

# How Successful People Manage Collaborative Overload



The collaborative intensity of work has exploded in the last decade. Email, meetings and phone calls take up 85% or more of most people's week. That places an enormous—and invisible—cost on organizations and people.

As collaborative demands have increased, organizations have experienced diminished engagement, increased employee turnover, the explosion of an invisible cost structure and reduced organizational agility and learning.

The good news is that the collaborative intensity of work is manageable. For more than a decade, Rob Cross has studied collaborative overload. His research with 300 companies and hour-long interviews with over 200 high-performing men and women have identified behaviors and practices of efficient collaborators—those people who give the greatest impact in networks and take the least time.

Offered as individual components or bundled with a webinar led by Professor Rob Cross, the Collaborative Overload online assessment and card deck activities are powerful ways to engage people. Rob's interactive one-hour webinar provides highlights of his research and the most effective practices for improving collaborative efficiency—as reported by the high performers who shared their strategies for avoiding collaborative overload.

It's possible to reclaim 18% to 24% of collaborative time with proven practices successful leaders use to manage collaborative demands and get work done.

**COLLABORATIVE OVERLOAD  
INDIVIDUAL OR TEAM  
ASSESSMENT AND CARD DECK  
TOOLS ARE OFFERED  
INDIVIDUALLY OR WITH A 1-HOUR  
WEBINAR LED BY PROFESSOR ROB  
CROSS FOR GROUPS OF MORE  
THAN 30 PEOPLE.**

For 20 years, **Rob Cross** has focused his research, teaching and consulting on applying organizational network analysis to critical business issues for actionable insights and bottom-line results. He has worked with over 300 leading organizations (companies, government agencies and nonprofits) across industries on a variety of solutions including innovation, revenue growth, leadership effectiveness and talent management. He is the author of three books and more than 50 articles. Rob is co-founder and chief research scientist of the Connected Commons and the Edward A. Madden Professor of Global Leadership at Babson College.



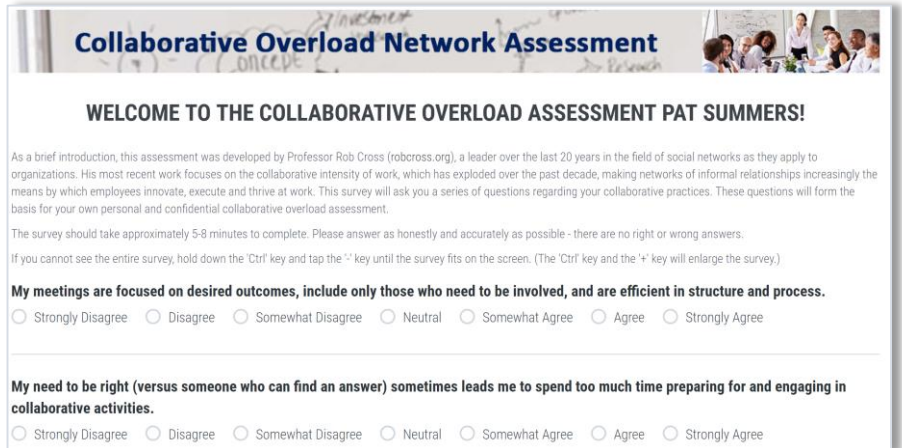
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# THE COLLABORATIVE OVERLOAD ASSESSMENT

The Collaborative Overload Assessment is an online tool that helps respondents reclaim 18% to 24% of collaborative time by providing targeted recommendations based on responses to 25 questions.

Upon completing this 5-to-8-minute diagnostic, respondents receive:

- An online and downloadable detailed report that identifies strengths and opportunities for improvement. Customized feedback describes why each practice is important and what proven habits will make a difference.
- A dynamic graph to compare results against past respondents' by gender, age, organization level and even career satisfaction.
- The option to seek feedback from raters or obtain a team profile by inviting team members to complete the assessment.



