



*Collaboration and the New Delivery Paradigm*

We are what we do and most of what we do we do in groups. If we are talking about our personal lives or our work lives, much of our time is spent getting people to communicate with us and each other. The goal is getting people to align with a common direction and then march down the road to reach the common.

The difficulty we bump into is communication, and here I will direct this discussion towards our lives within organizations. The challenge is making sure that everyone has the right information at the right time to do their part to reach those common goals in synch with each other. Since the beginning of the industrial age, and probably even beforehand, the challenge of communication is where we have seen the most dramatic evolution, from the spoken word to the written word, from post to fax to email and from overnight to real-time. And with each of these advances, we have needed to adapt ourselves and learn how to best utilize those tools to reach our common goals. The speed at which we can communicate with each other has changes the kinds of endeavors and projects we can take on together.

Although we have made great progress on communication tools, usage of those tools still needs

a lot of work. We still spend a huge percentage of our time on coordination, overhead and meetings just to make sure that everyone has the right information at the right time. We still often manually handle hand offs and collaboration. Even individual contributors spend time working on work instead of actually working.

Transparency and efficiency of processes and collaboration are ambitious goals. There are many tools on the market that help solve some of these problems such as Excel, Basecamp, MSProject. But the only solution to solve the full scope of the problem for the long run is a solution that addresses all the technical requirements, contains a robust feature set AND is a platform people are going to be excited to use on a daily basis. Building tools that address the end user and encourage bottom up adoption drive usage because they make sense and actually improve how work gets done.

The most pervasive aspect of team work is obviously communication and the most pervasive communication tool for the past decade has been email. Email is a great solution when dealing with a specific, distinct transaction. It falls short when talking about transparency and accountability. Then we moved on to platforms like GoogleDocs, Wikis and the like. But even when companies devote time and money to purchasing, installing and executing enterprise level communication platforms within their organization, when you walk around an office you will notice that those Enterprise level communication platforms are not the tools that the average worker uses on a daily basis. The average employee is still using simple tools like notepad or even sticky notes, excel, Outlook calendars. When an employee takes their own data out of the central repository, then edits and updates it on their own desktop and then must be cajoled to then go back and update the central repository, the integrity of the data is completely lost. When the information in a central repository can't be trusted, you lose all benefit of that system to begin with and end up with even less efficiency than you had before those platforms were implemented. Not to mention the cost involved and the loss in productive work time.

Conversations and collaboration need to happen around the actual work that is getting done. People are having conversations about tasks that are going on. The ability to add notes, documents and conversations about a task means that you don't need to check other platforms to get the full picture of all the contributing factors. The availability of structured and unstructured data gives you the best of both worlds; the ability to record informal conversations and the ability to search and index that information.

With these kinds of real time, bottom up tools, the role a project manager has shifted. Project managers no longer have to run around getting task updates. Instead they can remain involved in the project conversation, becoming a contributor to the team, remain up to date at all times.

When the team is empowered to keep their environment up to date, organizations have the confidence that the information is transparent and a real reflection of what is going on in the organization more effectively driving projects towards completion.

Another element of driving user adoption is the ability for the software to virally sell itself within an organization and across organizations. When software is adopted with a top down approach, the traction it generates is limited to those few champions who have the vision of the software's potential. Lowering the barrier to entry into an organization starts with giving free access to the full platform so that users can start deriving benefit from it immediately. Using the platform for personal, internal tasks is the first step, but the added benefit is when other can contribute and collaborate with you, which is the built-in virality of the platform. Now you have the inner core of dedicated users inviting the out circle of peripheral users until everyone in the organization is using the platform. Once an entire organization is using it, inviting partners, customers and vendors to share the platform is the first step towards a truly B2B viral environment.

The kinds of projects we approach today are fundamentally more complex and challenging than the projects we have done in the past. The improvement in speed and efficiency mean we can take on bigger and better projects all the time. These incremental improvements give teams the tools to challenge themselves even more to push their organizations ahead by changing the scope of the projects. The right tools not only makes project delivery faster, but also improves the lives of the people working on them on a daily basis.

*This interview was published in SIIA's [Vision from the Top](#) , a Software Division publication released at [All About the Cloud](#) 2011.*