

New Collaboration Tool

Collaboration tools are popping up like gophers on a spring day. The latest tool to emerge that has caught my attention is [SwarmTeams](#). From their site:

*The **Community Engagement Tool** – inspired by nature.*

Discover how you can enlist your key audiences – consumers, fans, citizens, staff, members or delegates – and transform them into proactive advocates of your cause, community or product.

Like a lot of the new social networking and collaborative tools – at first glance it takes a few moments to catch onto what they are offering to do for us. However what caught my eye immediately was the concept of turning audiences into communities. Inspired by natural systems [SwarmTeams](#) promises much in terms of collaborative possibilities.

You may have heard me mention in other posts that I am quite convinced that the traditional business model is changing so fast and so drastically that in a few years ‘communities’ will replace ‘brands’ and ‘community members’ will replace ‘consumers’. Social networking /marketing is one of the main forces behind this shift. [SwarmTeams](#) is a great concept – and well worth a visit – I would love to hear what others think about.

Collaboration & ‘People Issues’

An excerpt from ‘[The Thin Book of Naming Elephants](#)’ :

In their book [Execution](#), Larry Bossidy and Ram Charan estimate that **40 percent of an effective leader's time is spent on people issues**. They point out that: "This immense personal commitment is time-consuming and fraught with emotional wear and tear in giving feedback, conducting dialogues, and exposing your judgment to others. But the foundation of a great company is the way it develops people." There are no shortcuts in developing people, but here are some time stretching suggestions.

- Change the way you hold meetings and take turns to allow everyone to speak. This creates opportunities for people to build relationships and sends the message that you want to hear what others think. Consider rotating the leadership responsibility for the meeting among your employees.
- Instead of hitting the seductive reply button on your email, walk to the person's desk if possible. Face-to-face interaction builds relationships and may also cue you into subtle signals of concern that are missing in emails.
- Return phone calls in the shortest period of time possible without regard to the perceived status and rank of the caller. Failure to return phone calls in a timely manner (or at all) creates a lot of anger in the corporate world. Remember that all members of your organization have something valuable to offer.
- Host an informal lunch on a regularly scheduled basis. Order pizza or sandwiches if the budget allows and keep it to 30 minutes. Ask everyone to share an idea – about something they learned in the last week as the "price" of lunch. Or just use the time for informal conversation so people can get to know each other – and you – better.

If you are a manager of that 40 % of your time dealing with 'people issues' – you would probably agree that it constitutes

almost 100% of your stress. So learning to deal more effectively with people you manage, supervise or work with can have big benefits – you'd probably live longer too. And of course the end result is greater [collaborative intelligence](#) within your team.

Collaborative Intelligence in Our Bodies

If you needed proof that there is such a thing as collaborative intelligence – you only have to take a peek at how our bodies coordinate themselves. This excerpt from [Ervin Laszlo's 'Science and the Akashic Field'](#) makes the point much better than I could.

'In a complex organism the challenge of order is gigantic. The human body consists of some million billion cells, far more than stars in the Milky Way galaxy. Of this cell population, 600 billion are dying and the same number are regenerating every day – over 10 million cells per second. The average skin cells lives only for about two weeks; bone cells are renewed every three months. Every ninety seconds millions of antibodies are synthesized, each from about twelve hundred amino acids, and every hour 200 million erythrocytes are regenerated. There is no substance in the body that is constant, though heart and brain cells endure longer than most. And the substances that coexist at a given time produce thousands of biochemical reactions in the body each and every second.'

If this is the level of 'collaboration' our bodies can achieve, I argue that we can do this as a society as well. I

just wonder what it is we have to assume to make that process happen faster?

Working Alone

As much as collaboration is a great thing and working within groups enriches us – sometimes we have to work alone and I tripped over this piece about working alone that I thought I'd share. It comes from [Steven's Pressfield's 'The War of Art'](#) (by the way the rest of the book is just as great) ...

Sometimes we balk at embarking on an enterprise because we're afraid of being alone. We feel comfortable with the tribe around us; it makes us nervous going off into the woods on our own.

Here's a trick: We're never alone. As soon as we step outside the campfire glow, our Muse lights on our shoulder like a butterfly. The act of courage calls forth infallibly that deeper part of ourselves that supports and sustains us.

Have you seen interviews with the young John Lennon or Bob Dylan, when the reporter tries to ask about their personal selves? The boys deflect these queries with withering sarcasm. Why? Because Lennon and Dylan know that the part of them that writes the songs is not "them," not the personal self that is of such surpassing fascination to their boneheaded interrogators. Lennon and Dylan also know that the part of themselves that does the writing is too sacred, too precious, too fragile to be redacted into sound bites for the titillation of would-be idolators (who are themselves caught up in their own Resistance). So they put them on and blow them

off.

It is commonplace among artists and children at play that they're not aware of time or solitude while they're chasing their vision. The hours fly. The sculptress and the tree-climbing tyke both look up blinking when Mom calls, "Supertime!"

Open Source Comes to Pharmaceuticals

The open source approach literally transformed the software industry and in turn had a huge impact on just about any aspect of life touched by technology. I am so committed personally to the open source community – I published my book '[Teaching an Anthill to Fetch](#)' under a [Creative Commons licence](#), rather than the the traditional 'All Right Reserved' copyright approach.

Having spent some time in the pharmaceutical industry myself I know how territorial they are about their [IP \(intellectual property\)](#). Long, and often very expensive, research and development paths lead to the discovery of new drugs. However the pharmaceutical industry is one of of the most profitable because of the high cost they can demand for the successful new treatments. Pointing at no one in particular as I say it – there is a lot of unnecessary greed practiced in this industry. Some of the companies should look more closely at their vision statements to see if they reflect the well-being of investors bank accounts or the health of the human species (these are not necessarily mutually exclusive).

What I am saying is that the industry has the potential for

achieving a great deal of good for our planet beyond simply increasing its share value. I don't think it is tapping into that potential right now.

[Farmvita.net](#) is bringing the concept of open source into the field of pharmaceuticals and what a welcome sight. [This article](#) is a foretaste of some thing great a truly collaborative approach toward bringing much needed health care to all levels of society.

Ants and Swarming

Anyone who read my book '[Teaching an Anthill to Fetch](#)' will know that I have a fondness for these little critters. In my view they offer a promise of how selfless we may actually become as a species- given enough time. An [article in the NY Times](#) is a fascinating peek into the ways ants collaborate for the benefit of a the entire nest. From the article...

The reason may be that the ants have had a lot more time to adapt to living in big groups. "We haven't evolved in the societies we currently live in," Dr. Couzin said.

In fact thought they don't mention it in [the article](#) – ants have had a **lot** more practice. They have been living in colonies for over 40 million years. So we have a little work to do to catch up on with them it would seem from this article.

From '[Teaching an Anthill to Fetch](#)'....