

Changing Behaviors: From Working in Silos to Working Collaboratively

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CIOs need to maximize data access and knowledge sharing, but do not know how to change organizations when working in silos is the cultural norm. Changing the culture to be more collaborative requires specifying what that means, getting started through conversation and action, and measuring change.

Key Challenges

- An underlying requirement of digital business is maximizing the data access and knowledge sharing across the entire organization. But many organizations have siloed departments that have not historically shared information with each other.
- Moving to working collaboratively requires not just a set of technology tools, but, more importantly, a change in management and employee behaviors. Changing behaviors can feel like a daunting challenge.
- Setting the priority for the organization to work collaboratively is easy to say, but the progress is difficult to measure.

Recommendations

CIOs seeking to create collaboration through the mastery of leadership, culture and people dynamics:

- **Define:** Identify four to six specific behaviors describing what “working collaboratively” means for your organization. The difference between how the organization works today and how it needs to work moving forward will define what changes need to happen.
- **Design:** Initiate conversations about the different aspects of the culture that should be changed to work collaboratively. Change happens by simply starting, then unearthing and challenging, assumptions about how work is supposed to get done.

- Measure: Define how collaboration will be measured. Since managers and employees pay attention to what gets measured, you can change behaviors when employees learn that working collaboratively is what is rewarded.

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Introduction

Working in silos is not in and of itself bad for the organization. If you have work that gets done in silos, it is by intentional design. At different points in the organization’s history, it made sense to

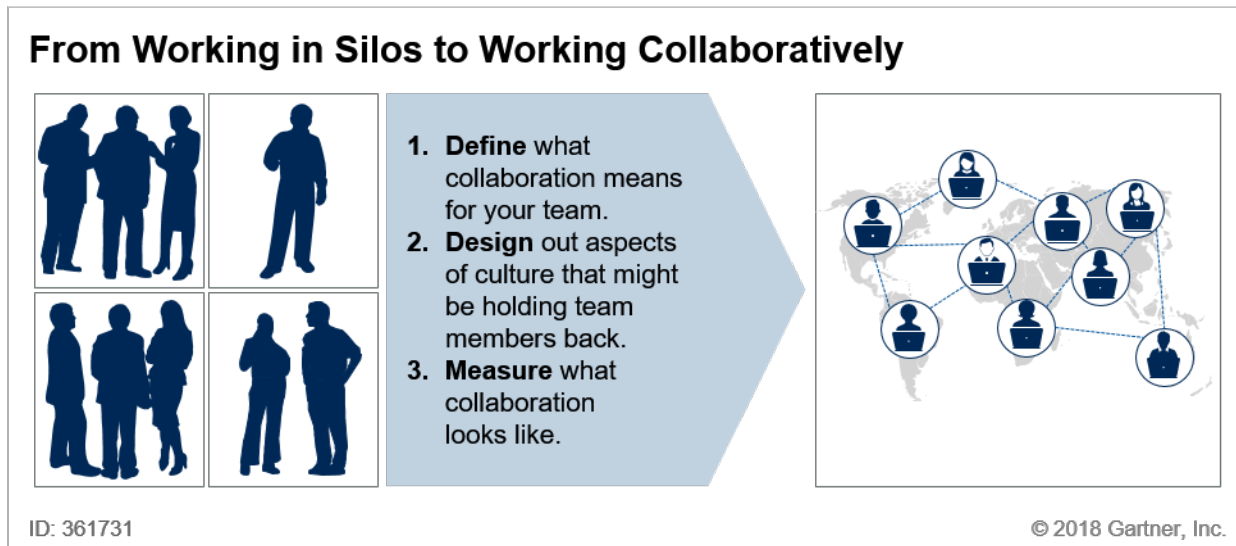
isolate work. Work might have been separated so that a specific program or project could get done quickly or simply because of functional differentiation and specialization. Other reasons could be past mergers or because of business decisions by past leaders that made sense to the business conditions they operated over. There are myriad reasons why work is done in silos. The question is: Can you as the CIO effectively deliver on the information and technology (I&T) needs of the enterprise with the silos that exist? If not, then the team needs to shift from working in silos to working more collaboratively.

