



Open the email and click on any link below and jump directly to the section for faster browsing

[Introducing the Smarter Collaboration Partner Academy](#)

[Certified Partner Hub](#)

[Smarter Collaboration Tools in Action: Upcoming Webinars](#)

[10 Ways Your Partner Compensation System Undermines Collaboration, And How to Fix Them](#)

[Smarter Collaboration in Action](#)

[Spotlight Story](#)

[Shortlisted Podcast: Sector Strategy & Collaboration in Professional Services](#)

[Stronger Together: Interview with Dr. Heidi K. Gardner](#)

[The Connection Hub](#)

[Year-End Appreciation](#)

[Book Time with Heidi and Ivan](#)

Smarter Collaboration isn't just an idea, it's a movement. This month, we're equipping leaders, coaches and teams with research-backed tools, fresh insights and global strategies to turn collaboration into your competitive edge.

Introducing the Smarter Collaboration Partner Academy!

NEW for 2026



**Introducing the
Smarter
Collaboration
Partner
Academy!**

We're kicking off 2026 with something big — our **first-ever Smarter Collaboration Partner Academy!** If you're a coach, consultant, trainer, or in-house leader looking to expand your toolkit, this brand-new certification program gives you everything you need to bring Smarter Collaboration into your work with confidence.

Across three days, you'll gain access to:

- A **one-year license** to administer Smarter Collaboration tools
- A **12-hour virtual training course** (with ICF credits)
- Partner facilitation kits, sample reports, and online resources
- Partner-only webinars, community events, and live support

Whether you work independently or inside an organization, certification equips you to run impactful Smarter Collaboration programs and join a growing community of practitioners.

Questions?

If you want to learn more about becoming a Certified Partner or are already certified (*ask about our special renewal rate for returning partners*) **reach out to our team at clientsuccess@smartercollaboration.com**

When: Feb. 18-20, 2026

Time: 10 a.m. - 2 p.m. EST

Where: Virtual, Zoom

[Apply to the Academy Now!](#)

The Certified Partner Hub

This monthly section is designed exclusively for our certified partners to help you get even more value from the tools. Think of it as your monthly snapshot of what's working across the partner community and what's coming next.

CERTIFIED PARTNER EVENTS

Upcoming Smarter CoLab Session:

What: *Using Smarter Collaboration Tools to Improve Team Collaboration and Performance*

Date: Jan. 14, 2026

Time: 11 a.m. to noon EDT

Where: Virtual (Zoom)

[Register Now](#)

Monthly Partner Use Case: C-Suite Retreat

Ever get a request for an off-site team-building program and wonder how to design an experience that's truly impactful—and memorable?

One of our clients used the Smarter Collaboration Profile and Team Report to spark a meaningful conversation about collaboration among their C-suite leaders during an annual executive retreat. A certified partner facilitated a half-day session, guiding the group through a debrief that surfaced real obstacles to high-performing teamwork—trust, accountability, delegation, communication, and conflict.

Using their individual Profile Reports, leaders gained insight into their personal collaboration preferences. The Team Report then helped the group examine how those collective dynamics would affect several major change initiatives they were preparing to launch.

If you're looking for an engaging, research-based approach to improving team communication and collaboration, consider a Smarter Collaboration workshop powered by the Profile and Team Report.

For more information, contact clientsuccess@smartercollaboration.com

Smarter Collaboration Tools in Action

Smarter Collaboration Tools in Action Webinar

Join us for a one-hour conversation to discover the suite of Smarter Collaboration tools. Learn how individuals and teams use them to work better together—driving engagement, client satisfaction, and measurable business results. We'll cover the Profile, Team Profile, 360, Networks, Certified Partner training, and what's coming next from R&D.

Upcoming Webinar Sessions:

What: Smarter Collaboration Profile and Team Report

Date: Jan. 15, 2026

Time: 11 a.m. EST

Where: Virtual (Zoom)

[Register Now!](#)

What: Smarter Collaboration 360 and PSF 360

Date: Feb. 12, 2026

Time: 11 a.m. EST

Where: Virtual (Zoom)

[Register Now!](#)

What: SmarterNetworks™

Date: March 12, 2026

Time: 11 a.m. EST

Where: Virtual (Zoom)

[Register Now!](#)

Research Spotlight

SmarterReward: The Top 10 Ways Your Partner Compensation System Undermines Collaboration and How to Fix Them

Partner compensation is one of the biggest — and least talked about — barriers to effective collaboration.

In our new white paper, "The Top 10 Ways Your Partner Compensation System Undermines Collaboration (and How to Fix Them)", we unpack why even firms that say collaboration is a priority often reward behaviors that work against it.

Drawing on decades of research and real-world experience, the paper outlines practical ways to realign incentives, governance, and partner development so collaboration actually drives performance.

