

Collaboration:

**Harmonizing Information Sharing with
Business Operations**

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Experience Revolutionary Collaboration

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Executive Summary

Corporate and Government organizations are increasingly looking toward collaboration and information sharing technologies to achieve operational efficiencies, but few are realizing the full potential.

Deploying a system that provides rich collaboration functionality does not guarantee increased collaboration among analysts, developers, management and domain experts with access to the system. Furthermore, such systems are frequently bundled with their own proprietary services, thereby creating a stovepipe accompanied by high maintenance, support and system costs. CollabraSpace offers an enterprise collaboration solution that provides a rich and increasing set of collaboration functions that resides within most corporate middleware services infrastructures. The CollabraSpace solution integrates seamlessly into the desktop environment, with functions apparent and readily available to people as they go about their work. Collaboration is a natural part of that work and should be as effortless and unobtrusive as using any of the other productivity tools on the desktop.

One of the largest obstacles to gaining “critical mass” in information sharing environments is analyst perception of the cost versus benefit of using the information sharing functions. Since the benefits of collaboration for knowledge creation is well understood (see: *Wisdom of Crowds* by James Surowiecki, *Infotopia* by Cass R. Sunstein, etc.), solutions that possess the least collaboration cost will enjoy the greatest use, acceptance and overall success. Obviously, getting people to log into a system whose sole function is to serve as a collaboration environment does not fit this “low collaboration cost” model. Most employees are already busy enough with the current mix of systems that they need to use in order to do their work. Adding an additional system for information sharing may be viewed as unnecessary and “not worth the effort”. Broad acceptance by employing familiar, natural and simple interfaces is the focus of the CollabraSpace offering.

CollabraSuite, CollabraSpace’s revolutionary set of collaboration services, seamlessly integrates into the fabric of existing business applications allowing users collaboration and information sharing services as a natural byproduct of their day-to-day duties rather than being an appendage to them.

CollabraSuite, Revolutionary Collaboration

CollabraSpace’s CollabraSuite offering is a single set of information sharing services that is easily hosted on customers *existing* systems. By embedding the CollabraSpace solution into existing infrastructure, the collaboration functionality is available by virtue of the

user performing their routine functions. For example, if native applications require access and authentication through a log-in, the action of registering with those applications will automatically invoke the full suite of information sharing services available through CollabraSuite. Many common desktop services, such as CRM tools, analysis tools, wikis, portals, reporting tools, financial tools, HR tools, contract support tools, program management tools, etc. require registration, any one of which could also serve as registration with the collaboration services. Thus the full collaboration functionality is available without the need for users to register separately with a new password and log-in ID. Additionally there is no new system to learn. Just the act of doing what the users do routinely is sufficient to provide immediate access to information sharing capabilities. Getting critical mass required for effective collaboration is simply an exercise of integrating collaboration functionality into existing web applications instead of requiring users to migrate to a another system.

In addition to the benefits to the users, integrating information sharing services within the organization's existing infrastructure also reduces the costs of supporting the information sharing services. Instead of building a new stovepipe, information sharing services are easily integrated into existing corporate application hosting environment while using existing corporate database and authentication infrastructure. Existing support teams can easily support the new services and can scale the system as the enterprise needs grow.

This type of system also easily extends the information sharing environment to all of an organization's customers and partners. When properly implemented and configured, the information sharing environment allows employees and customers to interact with partners and at the same time restricts partners to only that information to which they are entitled access.

CollabraSuite is hosted on existing enterprise infrastructure and seamlessly integrates with your existing business applications. This model for providing collaboration services effectively removes the technological barriers to achieving the critical mass required for effective collaboration without creating a stovepipe. In addition to the efficiencies gained in life cycle support costs, perhaps the most significant benefit is that the collaboration functionality is immediately available to users in their native environment.

Why do large organizations struggle when building effective Information Sharing Environments?

Building information sharing environments that deliver envisioned results is thought to be rare. A typical solution is the deployment of a single tool. Unfortunately, most

products do not embody all the collaboration functionality people want and need. This shortcoming leads to spotty utilization and users not even making use of the available functionality. Another approach is the deployment of a collaboration solution that employs multiple tools that “hopefully” interoperate. This approach attracts more users, but suffers from higher maintenance and support costs, duplicative functionality, inconsistent look and feel and generally just unnecessary complexity. This complexity tends to discourage wide acceptance of such solutions and can prevent reaching a truly transformative critical mass.

Another reason that users are reluctant to use information sharing environments is that they become overwhelmed with the number of tools and options available. In the minds of potential users this view is put in quite simple terms: “How much time and effort will it take me to learn this new system and what will be the benefit of that investment?” The cost is clear: “During the time that I am learning this new system, I am not producing!” This is the equation that the CollabraSpace offering, CollabraSuite, addresses.

Finally, for users to adopt a new information sharing environment, they need it to include everyone that they interact with – that includes their customers and their partners. Most customers and partners will not allow you to install your information sharing tool on their desktops; therefore a web based capability is required. Like other users, your customers and partners are looking for a “low collaboration cost” model.

Since customers already receive information via the web, it is simple to grant them access to the information sharing environment. In fact, the information sharing capabilities can be integrated into an existing CRM application. This would allow customers to interact in real time Customer Service Representatives. In addition, since both customers and employees would be connected to the same information sharing environment, customers could interact directly with the employees who are supporting them. This environment allows the customer a better understanding of what the analyst is seeing as well as providing the customer service representative a better understanding of what the customer needs. By integrating the information sharing services into both the business tools and the customer tools, an environment is created that allows seamless information sharing via existing applications.