Working collaboratively requires a commitment by individuals and groups to do work in different ways, to make decisions in a different way, and to give up specialized and single-purpose resources. The benefits of collaborative work are well-documented:

- Business benefits include generating revenue, boosting productivity, improving the allocation of resources and reducing inefficiencies.¹
- The business drivers for boosting collaboration include (but are not limited to) reducing process inefficiencies; conducting better research and making better decisions; responding faster to situations; and working with anyone, anytime, anywhere (see “Deliver Digital Business Results by Boosting Workforce Digital Dexterity”).
- Increasing digital dexterity is an important aspect of thriving in digital business. Collaboration, along with innovation, creativity and analytical thinking, are the core virtues of digital dexterity (see “Closing the Digital Dexterity Gap in Digital Business Strategies”).

Whether an organization works collaboratively or not is largely determined by its culture: the way people have learned to behave in their organization. So, changing to working collaboratively is a cultural, hence behavioral, change. CIOs can shepherd their organizations through these changes by specifying what working collaboratively means specifically for their organization. Get started through conversations that unearth cultural underlying assumptions, and make sure there is a way to know when progress is being made through measurement (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Steps to Move the I&T Team From Working in Silos to Working Collaboratively



Source: Gartner (August 2018)

Analysis

“If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.” African proverb

Define the Behaviors for Collaboration Using the From/To/Because Model

It is easy to say that you want the organization to work collaboratively. But what does that mean exactly? Because collaboration is an action, it can be described by a set of behaviors. Leadership needs to decide what working collaboratively means to their organizations. No two organizations will work collaboratively in exactly the same way. And they don't need to.

Use the From/To/Because Model (see “Compose the From/To/Because Story to Convey a Behavior Change Journey”) to document the specific behaviors you expect from the team and/or the leadership team. These should be specific behaviors that make it clear when the team is acting in a more collaborative way. As a leadership team, develop this list together so that everyone gets a chance to say what they want from the organization. You have to describe the way people behave today (the “From”) so that there is obvious contrast between the way that work gets done today and what you expect moving forward.

The reason why the team working in a more collaborative way matters is what should be documented in the “Because” section of the template. The Because should make it clear why the change is necessary, and not just for IT, but for the organization overall. The change has to make sense, given the business strategy and market conditions.

After completing the “Because” document, begin the “To” behaviors — what working collaboratively means in your organization. For every To, document how the work is getting done today. That should be put in the From column. See Figure 2 for an example of a completed From/To/Because focused on moving from silos to working collaboratively. This is just a suggestion. It is important to create this as a team so that everyone buys into what the expectations are moving forward.

Figure 2. Sample From/To/Because of Moving From Working in Silos to Working Collaboratively

From	To	Because
Forming functionally aligned project teams	Contributing to organically formed initiatives	Our customers' buying habits are changing, and they demand exceptional customer experience.
Information stays resident within the teams it is created	Information is easily accessible by any organizational member that needs it	Seamless customer experience requires that we have a one company view of our customers.
Develops and relies on deep expertise to form decisions and plans	Asks others for their ideas and opinions, and works together to form decisions and plans	We need to respond quickly and creatively to continue to win their business.
Conflicts with other teams are avoided and unresolved	Conflicts are discussed collectively and openly resolved	IT needs to build the infrastructure so that data access and knowledge sharing is easy, and create the workplace that enables creativity and speed for the business.
Prioritizes work within the team first, outside if possible	Pitches in on prioritized work before partners ask for help	
Evaluates success by the achievement of functional team's objectives	Evaluates success by the achievement of the organization's objectives	

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Source: Gartner (August 2018)

Recommended Actions

- Pick a first place to work on increasing the collaborative behavior. You can pick a small project as a pilot or a large project that spans across the enterprise. You are looking for a “chunk of work,” where the outcome of the team matters and the interdependencies of currently siloed groups are obvious.
- With your leadership team, complete the From/To/Because model to get to the next level of detail about what collaboration means for this chunk of work. Don't be discouraged if it takes more than one session to pull this together. Complete the template in the reverse order of the table — Because, then To, then From. The Because frames the context so it is important to agree on that first.

