

DEBATE: HAS COLLABORATION GONE TOO FAR?

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BY ONE ESTIMATE, KNOWLEDGE WORKERS SPEND UP TO 85% OF THEIR TIME DEALING WITH REQUESTS FOR SHARED INPUT. THE ECONOMIST HAS CALLED IT “THE COLLABORATION CURSE”. IS IT TIME TO STOP SHARING?

Matt Scott

WE NEED DIGITAL ‘DO NOT DISTURB’ SIGNS

A lot of the time, collaboration is necessary, and you need to keep one or two people in the loop.

Problems arise when you include people on the periphery who don’t need to be involved in making decisions or helping things progress – that’s when collaboration backfires on you

It can be a matter of ‘be careful what you wish for’: being in one loop is one thing, but being in 101 loops can be overwhelming.

All of these things have ways of raising your attention, and what you have to do is find a way to prioritise what you want to allow to interrupt you.

I want to be able to pick different ways of being contacted. I also need to be able to tell my communication tools – and my team members – when I need ‘do not disturb time’. This will allow me to go to my focus room and have some quiet space to think and work.

In theory, that’s easily done in the physical world, but electronically it’s hard to hide.

Jason Morio is global segment manager for project management and collaboration company Projectplace

SILOES INTENSIFY OPERATIONAL PROBLEMS

In a recent study conducted with Forrester, we found that almost half of businesses (43%) believe that competing departments – such as IT and marketing – wanting to ‘own’ digital is a barrier to effective transformation.

To provide a better service to the end customer, you must gain multiple insights from various teams and disciplines. Our research found that siloed organisations, processes and systems intensify the operational challenge and prevent the delivery of end-to-end experiences that exceed customer expectations.

One of the reasons that many organisations aren’t innovative is that they split responsibility and accountability within teams.

As a result, business units start operating in siloes, and it can quickly foster an environment of fiefdoms. When people work solely within these siloes, individuals don't question whether the answer they need might lie in another part of the business, which it may well do.

For an organisation to succeed, all stakeholders must take an active role in its overall direction.

This has a two positive effects: it improves togetherness and motivation, and introduces fresh perspectives to all aspects of the business.

Stephen Morgan is co-founder of digital transformation business Squiz

SCARCE RESOURCES MUST ALWAYS BE SHARED

Collaborative work is often thought to be just about open-plan offices, intranet work platforms and the like.

But we need to look at the bigger idea that sits behind collaboration, which is really all about the sharing of scarce resources – good ideas, physical assets, forms of money, people's time, and even access to markets and customers.

Uber, Airbnb, and the recycling of plastics and other forms of waste are major examples of what it means to collaborate across society. If we were to write the history of entrepreneurship over the past two centuries, we would see open, vibrant small businesses emerging in a corporate culture of multinationals with high walls and tight boundaries.

But, as we look forward, we see existing large corporations being toppled by new entrants.

The question is: how do they do it?

One way is through shared resources, and open and agile behaviours. Collaboration is at their heart – not for any philosophical or idealistic reasons – simply for the purpose of sharing scarce resources.

Dr Shailendra Vyakarnam is director at the Bettany Centre for Entrepreneurship, Cranfield School of Management

TRUE COLLABORATION IS VITAL, BUT COMPLEX

We would argue that collaboration hasn't gone too far – it hasn't gone far enough. But business leaders need to understand the complexity surrounding creative collaboration.

There seems to be a misguided idea that working without walls will instantaneously spark serendipitous cross-desk interaction. Having spoken to more than 150,000 employees across the globe, we know that variety is key to encouraging collaborative work.

Light-bulb moments are more likely to occur away from a meeting room than in it, so one-dimensional, one-size-fits-all solutions just don't work.

Forty-three per cent of the people we spoke to – that's more than 64,500 employees – told us that 'collaborating on creative work' is an important activity in their day-to-day role. Yet organisations are failing to provide workspaces that aid such teamwork.

If innovation, creativity and collaboration are the raw fuel of the knowledge economy, then business leaders need to start helping themselves by looking at the physical building blocks that support creativity.

Tim Oldman is CEO of workplace effectiveness think tank Leesman