

Collaboration Facilitation

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Imagine for a moment a world where you work in an organizations amongst other trying to collaborate within a massive, obscure bureaucracy. Let's assume your organization's culture doesn't mesh particularly well with mine, our computer networks are isolated from each other and we're legally restricted in what we can share. Some social networking tools have been provided to the workforce, but most employees tend to revert to email and telephone. You're probably asking "What sort of messed up bureaucracy is this?!". Ladies and gentlemen, I have described the general state of collective intelligence in the United States Department of Defense.

I'm Jonesy (Chris Jones). I work as a member of a specialized team of collaboration experts that accelerate online social collaboration between people across the Defense Department or "DoD" as we call it.

Our team's goal is to boost knowledge sharing to improve the DoD's ability to discover information, make decisions, and protect the country.

This type of knowledge-sharing is very important because it often concerns matters of life and death involving thousands of people trying desperately to find each other and communicate. Participants are using social networking tools and sharing what they know, don't know, and think fast enough to make a difference in all sorts of chaotic events like armed conflict, social upheaval, humanitarian assistance or disaster response. Issues can be emergencies that need to be worked very quickly or it can be complex geopolitical issues that involve considerate thought by dozens of experts to form agreement. The information flows freely between the lowest soldier on through to the top echelons of our government. Though many are using the social tools, they sometimes need a hand in making the most of this environment.

So what are Facilitators? Facilitators are dedicated professionals who are fluent in the use of social tools and help others use them, and to discover each other and knowledge. Facilitators login into several hundred chat rooms and cross post information between spaces, engage in the conversation to help get ideas flowing and are there to help anyone having issues navigating this very large, wild world of chat. They are like a catalyst to the natural interactions across all the chat spaces in a network we call the Human Network. They can help keep information and ideas flowing and are experts in how humans behave in social spaces.

Over the past 20 years we seen a growing use of chat, blogs, wikis and cloud sharing vice telephones and email to exchange knowledge. Today, our team commonly sees

dozens of organizations working together in the same chat room on fast moving issues and that is only one of tens of thousands of chat spaces. That's a big change for the DoD! Along the way we learned a few things through knee-skinning trial and error. We learned that simply providing the tools isn't enough to get the people to use them. Training was focused on the mechanical "how" but almost completely disregarded the behavioral "how."

We have knowledge IN what we do, but don't have knowledge OF what we are doing. We don't even have the time to understand what communities like Collective Intelligence are working on, because we're still too busy working one world crisis after another. So that's why we're here. We need help from experts like you who can look at how we do our facilitation and how the DoD is working across the masses and help us sustain the efforts.

We offer our lessons learned and insights for academic research. We could use help articulating the real significant model we've been using. There are some interesting puzzles we need help solving.

Our unique human network is dynamically forming and reforming. Facilitators have several roles within the network; broker, connector, and advisor, among others. We need help understanding how these roles help facilitate interaction.

Not only is the network dynamic, it's complex. We have a lot of heterogenous preferences, interests, angles, coming from things like generation gaps, medium challenges, and IT disparity. We need to understand the economics of opting-in and -out or some sliding scale of participation between in and out.

We don't believe that what we are doing is unique to the Defense Department or even the government. We believe the principles of facilitation apply to any social online environment where masses of people need to communicate synchronously, discover each other and information and collaborate in synergy. The role of the facilitator is universal, but we need more research to back up that claim.

I appreciate your time today and our team looks forward to exploring new insights in the world of Collective Intelligence.