- Don't let this be a "one and done." Create the expectation that this move is the beginning of a journey toward collaboration being "the way we get work done around here." Have your leadership team cascade the From/To/Because to their teams, customizing as appropriate to ensure the behavior change resonates with their respective teams (see "Share-Listen-Adapt: Connect Employees to Successful Change Outcomes").

Design the Collaborative Behaviors by Using the PRISM Model as a Guide

You must be able to talk about culture change in order to act on it. Use the purpose, rituals, identity, support, merit (PRISM) model (see "The Culture PRISM: Introducing Five Dimensions That Shape Your Culture") to start a conversation with your team on how to work collaboratively in your organization. The PRISM model provides a way to talk about the underlying reasons why work has been done in silos and what might be the impediments or challenges to working collaboratively. For each aspect of the PRISM model, we provide two examples of quick actions (see "The Art of Culture Hacking") that are things you could do immediately to start the change, as well as a longer-term question for your team to discuss. These are sample suggestions, and you are encouraged to brainstorm ideas that resonate with your organization.

Purpose

Purpose guides why we do the things we do. Purpose is a powerful intrinsic motivator. It doesn't just drive people's individual engagement and performance. It also unites people to collaborate with others with a similar purpose (see "From Push to Passion: Using Inspiration as a Management Approach"). The Because part of the From/To/Because model should have described why working more collaboratively matters, given the mission of the organization. Purpose provides the impetus for people to want to do the hard work that it takes to learn how to work differently and to trust the organization that they will be appropriately rewarded, despite the risks that come from doing something differently.

- **Quick action:** If you don't already have one, create a one-page document (preferably graphical) that explains the Because you developed in the previous section of this research (see "The Art of the One Page Strategy"). The act of creating the one-page document is, in and of itself, a good exercise to clarify the business strategy and, thus, the purpose of the organization.
- **Quick action:** For the chunk of work that you will use to get started, consider the value chain. Determine the receiver of value — understanding who benefits from the work that is done. Then ask how each group contributes to that value. Then, ask how working together more closely and collaboratively might improve that outcome value. This will establish the "what's in it for me" that will motivate the collective team.
- **Discussion questions:** For many organizations, work gets done in specific ways, because that is the way it has always been done. But many employees don't know why the work started being done that way. That lack of understanding engenders cynicism and a sense of inability to change things. So talk about the role the business plays in the industry, the competitive advantages/disadvantages of the business, why IT reports where it does in the organization, how budgeting priorities are set and so on. If you don't know the answers to these questions, get them.

Rituals

Rituals remind us of what is important. They represent how things are done around the organization. Organizational rituals are all those repeated and collective behaviors people engage in as part of how they work, make decisions, deal with conflicts and manage social relationships in the workplace. Conversations about rituals will uncover the beliefs that underlie them. Both the ritualized events themselves and the particular way they are performed contain coded messages about the importance of the activities carried out and the decisions that are made:

- **Quick action:** Invite partners to your team meetings, and run your meetings to get to know them better. You would mutually attend planning meetings, but your partners probably don't attend your team meetings. Make sure everyone knows each other and shares something of themselves that others might not know. When people get to know each other, they are more likely to reach out and engage others. This quick action will kick-start that more-collaborative partnership.
- **Quick action:** Create ad hoc multidisciplinary teams to attack cross-boundary opportunities. Is there a process that everyone knows is broken? Is there a difficult business problem that doesn't necessarily reside in just one business group to address? Make sure people have management approval for the time needed for this new sort of work. Set short deadlines for high level ideas and plans, or even prototypes or experiments.
- **Question to consider:** Meetings are a salient ritual in most organizations. Do you have the right decision makers in your planning meetings to ensure cross-team collaboration? Do you have clear roles for the participants in the decision-making process? Using tools like responsible, accountable, consulted and informed (RACI)² and recommend, agree, perform, input, decide (RAPID)³ can clarify decision-making roles and accountability. While it is time-consuming to have more people in decision-making meetings and to define decision-making roles for various programs and projects, the upfront involvement and clarity of expectations will increase the effectiveness of the teams.

