

## Press Release

### Empowering the Agile Corporation

*Quick-forming, quick-dissolving business teams are the wave 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, co-founder 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 free-lancers or outside consultants. Perhaps they're a combination of all of the above. Regardless, any corporation that's going to compete in the 21<sup>st</sup> 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 organization work groups do today 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. Often missing is a readily accessible team forum where everyone (managers and team members alike) can stay up-to-speed on the team’s activity and easily communicate with each other on critical interface issues. Online collaboration software has evolved to the point where it is possible to create very powerful work team environments.
- Project Workspaces: Because most QF/QD teams form to work on projects, they often need a project workspace equipped with special tools. These tools often include things such as 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 form 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 deploying 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 each trainee accomplishes during the course of the 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 airfare 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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**Collaboration Architects** designs, constructs and implements online work environments that enable people and organizations to collaborate via the Web. The firm offers a wide variety of services, including evaluation processes, implementation plans, customized virtual workspaces, training workshops, change management consulting and hosting.

Co-founders Bill Bruck and John Darling have more than 45 years of combined experience in information technology, psychology and organization development. Their backgrounds are key to their approach — they focus on the “human” side of online collaboration and use their knowledge to create technology-based solutions that are task-oriented and geared to the realities of each client’s corporate culture and capacity to embrace change.

To learn more, visit [www.collaborationarchitects.com](http://www.collaborationarchitects.com).\*\*

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