The screenshot shows the title "Collaborative Overload Network Assessment" and a welcome message from Pat Summers. It includes a brief introduction about the assessment's development by Professor Rob Cross and its purpose. Below the introduction, there are two survey questions with multiple-choice options ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree".

**Collaborative Overload Network Assessment**

**WELCOME TO THE COLLABORATIVE OVERLOAD ASSESSMENT PAT SUMMERS!**

As a brief introduction, this assessment was developed by Professor Rob Cross (robross.org), a leader over the last 20 years in the field of social networks as they apply to organizations. His most recent work focuses on the collaborative intensity of work, which has exploded over the past decade, making networks of informal relationships increasingly the means by which employees innovate, execute and thrive at work. This survey will ask you a series of questions regarding your collaborative practices. These questions will form the basis for your own personal and confidential collaborative overload assessment.

The survey should take approximately 5-8 minutes to complete. Please answer as honestly and accurately as possible - there are no right or wrong answers.  
If you cannot see the entire survey, hold down the 'Ctrl' key and tap the '-' key until the survey fits on the screen. (The 'Ctrl' key and the '+' key will enlarge the survey.)

**My meetings are focused on desired outcomes, include only those who need to be involved, and are efficient in structure and process.**

☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Somewhat Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Somewhat Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree

**My need to be right (versus someone who can find an answer) sometimes leads me to spend too much time preparing for and engaging in collaborative activities.**

☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Somewhat Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Somewhat Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree

In 5 to 8 minutes, respondents answer 25 multiple choice questions such as those shown above. An on-line custom report is generated immediately upon submission. This dynamic report allows respondents to view their results, which are characterized as strengths or opportunities for growth. For each practice, respondents can elect to read a detailed discussion with recommendations.

## OPTIONAL FOLLOW-ONS: RATERS & TEAMS

Once their survey is submitted, respondents have two optional next steps:

- (1) Request anonymous feedback from raters they choose. Respondents can then gauge their self-perception against the impressions of others.
- (2) Invite team members to complete the assessment from a group perspective—an effective way to assess the group's collaborative effectiveness and drive these ideas further into practice.

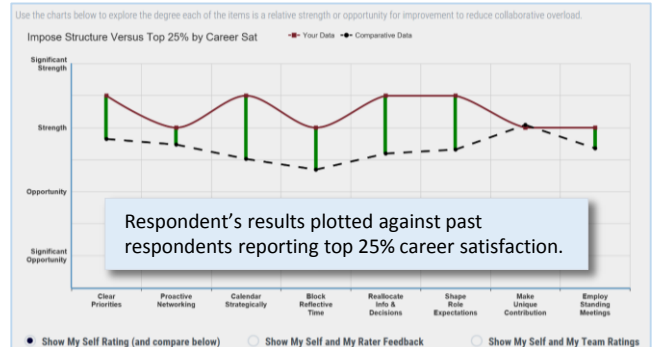
WITH A SMALL INVESTMENT OF TIME, RESPONDENTS RECEIVE TARGETED RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMMEDIATE IMPACT.

For more information, see: <https://connectedcommons.com/featuredresources>

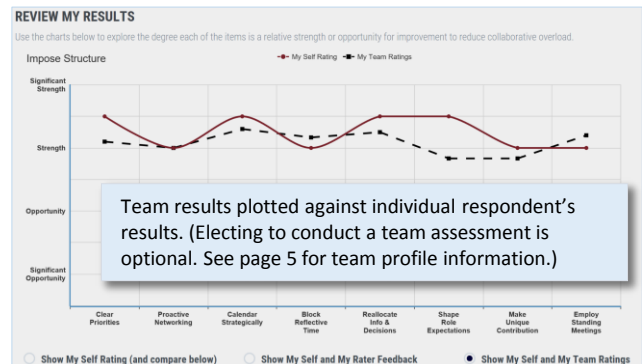
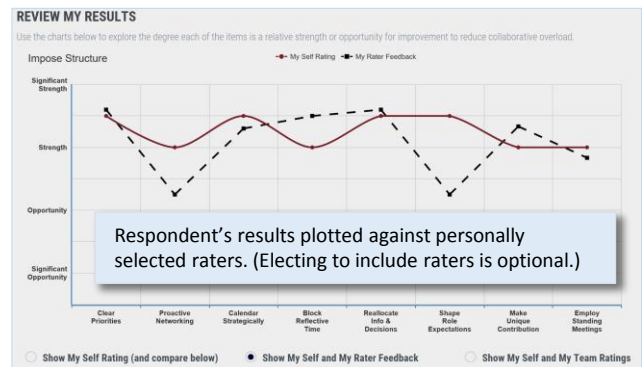
# THE COLLABORATIVE OVERLOAD ASSESSMENT



