



Accountability... the Next Frontier

*Accountability, Transparency
and Collaboration: All three
should help with business
effectiveness, but do your Web
2.0 tools really support them?*

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Introduction

We live in a time where no one wants to take personal responsibility, where we have been scammed for billions, and trillions more is being asked for by businesses that need a bailout. It is a time of finger pointing, every man for himself, get mine and get out, and short-sighted financial goals. But these processes are not working (except for a few at the top of the pyramid), and new Web 2.0 technologies, along with Gen Y entering the workforce, are changing not only who works but how they work together and what level of transparency is acceptable. This paper examines these trends and technologies, and finishes with specific recommendations for a more transparent and accountable organization, and better collaboration and relationships with your value network.

Where is accountability today?

Big 3 Auto CEOs flew private Jets to ask for taxpayer money¹

Countrywide employees filed a class action suit in California federal court against Countrywide CEO Angelo Mozilo and executives in charge of the company's retirement plan²

**Billions given to AIG and they want \$30 Billion more
The government (who now owns 80% of shares)
agreed to provide \$30 billion more to American
International Group after a \$60 billion loan, a \$40
billion purchase of preferred shares, and \$50 billion to
soak up the company's toxic assets.³**

Collaboration is Critical

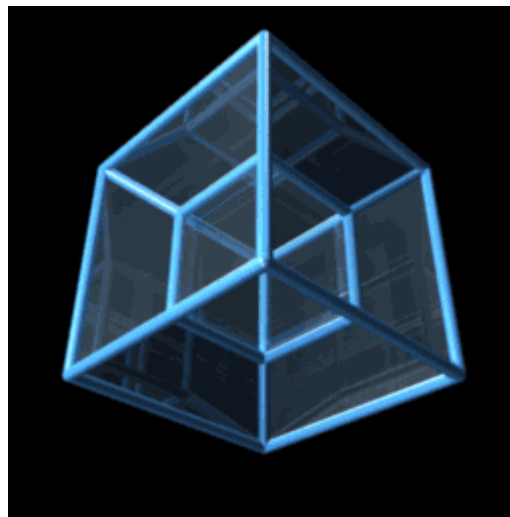
With many large businesses becoming decentralized over the last decade, the ability to collaborate across time and space is even more critical. Collaboration can only really have value in the context of a specific process. Collaborative Strategies has identified six critical processes in any organization that have collaborative leverage:

- Sales & Marketing (proposal development)
- Customer Service/Support (exception handling)
- R&D (new product development)
- Value Network Management (relationships with external organizations, project management, and exception handling)
- Training (internal and external)
- Decision Support/Crisis Management



Collaborative leverage occurs when you apply the right tool to the right process and get a big win. This can be an increase in quality of the product or service, a new ability to access expertise, or a decrease in cycle time for many types of tasks, projects and processes.

In today's complex business environment, with SOX (Sarbanes-Oxley Act) and HIPPA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) regulations and increasing government oversight, collaboration is critical, but accountability is even more so. Providing a complete record would mean that the underlying database for the collaborative tool would have to link everything to everything else, with no silos of data that are NOT connected, which is often the case in today's project management tools. The ability to connect all information and people is called *hyper collaboration*, in that this connection architecture is like a hypercube and often reflects the notion of hyper links first proposed by Ted Nelson in the early days of the, when he worked on Project Xanadu.⁴



**Figure 1: Hypercube – everything is linked to everything else
(from Wikipedia: Hypercube)**

There are very few Web 2.0 products that support this level of accountability. Because of situations like the one outlined above, this more traceable level of collaboration is fast becoming a requirement for doing business.

The idea of functional integration is the ability to bring many different features and functions together into one piece of software. Often these functions are not usually seen together in the same software. For example, it is not unusual to see an e-mail software paired with a group calendar (for notification) or a DMS (document management system).

Functional Integration and SaaS



In collaboration tools, it is rare to find presence and instant messaging capabilities paired with a DPM tool.

