

Smart Collaboration Puts Starts Ups on the Path to Success— and Pays Off for Investors (a mini-case study)

“If we had the Smart Collaboration lessons even earlier, our evolution would have been much faster. We could have avoided many hours spent on learning how to work with one another and instead focused on talking to our customers and building the product.”
(co-founder, Klarity)

Funded by Y Combinator, Klarity is a ~3-year-old startup developing AI powered contract review software. Born out of an MIT classroom, headquartered in San Francisco, operating with colleagues across the US and India, the 12-person strong team has developed an intelligent system that lifts highly repetitive work off of humans and completes it with higher precision. The early-stage business was, like many SaaS startups, constantly challenged by growth pains resulting in delays, subpar work quality and internal tension:

- **Operational effectiveness.** *“Many of the operational glitches go back to the lack of structure, common language, understanding each other. Unearthing, structuring, and documenting the interdependence within the organizations and identifying what expertise exists where, and how they can be activated and brought in at the right time is the only way to prevent those glitches.”*
- **Team cohesion.** *“Every startup spends time searching for the product-market fit before scaling up. We spent 3 years testing it out! It was hard and stressful for everybody, mainly because of the lack of clear direction and team cohesiveness.”*
- **Skillful leadership.** *“Hit hard with complex leadership challenges, less experienced founders/executives often end up hiring management coaches. But that is a reactive measure after missed opportunities and lost time and resources.”*

The highly driven, entrepreneurial Klarity team recognized the need to take a deep breath and examine the root causes of their organizational challenges.

The founders were guided by the 4-week **Smart Collaboration Accelerator** program: a combination of individual and group assessments, group workshops and one-on-one coaching sessions that helped the organization better understand their individual and collective

strengths, barriers hindering effective collaboration, and tangible ways to collaborate more effectively to drive their business goals.

Smart Collaboration became the currency of their interactions with compelling results. After the program:

- **87%** of employees report making intentional choices to collaborate more effectively
- **87%** have a better understanding how their work fits with others
- **75%** developed a deeper understanding of their own collaborative behavioral tendencies
- **75%** uses colleagues' expertise better to enhance the quality of their work.¹

The intervention has yielded tangible business outcomes:

1. Better sales strategy and execution

- *"The Accelerator gave us a solid platform to talk about our differences and similarities. For instance, I am a Complex thinker, and my right-hand Sales executive is Concrete. I now understand and don't feel bad about generating a ton of ideas – he is happy and very talented in executing them. This new-found dynamic makes our sales capability more efficient."*

2. More communicative, vibrant, and creative organizational dynamics

- *"The founders are really similar: the same analytical thinking, the same decision-making style, which ultimately silenced the rest of the people. Although they invited other opinions for healthy debate, folks were not forthcoming and rarely spoke up. The Accelerator helped us break that pattern and there is now a shared sense of empathy and understanding of how and why we differ. Our ability to communicate effectively is critical in achieving our high aspirations and delivering on our business goals, especially during times when the workload is massively intense."*
- *"Certain employees who should have worked together had a fair amount of tension in the past. The Accelerator gave them an objective starting point to re-establish their working relationship without emotions. It has reduced the frequency and scale of friction and helped them to manage the remaining ones effectively. Basically, fewer problems escalate and are turning up on the founders' desk."*
- *"Our company is culturally highly diverse— people don't look or talk alike at all—and the Accelerator now allows us to come together by focusing on each person's strengths, recognize similarities, and celebrate our differences."*

¹ Gardner & Co: Accelerator Impact Survey, Klarity, administered post 4-week Accelerator program (December 2020)

3. Tangible leadership skill improvements

- *“We, the founders, went through an exercise to define company culture. My Accelerator coach has suggested to look in the rearview mirror and identify patterns that led to success or failures. We now see how different traits played out and why.”*
- *“I now get the regular Smart Collaboration follow-up prompts [via email]. I think about it and use it. Those follow-up nudges are quick and actionable and help me to think about the Smart Collaboration principles every day.”*

4. Fast-tracked the development of the younger, less experienced team members

- *“People’s self-awareness of their own strengths speeds up their ability to effectively handle practically every situation. Our young people are very elastic, and the Accelerator helped them to be receptive and to improve their non-technical skills so much. We heard them stating ‘we realize we don’t understand XY as an issue, but we see why it is important’ – and we can trace the behavior shift to the workshop. It just opened people’s mind.”*
- *“Thanks to the knowledge and vocabulary we have acquired through the Accelerator workshops, we are now much more open, willing and able to discuss delicate topics. We’ve recently launched a mini discussion-series on inclusion and now better understand that we are all different, and don’t need to hide it – the contrary. The company benefits from the difference!”*

Today’s complex problems require experts to integrate their knowledge to generate higher-impact solutions than anyone could produce on their own. This is particularly true when start-ups form to tackle green field problems. But collaboration is challenging in the best of times. It becomes far more difficult and essential when teams are spread across the organization, locations, and time zones.

The **Smart Collaboration Accelerator** program unearths individual’s natural collaborative behavioral tendencies and enhances self and group awareness. By embracing one’s own strengths and inviting others to use their strengths, smart collaborators drive inclusive, innovative, commercially successful organizations forward.

Smart Collaboration helps organizations achieve their business results —and in turn benefits their investors and stakeholders. Evidence from early-stage tech startups suggests that exposure to the Accelerator program early on can significantly increase productivity and deliver business results faster via smarter collaboration.