Identity

Identity establishes our position relative to the social circles in which we engage and explains who we think we are in relation to others. Because we are social creatures, a large part of our identity is defined relative to the people around us. We define ourselves by how we are similar and how we are different. The silos in your organization have unique identities and do not see team members from other silos as being on the same team. That is what you want to focus on:

- **Quick action:** Put up a location (low-tech is fine — a sheet of paper on the wall would suffice) where you ask people to make comments about how the work is going, encouraging them to offer acknowledgment of others' work. The visible display of teamwork matters.
- **Quick action:** Look for a chance to tell a story about how the collaboration work is going (see "Storytelling in Three Acts: A Guide to Persuasive Communications"). Have people explain how that work couldn't have happened the same way if they'd done it the old way. Market such experience stories widely.

- **Question to consider:** In an organization that is truly collaborative, work gets done in dynamically organized teams that form and disband around the work product. The formal organizational structure sometimes is used to solve operational problems, but should be designed to build capabilities (see “Organizing for Success”). Is the formal structure that you have today supportive or inhibitive of collaborative work?

Support

Support helps employees feel safe and secure within their social circles to reach their full potential. Because working in silos was designed that way, employees have learned that if they focus on the work in their team only, they will be rewarded. Asking them to give up control, share information or change the design of systems to make them more interoperable could be perceived as a threat to the security of their jobs. They feel job security because of their deep expertise in the silo they inhabit. To increase your employees’ sense of security as you transition to working collaboratively:

- **Quick action:** Create a master/apprentice construction, and let people be masters in some topics and apprentices in others. They will learn that sharing information, as well as learning new things, doesn’t diminish their status, but elevates it, and grows their network and influence at the same time (see “Reimagine Apprenticeships to Develop Talent to Scale Digital Business”)
- **Quick action:** Make sure cross-silo teams have time to get to know each other before just doing work. Have a personal sharing experience (such as sharing favorite apps, hobby, games, movies, music, one thing you think is meaningful outside of work, something no one knows about you, a story about your mother/father or where you live). The investment of time to get to get to know each other personally will pay in supporting collaboration.
- **Question to consider:** Do we handle conflict in a way that focuses on the issue (i.e., the piece of work, the case, the problem, the transaction), not the person? Conflict management is a practice and learning how to do that well can be a competitive advantage.⁴ Creating an agreed upon way to resolve conflict can increase collaborative behaviors because employees will know how to raise and work through the inevitable issues that will arise.⁵

Merit

Merit describes what we value and what we pay attention to, which are the collectively held beliefs of what is important and valued by a group. In an organizational context, merit is shaped by what is measured, rewarded and responded to. It is what is acknowledged and rewarded. Employees attribute meaning to what leaders do and what leaders do not do. The meaning that employees attach to actions, and inactions, might not be what is intended by leadership:

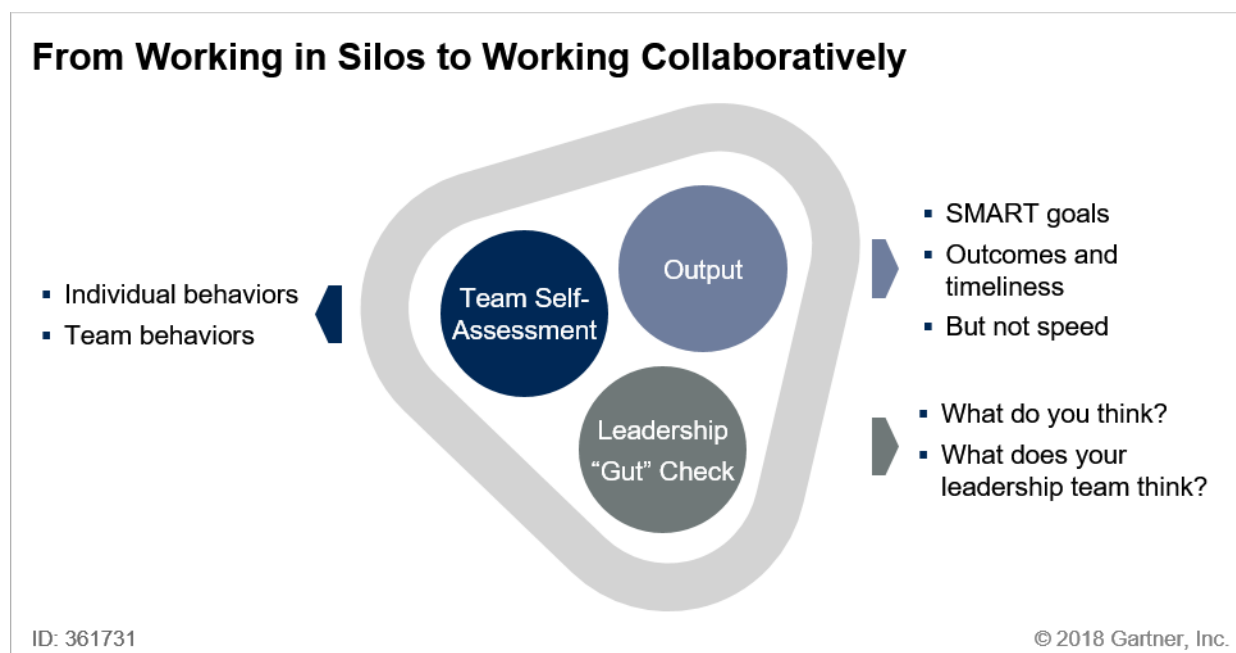
- **Quick action:** If you want to convey the importance of working collaboratively, then *you* start first. Find an opportunity to work with someone you don’t normally partner with, and make sure your team knows about it. Where you are spending your time will tell the organization what is important.