Another level of complexity comes from the fact that people are needed to support all of the applications servers for these tools, as well as to figure out the licensing model for usage in an organization. To make matters worse, the initial purchase of these tools is often so large it is a capital expense and often needs to be cleared through the management committee (which is much harder to do these days).

The advantages of a SaaS (software as a service) is that they don't need to be installed on more servers and or require additional staff to service them. They can be up and running in a matter of hours rather than months. New policy details can be programmed into the software to support compliance, and the software is sold (or rented) on a subscription basis for a few dollars a month per person. Rather than a capital expense for IT, it is an operational expense that is small enough to not have to go through management committee review.

In addition, a SaaS is always being updated by the hosting company so you always are accessing the latest version. Often, new versions will include new functionality. For many collaboration applications today, that means adding in features that have been requested. This can lead to a SaaS with more functional integration than a similar desktop tool.

For example, let's say you need to find a SaaS that not only allows you to create a project but allows you to store all the documents and conversations (decisions) in one easily reachable space. It has to be secure (encrypted) to comply with HIPPA regulations (for medical or pharmaceutical applications that deal with human medical data). It also needs to be outside your firewall so your lawyer and other professionals can get access to this space, eliminating the need for extra work in reporting to clients, regulators or insurance companies.

It looks like big business is expecting the U.S. taxpayer to bail them out to the tune of trillions! Where is the accountability? Why are the CEOs of these failing companies leaving with multi-million dollar severance packages? Who is accountable?

Accountability is defined as "a concept in [ethics](#) with several meanings. It is often used synonymously with such concepts as

Accountability



[responsibility](#), answerability, enforcement, blameworthiness, [liability](#) and other terms associated with the expectation of account-giving. As an aspect of [governance](#), it has been central to discussions related to problems in both the public and private ([corporation](#)) worlds.”⁵

What these definitions focus on is the ability to trace a path of investigation and to see both the associated documents as well as the conversations that pertained to them. There are very few collaborative tools that do this. Most tools are siloed, and not all information is connected to all other information in the system even if there is an underlying database for the application. Collaborative tools connect people to people, people to content, but usually not content to content. Because of situations like the one outlined above, this more traceable level of collaboration is fast becoming a requirement for doing business.

One of the new SaaS services in the collaboration area is [Qtask](#), which was designed with the idea of accountability in mind. Qtask also does a fair amount of functional integration; they offer project management threaded discussions, presence, advanced search and other collaboration functions in one seamless tool.

Qtask is built around a new model of collaboration. In this model, like the hyperlink, everything is connected to everything. People are connected to content, content can be linked to other content and to people or discussions, and all of this is transparent (within a project). Some of the features that make Qtask an [accountable](#) collaborative tool include:

1. Discussions thread records: no way to modify/delete anything and everything available back in time.
2. Task acceptance: formal handshake between those proposing the task and those agreeing to do the task (In many projects, tasks are just assigned to a resource, and there is no formal acknowledgement that they have accepted the task, timeline, etc. This can lead to miscommunications on the project team.)
3. Task history: log with all task events.
4. Task definition: ability to describe and define task before and during execution.
5. Milestone: ability to set a date for task(s) completion in a project.
6. No definitive deletion: trashcan can not be emptied
7. File history log: access to all previous versions and all events (upload, download, new version, date/time/user) - this feature



can be used to check if people did their “homework”. If you propose an online meeting next Monday and include a link to documents that you ask everyone to review, through this log history you can see who downloaded the documents. You can’t tell from this if they actually read the documents, but it gives you an initial idea of their involvement).

