

The 90-9-1 Collaboration Paradox: Organisations Should Aim to Reverse It

Through various studies and reports, given the chance where online participation is possible, 90% of the users will simply observe and lurk (remember, [Learning is Lurking](#)), 9% will occasionally contribute, edit, etc. whereas 1% of users can be denoted as those that contribute most of the content itself. (aka. The Power Collaboration Users)

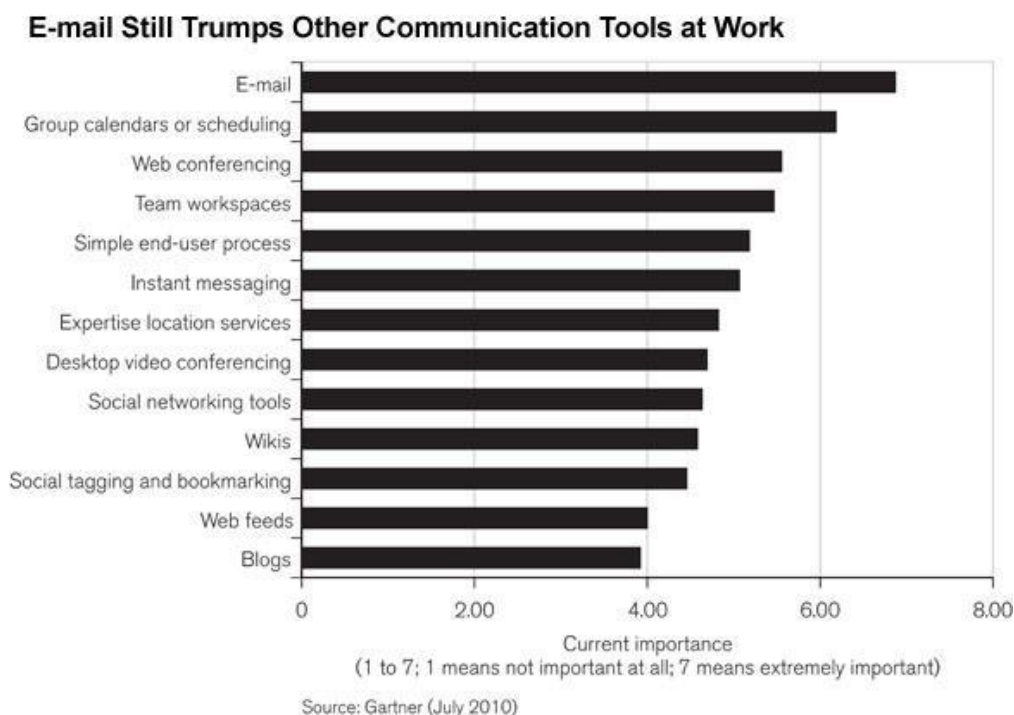
Thus, we pay homage to the 90-9-1 phenomenon or as Nielsen describes, "[participation inequality](#)".

It is also known as the [1% rule](#).

Randstad recently published a [Global Workmonitor study](#) suggesting Canada, USA, France and the UK aren't utilizing the power and capability of social media in the workforce to assist their actual work output, whereas, China and India are.

- Sixty-seven per cent of Canadian employees only use social media to stay in touch with family, friends and acquaintances, as opposed to the 27 per cent of employees who use social media to profile themselves as an employee.
- The results are vastly different in India (78 per cent) and China (63 per cent), where employees use social media solely to present themselves professionally.
- 68 per cent of workers surveyed in India, and 65 per cent of those in China, say they use social media to get customer information, while only 25 per cent do so in Canada, and similarly approximately 30 percent in the United States, UK and France.

Gartner published some worldwide summative data in 2010 that outlined the perceived importance of traditional communication technologies and 2.0 collaboration technologies by users:



Naturally, these data points got me thinking. Specifically, it got me thinking about the 90-9-1 phenomenon.

