue to deliver on its promises to clients.

"Management saw collaboration as a business and not a technology imperative. Certainly, they put adequate resources behind the technology roll-out, but more importantly, they made it clear that collaboration was a *sine qua non* for the business," explains Johnson.

Johnson helped develop a collaboration charter that set out the principles on which collaboration was to be carried out – with technology as a process enabler.

The company already had a robust technology infrastructure. Even so, Johnson took an innovative approach in combining what was already available to him with technologies he had to acquire.

He used his knowledge of the way the business needed to operate to refresh the way it used its existing technology. He implemented TANDBERG (now Cisco) in-room, fixed unit, high-definition video conferencing facilities and combined those with Cisco's WebEx, desktop sharing, low-frame rate webcam facilities, and an audio/video bridge. He then incorporated Microsoft® Lync™ (formerly Microsoft® Office® Communicator®), to obtain presence and instant messaging, as well as Microsoft® SharePoint® – to provide project teams with a space in which they could share ideas, discussions, and documents in either a functional group or project context.

In order to achieve face-to-face collaboration among our 2,600 specialists, our travel costs in terms of airfares, vehicle hire and accommodation were astronomical.

There was no requirement for investment in the network, other than some tweaking of class of service settings. The only significant expenditure was on the video conferencing technology. Access to WebEx was treated as a monthly operating expenditure.

Rather than incur the operational risks of a big bang implementation, Johnson trialed the newly integrated collaboration tools in locations where travel costs had been greatest.

Knowing that it gained nothing if no-one used the new system, PB A-P mounted a targeted education and marketing campaign to ensure that employees understood not only the business need for using the system, but also how easy it was to use and how to exploit it fully.

Adding Value

Johnson's business case suggested that, on its initial investment of \$292,000, PB would have a payback within eight months. As things turned out, just by taking travel and accommodation out of the equation, the company saved \$750,000 in just 60 days.

Once the system was being used effectively, Johnson focused on sweating it for additional returns. He introduced portability – using video units that could be taken to any room.

He also eliminated connectivity issues with a secure gateway into the network, enabling any client, partner, or project office using either Internet Protocol or ISDN to connect with PB A-P without problems.

In recent months he has introduced high definition video conferencing facilities that can be operated from individual desktop computers.

“We’ve had to keep a close eye on the demands that our new levels of collaboration are making on our network. We schedule video calls carefully, using the TANDBERG management suite.”

Initially, PB A-P used third parties to establish key collaboration infrastructure such as voice bridges and express gateways. In the past twelve months, the firm brought in Dimension Data to manage professional services for the infrastructure, focusing on maintenance.

Johnson's future collaboration plans include providing users with an even richer virtual office experience, enabling them to function from any location with a secure network connection from any number of smart devices. “We expect device-based convergence around the smart phone and smart tablet, with a far greater reliance on wireless networks. “Essentially, we’re constantly looking for smaller, faster, cheaper and connected.”

PB has benefitted hugely from a management focus on collaboration underpinned by creative use of technology. What have been the benefits to PB's clients?

“Their projects benefit from the fact that we don't have to pass on the costs of travel,” Johnson says. “More importantly perhaps, we're able to put the very best person onto the project without having to put them on site. Clients get the most appropriate skills and lower project costs.”

Essentially, we're
constantly looking for
smaller, faster, cheaper
and connected.

Research Notes

IT DECISION MAKERS PLAN TO INVEST IN COLLABORATION TO IMPROVE PERFORMANCE

A recent study undertaken by Cisco found that 77 percent of IT decision makers surveyed plan to increase their spending on collaboration tools this year, while employees feel that their ability to collaborate is constrained by corporate policies. More than a quarter of those who work at organisations that prohibit the use of social media applications admitted to changing the settings on their corporate devices to gain access, claiming they 'need the tools to get the job done.'

The research, titled 'Collaboration Nations,' investigates the benefits and challenges to successful collaboration in medium to large enterprises (those with more than 250 employees). The study, conducted by InsightExpress, a digital marketing research company headquartered in Stamford, Conn., surveyed 2,023 end users and 1,011 information technology decision makers (ITDMs) from 10 countries around the world.

The research found that ITDMs recognise the importance of collaboration tools to the future success of their business, with India and China being the most progressive in adopting the technology. Consequently, many ITDM respondents said that they are planning to increase their spending on collaboration technologies over the next year, identifying video conferencing, Web conferencing and IP telephony as primary areas of investment.

For more information on this study please visit: http://newsroom.cisco.com/dlls/2010/prod_032310.html

DECREASE IN THE NUMBER OF IT SECURITY VIOLATIONS

A recent key finding in Dimension Data's Network Barometer Report 2010 reveals a 35% improvement in the number of devices on networks found to be running security vulnerabilities.

However, this figure – down from 73% in 2009 to 38% this year – still represents significant risk to organisation networks. According to the 2010 Report, networks continue to run with security, configuration and end-of-life vulnerabilities which will impact overall business efficiency. The evolution of the Internet, particularly in the cloud computing space, suggests that organisations can evolve their IT infrastructure to benefit from these developments. The 2010 Report also addresses the fact that vulnerabilities are generally known but not effectively addressed, and that organisations need to align to published best practice standards to minimise risk.

In addition, more planning discipline is required in network asset management.

ABOUT THE 2010 NETWORK BAROMETER REPORT

The 2010 Network Barometer Report, published by Dimension Data on the status of networks globally, aggregates data from 235 organisations and the Technology Lifecycle Management Assessments (TLMAs) conducted by Dimension Data around the world during 2010. The Report reviews networks' readiness to support business by reviewing the security vulnerabilities, end-of-life status and configuration variance from best practice of network devices.

For more information about Dimension Data, and to download the free Network Barometer Report, visit www.dimensiondata.com/networkbarometer

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