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Empowering the Agile Corporation.

Quick-forming, quick-dissolving business teams are the way of the future. Collaboration Architects creates online work environments that make such teams possible—and companies like CNA are reaping the benefits.

Falls Church, VA (April 2002) — Agility. It's as critical a quality for today's corporation as it is for, say, an Olympic athlete. A company that can quickly respond to the whims of the marketplace, rapidly modify its products and services, and solve problems before they become disasters is a company that ultimately "takes home the gold." According to Bill Bruck, cofounder of Virginia's Collaboration Architects, LLC, the key is having a system in place that allows for the creation of what he calls "quick forming, quick dissolving" (or QF/QD) teams.

"Effective companies now are working in projects, and each project necessitates its own team of experts," he explains. "Perhaps these experts are people hand-selected from several departments across an organization. Perhaps they're members of a sister company, or they're freelancers or outside consultants. Perhaps they're a combination of all of the above. Regardless, any corporation that's going to compete in the 21st century must have the agility to create and utilize these QF/QD teams."

Bruck should know. Along with his business partner John Darling (the other founder of Collaboration Architects), he designs, constructs and implements online work environments that allow people and organizations to collaborate via the Web. They create a total information-sharing package that makes sense for each client and for that client's task at

hand. Bruck offers the following examples of functions for which companies need QF/QD teams—and for which they may use collaborative online environments:

- Department Workspaces—Much of the work done today by organization work groups is initiative/project centric. This means that any given department or group has a certain number of projects “on its plate” at any given time. What is often missing is a readily accessible team forum where everyone (managers and team members alike) can be kept up-to-speed on the team’s activity and can easily communicate with each other on critical interface issues. Online collaboration software has evolved to the point where very powerful work team environments can be created.
- Project Workspaces—Since most QF/QD teams are formed to work on projects, they often need a project workspace equipped with special tools. These tools often include things like a project charter, a roles and responsibilities matrix, a task list linked to a conversation forum (so team members may collaborate on the task), a way to manage project documents, web conferencing software, methods for tracking issues, etc.
- Communities of Practice – Some QF/QD teams are formed strictly for the purpose of knowledge sharing (e.g. best-practice sharing, think-tank activity, customer forums, etc.). These groups may or may not have the kinds of time-critical deliverables as do project teams. However, they *do* need a community of practice online environment equipped with appropriate tools (e.g. survey tools, customizable discussion forums, library, etc.).
- e-Learning Programs In today’s competitive environment it is critical to be able to provide just-in-time learning. With the artful blending of traditional face-to-face training, e-Learning technology and online collaboration software, it is possible to rapidly deploy learning initiatives faster and at a lower cost than ever before.
- Online Events – These events can take the form of Town Hall Meetings with executives, staff meetings, Virtual Trade Shows, sales presentations, etc. More and more organizations are using web-conferencing software to conduct real-time meetings, presentations and mini-events. The next stage of evolution for online events is the creative use of real-time tools with “asynchronous” conferencing software to eliminate the need for everyone to be together at the same time.

One corporation that has successfully used a collaborative online environment in the deployment of its QF/QD teams is CNA, a global insurer that offers a broad range of insurance products and insurance-related services for businesses and individuals. The company's Senior Vice President of Organizational Development, Christy Keener hired Collaboration Architects to implement several initiatives as part of an overall corporate strategy to improve teamwork and learning across corporate boundaries. Thus, the CNA Collaboration and Learning site was born.

The site is a symphony of different tools and processes—Web-based asynchronous learning modules, real-time discussion forums and classrooms, message boards, surveying programs, etc.—that seamlessly combine to serve a variety of e-learning and information sharing needs.

Employee training is one of the site's most compelling functions. CNA will be using the e-Learning application to train approximately 600 front line supervisors this year. The program is a blend of "book work," interactive Web meetings, group exercises and practical assignments that are accomplished during the course of each trainee's regular workday.

Of course, this is only one example of the site's uses. Various departments within CNA use it for many functions—managing project teams with members in widely dispersed locations, sharing documents, collecting data, conducting immediate surveys, gathering feedback, holding follow-up discussions after face-to-face-meetings, creating and maintaining searchable databases, etc. Essentially, the site can accommodate any QF/QD team that must be deployed to meet the needs that are constantly arising.

"In today's business world we must *rapidly* provide people with the capabilities they need to address the issues that are right in front of them," asserts Keener. "That necessitates quick-forming, quick-dissolving

teams. For us, this is true not just in the Organizational Development department, but also in Claims Handling and Finance Operation, for example. Both of these departments are now using the site for various purposes. It's proved invaluable for everyone. And because it renders geographic location irrelevant, it is saving CNA untold amounts of money in air fare and employee downtime."

"Let me add that none of this would have been possible without Collaboration Architects," she concludes. "They took the time to understand our needs and put together a blend of technology that meets them perfectly. Together, we built an online environment that makes sense for our company. We're delighted with this partnership, and we look forward to seeing where it leads us in the future."

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About Collaboration Architects

Collaboration Architects is a leading provider of online workplaces for virtual teams, e-Learning programs, and business communities. Collaboration Architects' solutions are designed around the way people communicate, share information, and collaborate in order to get work done. We blend critical work processes, people issues, and right technology to create effective online workspaces that enhance your business outcomes.

To learn more, visit www.collaborationarchitects.com.