Why are there 6 Zones of Collaboration?

In the beginning…
In 2016 a research project sponsored by the Association for Project Managers (APM) and Assentire Ltd was completed exploring Group Dynamics.

Moving on
From 2019 and 2024 APMG International (APMG) Partner with Assentire to deliver the new Accelerating Collaboration Everywhere® Certification. Assentire has developed a unique approach to understanding, improving and strengthening the bonds within dynamic professional groups through the Accelerating Collaboration Everywhere® suite.

How to benchmark a group or team
It soon became apparent that people wanted the ability to benchmark themselves against others. The getCollaborating tools explicitly explore the relationship between the Learning Dynamic (an essential aspect of Group Dynamics) and the Environment Dynamic (the context the group is working within). As we explored the research from more than 400 participants, it became clear that those that were able to operate and 'be' agile scored much higher than those that did not.

The 6 Zones of Collaboration
We explored the data in response to the need to create a meaningful comparison. By harnessing statistical analyse, we calculated the average scores. We then moved out in bands of 1 standard deviation at a time. We plotted each of the 400 participants' results on a scatter chart, showing the mid-point (the boundary of Zone 3 & 4 and then plus and minus 3 standard deviations, creating the 6 Zones of Collaboration.

The evidence from the field
Over time, it became clear that the 6 Zones (bands calculated using standard deviation) provided a way to index one's results. The higher the zone number, the greater the probability of being able to 'be' agile. We know from the work of the Agile Business Consortium that Group Dynamics is an essential aspect of interacting effectively with each other. We need to be aware of this as this directly impacts a group's ability to Collaborate effectively.

Readiness to Collaborate Index
The evidence led us to the final phase in defining what it takes to work together well. We need to be able to explore the unique perspective each group member will have of the same group! Once we realise, we all 'see' the same information differently, we can benefit from collectively sharing the multiple views. By exploring these views on the scatter chart, together we develop the ability to analyse and enter into deeper dialogue with each other. Through deeper dialogue comes deeper understating.

The outcome
We are delivering on Individuals and interactions over processes and tools.

Do you want to deliver on 'Individuals and interactions over processes and tools?

What do the
6 Zones look like?
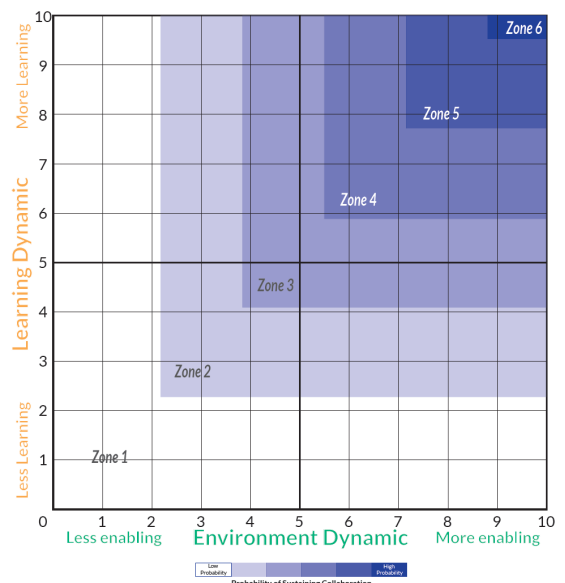
Characteristics of the 6 Zones

Zone	High level description
1	This organisation probably needs help. It's likely not to know how to collaborate, and almost certainly unable to develop Business Agility.
2	This organisation can probably collaborate, able to show signs of Business Agility when it is prompted or directed how to do so.
3	This organisation uses several strategies to collaborate showing early signs of Business Agility, but it may not be sure when and/or why to use these strategies.
4	This organisation uses several strategies to collaborate, and it knows when and why to use them, delivering Business Agility as required.
5	As per Zone 4 plus it is able to teach others how to collaborate, it can act as a role model for others and continually seeks feedback to improve.
6	As per Zone 5 plus it has mastered both the Environment and Learning Dynamics and is probably able to adapt as demanded by the future.

Readiness to Collaborate Index

The 'Readiness to Collaborate Index' is represented by a single dot on the chart for one person's perception of the group. Multiple dots (from the same group) show how individual members of the group perceive differently, the behaviors within and around the group.