8. Compliance: get a permanent record to a yes/no question (This is a quick way to ask a number of people a simple question, kind of like a polling function with only one answer type. For example: “Have you completed your weekly reports? (click Yes or No to answer.” The results are displayed in a simple report that enables you to see the entire team’s answers. It also allows you to pinpoint issues and dig deeper into their cause or solution.)
9. Changes tab: creates a log of project/meeting/task/wiki changes (This is similar to Facebook’s RSS (really simple syndication) news feed. It creates a list of everything that people have done

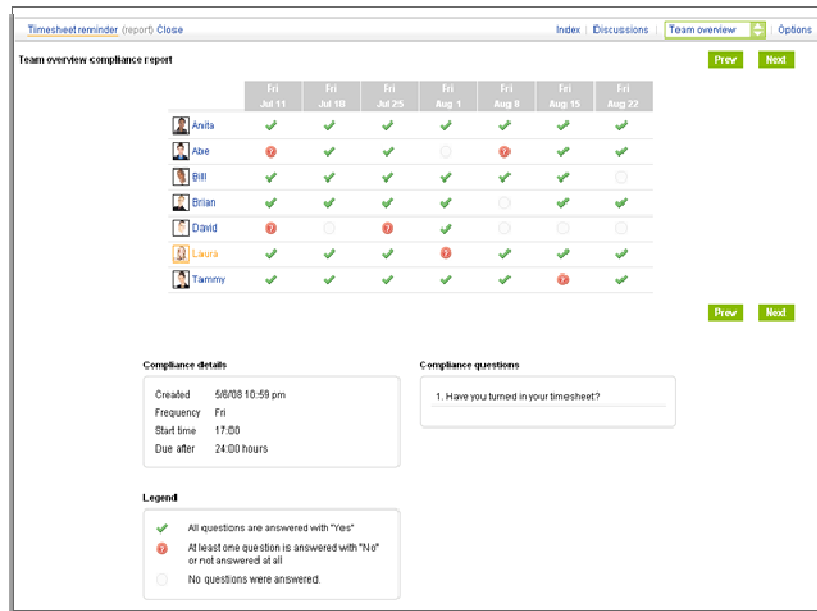


Figure 2: Compliance Report in Qtask

or changed (pictures, status changes, additions to profile, groups joined) and aggregates this information.)

10. Powerful contextual search: find anything easily, search within a project, see all changes to projects, calendars, wikis and tasks, and perform a more general search across all projects.



Accountability Scenario

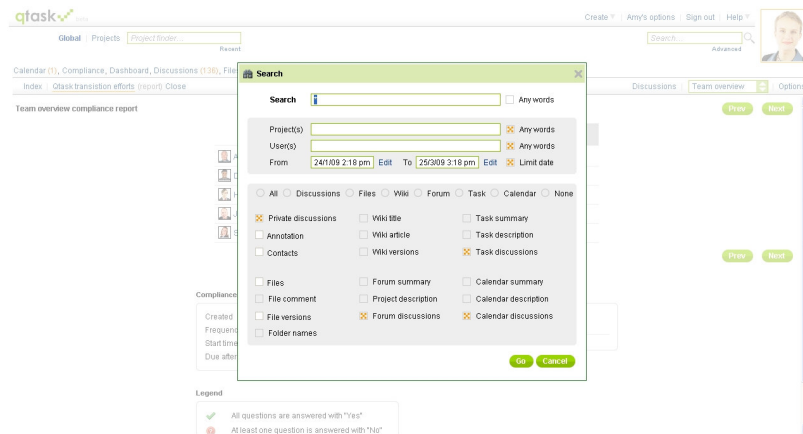


Figure 3: Advanced Search in Qtask

A good example of how accountability is critical to an organization can be seen in this scenario. You are a doctor and you ask one of your colleagues who has some expertise in diagnosing early stage cancer for a consult about one of your patients. You ask him by e-mail and try to attach some of the x-rays, but the mail bounces back because the attachment is too large. In frustration, you call him and then share your computer screen with him to show him the x-rays. After some discussion, he recommends both a biopsy (which is a painful procedure) as well as a regimen of chemotherapy. You thank him and hang up. A few days later you get a bill for several thousand dollars for the consult.