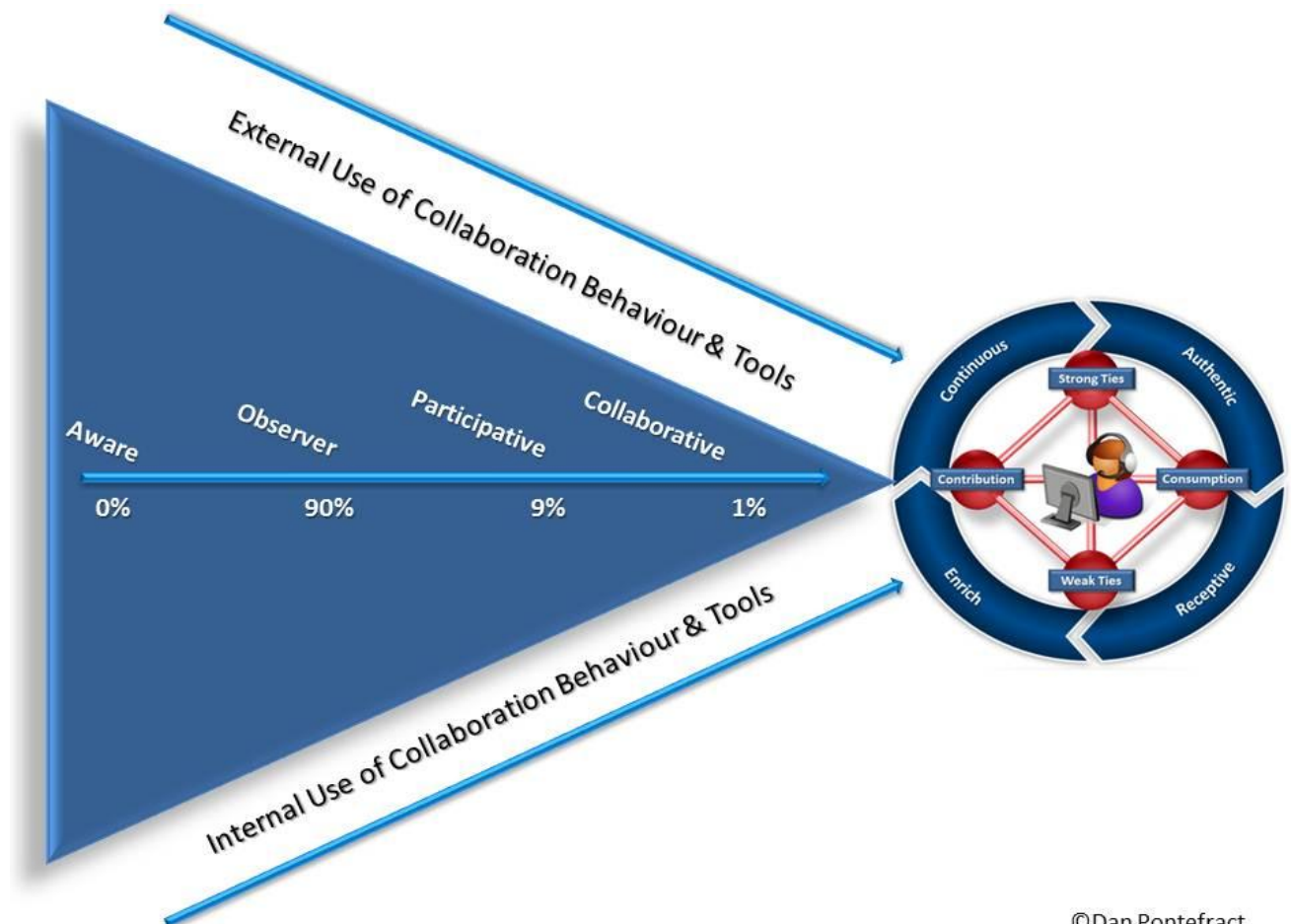
To get to the true state of the Collaboration Cycle, where users both contribute and consume, through strong and weak ties, employing the model in a continuous, authentic, receptive and enriching fashion, we have to ask our various users two questions:

1. Where are you right now in the 0-90-9-1 continuum?
2. How can we help you shift to become more collaborative?

A-ha! (not the band)

You've no doubt (not the band) noticed the number 0 added to the 90-9-1 continuum.