It also introduces SmarterReward™, the first diagnostic tool designed to reveal

how partner compensation enables or inhibits collaboration — and where to focus change for the greatest impact.

[Download The Full White Paper Here](#)

SMARTER COLLABORATION IN ACTION



Dr. Heidi K. Gardner and Ivan Matviak speaking at the Global Minds inauguration event for AmCham Brasil.



Hi-Po leaders get a taste of collaboration under pressure; racing to complete the puzzle task that demands unexpected innovation.

Spotlight Stories

What Leaders Are Really Facing And How Our Brains Sometimes Work Against Smarter Collaboration

From Zurich to New York, Sydney to Brazil, in corporations and professional service firms, leaders keep asking us the same question as we traveled the globe over the last few months:

"How do you sustain growth and momentum when people—even the leaders—are paralyzed by uncertainty?"

Leaders confided in us about mounting volatility. Economic instability, rapidly shifting geopolitical dynamics, new tariff structures, and the accelerating pace of AI innovation are creating a leadership environment where the ground moves faster than decisions can be made.

Astute leaders recognize the issue: in times of uncertainty, teams tend to freeze. Not through intentional inaction, but through a slow accumulation of doubt, risk aversion, and siloed information.

The deepest insight from leaders was this: The leaders who kept moving did something different. They not only brought together people representing different professional backgrounds, regions, seniority levels, and thinking styles, but they also **worked tirelessly to create the context where those differences thrive**. This diversity of lenses helped teams challenge assumptions, see blind spots and create a clearer shared picture of what needed to happen next.

Unfortunately for all of us, these crucial actions can be hampered by the way human brains tend to operate under stress. Under pressure, similarity matters more than diversity. Psychologists call this “homophily” and it happens for several reasons:

1. **Cognitive Load and Shortcuts.** When we’re stressed, the brain seeks efficiency. Similarity acts as a heuristic—a mental shortcut—because people who share our background, values, or experiences are perceived as more predictable and less risky. This reduces the cognitive effort needed to evaluate trustworthiness.
2. **Threat Response and Safety Signals.** Under pressure, the amygdala (the brain’s threat detection center) becomes more active. Similarity signals “ingroup” membership, which the brain interprets as safer. This dampens perceived threat and activates affiliative behaviors
3. **Oxytocin and Social Bonding.** Stress can trigger oxytocin release, which promotes bonding—but primarily with those we perceive as part of our ingroup. This neurochemical bias strengthens trust toward similar individuals.

The irony? High-VUCA environments are precisely when Smarter Collaboration can become an antidote to paralysis . . . but that’s when people default to familiarity and similarity.

Leaders must be bold champions of diverse perspectives to combat this tendency. They must act as role models of openness and curiosity, and

promote psychological safety up and down the hierarchy. Unlocking growth and driving forward momentum in the face of uncertainty demands leaders who embrace Smarter Collaboration.

Dr. Gardner will speak on this topic at the World Economic Forum in Davos in January 2026. If you plan to attend WEF, please let us know!

- NEW EPISODE -

SHORTLISTED Podcast

HEIDI GARDNER
DISTINGUISHED HARVARD FELLOW

DAVID HARVEY
PRINCIPAL & FOUNDER

SMARTER COLLABORATION

HARVEY GLOBAL

EP. #5

AVAILABLE ON
ITUNES/ANDROID
NOV. 24

episode now five

The graphic features a central vintage microphone, navigation icons (back, play, forward), and a smartphone frame containing the speakers' photos and logos. The background is a gradient of blue and grey.

The *Shortlisted* episode featuring Heidi continues to receive positive feedback from the community. Make sure to listen!

[Listen Here!](#)

STRONGER TOGETHER



Coach for strong teams

Dr. Heidi K. Gardner is an internationally renowned expert and consultant on teamwork in complex organizations. She teaches at Harvard Law School and is co-founder of the Gardner & Co. Institute. In her books "Smart Collaboration" and "Smarter Collaboration" she explains how organizations can build powerful teams by fostering targeted structures, trust, and a strong leadership culture.

Powerful ideas arise through collaboration. Harvard professor Heidi K. Gardner demonstrates how interdisciplinary teams unlock their full potential and emphasizes the importance of managers having the courage to dismantle silos.

As a researcher and author, you probably spend much of your time working independently. Why do you remain interested in effective teamwork in complex organizations?

I developed this interest during my time as a consultant at McKinsey, where there were teams with diverse backgrounds. The members contributed experience from fields as wide-ranging as physics, the military, and music, and often brought together the finest aspects of these viewpoints to produce genuinely innovative outcomes. However, this was not always the case, which led me to question the reasons behind this phenomenon. What distinguishes teams that achieve exceptional outcomes from those that are merely solid performers? I left McKinsey to pursue my Ph.D. on this very topic. Now, after almost 20 years at Harvard University, I continue to research and write about this subject.