Following your colleagues advice you do the biopsy, which is inconclusive, so you send the results out to a pathologist, and this expert looks at the biopsy sample and in a few days gets back to you saying that the cells show early stages of cancerous growth. A few days later you get a bill for several thousand dollars from the pathologist.

The patient goes into chemotherapy, suffers hair loss, but the cancer does not spread so the treatment is deemed a success. You present a bill to the patient's insurance company for \$40,000, and they respond not with a check but a request for documentation to support all treatments and also copies of the discussions where the decision was made to do the biopsy and treat with chemotherapy.

After much searching, you are able to find the bills from your colleague and the pathologist, as well as the biopsy (surgery) costs and the chemotherapy costs, but you are unable to find any documentation on the conversations around making the treatment decision for this patient. You send in the documentation you have



to the patient's insurance company, and because the documentation is incomplete, and their experts are not sure that the biopsy and chemotherapy was the best decision, they decide that they will pay only \$20,000 of the \$40,000 bill.

Rather than fighting with the insurance company, you e-mail your lawyer, explaining the situation and attaching each of the bills to the e-mail. A few days later you get a call from the lawyer asking for documentation on the conversations with both your colleague and the pathologist. Since you have no record of those, the lawyer advises you to take the \$20,000 offered by the insurance company and move on. You are angry because you have just lost \$20,000 and have no idea on how you could have provided the insurance company with the documentation they required.

You bring this situation up at the next hospital administration meeting and find out that this has not only been happening to you but to many other doctors at the hospital, and to date it has cost the hospital almost a million dollars. You bring in the IT guy and ask if there is a technical or policy solution to this problem, and he tells you the current collaborative infrastructure (Microsoft Exchange) has reached its limit on the servers you currently have and that if you want to install Microsoft SharePoint, it would require not only a new server but someone with the expertise to maintain it. In addition, SharePoint would enable you to store all of the documents in one place, but you could not share them easily with anyone outside the hospital firewall (pathologist, lawyer, insurance company). Besides costing millions of dollars, the IT guy tells you it will take about two years to roll this technology out across the hospital.

How familiar does this situation sound to you? Are your documents scattered as attachments to e-mails on various people's hard drives? Are there policies in the hospital around complete documentation for each patient's case? How does the current and new technology fit in with HIPPA requirements for patient confidentiality and privacy? SharePoint does not sound like the ideal situation for the hospital, but you don't know of any software that integrates all the functions you are looking for to help you easily support a compliance policy of complete documentation for all new cases (because most of the doctors and nurses in the hospital are not computer geniuses).



Gen Y: Transparency and Security

The last thing anyone wants is more overhead because of a new collaboration tool and, if asked to use such a tool, many of the doctors will resist. In order to keep a complete record (documents, conversations, decisions, tasks, etc.), the collaboration tool has to do much of this behind the scenes and not require any additional work from the medical staff, yet fit in with the processes they currently are used to.

Today, more collaboration tools, especially consumer-oriented tools like social networks, are more focused on transparency than security. As Gen Y (those born after 1982) moves into the workforce, the difference in how the four different generations online today share and extend trust is evident. Gen Y is more used to the transparency that today's Web 2.0 tools offer than the hierarchical security imposed by the Baby Boomers (born 1945-1965).

A lot has been written about Gen Y, the first generation to grow up digital. They are often online; extending trust and talking about everything (just look at some [MySpace](#) pages) online is only natural to this generation. They not only are willing to do this but expect it. They also expect others they interact with will be willing to discuss anything (even conflict) openly and as part of the community or social network. I have often seen Gen Ys in conflict put the question to the group and ask for their advice. This is the Twitter generation, the micro-bloggers, and they are willing to let their peers know where they are (location-based applications) and what they are doing. This level of transparency would be anathema to a senior (born before 1945) and probably to most Boomers.

