

Building a collaborative culture: people, processes and technology

Angela Ashenden, MWD Advisors, Presented at the UKeIG AGM June 2012

Angela Ashenden gave an interesting presentation on ways of encouraging collaboration within organisations.

She framed her talk around three goals of collaborative working : to flatten the organisational hierarchy, to encourage a culture of sharing, and to achieve an engaged workforce. Unfortunately many organisations seem dedicated to ensuring just the opposite, and her slide on the major blockers to collaborative working identified very clearly where these blockers might lie. There might, for example, be a lack of top-level support, or there might be middle managers preventing progress (I have encountered some organisations with both together!).

Her talk covered the major components of collaboration, without getting involved in the specifics of software tools and details of implementations. This was refreshing, since in this area it is often the technology innovators who seize the collaboration space; they set up a new platform or collaborative space, and because they have more of an interest in the technology than in the sharing, they then leave the collaboration tool running with a few keen users, but the rest of the organisation uninvolved and uninterested. After two or three initiatives of this kind, the result can become a widespread disenchantment with new technology (however useful that technology might prove to be if fully implemented across the organisation).

She pointed out very sensibly that technology is not the only focus and the need to avoid new silos of information. Such advice is excellent, but all too frequently ignored.

Perhaps that was both the strength and weakness of Angela's presentation: it was difficult to disagree with anything she said - her suggestions were pragmatic, in that there is no quick fix, you should lead by example, and so on. But for me the presentation was a little tantalizing, in that it raised lots of issues, but didn't give enough specific and detailed information to have immediate applicability for individual cases. I suspect that Angela Ashenden has good knowledge from her experience in this area that could provide clear pointers and quick wins for organisations attempting to create more collaboration, but it would take a much longer presentation to reveal the most appropriate tools for individual circumstances. The presentation concluded with a useful question-and-answer session, when she gave some practical and useful suggestions for implementation. Nonetheless, this was a worthwhile talk on a highly important topic.

Michael Upshall