Own Your Transformation

A Five-Point Agenda for Creating Your Organization’s Collaborative Leadership System for a Digital World

Insights from The SMART Partnering Alliance of The Rhythm of Business and Alliancesphere
Technology + Partnering together are today’s business imperative. They are redefining and rewiring organizations, changing how work is done, creating new business models, new value for customers, and shifting power dynamics. Partnering is happening everywhere, requiring collaborating internally and externally—at all levels and across all functions—with unprecedented speed, scale, and scope. But developing the systems, incentives, structures, and accountabilities that drive collaborative work—in other words, a collaborative leadership system—has at best been an afterthought, primarily used for selling to and through channel partners.

The result: a collaboration execution gap. Companies spend much time and resources on elaborate partner programs, with tiers and varied benefits that do little to drive customer outcomes with partners once they become part of the program. It’s apparent to leaders now: digital transformation doesn’t happen without robust partnering capability.

Collaboration redefines leadership. Previously partnering executives were incented to build a team that followed orders and achieved quarterly targets. Now collaborative leaders must become entrepreneurial catalysts for change—while still delivering quarterly results.
Alliance and partnering professionals—the tip of the spear of collaborative leadership—must redefine their roles too: from managers of individual alliances or a portfolio of like partnerships to orchestrators of the partnering ecosystem, where the customer is at the center and there’s no boundary between your company and your partners.

The challenge and opportunity for today’s collaborative leaders could not be more meaningful and impactful:

*How will you create, deploy, and integrate a leadership system for collaboration from top-to-bottom and end-to-end, overcoming organizational boundaries, inertia, and old ways of leading?*

We offer a five-point collaborative leader’s transformation agenda—a roadmap for creating your organization’s leadership system for a rapidly changing digital world:
Collaborative leaders inspire others to embrace what can only be achieved by harnessing the collective wisdom and resources of the ecosystem. The North Star defines the collective aspiration, stated in terms of what customers value and the experiences they seek. The North Star provides focus and helps determine priorities.

Every North Star should have a single metric that captures the core value received by your customers. It is a powerful way to lead your team, create transparency and visibility into what they do, communicating demonstrable progress and outcomes that matter.
Design for customer outcomes.

Digital transformation upends business models based on selling prepackaged solutions, replacing them with outcomes-based models. Only recipients can judge value; only customers determine the value of the outcomes they receive from what you and your partners provide them.

Collaborative leaders think, communicate, and act holistically, always from the customer’s perspective. Start with customer needs, wants, and opportunities to disrupt the status quo. Design for the outcomes customers—and partners—achieve and the experiences they have. Your focus needs multiple time horizons. Maintaining the loyalty of customers and partners requires working on a portfolio of value-producing solutions. Always execute and monetize the immediate solutions, while also creating what comes next, and ideating what comes after that.
Digital transformation demands a level of collaboration that is unprecedented for most organizations.

A collaborative leader breaks down the traditional boundaries of functional and organizational silos and blasts through the complexity of the matrix to create cross-functional teams that mesh with their external partners. Organized around customer use cases or set of customer needs, these teams have the end-to-end capability to strategize, operationalize, and execute with agility, guided by a clear North Star that drives focus and speed.

Agile teams are not permanent structures. They take ideas and concepts, develop them just enough to take to the customer, test them, and come back with key learnings that the team further develops. Collaborative leaders create opportunities for experimentation and the means to advance them through the business, eliminating process and tearing down structural, cultural, and political barriers.
Redefining and rewiring an organization for the partnering required by digital transformation is a change initiative. It requires resources, commitment, alignment, and shared accountability for both process and outcomes throughout the organization. Be prepared to communicate why Technology + Partnering combine to become the burning platform. Make visible what is expected of all leaders in the organization. Have a specific program of initiatives in mind, the details of which, including goals, milestones, activities, and metrics, are designed by the users. Systemically and programmatically, show how individual and team projects roll up to the whole, describing what the transformation looks like at various stages—help people viscerally grasp what is different as they collectively reach for the North Star.

Include training at all levels. Don’t assume people can naturally pick up on what to do to work collaboratively, especially externally. Give people the tools and access to data they need to learn and adapt to this new way of working. Help them understand the metrics that matter both as a demonstration of progress and measurement of customer outcomes. Let them plot their path to impacting the metrics and take ownership of the outcomes.

Build a culture of shared accountability.
Collaborative work requires all individuals to lead themselves, acting boldly and with focus. What leadership means is different if you are in the executive suite, the front lines, or the middle of the organization.

The new leaders in the middle of the organization are the explicit coaches on the front lines—the people who engage with customers and partners in the field and who make or break any collaboration. It is the new leaders in the middle who must play the multi-dimensional role of internal change agent and ecosystem orchestrator, all the while building the operations, the backbone that allows a company to deliver to customers, capturing and reporting value.

Your role is more important than it has ever been. Build a business case for the resources and tools you need to operationalize strategy and enable the field to execute. Internalize the organizational challenges the field faces that block execution, then work to carve a path forward.

Own your transformation.
For more than 16 years, **Alliancesphere** has helped leading businesses collaborate with customers and partners to predictably turn shared visions into transformative innovation, measurable mutual value, and sustained growth.

Since 1999 **The Rhythm of Business** has developed thought leadership, designed and implemented systems and organizations, and offered education and training to drive business outcomes through partnering and alliances.

In 2014, Alliancesphere and The Rhythm of Business joined forces to form **SMART Partnering**, offering executive suite sponsored solutions to build the leadership system and organizational capability to realize the value of **Technology + Partnering**.

**About The Authors**
Own Your Technology + Partnering Transformation

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