- **Quick action:** Reward collaboration. Pick a few cases that represent identified behaviors in your From/To/Because model, and celebrate them. Gather “caught collaborating” stories. Add one story to all team meetings.
- **Question to consider:** Do your employee performance expectations cover collaborative behaviors? You can use the next section to identify expectations of what collaborative behaviors look like, and reward employees that demonstrate these behaviors. Match your rewards to the demonstration of these behaviors (see “How We Will Work in 2028 Demands Changes in How We Will Reward”).

Measure Working Collaboratively to Confirm Change Is Happening

What gets measured gets attention. Measurement of collaboration should consider three different elements — the output of the work done by the team, team self-assessment and the leadership team “gut” check assessment (see Figure 2).

Figure 3. Multiple Methods to Measure Collaboration



SMART = specific, measurable, actionable, relevant and time-bound

Source: Gartner (August 2018)

Measure: The Outcome

All collaborative teams are put together to get some unit of work done. Measure that outcome. If you have asked the team to design a way to get disparate sources of information working seamlessly together, then the outcome is whether or not the solution works, as determined by the user of that shared information.

Follow these considerations:

1. Follow the SMART principles in setting the goals of the team.⁶ Collaborative work is best served when there is clarity around the objectives of the team. Use the SMART principles to make sure the goals are clearly understood by all team members. This will make the measurement of whether the goals were achieved easier:
 - **S**pecific (simple, sensible, significant)
 - **M**easurable (meaningful, motivating)
 - **A**chievable (agreed, attainable)
 - **R**elevant (reasonable, realistic and resourced, results-based)
 - **T**ime bound (time-based, time-limited, time-/cost-limited, timely, time-sensitive)
2. Focus on output and time frames, not how the work should get done. In a truly collaborative endeavor, the work will definitely be done in a way that is different than if one siloed team had done it. You need to give the team the freedom to let the creativity come out of their shared experience. The good news is that this freedom is known to increase employee engagement as well (see “Get, Give, Grow: A Conversational Model for Increasing Employee Engagement”).
3. Do not focus on speed or time to complete as an important metric of the effort. As the African proverb states, “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.” Speed will motivate the team to cut corners and fall back on siloed behavior.

Measure: Team Self-Assessment

You can’t only measure the output of the team that is now working collaboratively. You need to measure how they are getting that work done. Building off the work done by Thomson, Perry and Miller⁷ for group-level measurements and the University of Nottingham’s work on individual level measurements (see the recommended list of questions below).⁸ Table 1 contains examples of questions that can be asked of various team members to understand whether the teams are behaving in a collaborative way and whether the individuals on those teams are behaving collaboratively.

- Have the team score each question on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = not demonstrating, 2 = somewhat demonstrating, 3 = demonstrating, 4 = mostly demonstrating and 5 = always demonstrating.
- Have all the team members complete the group behavior questions once.
- Have all the team members complete the individual behaviors for each member of the team.
- Have the team complete the self-assessment periodically to measure progress. Your first measurement will be the baseline for the team and for the individual participants.