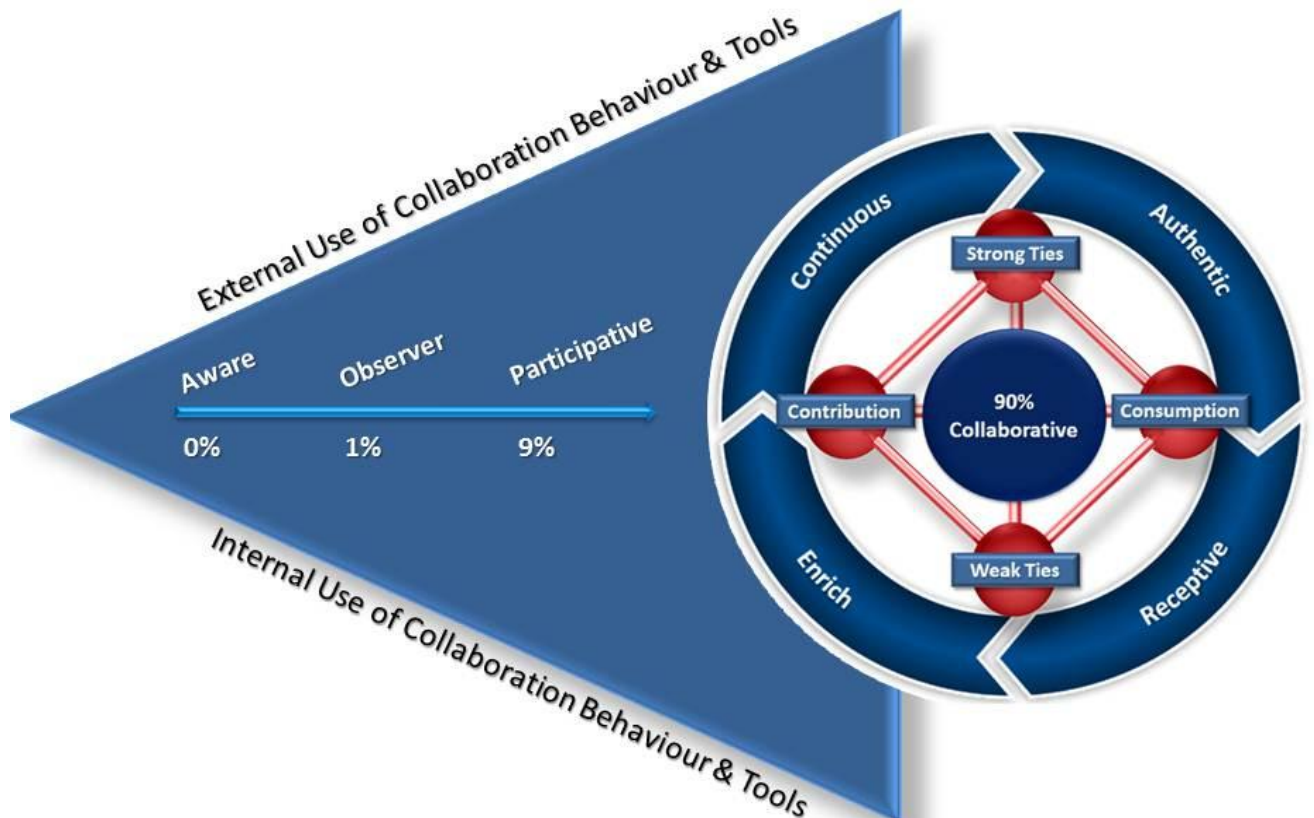
That's because it's my belief we have forgotten to qualify a set of users who, quite frankly, aren't even observing/lurking. They are the individuals who, at a 0% collaboration level, are simply 'aware' of the 2.0 tools (Twitter, Discussion Forums, Openness, etc.) and perhaps the behaviours of being more collaborative, but aren't yet even observing/lurking, let alone passively contributing or collaborating.



By viewing the Gartner and Randstad data, it's evident that we may be putting more emphasis on collaboration behaviour and tools in our personal lives, than in our work lives, but either way, the entire working population is not on the collaboration bus to start with. (aside from China and India) That is, many are just simply *aware* you might be able to use

these techniques in the work world but they aren't in fact utilizing them for business productivity results.

Our quest in the corporate world, therefore, is to help employees recognize that for the sake of their personal and career growth, along with the growth of business results for the organization, the model needs to be flipped around such that 90% are actively collaborating, 9% are somewhat collaborating and 1% do nothing.



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The steps to think about that help flip the model are as follows:

- Qualify
 - Where do employees sit in the 0-90-9-1 continuum?
 - Where are you? Aware, Observer, Participative or Collaborative?
 - Once qualified, you can address change management steps.
- Educate
 - Provide the most appropriate education & change management opportunities for each 0-90-9-1 stage.
 - Shifting people from Aware to Collaborative is the ultimate goal
 - Engage with them – utilize collaboration methods & behaviours to help the shift

- Reinforce
 - In all aspects of your business, reinforce Collaboration as an arc to being more productive
 - Build the transition from Aware through to Collaborative in as many practices and systems as you can found throughout your organization (IT, HR, Finance, Marketing and other organizational pillars)
- Re-Qualify (and measure)
 - On a quarterly basis, qualify where your users are in the continuum
 - Has the individual made a shift (behaviour and tools) and has the team, business unit, org, etc.
 - This can help paint the picture, and assist in the transformation & change management planning

It's a shame that we humans (at least in Canada, USA, France and the UK) view the collaborative nature of Web 2.0 (ie. the external use of social media) as more fruitful than within our corporations and organizations and that the use of such tools are deemed not as important as traditional communication or collaboration means. It's even scarier to see that India and China don't view things this way; even more reason to suggest that their more collaborative ways are pushing their economic growth through 2050. (see [BRICs and Beyond](#): Goldman Sachs Global Economics Group, 2007)

Is there a link?

I'd like to suggest there is.

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