This is the generation that is defined by what online groups they are in and who they know, not where they are and what they have. They don't want to miss anything and want to be part of everything. They not only extend online trust to everyone, but are willing to keep the relationship even when the other person does not prove to be entirely trustworthy, as long as they remain part of the online community or social network, and the network is still willing to have them as a member. It is common for these Gen Ys to have a group of friends they talk with on a daily basis, who may be geographically all over the world - people they have never met in person.

Older generations in the workplace are shrinking while the number of Gen Ys in jobs is expanding. According to Larry Matarazzi, Senior Director, Workplace Resources at Cisco, by mid-year 2010



Accountability, Transparency and IT

Gen Y will outnumber Boomers working at Cisco⁶. So the generation that is more interested in transparency is moving into the workplace while the generation that is more secretive is moving out.

What is transparency really composed of? Is it the ability to see what others are doing, saying or storing? Is it the ability to track people, meetings or events and documents in real time? Is it the ability to trust your employees and let them write about their work lives with their own opinion to the public? Is it putting a much more personal face on the corporation?

[Salesforce.com](http://salesforce.com) engages in transparency when they show a Web page with real time information about their network and whether it is up or down (see:<http://trust.salesforce.com/>). In this case, Salesforce is partnering with its customers and saying, “we are not perfect, and we can show you where we go wrong, and maybe you can help us do it better.” This level of trust and transparency is about making your customers into partners rather than someone just to sell to.

Another vendor encouraging transparency in collaboration, a different way, is Qtask. In this Web 2.0, SaaS-based collaboration tool, everyone can see all the discussions in the project they are in. They can see who are the leaders and who are the workers in the project (this is important for task management), every conversation, every document, every version - everything is recorded. Not everything is open to everyone; Qtask allows very granular control of transparency through private discussions, private tasks or private meetings. When people know they have to be transparent, they tend to act better (those who feel they are anonymous on the Internet can become Trolls or Flamers).

Group discussions allow everyone to weigh in with their opinion and to see how the decision process is carried out and by whom. This level of transparency is something that is common to Gen Y but not as natural for Boomers.

Although collaboration online is more natural for Gen Y, they have different values than other generations. Unlike Boomers, who were focused on the aggregation of money and acquisition of possessions, Gen Ys want to spend their time in meaningful and useful ways⁸ which includes their time at work.



With all that's going on with the current economic crisis, not only do people (taxpayers) want more oversight on government, but government's scrutiny of business will intensify in many developed countries. Already, in the United States, the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency weighs in on the resiliency of banking

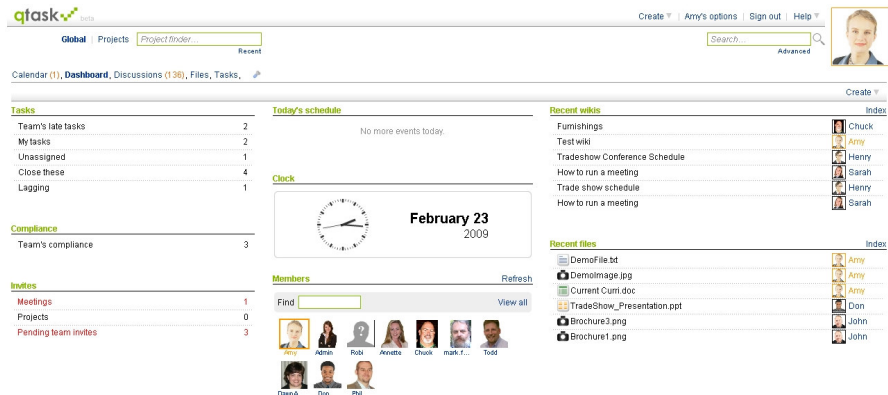


Figure 4: Project Dashboard in Qtask

systems, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) requires that many pharmaceutical systems be validated, and Sarbanes–Oxley drives decisions about accounting systems in every industry.

