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The Ten Worst IT Collaboration Offenses

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1 Worrying about uptime not uptake If operational "up-time" defines IT's success metric, then collaboration is doomed to failure. IT, more so than any other support organization, must own not just the deployment of collaborative technology, but also its adoption. That means working with HR, lines of business and others, so that the real value of the technology comes from business results, not just technical achievements.

2 Failing to match-make between features & practice Understanding the business and being proactive about helping end users align new technology with the way they work, often proves the best way to facilitate adoption. Identify situations that demonstrate the value of collaboration and collaborative technology, and then work with leaders and staff to integrate the new technology with practice.

3 Not creating preferred use-cases It is hard to imagine all the ways a tool can be used. Use-cases help people transition from an old approach to a new one. Select important target processes and high-profile activities to engage early in the deployment process, and then document the before-&-after. Let people experiment as well, and share their results through the collaborative environment. The more people see others engaging and sharing how they collaborate, the more others will emulate new behaviors, share and learn.

4 Failing to negotiate expectations with the organization Not having the conversation about how collaboration should, could or might change the way people work ahead of deployment can create resistance to new technology even if people like what they see. Engage early in helping individuals understand what capabilities will be deployed, how to effectively use them and why the organization has invested in collaboration.

5 Seeking incentives rather than giving permission Most people want to work well with others. Daunting technology infrastructures can curtail collaboration, so too can misdirected psychology. Many organizations perpetuate top-down management techniques that focus on reward, while behavioral reinforcements accumulate for heroic, individual effort. People need permission to change the way they work, and if management doesn't behave in a way that reinforces that permission to change, then people will continue to work to existing expectations. IT needs to work with the business to give people permission to explore.

6 Not using collaboration software to support collaboration If someone calls the help desk, or a weekend update brings a new version of a collaboration platform, and activities like those are communicated only via e-mail or in meetings, then IT isn't reinforcing the central value of collaboration. The first line of demonstrated value should be IT supporting collaboration via the collaboration environment.

7 Not thinking globally Collaboration is a cultural activity, and as such, various cultures define collaboration differently. Some cultures have many names for collaboration, each with subtly different meanings. IT must avoid employing a culturally-biased approach to collaboration, or they risk alienating local immigrants as well as colleagues and partners in other countries. A failure to account for cultural differences can result in frustrated teams and an increase, rather than a decrease, in coordination costs.

8 Failing to learn (and adjust) based on actual practice All collaboration projects start out as theory, even after extensive surveys or deep design. Until people integrate technology into their day-to-day work experience, they won't really understand its impact or its value. IT organizations that fix goals and fail to adjust to the reality of adoption, both good and bad, risk suboptimal collaboration environments. Actively engage and learn about what individuals, teams, projects and others are doing with collaboration technology in order to meet the needs of real world users, not just the goals of a plan.

9 Avoiding reverting to old technologies Retrenchment to old solutions when new collaboration solutions don't produce immediate results elongates adoption, and may even stop it altogether. Avoid falling back on old practice, rather, seriously and actively examine why an approach didn't work and adjust it as necessary. Only go backward when the old tool is the right tool, or it may remain the primary tool. Keeping old technology around reduces returns on new investments.

10 Forgetting about training and professional development New software requires people to learn new skills, even if they already use similar technology. We often forget, however, that education, cultural differences and lack of experience make collaboration a skill that requires experiential learning. Work closely with organizational development to create programs that help people see how the new technology adds value to the work they do, not just work in general—the more interactive, immersive and experience-based, the better.