Impact assessment

Knowing how you and others 'see' the Group Dynamics, has the potential to bring into your awareness the things that you and others may need to do differently if you wish to have sustained agile practices.

Benchmark a group against
The 6 Zones of Collaboration

Characteristics of the 6 Zones

Zone	High level description
1	**-2 STDV (or more below the average).** This suggests the overall effectiveness of the group and the environment (in which it operates) is likely to be sub-optimised. It is common to see higher levels of churn, stress, potential dysfunctional behaviour and low productivity. Command & control leadership is likely to prevail combined with little psychological safety.
2	**-2 STDV to -1 STDV (below the average).** This suggest the group performance is adequate but has considerable scope for enhancing collaboration within the group and creating better conditions (or culture) to improve productivity and performance. There may be pockets of strong collaboration and/or agility, but overall people are not working to their full potential and there may well be some wellbeing issues at play.
3	**-1 STDV to Average.** This suggests people are likely to work well together, and the environment is generally supportive. There is scope for further improvement in both areas. People begin to 'feel safe' to explore new ideas and are motivated to experiment, enabling more adaptability and agility in the group and the organisation.
4	**Average to +1 STDV.** Performance is likely to be strong and there is a willingness across many groups across the organisation to continually explore and try new approaches to continually enhance collaborative behaviours and support change. Morale and motivation are likely to be good with people enjoying their work.
5	**+1 STDV to +2 STDV (above the average).** The team is likely to be highly effective and collaborative, the environment is very supportive. There is some scope to further strengthen the collaborative group and provide greater support from the wider organisation, but this is a very desirable, rewarding and sustainable zone for individuals and business agility overall.
6	**+2 STDV (or more above the average).** The team is likely to be highly effective and collaborative, the environment is fully supportive. People throughout the organisation are highly motivated and able to self-organise into adaptable and innovative groups. Sustaining this position long term would be challenging, but achievable for selected teams or projects.

The Environment and Learning Dynamic, together form the zones based on STDV boundaries.

Readiness to Collaborate Index

The scatter chart shown details of individual perceptions from 417 participants.

How do you stand against the rest?

Groups and Teams operating in different zones are at different levels of readiness to effectively utilise Agile Business Practices. The results are driven by the Group and Environment Dynamic.

Zone 5 and above can 'be' agile.
Zone 4 are can 'do' agile.
Zone 3 and below can 'learn' agile
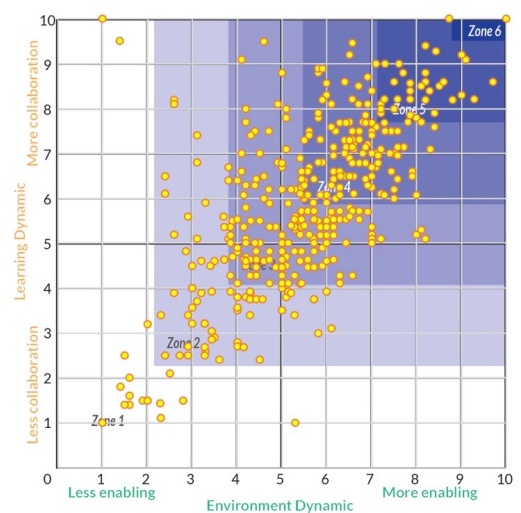
How can I use the
6 Zones of Collaboration

getCollaborating tools used to identify which Zone your group or team is operating within are available in several formats.

Step 1.
Try out the getCollaborating online tool. The getCollaborating tool is a simple free tool that takes less than 15 minutes to complete and shows you where your team sits for each of the six collaboration zones. We can then recommend a set of actions that you may take to help improve collaboration within your organisation.
https://www.agilebusiness.org/page/business-agility-toolkit

Step 2.
Train yourself online using the free eLearning portal. The training uses the Boardgame 'getCollaborating'. Even if you do not want to use the board game, you will learn about the underpinning ideas used on the getCollaborating online tool and board game. At a minimum, you will start to appreciate some of the elements to pay attention to if Group Dynamics is something you care about. https://assentire.net/home

Step 3.
If you enjoyed the training, why not become a certified facilitator? Strengthen your facilitator skills, knowledge and understanding of collaboration and group dynamics through a gamification approach to develop more collaborative, agile and high-performing groups or teams working in effective enabling environments.