

## Collaboration White Paper – Philip Louis CEO TAH

### INTRODUCTION

Have you ever wondered if we, as a group of info-maniacs within the IT industry actually feel that in choosing words like ‘collaboration’ to describe our activity today we magically invent something ground breaking? Is collaboration more effective, more powerful or even more probable today given all our investments and the entire information and technology infrastructure that we possess? Or is it that in using our systems and technology, we have just added a dimension to collaboration which includes our ability to share information and in doing so we have a result. We all have a tendency to treat things in a single dimension when we consider technology, systems and data; under consideration here is the wider aspect of how and why we should **want** to collaborate and make it work.

Is it any wonder that given the pressure to produce more with information that is dispersed too far and wide to decipher, we are in fact becoming more isolated behind our emails, screens and portals? We think we collaborate when we interact with our systems but in fact they are the tools which should direct and support us – collaboration comes when **people** share ideas, work together and create value.

This is a critical point in many of our lives and our organisations, we can advance or stagnate and get left behind – the competitive battlefield is as much intra-company as it is outside.

Creating the incentive for management to address this is an issue. With every expert saying we have to look forward and focus externally, where is the ‘voice in the wilderness’ that dares to even suggest that the enemy is more within than without?

### COLLABORATION OR ENTERPRISE DISINTEGRATION?

Information technology has done exactly what it was labelled to do – given us access to technology which in turn leads us to the trough of enormous data volumes. Exit now the human mind, satiated with excess, imploring we were made to be intellectual, creative and innovative, not read rows of data. We have such a body of research on cognitive and business intelligence, clearly indicating the excellence of our thinking and need for purpose, yet our work life experience is in the 19<sup>th</sup> century but for our technology.

Look around you and ask yourself, which is closer to reality in your situation? Are the signs of disintegration occurring in our people, systems and decision making or is increasing collaboration and the evidence of 'peer structures' within organisations leading to a less hierarchical and more open, undefended management culture?

Humans are meant to communicate through speech, facial expression, touch and through our feelings. Information technology gives us the means to do things instantly and more of our community than ever are linked together electronically.

Consider the voice networks - just dial a number and speak to 'someone, real or a recording. No need to see, touch or feel, no emotion or suspicion. If you would rather not hear a response from your contact, just send an email. This is even more impersonal and is where what we think is collaboration degenerates to mere messaging. The impersonal, quick-fire staccato short bursts of words that we send through the 'ether' leave little room for finesse, reflection or analysis. Technology may have made things faster but unless our brain and emotions can keep up, we shut down and hide behind the barrage of intrusions.

Badly conceived and implemented Business Intelligence systems (in the widest sense) hurt the human soul and damage our most value creating asset. The desire to tackle this is to face the transformational agenda which sits at our door and waits to be let in. If 'Attila' is in the boardroom, the transformation will languish and die outside. This is a CEO and CIO issue of the greatest significance. In our haste and economy to get results, we are damaging shareholder value; an issue the Board would find difficult to defend if challenged.

## **WHY COLLABORATION AS OPPOSED TO INDIVIDUAL PROMOTION AND EXCELLENCE?**

Collaboration has always been about people, building successful relationships and the achievement of purpose has always been the reason for coming together. If we focus on the needs of people to work as peers in conjunction with one another, also to identify where similar or common objectives will produce a better, more harmonious working experience, then we can start to join up our human assets and create a performing, healthy enterprise.

Collaboration has framed the advancement of our civilisation from the dawn of time. Whether you are a believer of the theory of evolution or a proponent of intelligent design, some form of collaboration has always been the hallmark of our advancement right from our origins. In the

Garden of Eden, collaboration led to issues of allegiance and experience which are symbolic of many of our choices today.

Choosing creation then, you may quote from the Bible as a source; “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God.” The creative process here is generative starting from the Word to everything that we know today. This is the basis of our initiation and inspiration to live and therefore the basis of our being. Our need to be connected and part of something bigger, providing and searching for meaning, building and nurturing community and advancement lies at the core of our foundations and our intent. It has shaped cultures, faith groups, fan clubs and football teams.

