



# Collaborate to create value

**Discard the outdated “command and control” structure and embrace collaboration to move your company ahead.**

**By Evan Rosen**

**C**reating value in the Information Age requires collaboration, but many companies suffer from command-and-control organizational structures left over from the Industrial Age. When distances were great, travel time long and communication difficult, command and control ensured that businesses ran efficiently. Now that we can interact spontaneously with anybody, anywhere, command and control stifles efficiency and impedes value creation. Plus, it breeds fear, internal competition and information hoarding—all of which drain value from companies. A key step in transitioning from a command and control to a collaborative organizational structure focuses on people. Here are five practical people strategies:

**1. Establish an all-access people policy.** Information can get lost or buried, sometimes with devastating consequences. If NASA and its contractors had an all-access people policy, the space shuttle Challenger disaster may have been averted. Roger Boisjoly, an engineer at Morton Thiokol, warned in a 1985 memo to the company’s vice president of engineering that seals on Challenger’s booster rocket joints could fail. Despite the memo and other warnings, managers at Morton Thiokol gave NASA the okay to launch Challenger. Suppose

Boisjoly had felt empowered to share his concerns with Morton Thiokol’s CEO or even NASA senior leaders without going through channels?

Adopting an all-access people policy means everybody has immediate access to everybody else. Plus they have the organization’s blessing to use that access whenever necessary. The technology enabling this is unified communications: People can easily view each other’s availability, see one another’s location and connect through instant messaging, voice, webconferencing, videoconferencing or telepresence.

**2. Move from email to more spontaneous interaction.**

Email disrupts communication and impedes collaboration. A remnant of command-and-control structure and culture, email is the digital equivalent of the memorandum. While useful for more formal external communication, email often creates bottlenecks internally and with business partners. Also, some people squander time trying to write the perfect email so they can impress colleagues and leaders. In email-oriented workplaces, inboxes become focal points.

A business adopting a collaborative structure embraces spontaneous interaction instead of email. Removing the cultural necessity to set meetings and make appointments liberates team members to engage

one another. Atos, an information technology services company with offices in 48 countries, has adopted a "zero email" policy. The company is transitioning its 74,000 team members from email to enterprise social networking. Atos has anticipated the cultural shift by recruiting regional "ambassadors" to explain the benefits and by training team members and leaders in which behaviors work in the post-email world.

### **3. Replace the star culture with a sharing culture.**

A mass exodus of partners from the leading law firm of Dewey & LeBoeuf in the spring of 2012 culminated in one of the largest law firms ever to file for bankruptcy under Chapter 11. Contributing to Dewey's demise was a two-tier partnership system in which the firm treated "star" partners much differently from other "service" partners. When word of the vast compensation gap spread, "service" partners became resentful, and the exodus began.

Dewey is by no means alone in falling into the trap of recruiting so-called star players. Some organizations believe that recruiting stars is more important than recruiting people with domain knowledge. The stars can master anything, the thinking goes. Star culture divides an organization by increasing internal competition, promoting hoarding over sharing of information and fostering hidden agendas. In a sharing culture, people freely exchange information so that they can collaboratively make better, faster decisions and develop better products and services.

Replacing star culture with sharing culture requires rewarding people for sharing information and recruiting team members

interested in collaborative achievement over solo recognition. Any team member who has customer contact becomes the eyes and ears of the organization. A customer may suggest a product modification or a process improvement. Rewarding team members for sharing customer input creates value.

### **4. Pay everybody to think.**

Command-and-control companies segment their workforces into knowledge workers and everybody else. Collaboration suffers because the organization effectively muzzles frontline workers who know critical elements of the business and may know customers. When people are paid to think, they stretch themselves to perform for the organization—and they can collaboratively develop solutions that enhance value.

In the Information Age, every worker is a knowledge worker. Ensure that information flows in multiple directions rather than cascading from senior leadership down through levels of management to frontline people. Reward team members for contributing, sharing knowledge and participating in making decisions whether team members are loading crates, designing products, servicing customers or creating marketing plans. One approach to incenting collaborative behavior is empowering teams to reward other teams. Say a marketing team solicits input from a sales team in creating a campaign, and the campaign motivates customers to buy. The sales team could reward the marketing team with a "spot reward" of cash bonuses.

### **5. Look to different disciplines to tap talent.**

Skills and talent in one discipline can create value in a seemingly

unrelated discipline. The challenge is to recognize how skills apply across disciplines and enable the organization to tap talent for collaboration. A journalist synthesizes information under tight deadlines, skills potentially useful when evaluating possible acquisitions or investments. A personal trainer examines how to strengthen bodies without causing injury, skills potentially useful in designing workplaces.

Consider the challenges inherent in designing an airport terminal. With 20 million people a year moving through a terminal, waiting in security lines and hurrying to far-flung gates, an airport terminal is perhaps the least choreographed of buildings. So why not engage a choreographer to address this issue? After all, a choreographer studies and designs movement.

Engaging a choreographer is exactly what the Rockwell Group did when the architectural firm was designing the JetBlue Airways terminal interior at New York's John F. Kennedy International Airport. Choreographer Jerry Mitchell collaborated with the Rockwell team of architects, interior designers, graphic designers and technologists to determine how to move people safely and logically around a large space while simultaneously providing an illusion of freedom. The Rockwell Group could never have accomplished this design feat were it not for collaborating across disciplines. **ET**

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