Collaboration, Compromise, AND Cows

By Terri Hall

This issue's theme of "Sticking together" reminds me of the collaboration and compromise that is needed in research administration and system support. And that reminds me of this story: A wealthy man with seventeen cows died leaving a will that stipulated the cows are to be split among his sons in this manner: the eldest son was to receive one-half of the cows, the middle son was to receive one-third of the cows and the youngest son would get one-ninth of the cows. Although excited about their inheritance, the sons could not think of an easy way to split up the seventeen cows and felt their father had played a cruel trick on them. They began whining all over town. A woman who owned only one cow offered to help the sons by adding her cow to the mix. With the total number of cows now at eighteen, the eldest son received his half or nine cows. The middle son was given his six cows as one-third of the total, and the youngest received his one-ninth inheritance of two cows. There was also one cow remaining. The woman took back her original investment, told the sons to stop whining, and they all lived happily ever after.

How often in research administration do we rescue a frustrating situation by utilizing a bit of compromise and collaboration? We collaborate with people in our areas or on the same campus, and in different cities, states and countries. Proposals and awards can involve many documents and versions of those documents. Large proposals can involve a team of investigators and a team of administrators who must stay informed as they assist the researchers. Systems have quirks that can be resolved more easily by seeing the issue rather than reading a description. We use email to stay in touch, and when a file we need to share is too large for email, we turn to a system to share files. In addition, we share tasks and schedule meetings or events. We've grown comfortable jumping from system to system. And the reality is we are juggling several projects at a time.

When we need to find a specific piece of information, that we recall working with a couple of months ago, it can be a challenge to remember which program has it.

Below is a summary of a dozen free tools that may help you get things into one place. Some focus on project management, while others are geared more toward sharing ideas and a couple try to do it all. These tools work on both PC's and Mac's and most are also compatible with iPhones, Android, iPads and Windows 8 Tablets. Best of all they are free! And I don't mean just a free trial. Some of them also offer extra features for a monthly fee but the basics are available at no cost. A few minutes of your time is needed to set things up, and you're on your way. Most of these programs have a 1-2 minute demo or tour that quickly shows you the features to help you determine whether it fits your goal.

Please note that I did not use a standard list to compare these tools and so if a feature is mentioned in one listing but not in another does not mean the other does not also include the feature. It was merely a matter of the feature impressing me at the time of my review. I have no connection to any of them – so no conflict of interest here. These are just tools I've investigated and think they may be useful to you. Ready to get started? Here we go:

Project Management

SamePage http://samepage.io allows teams of unlimited users up to 10GB for project management and collaboration. Create your own dashboard for projects. Add a task list, a calendar, files and photos, a comment section, etc. Allow new members to review history and quickly get acclimated. All information is on one
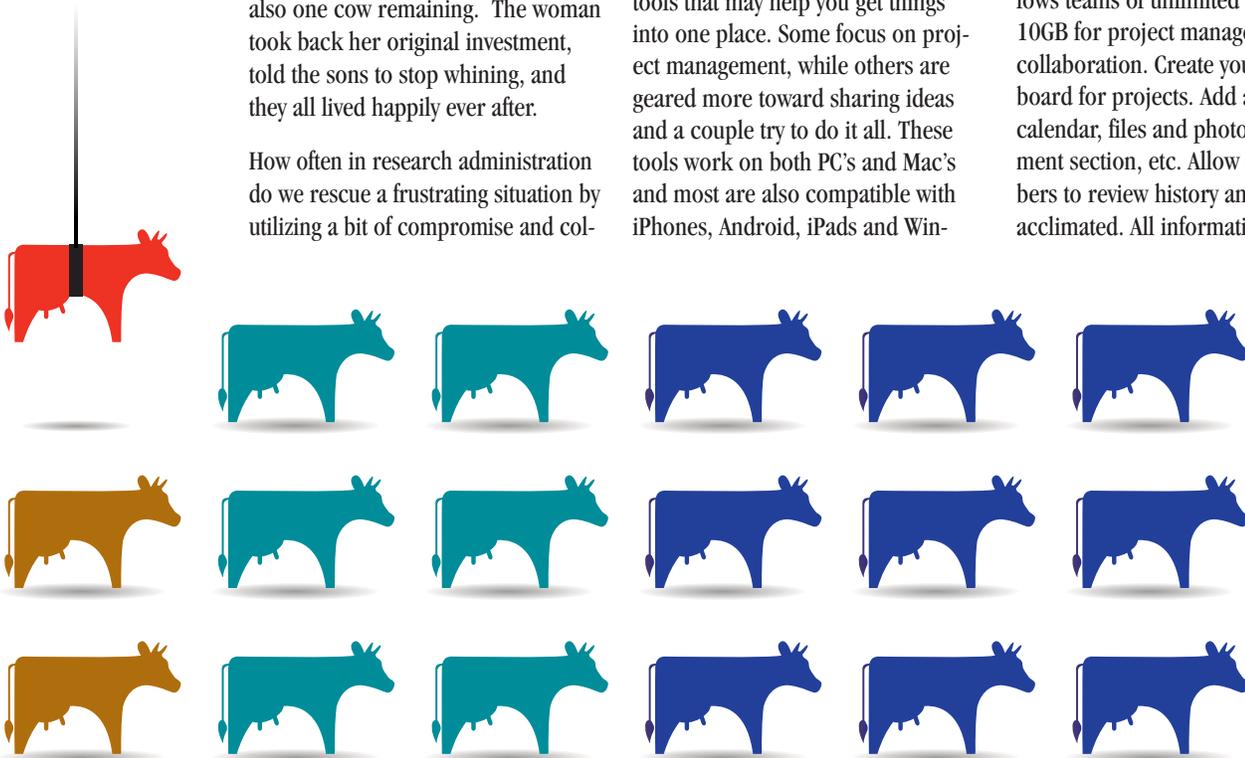
page and you may create additional pages for more detail.