One of the first examples of collaboration to the written word was evidenced by Moses when he ‘created’ the Ten Commandments, and from this a whole culture collaborated on a single moral code, which has affected the world.

At the other extreme of the spectrum, today we create our own personal content on Facebook, MySpace and blogs. Critically in both examples, how information or content is stored and shared makes the information either totally personal (eg. tablets of stone or our notebooks) or more widely available (eg. the www or in corporate databases). Moses had his information on a difficult storage media, quite impossible to take your work home on tablets of stone. So it was not the way he captured it but how he communicated it into the hearts and minds of his people that made the difference. It was also short, only 10 bullets. Today Brussels would produce 16,783 commandments, just on waste disposal alone!

Collaboration cannot begin if we hide our information, ambition, purpose or desires, and keep them (in today’s terms) on our individual storage systems. We only hide things if we are suspicious, afraid, insecure or purely self-interested.

*To collaborate we must create, communicate and relate.*

Today, the difference that can help us to be more effective in finding collaborative possibilities comes from not just linking up with those we know within our circle and therefore can choose to work with but rather those (we do not currently know) with whom we need to gain access to deriving the direction to where the missing pieces of our puzzles can be found or extraordinary gains made.

At this stage, we have three factors in the equation.

**People** who create **Content** (personal information footprint) and the advantage that can be gained from using this to achieve new, unique combinations of

**Collaboration**, achieved through the cataloguing and inter-relation of content and intent across a wide community.



### START SIMPLY AND PRESENT A NON-THREATENING APPROACH

The conventional way of being drawn to one another in collaborative effort is to be introduced, to find someone by their title, reputation or grouping, e.g. a credit controller, in the Finance Department. There is another indirect method, which has been operating for decades but is now being transformed through widely distributed business intelligence portals or networks. We mentioned our 'personal information footprint', so let's create a new TLA for the industry— and call it '*pif*'. This is what we generate and say about ourselves, how we register ourselves on sites, what Google has stored about our profile and history, etc. So now our own 'calling card', or our *pif*, is hugely expanded from the 3cm by 5cm business card to anything that our corporate systems can capture and learn about us.

Like our carbon footprint, our *pif* can be measured and assessed. Our *pif* creates our personal profile, an information curriculum vitae; our diary and email entries all contain clues about our interests, desires, likes and dislikes. If our systems are clever enough, this now makes a 'collaboration bridge' possible which, when intelligently inter-related to the *pif* of others, can provide the 'magical' route to new relationships and contacts. A portal that has information about people, profiling, the content they have created in the business and access to your communications is one of the most enabling systems to transform your way of working. Therefore, a new concept emerges; to '*piffle*', to manipulate our information footprint, to achieve better levels of

collaboration in our work-life.

*Are you creating and leveraging pif within your organisation?*

## **THE NEED FOR PURPOSE-DRIVEN ORGANISATION AND INFORMATION STRUCTURES**

Collaboration is a powerful driver or energy that we have experienced throughout civilisation but it is an even more powerful and basic instinct that drives the realisation of our ambition, vision and dreams. Few of us can ever achieve our full potential in life on our own without input from (collaboration with) spouses, mentors, teachers, even our bosses. But it is truer of this last 100 years that much of our drive to achieve potential is channelled and expressed through our participation in organisations and enterprise, rather than family or local community.

Collaboration in the context we are suggesting needs a common purpose to flourish. To find this in large complex organisations where individual and departmental objectives are often in opposition is highly unlikely if left to normal communications and interaction. Organisations need some intervention and the application of intelligent information networking systems to do this. Fear, self preservation and politics are some of the greatest barriers to collaboration. These human factors inhibit any organisation's ability to change and achieve advancement. Any technology that can get past these tendencies, without being turned off, can add significant benefit and will promote innovation and breakthrough.

By collaborating we gain access to higher 'value extraction' and advancement. Today we can no longer see all the angles in our complex organisations; we cannot know all the touch points that lead to those 'magical' connections. There are just too many people, confusing politics and such huge amounts of content that meaningful comprehension is fraught with difficulty.

