



‘How Do We Collaborate?’ and Other Burning C-Suite Questions *Cisco’s Collaboration Guru Discusses ASAP, the ISO 44001 Business Collaboration Standard, and the Shifting CEO Conversation*

By John W. DeWitt

“I have the best job of all,” exults the effervescent business collaboration champion Ron Ricci, who has the deceptively mundane title of vice president of sales enablement at Cisco. “At Cisco get to spend all my time with customers.” And he means a lot of customers. Over past five years, Ricci and his organization have had in-depth visits and conversations with a remarkable 10,000 unique customers and 100,000 individuals. Ricci says that CEO conversation has shifted dramatically in that time—bringing business collaboration to the forefront as a key enabler of the C-suite’s urgent need for speed and agility.

“How the customer conversation has evolved—there’s been an arc to this story over the last five years, [a shift] that has been accelerating as every day has gone by,” Ricci explains. “Four to five years ago, we were spending a lot of time talking about the disruptors—the Internet of Things, digitization, mobility, security. That conversation advanced two years ago ... as CMOs [chief marketing officers], heads of sales, heads of customer service, all those heads were coming to say, ‘I know why this is important, what can we do about it? Right now, the conversation is not about why addressing digitization is important, or what it is, but ‘how do we do it?’ So we’ve had a real big shift in this conversation that highlights what’s important.”

Ricci has established himself as a prominent thinker on business collaboration and is known for *The Collaboration Imperative: Executive Strategies for Unlocking Your Organization’s True Potential*, which he co-authored with Cisco colleague Carl Wiese in 2011. Ron’s first book, *Momentum: How Companies Become Unstoppable Market Forces*, was published by Harvard Business School Press in November 2002, and was ranked as a “Top 100” Amazon.com book for marketing and business strategy.

Ricci shared some insights from his customer conversations during the February 15, 2018 ASAP Netcast Webinar, “**Is Your CEO Challenging You to Go Faster? Why a Collaboration Standard Can Help.**” Along with Verizon, Cisco is a corporate sponsor of the International Standards Institute’s ISO 44001 standard for business collaboration. Ricci serves on the US technical advisory group (TAG) to the ISO 44001 standards, along with several representatives from ASAP: ASAP President and CEO Michael Leonetti, who chairs the TAG, Norma Watenpaugh, CSAP, principal of Phoenix Consulting Group, who leads the TAG, and Parth Amin, CSAP, principal of Alliance Dynamics, LLC, who is the TAG’s evangelist for the standard.

Editor’s Note: Watenpaugh and Amin will present an in-depth ISO 44001 preconference workshop on March 26 at the 2018 ASAP Global Alliance Summit. The 90-minute preconference



workshop will discuss how ASAP certification and best practices complement and accelerate ISO certification. Watenpaugh and Amin will walk workshop participants through a collaborative maturity model based on the fusion of the ISO Standard and the *ASAP Handbook of Alliance Management: A Practitioner's Guide*. Takeaways include a comprehensive implementation guide that maps the ISO 44001 standard to the *ASAP Handbook of Alliance Management* and other tools that enable ASAP members to benchmark and validate their ability to deliver high-performing collaborations. There is no additional charge to Summit attendees for the workshop.

So what are the questions that CEOs and other top executives now are asking Ricci and his colleagues—and how does this connect to a collaboration standard and the ASAP community? According to Ricci:

“The number one question is ‘how will digitization impact our employee or customer experience?’ How we drive alliances and collaboration is really around that issue,” Ricci says. This is a particularly critical question for customers thanks to “mobile millennials who say, ‘we don’t want to talk to people, we want to push buttons’—that self-service experience. But even in that environment [we must focus on] what elements of human collaboration make that easy.”

The number two question: “How do we create an agile workforce?” Ricci explains: “That’s what CEOs think about when they want their team to move as fast as their business is now moving. Whether working internally or externally, this is where collaboration standard can intersect with all of our worlds.”

And then Ricci delves deeper into why a collaboration standard can help.

“The top barriers to creating agile workforce are precisely the same things we look at in a collaboration standard. When I ask about top barriers, these are the top three answers that I get from talking to CEOs. Number one is, ‘we frequently will have a lack of vocabulary and taxonomy when we talk to each other. That grinds our speed down to slow motion.’ Number two is lack of shared goals and measurement systems in the ways organizations work together. Most of us understand how important measurement is, but what if they use a totally different measurement system from you? Can you imagine how that speed grinds to a halt? Third is lack of a common meeting model and governance process. When you want to call a meeting between you and a set of partners, how many steps does it take to get that meeting called together? On average, between 11 and 15 steps. What that says is we don’t have common models that allow us to work with organizations and people that we’ve never seen and worked with before.”

Ricci puts it like this: “A good way to think about it is that Amazon Web Services is coming into your world in some way” to accelerate the digital transformation of your companies. This



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means “you’re going to work with people you haven’t worked with before.” From the CEO’s point of view, the value is clear. “This is a fantastic opportunity—using the collaboration standard and [ASAP’s] practices and processes within it—to better help our organizations achieve their goals.”

Stay tuned for more ASAP Media coverage of the ISO 44001 business collaboration standard. To learn more and register for the ISO standard preconference workshop at the 2018 ASAP Global Alliance Summit, visit www.asapsummit.org.