Selecting from the menu beneath the graph allows for comparisons with select peer groups as shown.



Results are organized into three areas that deliver the greatest results: **Impose Structure**, **Challenge Beliefs** and **Alter Behaviors**. Example output below comes from the **Impose Structure** section.



REVIEW MY RESULTS

Use the charts below to explore the degree each of the items is a relative strength or opportunity for improvement to reduce collaborative overload.

Impose Structure

• My Self Rating

☒ Show My Self Rating (and compare below) ☐ Show My Self and My Rater Feedback ☐ Show My Self and My Team Ratings

Compare By Gender:

☐ Men ☐ Women

Compare By Age:

☐ Under 20 ☐ 20+ - 35 ☐ 35+ - 50 ☐ 50+ - 65 ☐ 65+

Compare By Level:

☐ Individual Contributor ☐ First Level Leader ☐ Manager of Managers ☐ Senior Executive

Compare By Tenure:

☐ Less than one year ☐ 1 to 3 years ☐ 3+ to 5 years ☐ 5+ to 10 years ☐ 10+ years

Compare By Career Satisfaction:

☐ Top 25% ☐ Bottom 25%

REVIEW MY RECOMMENDATIONS

Click Below To Review Actions Related To Your Opportunity

(+) EMPLOY STANDING MEETINGS

Click Below To Review Actions Related To Your Strength

RESULTS PROVIDE A VIEW INTO SPECIFIC PRACTICES, BELIEFS AND BEHAVIORS AS WELL AS RATER AND TEAM FEEDBACK.

For more information, see: <https://connectedcommons.com/featuredresources>



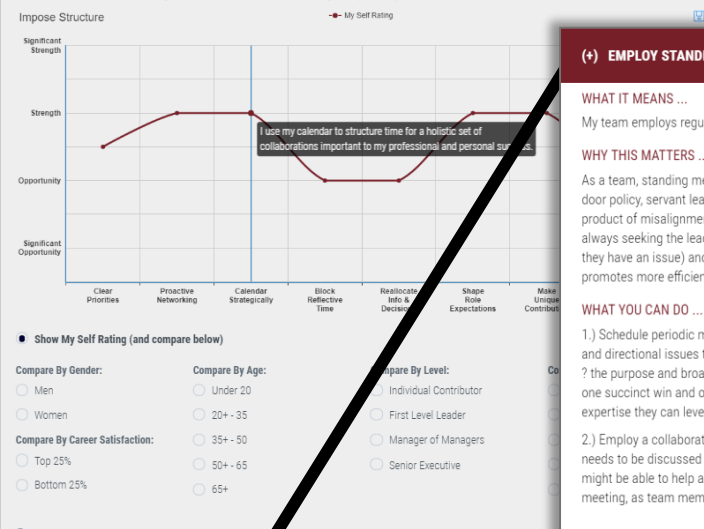
# THE COLLABORATIVE OVERLOAD ASSESSMENT

## IMPOSE STRUCTURE

More efficient collaborators **impose structure** by orienting networks to important personal objectives and shaping role interdependencies to improve collaborative efficiency. They are clear on priorities in their lives and implement a proactive network strategy to pull them to these objectives. They are also diligent on calendaring and structuring time throughout a week to ensure collaborative requests do not take over their lives. In addition, they are more aware of and proactive on streamlining collaborative interdependencies in their work. For example, they are quick to revise role structure and expectations of others to only get drawn into work and activities that pull them toward their objectives and to which they add unique value. By maintaining a focus on personal priorities and shaping role interdependencies they keep from being overrun by others' needs.