The latest innovation in business intelligence systems takes us to the threshold of a new age where, through intelligent personal profiling, every user can state their interests and define their need for collaboration. Then all the content that is available can be pushed to where it may be of greatest benefit as opposed to lying redundant until such time as it is accessed.

Google is the world's greatest aggregator of information and intelligence. It provides the means to incredible advancement of knowledge but is it collaborative? It can certainly lead to collaboration through the supply of information that may lead to joint participation. However, information is dormant waiting to be accessed. You must know what you want, be able to define key words and crucially, have the desire to search for it.

Knowledge management has up to now been primarily concerned with how we access and store information, intelligent search, analysis, interpretation and facts. Vendors refer to software systems as being providers of business intelligence but in truth, intelligence still is best evidenced in the human mind and its capacity for thought. All the information in the world cannot produce intelligence but it provides the facts and insight which the human mind can convert intelligently to action, advancement and gain. Information on its own does not produce advancement, it is the application of insight and it is action that produces advancement or destruction. So, despite information systems, technology and data optimised to the maximum, we are not going to produce significantly more than what we have already perceived as diminishing returns today.

Some of the most valuable and current content is created by the spoken word, hidden in our diaries and in emails, for which no standards or structure for storage exist.

The shelf life of a conversation is transient; information in email is forgotten by the next interruption. Therefore trying to incorporate this information into a logically referenced model could be hugely wasteful and create a massive redundant overhead of data.

That is not to say that solving the problem won't have significant benefit. By giving access to data critical for decision making and bringing the right combination of people to the table, relevant content leads to dynamic action. This is what business intelligence is all about. Today people are still disconnected, information is hidden behind barriers and broken up into unreachable pockets of data and often not understood by organisations. The enormous value of the information a company possesses is well appreciated but rarely entirely grasped. It is just too mind numbingly impossible – this is the point at which information technology usually comes into its own. Neural networks can solve complex mathematical and statistical problems, but can we successfully deploy such concepts to address collaborative network problems?

The frameworks which can produce intelligent interactions exist today; they have a combination of business intelligence, intelligent profiling and artificial intelligence (business rules). Correctly applied,

we will be able to solve the problems today which have yet to produce their unwanted symptoms, by avoidance rather than resolution. We will know how to avoid irrelevant meetings and be able to take our diaries from being planned out 6 weeks in advance, limiting any spontaneity and flexibility, to determining ‘what does the business need from me today’?

**BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE AND INFORMATION MANAGEMENT MATURITY**

Our observation is that business intelligence to date has been relentless in its creation of integrated reporting platforms, dashboards, building data universes, defining measurements and obsessions with KPIs; with its central purpose being to drive and deliver relevant information for decision making. This has worked and every company that has implemented BI systems has seen short term benefit, improved insight and more relevant reporting. But this is still ‘hindsight’.

<b>Business Intelligence 1.0</b>	Data integration and reporting
<b>Business Intelligence 2.0</b>	Dashboards, analytical engines cubes
<b>Transitional phase</b>	Proactive intelligence: predictive modelling, the use of alerts, triggers and intelligence to push event based information to specific users.
<b>Business Intelligence 3.0</b>	Transformational BI changing the way we create, communicate and relate – this is the big fish that is sitting out there waiting to be hooked!!
<b>Business Intelligence 4.0</b>	End to starvation and the beginning of world peace

We should consider the development of the Business Intelligence market as follows;

Our challenges in business have not diminished with all our IT investments, we are still saying that we must be ‘Proactive and not reactive’ - throw all the other clichés that we can choose to mention in to the mix – this still remains as provocative grit in the eye of every business leader. But business intelligence properly conceived understands that the key lies with the people who sit around tables, talk on the phone, email and watch their screens, write white papers and solve complex technical problems – it is their collaboration that produces acceleration and advancement, everything else just supports the process.

