

Staff and business areas often identify a need for collaboration tools, without knowing what the best solution would be. They may have some familiarity with a handful of tools, but not know how others work.

As discussed in the earlier article *Successful collaboration requires support*, there needs to be a centralised team that supports collaboration tools throughout the organisation.

One of the key roles of this central team is to help business areas choose the right tools. This starts with determining whether there is a legitimate and practical need for collaboration tools. The right solution (or mix of solutions) needs to be selected, followed by support, guidance and training.

In practice, this means asking a lot of questions. These build an understanding of the current situation, points of pain, business context, and business needs.

To kick-start this process, this briefing outlines a number of questions the central team could ask. Use these as a starting point when approached by business units, and adapt them to fit the specific situation.

These questions must not be seen as obstructive, or as a hurdle designed to minimise the spread of collaboration tools. Instead, they should be used as a basis for constructive dialogue, with both sides learning valuable information.

Information gained from these types of questions is invaluable for the central team, helping them design or adapt collaboration solutions to fit the organisation's changing needs.

Understanding the current situation

- What is the problem or point of pain?
- What information is proving hard to collect or communicate?
- Can you tell me more about what your area/team does?
- How many people are in your area/team?
- Where does it sit within the organisation?
- What budget do you have for collaboration solutions?

Technology familiarity

- Have you used any collaboration tools at work or at home? If so, which ones?
- What was your experiences with these tools?
- What made you think of collaboration tools as a potential solution for your problem?
- How technology savvy are the potential collaboration tool users?

Information needs

- How is the information managed at present? (eg documents, emails, web pages)
- Is this about capturing information or supporting conversations?
- How long does the information need to be kept?
- Are there people outside of the business area who need to access the information?
- What business outcomes are hoped for?

People and behaviours

- Who needs to work together or share information?
- Have these people worked together before?
- How do they normally communicate? (face-to-face, phone, email, etc)
- Are these people in a single geographic location, or in multiple locations? Are time zones an issue?
- Who will be creating the information?
- How much time will they have?
- Who will be accessing the information?
- Who will be managing the collaboration tools?

Just a start

These questions are just a start, intended to spark the right kinds of discussions. There are a hundred other questions that could or should be asked, these questions will need reworking to fit the culture and context. At the end of the day, keep asking questions until the situation is clearly understood, and only then recommend solutions!