Teambox teambox.com assists in planning and coordinating tasks for up to five users. It has an Outlook email plugin. A calendar shows Gantt chart view for milestones and workloads. You can share documents. Integrates with Dropbox, Box, and Google Drive. Communicate with people in and outside your organization in real time. Configure your email address (or your support team's email address) so it forwards email to Teambox and saves you the time of re-entering an issue or task into Teambox. It can export tasks to CSV or XLSX file as well.

Trello trello.com is another task or project management tool. If you are familiar with the Kanban method, this works well as an electronic version of that. Set up various columns representing the workflow stages (e.g., To Do, Doing, Done) and move cards (representing tasks) through a workflow. Assign the tasks and easily move them from one column to another. Everyone on the team sees at a glance who's working on what and in what stage or status it is.

Producteev producteev.com helps with project or task coordination and meeting deadlines. Gives team visibility to everyone's tasks and their status. Get all of your to-do's out of your head with access anywhere, anytime. Share files. No limit on users.

Wiggio wiggio.com can send mass text messages and voicemails to teammates for big news or last minute changes. Shared calendar, file storage, conference calls and online meetings. Poll the group to confirm members' availability

for a meeting, vote on next actions, or decide on favorite locations to meet.

Siasto siasto.com for collaborations involving teams of up to three members for up to 10 projects and 1 GB of space. Connect with your team, know the status of different tasks and view what everybody else is doing. A shared calendar exports to Google Calendar. Share documents.

Docs9 docs9.com shares any type of document (Word, Excel, pdf, PowerPoint, etc.). Invite others to view files and provide feedback. No configuration. If you want to share documents from another tool such as Visio or Microsoft Project, your collaborators need not have these systems to view it in Docs9.

LiveMinutes liveminutes.com has partnered with Evernote to offer videoconferencing and collaboration. Allows up to 5 workspaces. Use videoconferencing to share progress or troubleshoot obstacles. Everyone is notified when a workspace changes so you are not wasting time emailing everyone. Edit notes in real-time and save everything to Evernote for future reference.

System Support

Freshdesk freshdesk.com helps up to three support staff to provide helpdesk support for the systems you manage, and to track system bugs and questions. Can set up so that you can continue to use your regular support email address for users to send in issues or questions, and the system then forwards the message to another email that automatically enters the item into Freshdesk. You can also download the entries as a csv file if you wish to show the activity in a graph or analyze it in other ways.

Jam jam4.sapjam.com allows everyone in your organization "to communicate and collaborate privately and securely." Record your screen for training videos and download an mp4 version to embed on your website or to send to NCURA for YouTube Tuesdays. When you sign up it informs you that you are the nth person from your organization to join. Create groups, upload documents and photos, create a wiki page or blog postings. Limit of 10MB per user. Although listed under System Support, this tool can also be used for project management.

Brainstorming

groupZap groupzap.com is an online whiteboard to brainstorm ideas or to work an idea during a conference call. There's no registration. Enter your email to get a web link, then share it with your collaborators and everyone can work on the same screen. Share documents in real-time. Session is recorded which enables you to review how a particular idea came to be. The whiteboard stays active for 7 days so the group can add ideas after your call and you can create a PDF to send to the team as a record of the meeting for any follow-up action items.

Scribblar scribbler.com is another online whiteboard but with real-time audio capabilities and text chat as well. The free version has a limit of 5-pages for documents, and 3MB of space. Share screenshots and work through a system issue, or do some training. You are not limited to one screen, however, you can add various screens (pages) during a session. Take a snapshot of the screen to save it to review several variations on a theme.

I hope you test some of these tools and find one or two that will ease your daily burden. If you do, I'd love to hear about it. Let me know how you saved the day whether it was splitting up cows, budgets or solving a system issue. And here's to living happily ever after (with no more whining). **N**

OMB Sets 2017 as Deadline to Move to Dynamic Cybersecurity

I asked our NCURA IT Experts if this impact administering sponsored projects?

Ron Splittgerber from Colorado State University shared with me that this OMB directive extends FISMA compliance that has been in place since 2002, and moves the focus to Homeland Security. Previously NIST and GSA were largely responsible. The focus on what they term Information Security Continuous Monitoring (ISCM) – again isn't new, only that the entire concept has been moved under DHS.

The outcome for Ron's shop @ CSU has been in a number of opportunities to provide FISMA compliant services for research under USDA funding. Other than that, in Ron's opinion it focuses more on procurement of IT goods & services, especially as those resources focus on the cloud. Ron see's little impact on day-to-day operations with the research agencies beyond the efforts we've seen in securing Grants.gov, NIH Commons and Research.gov

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