## REVIEW MY RESULTS

Use the charts below to explore the degree each of the items is a relative strength or opportunity for improvement to reduce collaborative overload.



For every strength and opportunity identified, respondents receive very specific recommendations focused on why the practice matters and what actions people can take.

## (+) EMPLOY STANDING MEETINGS

### WHAT IT MEANS ...

My team employs regularly scheduled meetings and/or technology to address one-off requests at a single point in time.

### WHY THIS MATTERS ...

As a team, standing meetings can promote collaborative efficiency by reducing or streamlining excessive one-off requests or disruptions from an open door policy, servant leadership mindset or hub/spoke approach to managing collaboration. They also reduce collaborative costs that can occur as a product of misalignment between team members and help to create awareness of expertise so that team members turn to each other rather than always seeking the leader or a single expert. Norms to not simply fill time (e.g., make it a goal for the meeting to end early and that people only talk if they have an issue) and agendas that focus on efficiency and creating awareness of colleagues' work and skills ensure that this time is productive and promotes more efficient collaborations.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO ...

- 1.) Schedule periodic meetings that fit the rhythm of work (e.g., weekly, bi-weekly, etc.). Structure meetings so that the opening is focused on priorities and directional issues that ensure alignment of the team around core goals and objectives. Use this time to re-establish and remind people of the 'why' of the purpose and broader contribution of the work. Then proceed to a standing list of issues to be resolved. Conclude by having team members share one succinct win and one succinct challenge so that the group learns where they might be able to help others and also become aware of colleagues' expertise they can leverage in the future.
- 2.) Employ a collaborative tool for the team to post issues and challenges to cover in the standing meeting. Then use meeting time to focus on what needs to be discussed - not update information that people can read. This creates transparency on challenges team members are facing that others might be able to help address. Over time, leaders typically find that 50% or more of issues that are put on the list get resolved by the team before the meeting, as team members learn each other's expertise/needs and develop a collaborative culture with the expectation of helping.

## REVIEW MY RECOMMENDATIONS

Click Below To Review Actions Related To Your Opportunity

### (+) EMPLOY STANDING MEETINGS

Click Below To Review Actions Related To Your Strength

### (+) MAKE UNIQUE CONTRIBUTION

Team and rater reports (optional) take the same form, but reflect the group's responses and offer suggestions for how to make changes that support reducing collaborative overload.



Individual results are organized into three areas that deliver the greatest results: **Impose Structure, Challenge Beliefs and Alter Behaviors**. The example used in this brochure comes from the **Impose Structure** section.

RATER FEEDBACK IS CONFIDENTIAL AND REQUIRES A MINIMUM OF THREE RESPONSES TO SHOW RESULTS. THE TEAM REPORT IS ANONYMOUS AND BASED ON AGGREGATED RESPONSES TO TEAM-LEVEL PRACTICES.

For more information, see: <https://connectedcommons.com/featuredresources>

# THE COLLABORATIVE OVERLOAD TEAM ASSESSMENT

The optional Team Assessment enables leaders to drive ideas into action by influencing team behavior. Our research shows that changes in collaborative practices can yield significant efficiency in an individual's work. It also indicates that adapting an individual's own collaborative practices requires that others accommodate and work with these changes. For example, streamlining meetings or using email more efficiently requires others to support and engage in similar practices. For this reason, assessing how team-level tendencies create collaborative overload can help identify three to four norms the team can choose to hold itself accountable for in driving down unnecessary collaborative activities.