Table 1. Example of Measurements of Collaboration

Individual or Group Level	Category	Questions
Group Behaviors	Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take the team's opinions seriously when decisions are made. And vice versa. Have your team brainstorm with other teams to develop solutions.
	Autonomy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teams are upfront about what they can and cannot give (in time, money and expertise) to achieve goals. You, as a representative of your team, are allowed to make commitments without having to first get your team's approval.
	Mechanisms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Your team brings conflicts out in the open to work them out among the teams involved. Team meetings accomplish what is necessary.
	Exchange	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Your team shares information that will strengthen other teams' operations and programs. You feel what your team brings to the collaboration is appreciated and respected by partner teams.
	Trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The people who represent the teams in the collaboration are trustworthy. Your team can count on each partner team to meet its obligations to the collaboration.
	Individual Behaviors	Cooperates with colleagues
	Is a good team player	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has a positive view of the team and wants/expects the team to deliver its objectives Accepts that others have a valid point of view, and shows respect for others' intelligence
	Solicits input from others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Asks others for their ideas and opinions, and works together to form decisions and plans Values, calls on and utilizes the experience and expertise of colleagues
	Encourages others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Openly praises other members of the team when they have done something well, and gives credit for good teamwork Encourages colleagues after a setback

Source: Gartner (August 2018)

Measure: Leadership Gut Check

An undervalued assessment is whether or not people perceive that work is being done in a more-collaborative way. Culture is one of those things that is difficult to measure, but very clearly felt by the organizational members — leadership included. If you believe that collaboration is occurring, it most likely is. If your leadership team sees people working together in ways they hadn't before, then collaboration is occurring. The move from working in silos to working collaboratively is a journey and evolves over time. There is no destination for collaborative behaviors, just evidence that people see it and feel it. Your role as the CIO is to make sure people see that evidence.

Recommended Actions

- Define upfront how the collaborative team's work will be assessed. Make sure the assessment focuses on the output of the work the team is supposed to accomplish. Do not focus on time to complete as a key metric, because collaborative work tends to take longer in the short term, but shorter in the long term, due to not needing to revisit the work.
- Modify Table 2 to represent what collaboration means for your organization. Review the individual behaviors with your HR team to make sure those expectations are consistent with what they might have already published. Have the team members complete self-assessments of the group and of individual team members first to set a baseline, then periodically to measure progress.
- Have open conversations with your leadership team, specifically looking for evidence of collaboration. Use those observations as a discussion point about where more opportunities to encourage collaboration should focus. And where there is little evidence of collaboration, discuss ways to address that.

Gartner Recommended Reading

Some documents may not be available as part of your current Gartner subscription.

“Embrace Workstream Collaboration to Transform Team Coordination and Performance”

“ESCAPE the Past: Six Steps to Successful Change Leadership”

“Leading Through Uncertainty for CIOs”

“How to Select Collaboration Technology Using Gartner's ACME Framework”

“Toolkit: Behavioral Event Interview Guide for Digital Workforce Competency Assessment”

Evidence

¹ R.L. Cross, R.D. Martin and L.M. Weiss, “[Mapping the Value of Employee Collaboration](#),” McKinsey & Company, August 2006.

² RACI is a project responsibility chart. B. Kantor, [“The RACI Matrix: Your Blueprint for Project Success,”](#) CIO, 30 January 2018.

³ RAPID is a tool to clarify decision making accountability from Bain and Company. See [“RAPID®: Bain's Tool to Clarify Decision Accountability,”](#) Bain & Co.

⁴ D.B. Lipsky and A.C. Avgar, [“Toward a Strategic Theory of Workplace Conflict Management”](#) Ohio State Journal on Dispute Resolution, Vol 24(2), 2008, pp. 143-190.

⁵ P. Lencioni, *Five Dysfunctions of a Team: A Leadership Fable,* Jossey-Bass, 2002.

⁶ [SMART Goals.](#)

⁷ A.M. Thomson, J.L. Perry and T.K. Miller, [“Conceptualizing and Measuring Collaboration,”](#) Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory, Vol. 19, No. 1, pp. 23-56.

⁸ [“Collaborating With Others,”](#) University of Nottingham, 1 August 2016.

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