So the ability of collaboration to unleash productive energy depends not only on the people involved but also on the structures in place?

Absolutely. By "smart collaboration," I mean a way of working together that is intentionally structured to build mutual trust and enhance the team's capacity to learn, ultimately driving optimal results. The management culture, along with motivating incentives such as those found in the compensation system, plays a key role in fostering an environment conducive to high-performance teamwork.

When is it truly important to use interdisciplinary teams?

Such teams are unnecessary for routine and well-established processes - and may even get in the way. Teams with diverse perspectives leverage their strengths when it comes to creating something new. You also need to consider

In a recent conversation with TÜV SÜD, we reflected on a pattern we've seen repeatedly in our research and work with organizations around the world: collaboration is one of the most powerful drivers of performance — and one of the most misunderstood.

The highest-performing organizations don't collaborate *more*. They collaborate **better**. Smart collaboration brings the right expertise together at the right moments, with clear purpose, trust, and incentives aligned to shared success.

We also see a consistent leadership challenge. Complex, novel problems require interdisciplinary teamwork — but when collaboration isn't deliberately designed, it leads to overload, burnout, and diminishing returns. The difference lies in how work is structured: decision rights, meeting design, and performance systems that reward collective outcomes, not just individual wins.

Our takeaway is simple: collaboration doesn't fail because people resist it. It fails because leaders don't design for it. When they do, organizations move faster, break down silos, and unlock the full value of their expertise.

[Download the Full Interview](#)

The Connection Hub

Voices from our network, insights in motion

Last month we asked:

When your team faced pressure or uncertainty this year, what helped you collaborate more effectively instead of retreating into silos?

One response captured the heart of Smarter Collaboration:

"When people feel safe to challenge assumptions, admit uncertainty, or ask for help. Many high-performing professional services firms still have real work to do before they can honestly say that about their cultures."

This insight reflects what our research shows again and again: psychological safety isn't "soft", it's the backbone of effective teaming, especially under pressure. As we head into a new year, it's a powerful reminder that sustainable performance comes from environments where people can speak up, push back, and rely on one another.

This month's *Connection Hub* question:

If you had to commit to *one* collaboration behavior for 2026—just one—what would you choose, and why that one?

Share your thoughts with us on LinkedIn, we may feature your insights in next month's "Connection Hub."

Join the LinkedIn Conversation



Every December, it's a cycle of the same resolutions: be more productive, be more organized, be more efficient. But the leaders who truly transform their work don't start with productivity. They start with people.

Looking back on 2025, the organizations that made the biggest strides did one thing differently: they doubled down on the human glue—trust, transparency, and the courage to collaborate across silos.

So as we head into 2026, here's a resolution worth making:

- Prioritize the relationships that unlock your best thinking.
- Invest in the partnerships that elevate your impact.
- Collaborate with intention—not just when it's convenient.

Because tools matter. Strategy matters. AI certainly matters. But none of it works without the people who choose to work with each other, not around each other.

Here's to a year of smarter, braver, more human collaboration. Onward.

Book Time with Heidi and Ivan: Limited Availability!

Ready to unlock your organization's full collaboration potential? Don't miss the chance to work directly with Dr. Heidi K. Gardner and Ivan Matviak, globally recognized experts in Smarter Collaboration.

Book a private executive workshop, client roundtable or leadership strategy session designed for:

- Aligning teams faster and eliminating cross-silo friction
- Equipping leaders with research-backed collaboration tools
- Driving measurable performance across functions

Upcoming Availability:

- London: Jan. 6-9
- Davos (World Economic Forum): Jan. 18-21
- New York City: Jan. 22-23
- Buenos Aires: Feb. 11-27
- Punta del Esta (IBA): March 20-24

Spots are limited and fill quickly. Secure your preferred date today.

[Reserve Your Session Now](#)

Take Action Today. Lead the Future of Work.

Smarter Collaboration is reshaping how leaders innovate, scale and succeed. Be part of the movement.

Share your insights with a global network of leaders driving change

[Join the LinkedIn Conversation](#)

Secure your private workshop or executive session before schedules fill up.

[Book Heidi and Ivan](#)

Stay in touch with us as we roll out new tools and events

[Notify Me of New Events!](#)

Stay Connected, Don't Miss What's Next

-  Explore the Smarter Collaboration website
-  Visit Gardner & Co.
-  Access real-time insights and event highlights
-  Watch thought-leadership talks and client case studies

 Share this newsletter

Give Feedback

What else can we do together? Please send your thoughts to

ideas@gardnerandco.co.

This email was sent to <<Email Address>>

[why did I get this?](#) [unsubscribe from this list](#) [update subscription preferences](#)
Smarter Collaboration · 1563 Massachusetts Avenue · Cambridge, MA 02138 · USA