**Collaborative Overload Network Assessment**

THANK YOU PAT SUMMERS FOR COMPLETING THE SURVEY.

Your results are ready for your review. You have the option of going directly to your results by clicking "Continue" at the bottom of the page or selecting one of the following options first:

Choose Your Option(s)

- ☐ **Add Raters** - You can identify raters to provide you with confidential feedback to the same questions that you just completed. After you add the raters, you will be able to view your own results immediately, and once at least 3 raters respond, your results will be dynamically updated with their feedback.
- ☐ **Add Team Members** - You can also nominate team members that you would like to take the assessment with you so that you can see group level opportunities to improve collaborative efficiency. If you select this option, you will get your individual results immediately, the team results will become available once at least three team members (including yourself) complete the team assessment.

**CONTINUE**

## GROWTH: PROACTIVE NETWORKING

### WHY THIS MATTERS ...

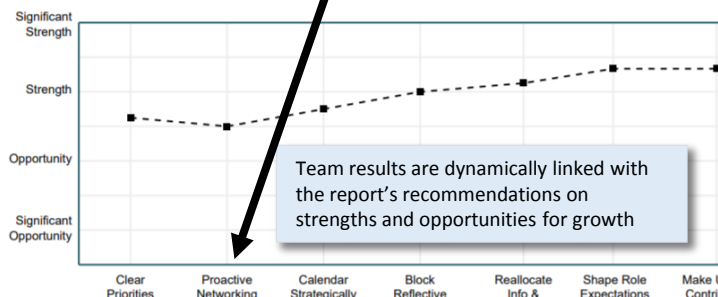
Broadly speaking, people can play offense or defense through the approach they take to building a network. Offense means having a north star and progressing to it over time through the connections you initiate. It also means building non-insular networks - those rich in boundary spanning collaborations inside an organization and investments in relationships outside an organization. Research shows that less insular networks are critical to our confidence to say no and not simply give authority to others. This is because, in part, our identity is not tied up in one network - a result that makes us unidimensional and susceptible to fluctuations in that sphere of life. Also, we know that even if a decision hurts our opportunities in one context, we have other possibilities through the network we have built. Playing defense typically means letting network interactions and collaborative demands define you. It often results in people getting unidimensional in work, caught up in politics trying to predict and please influential members of a group and living reactively. Teams that create a supportive context for this network development, and whom offer recommendations and referrals, increase the odds that people will make these important investments in building enterprise networks.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO ...

- 1.) Encourage teammates to be proactive in network development and focus on spheres they should invest in for depth or complementary expertise where career innovation could occur. Help them identify those they don't know and make introductions with a request to explore overlap/complementarity in their work. Then, encourage them to always end meetings by asking: Who else should I be speaking with and can you connect me? A large proportion of the time, these second steps will get them to the true influencers in networks. While only a small number of these interactions might yield fruit, the ones that do are often career defining as people benefit from well-connected peoples' network, influence and legitimacy.
  - 2.) Help team People with influence/po their network on politics, p the influence
- For every strength and opportunity identified, respondents receive very specific recommendations focused on why the practice matters and what actions people can take.

Efficient teams **impose structure** by orienting networks to important objectives and shaping role interdependencies and stakeholder expectations to improve collaborative efficiency.

Use the chart below to explore the degree to which each of the items is a relative strength or opportunity for the team to reduce collaborative overload.



Team results are dynamically linked with the report's recommendations on strengths and opportunities for growth

## REVIEW MY RESULTS

Use the charts below to explore the degree each of the items is a relative strength or opportunity for improvement to reduce collaborative overload.



Team results are organized into three areas that deliver the greatest results: **Impose Structure, Challenge Beliefs and Alter Behaviors.** The example used in this brochure comes from the **Impose Structure** section.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE COLLABORATIVE OVERLOAD TOOLKIT,**  
**PLEASE VISIT: <https://connectedcommons.com/featuredresources>.**