

Collaborative Relationships in the B2B World

By Robert Mortenson, Ph.D., KS&R Vice President and Principal

The phrase "it takes a village" is relevant not only in social and political spheres, but also increasingly in many business markets. Let me demonstrate with an example from the networking industry.

In the past, it was relatively common for large networking product/services providers to offer "end to end solutions" – delivered entirely by that provider, with little involvement from third parties or end customers. Today, providers have typically embraced collaboration. And the collaboration is multi-faceted, involving the provider, their partners, and their customers.

Each plays a key role:

- The provider has the greatest range of experience with their products/services. They understand the roadmap, have the deepest bench for resolving issues, generally have a broad geographic presence, and provide stability.
- The partner is often more specialized in an industry or application and has knowledge of the customer's business. They may be local, faster to respond, and with a better price point than the provider. Most customers have a multi-vendor environment, and partners often provide such broader support.
- Finally, the customer knows their business and its needs/nuances best. And they have ultimate responsibility for the quality, performance and cost of

products/services deployed. This is true whether there is a large in-house technical staff, or that has been outsourced.

Collaboration is the "glue" to effectively bind the system together. While the partner may be the direct customer interface for problem resolution, they require a tight linkage to the provider's knowledge data bases, tools, and multi-tier technical resources to ensure provider expertise can be quickly leveraged. Also, many customers want involvement of their internal resources in problem resolution, desiring knowledge transfer so they can perform more trouble shooting/resolution in-house.

And finally, this "glue" is often accompanied by tight contractual arrangements binding provider to partner, and partner to customer. Service Level Agreements addressing time to response, resolution, down time ... and penalties ... are common. The village may indeed be collaborative, but it still needs laws!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bob has over 25 years of experience in the telecom and information technology industries. He is a Vice President and Principal at KS&R.



His Ph.D. in Mathematics provides him the skills for rigorous analysis. Bob leads a wide range of engagements, including competitive benchmarking, channel strategy creation, customer/market segmentation, and opportunity analysis.