Likewise, partners who are also connected via the web can be given access to the information sharing environment. In this case, management of access to information by partners is addressed by segregating the data to which the partner has access. All privileges, be they customer or partner, would be set up by the administrators and handled by the system.

If implemented properly, it is possible to provide an information sharing environment that allows employees and customers to interact with the partners and not allow the partners to see all of the information that the employees are sharing with their customers.

Why is an Information Sharing Environment often implemented as a separate application?

Many organizations respond to their information sharing needs by implementing a stand-alone solution that offers a core set of desired features but is segregated from existing business applications. This implementation scenario is primarily a consequence of the belief that information sharing is a new capability and thus is provided by an independent solution. *CollabraSuite resulted from a radically different premise: that collaboration is what one does naturally as part of one's job and not something that is done in addition to one's job. That is why CollabraSuite is made to seamlessly integrate into the fabric of existing business applications, instead of being an appendage to them.*

When tasked with implementing information sharing capabilities throughout the organization, IT departments often begin by looking at tool suites that support a predefined set of capabilities such as instant messaging, presence awareness, document sharing, web conferencing, and whiteboards. This search tends to be driven by comparing features between various vendors' product offerings and narrowing them down to a few products that appear to meet these predefined user needs. Usually little weight is given to the ability of the chosen solution to integrate with the existing IT services such as business applications and authentication. The result is another stovepipe with the concomitant demands on users and IT support teams.

When the IT department realizes that not everyone likes the first tool selected or when the initial decision doesn't meet users needs they begin to look at multiple tool solutions and the inevitable interoperability consequences. Complexity with life-cycle costs and reliability implications begin to dominate and the result is frequently a clumsy solution that is seldom used for its intended purpose.

Alternatively, considering information sharing as part of the enterprise IT infrastructure, leads to solutions that integrate with existing business applications that together are hosted on the same IT infrastructure. This requires that the collaboration solution use open standards and co-exist within the existing hosting infrastructure already in place to support this type of environment. For example, is the solution a Java Enterprise Edition, JEE, application that will deploy into the current hosting infrastructure already in place? If so, will the collaboration solution support clustering for fail over and scalability? In addition, does the solution support and use the existing services already running in the infrastructure such as database services, security modules for authentication (i.e. PKI) and authorization? Using the services already in place helps to assure low cost and reliability and likely decreases demands on users to learn a "new system".

Finally, solutions that support service oriented architectures (SOA) enable the services to be used everywhere within the enterprise. For example, an instant messaging or presence

awareness web component embedded into any web based application – portal, wiki, web site, etc –allows users in any of these applications to communicate freely regardless of the web application being used.

An information sharing environment needs to be part of a corporate infrastructure. With today’s complex problems, collaboration is indispensable for analysts, developers, project managers, office managers, security, etc. Collaboration supports reporting, analytics, customer relationship management, human resources, etc.

Today many information sharing solutions implemented by IT departments require users to log into separate applications in order to share information. Since users are already overwhelmed with the systems that they currently use to perform their job, they must learn and change, and change always comes with a price. This price usually accounts for the ineffective use and low return on investment of information sharing solutions. When users fail to use a new information sharing capability because it is yet one more access controlled system to navigate, the potential for which that system was intended is not realized.

Conclusion:

Information Sharing initiatives are NOT aligned
with Enterprise Initiatives

A better solution is to integrate Information
Sharing capabilities into existing Business
Applications

One of the largest obstacles to gaining “critical mass” in information sharing environments is getting people to log into the “new” system. Most employees are already busy enough with the current mix of systems that they need to use in order to do their work. Adding an additional system to their desktop does not necessarily help them. However, by embedding a single set of information sharing services into their *existing* desktop applications removes that barrier. Now everyone who is online working with their business application is automatically connected to the information sharing environment – no additional applications, no additional logins. Since the user only requires a web browser and the users are already logging into their business applications, the organization could easily produce the critical mass required to sustain information sharing.

When a user logs into a native applications-whether it is an analysis tool, a collection tool, a wiki, a portal, a tasking tool, a reporting tool, a financial tool, a contract support tool, a program management tool – the user is immediately logged into a suite of information sharing services, *automatically*. No new password. No new system to learn. Just the act of users doing what they must do to do their job gets them access to information sharing capabilities that are available immediately. This would allow *all* users to be notified of each other’s presence on the network without them ever logging into an information sharing environment. Once users are made aware of each others presence, they can easily contact one another and to share information, regardless of which CollabraSuite service enabled application they are using. Any user who has web access to the network and access to the applications would be “connected”.

This type of system is also easily extended to all of an organization’s customers and partners enabling them to participate in the information sharing environment. If implemented properly, it is possible to provide an information sharing environment that allows employees and customers to interact with the partners and not allow the partners to see all of the information that the employees are sharing with their customers.

CollabraSuite is hosted on existing enterprise infrastructure and seamlessly integrates with your existing business applications. This model for providing collaboration services effectively removes the technological barriers to achieving the critical mass required for effective collaboration without creating a stovepipe. In addition to the efficiencies gained in life cycle support costs, perhaps the most significant benefit is that the collaboration functionality is immediately available to users in their native environment.

CollabraSuite: The Source for Your Revolutionary Collaboration Platform.

For more information on how your organization can benefit from CollabraSuite’s revolutionary collaboration, contact us directly.

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