: Can smartphone apps increase collaboration?

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Smartphones have enabled a mobile world and these devices have initiated a series of significant changes in the workplace. Smartphones combine a cellular telephone and a mobile computer into a single, handheld device. Apps or mobile apps are applications designed and programmed to operate on a smartphone. In 2014 there are approximately 1.6 Billion (http://www.statista.com/) smart phone users globally. People can "work" in many locations and work tasks and one's personal life increasingly overlap.

The array of mobile applications for smartphones is evolving quickly with new apps rapidly introduced and other apps quietly retired. Keeping up with the possibilities for supporting collaboration and improving decision making is challenging. Some tools focus on supporting teams, others support multiple permanent and temporary teams, some provide support for all the employees of an organization. Collaboration apps can let teams include non-employee collaborators.

A "smart phone" or "smartphone" is much more than a mobile phone. Devices have advanced computing capabilities, sensors, voice input and output, and anywhere and everywhere connectivity. What is equally important is that many smartphone apps can and are intended to support work activities.

One multi-platform app that has evolved over the past two years is Quip, a mobile productivity suite. Quip at quip.com helps groups and teams collaborate using documents, spreadsheets, lists and chat. Quip is promoted as "the modern productivity suite that helps your team get work done faster".

Ronda Swaney on 9/2/2015 posted a brief review of three apps that foster collaboration and innovation. She reviewed IFTTT (https://ifttt.com/), Asana (https://asana.com/), and Evernote (https://evernote.com/).

IFTTT stands for "If This, Then That". IFTTT enables automation of everything from a user's favorite app or website to app-enabled smart devices. Supposedly IFTTT "gives you creative control over the products and apps you love." IFTTT uses conditional statements called "IF recipes" and "DO recipes." IF recipes run in the background while DO recipes run at the tap of a screen. An IF recipe might be "If I post a picture on Instagram, save the photo to Dropbox." A DO recipe could be "Create a new task in ToDoList when you receive a high priority email." IFTTT seems less a collaboration

app and more a productivity enhancer. IFTTT does let you control Microsoft Office 365 with IF and DO recipes.

Asana's website claims the app "keeps your team organized, connected, and focused on results." The Asana developers identified email as an inefficient tool for managing projects and developed Asana as an alternative. With Asana you can create projects and tasks, assign tasks to team members, and set due dates. You can attach any needed files to a task and keep your conversations associated with a project or task, putting all project communications in one place.

Evernote focuses on note-taking and archiving. Evernote helps users collect notes, web clips, audio, photos, and other media. Evernote indexes the content and provides a search capability. The Evernote website claims it is "The workspace for your life's work". In the workspace, users and groups can write, collect, discuss and then present what is found.

Swaney argues "collaboration is the new way of doing business".

Collaboration has always been important in business decision making, what has changed is the many new mobile apps that have made collaboration easier, less costly and more effective. Collaboration is work and work is collaboration.

Smartphones can and are increasing workplace collaboration. A smartphone is more than a social collaboration tool. Whether you bring your own device (BYOD) or use an organization provided device (OPD), your smart phone is now a work tool that provides collaboration capabilities and easy access to personal and shared information. According to Pitichat (2013), "using Smartphones in the workplace can be valuable in three ways: promoting autonomy, strengthening relationships with peers as well as superiors, and improving knowledge-sharing". Choosing to collaborate using a smartphone changes the communication dynamics in an organization. Effective collaboration requires widespread use of a connected device with the same mobile apps. Work must become a task-oriented social network.

Smartphones and collaborative mobile apps support and enable more and better collaboration. The hardware, networks and software create the possibility to increase collaboration. To realize benefits, people must be: 1) trained to use the apps effectively, 2) motivated to share and collaborate, and finally 3) rewarded for using smartphones and apps to collaborate.

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