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Gartner Outlines Six Best Practices for Moving to a Culture of Extreme Collaboration

STAMFORD, Conn., 6 December, 2012 — CIOs and business managers will fail in their efforts to improve business performance outcomes through business process management (BPM) if they cannot overcome major barriers to cross-functional communication and collaboration, according to Gartner, Inc. Gartner said that business leaders can avoid this failure by embracing extreme collaboration (XC), a new operating model and an extreme style of collaboration.

XC is enabled by combing four nexus forces into a pattern that can dramatically innovate the way people behave, communicate, work together and maintain relationships — often across wide organisational and geographic boundaries — to collectively deliver breakthrough process performance.

"Collaboration is a critical activity in many operational business processes, both structured and unstructured. An XC environment is essentially a virtual war room or crisis centre, where people can come together to collaboratively work on a shared purpose," said Janelle Hill, vice president and distinguished analyst at Gartner. "This environment is available 24/7, thus enabling people to work when, where and how they need to in order to meet shared goals and outcomes. What makes it extreme is people's willingness to cross geographic, organisational, political, management boundaries, to pool their collective skills and resources to solve problems and move toward the attainment of a shared, ambitious goal."

Gartner has identified six best practices for moving to a culture of XC:

Foster the Use of Virtual, Web-Based Collaboration Spaces in People's Daily Jobs

Gartner said that one way to spur novel forms of collaboration is to select an activity currently handled through traditional methods, such face-to-face meetings or email, and encourage it to take place in a virtual, likely web-based, collaboration space instead. These environments are easily accessed and almost always available. Virtual environments used to host such spaces can range from process collaboration environments to social networks or on-premises collaborative and social media tools.

Experimenting and gaining experience with such virtual collaboration is critical to XC, because an XC environment virtually operates in the same vicinity where the people do their daily jobs. The always on/always available characteristic of an XC environment means this type of extremely collaborative behaviour can be dynamically incorporated into processes as an ad-hoc activity.

Exploit the Value of Near-Real-Time Communication Addiction

The surge in real-time, or near-real-time, communication activities, such as texting, tweeting or updating Facebook, is not just a fad and businesses should embrace and encourage such behaviour. Establishing real-time communication habits in the workplace enables a freer flow of information and more proactive notifications, so that people can respond more quickly to unexpected events and business disruptions. This can address the common problem of information being constrained and delayed through formal communication channels that run up and down the organisational hierarchy, or through defined email and need-to-know distribution lists. Real-time communication can break entrenched behaviours of relying on

the management hierarchy to distribute information appropriately and, thereby, help overcome some of the communication-related problems associated with organisational politics.

Use Crowdsourcing and Popular Social Media Tools to Facilitate Dynamic Communities and Collaboration

One good way to kick-start the mind-set for extreme collaboration is to host a "tweet jam" to trigger a dynamic community to brainstorm on a problem. This involves simply setting a time and topic, and encouraging people to participate and get working. Unlike a conversation in a meeting room, all communication is captured so there's a clear record of what was discussed, who contributed ideas, and which participants excelled at facilitating discussions and problem-solving. Crowdsourcing is also proving to be very effective for bringing together people — who often didn't previously know each other — to tackle shared problems. Although not XC, per se; crowdsourcing is another style of collaboration.

Change Reward Systems to Encourage Collaboration

Today's dominant performance management methods are ineffective for process-centric organisations, because they discourage collaboration by rewarding individual efforts to deliver specific, one-time outcomes, rather than rewarding collaboration and team efforts. Organisations that embrace XC reward influence collaborative behaviour that contributes to resolving complex problems, in addition to rewarding individual deliverables. They design performance evaluations and incentives to foster teamwork and reward exceptional collaborators. The use of collaboration technologies also makes it easier to track collaborative behaviour and tie it directly to outcomes achieved.

Use Social Network Analysis to Measure the Collaborative Behaviour of Teams

Another way to measure and reward collaborative behaviour is to track how people interact. Social network analysis (SNA) and some social media monitor people's social network influence. An XC culture is built on openness, trust and mutual respect and SNA is a technique to help process owners and business process improvement (BPI) leaders identify strong social networks where a foundation of trust and respect exist. Once such networks are identified, organisations should try to leverage these relationships by asking these groups of individuals to pool their collective strengths to address some critical, cross-boundary process performance challenge. Other social, mobile and cloud technologies will also provide new ways to track how and where people have collaborated and to measure what happened.

Plan Group Events to Kick-Start Real-Time Communication and Collaboration

A few simple steps can help force people out of their "comfort zones" to experiment with new ways of collaborating and interacting, including:

- *Designating mobile-video attendees at meetings.* Mobile video tools allow people to attend meetings via their mobile devices. This use of mobile video is a dramatic breakthrough compared with videoconferencing, which requires dedicated facilities. Although perhaps not appropriate for larger groups or longer, sustained participation, mobile video is particularly effective for bringing key experts into the conversation when needed.
- *Use game play to spur new forms of collaboration and creative interaction.* Gamification is a great way to spur engagement in collective problem solving. Experimenting with game-based techniques can shake things up and get people working together in new ways.
- *Consider turning off email for a defined time period.* Email is the dominant means of business communication, but it's a poor collaborative tool — and an overused "crutch" that keeps people from using more collective and interactive approaches to solving problems. To break the habit, organisations should try turning off email for a defined interval of time, ensuring that alternatives are in place and easy to use. Such experiments will force people to use social networks and real-time communication in ways they haven't before.

Additional information is available in the report "Six Best Practices for Moving to a Culture of Extreme Collaboration." The report is available on Gartner's web site at <http://www.gartner.com/resId=2224215>

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