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The Use of Collaborative Virtual Spaces in a Physically Distributed Business in South Africa

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ABSTRACT

Collaboration is important to organisations because it has the potential to increase an organisation's flexibility and its access to market share, which may lead to strategic differentiation and revenue enhancement for the organisation in the marketplace.

The purpose of the research is to assess how a collaborative virtual space tool is used in a physically distributed business as well as to indicate the precursors and barriers of successful collaboration across the business.

The selected research method is a qualitative case study based on the interpretive paradigm. Several research instruments were used in collecting data for the case study and include documentation, archival records, direct observation and interviews.

The implementation of a collaborative space toolkit has allowed the case organisation to put processes in place to introduce services that make it easier for employees to find, manage, share and collaborate around information. It is recognised by interview respondents that there are value adding aspects of using the collaborative virtual space toolkit and that socio-psychological precursors, organisational precursors and technological precursors are necessary to promote collaboration within the organisation.

The three emergent reasons from respondents interviewed as to why users do not use some or all of the collaboration tools are employees firstly not being aware of these tools at their disposal, secondly not finding a need to use the tools in their daily working environment due to substitute communication and collaboration methods, and thirdly due to a lack of change management.

It is therefore in management’s interest to understand what collaborative space tools and processes employees need and how they will add value to the way they work. This could lead not only to improved workplace productivity, but also to compete for market share and competitive advantage more effectively.