Integration within businesses is somewhat mature in terms of technology, linking systems, creating central repositories of information and transaction processing. We process, we analyse and we report; but still the filing cabinet and ‘memos’ of the paper age characterise our implementation of systems and technology. Ask any IT professional, the tasks related to creating, organising, finding, and analysing information have become significant time stealers. Collaborative architectures have to be introduced and the ‘filing cabinet’ removed from our information mindset. Then we will reap rich rewards.

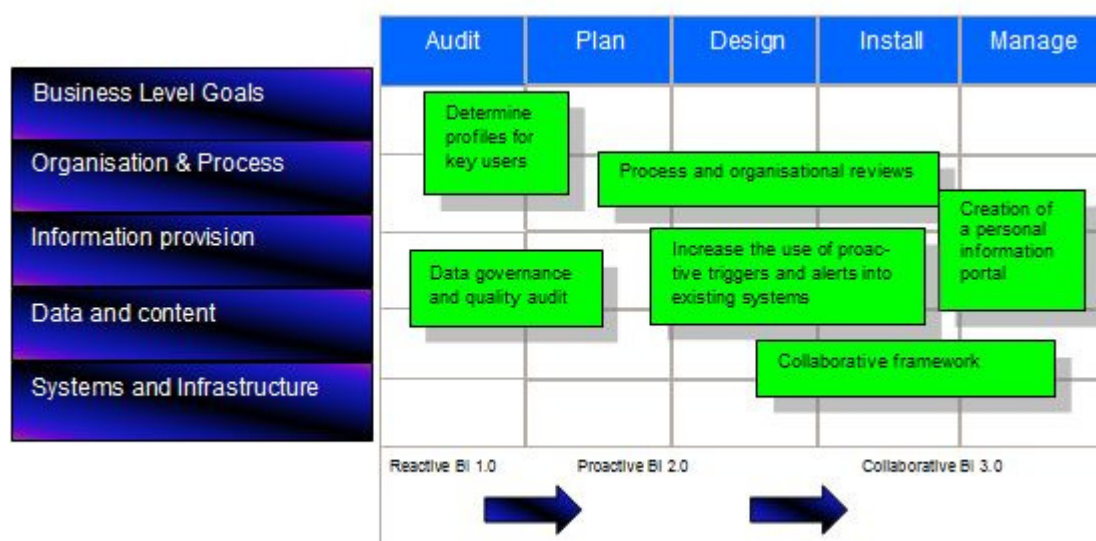
## ENTERPRISE BLUEPRINTS BUILT FOR COLLABORATION

Every organisation needs to remodel its structures and then create the architecture to support its goals and strategy. There are several frameworks that support this type of analysis making it possible for businesses to translate their vision of the future, together with the supporting business infrastructure design and implementation. A very simplified approach to an architectural review would build a framework that brought together all aspects of the business in summary form to one top level blueprint. From this, all the initiatives of the business will be modelled, tried and tested before implementation.

While each software vendor will have built in architectures and configuration for their own collaborative systems, each organisation must decide for itself how they are going to approach this challenge. The path an organisation will take will vary according to the existing culture and infrastructure.

Using this approach we can glean where corporate structures, systems and data design have to change to establish a more collaborative foundation for the business. The diagram below is a very simplified and a stylised representation of a road map showing how an existing hierarchical organisation with its data structures can be migrated to support a more collaborative working environment. This is a subject area in its own right and is handled in another TAH document.

Enterprise Blueprint



We have invested in innovative systems and data architecture which encourage our clients to not only integrate but push towards collaborative systems. Systems are formed by everything that happens in a company, not just the information and data layer as seen below. Our models drive out contradiction and help align organisations towards achieving their goals.

At TAH we are working to bring solutions that are built on the correct values, organisational structures, processes, information strategies, data architectures, and corporate philosophies that guide an organisation towards its goals. We create advancement and accelerate corporate performance by releasing intelligence locked by bad practice, systemic failure, and poor data quality and help organisations to align their organisations to successfully address the challenges of their customers.

I hope that this article has set out the case that collaboration and information management are not a technology or systems challenge. Key vendors have the products that can achieve this today; it is the questions of 'what' and 'how' which will continue to dominate corporate thinking.