In the future, policy makers and regulators will probably demand that IT systems capture more and better data in order to gain greater insight into and control over how pharmaceutical companies manage drugs, banks manage risk, and industrial companies affect the environment. Government officials also will monitor many legal and business rules more closely, to ensure compliance with mandates. Successful CIOs will need to enhance their relationships with internal legal, financial and corporate affairs teams, and be prepared to engage productively with regulators. They will need to seek solutions that meet government mandates at manageable costs, and with minimal disruption. This means not only a greater level of governance, but a great level of accountability.

It turns out that not all collaboration technologies are equal. Many that came from desktop applications have integrated functions but support silos of information, and are generally not transparent. In the Web 2.0 world, it is relationships that are important. Changing your client from a customer to a partner, being transparent about your system or services up time, so those using it can be proactive

Summary and Recommendations



and give you valuable feedback. Increasing governance and regulation of more industries and the government (because of abuse, etc.) are being demanded by citizens who end up bailing out whole industries where a few have run off with most of the cash. The ability to make people accountable for their actions and what they say is a step forward for collaboration, because it takes collaboration out of the anonymous model of the consumer Internet and puts it into the measured decisions of an organization that may be liable for those decisions, products or services.

The integration of these critical features into one collaborative product is the next step in the evolution of collaboration. The ability to connect everything to everything else in the system, not only alleviates information silos but increases transparency and accountability.

It is the responsibility of every CIO to look at this as part of an overall corporate collaborative strategy, as well as one of the best ways to “do more with less,” cut down on travel, make your company “greener,” and move you into a leadership position in your industry. As we become more “globalized” and more distributed teams are used for everything from brainstorming to project execution, the need for these new collaboration tools becomes even greater.



End Notes

1. CNN reports: <http://www.cnn.com/2008/US/11/19/autos.ceo.jets/index.html>
2. <http://www.law.com/jsp/ihc/PubArticleIHC.jsp?id=1203602189184>
3. <http://www.kansascity.com/business/story/1061852.html>
4. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hyperlink>
5. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Accountability>
6. Presented at the [New Ways of Working](#) Symposium VI Palo Alto January 25-28, 2009
7. http://advice.cio.com/dan_lohrmann/are_we_working_9_to_5_gen_y_social_networks_and_accountability_2?page=0%2C1
8. Pew Internet & American Life Project, Generations Online, Susannah Fox and Mary Madden, December 2005

Resources/ Author



David Coleman, Founder and Managing Director of [Collaborative Strategies](http://www.collaborate.com) (www.collaborate.com) has been involved with groupware, collaborative technologies, knowledge management (KM), online communities and social networks for the last 20 years.

He is a thought leader, frequent public speaker, industry analyst, and author of books and magazine articles on these topics. David has written four books on collaboration:

Groupware: Technology and Applications, Prentice-Hall 1995

Groupware: Collaborative Strategies for Corporate LANs and Intranets, Prentice-Hall, 1997

[Collaboration 2.0: Technology and Best Practices for Successful Collaboration in a Web 2.0 World](#), Happy About Press, 2008

[42 Rules for Successful Collaboration](#), Happy About Press, 2009

David's comments and analysis are most frequently found in the Collaboration Blog at www.collaborate.com.

David has worked with a wide range of collaboration vendors including IBM/Lotus, Microsoft, Macromedia, Adobe, Intuit, EMC and Oracle, and helped them with strategy, product positioning, and demand generation projects.



David has also worked within the enterprise, building online communities and creating a variety of social networks. His work includes defining collaborative strategies for distributed organizations, and distributed teams across organizational boundaries, to help them be high-performance teams. He can be reached at dauidc@collaborate.com or (415) 282-9197.

About Qtask

Qtask Founded in 2007, is the developer of a comprehensive, secure SaaS-based project management and collaboration environment that adds accountability and improves bottom line results. Qtask provides uniquely transparent and dynamic collaboration capabilities to effectively manage all projects to successful completion, reduce overhead expenses and increase productivity. Qtask, when implemented, becomes a team's or an company's virtual office accessible anytime, from anywhere.