

Addressing the Problem of A Lack of Effective Collaborations in Workplaces

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Introduction

Collaboration promotes working together and sharing ideas. It is about giving time and knowledge, and receiving another's wisdom and efforts. A lack of effective collaboration is likely to happen when people are not willing to invest their time and efforts to share their knowledge, or inquire when they feel uncertain. This results in overall poor learning progress.

In this part, we will discuss the two hypotheses that either a) people are not willing to collaborate genuinely, or b) they are willing to do it but not aware that they are not effectively collaborating. We will focus on addressing these issues and suggest possible solutions to make improvements towards this problem.

Aware of the problem but not willing to invest time and effort to solve it

One reason that results in a lack of collaboration is people not inquiring or discussing genuinely because they do not believe in the importance and benefits of genuine inquiry. It has been suggested that the cause of ineffective collaboration is due to collaborations not result-oriented, and that there is a lack of incentive and competition between teams to motivate and drive people to collaborate effectively (Cordingley, Bell, Thomason, & Firth, 2005; Croft, 2016; Hanushek & Rivkin, 2012; Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, & Thomas, 2006; TNTP, 2015). An introduction of a market driven model, and corporate-like competitive environment ensures people are collaborating with a mindset to achieve better outcomes and subject to rigorous cost-benefit analyses (Croft, 2016).

In contrast, some have suggested that collaboration should not be forced and effective collaborations should be developed through trust with one another, clear and consistent feedback, openness about problems, and everyone should be supporting others as partners and be accountable for the overall results (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Bryk & Schneider, 2002;

Hargreaves, 1994; Little, 1990; Lortie, 1975; Nias, Southworth, & Yeomans, 1989). They argue that introducing rivalry is likely to cut off individuals from being collaborative and incentive are actually damaging and distracting (Pink, 2009; Waller, 1932).

These researches do not provide conclusive evidence to indicate the better approach. They give the impression that the cause of the problem is dependent on the situation and the underlying reason of why teams are not expressing themselves can be more complexed. Therefore, a need to inquire individuals with open-mindedness is necessary to find the underlying reasons as to why collaborations did not work for them in their environment, and provide the supports require to help them to create a climate for effective collaborations.

Not aware of the problems

Another cause for a lack of effective collaboration is that people do not recognise or apply incorrect approaches to fix it. People often do not know the existence or how they contributed towards a problem, until they see evidence and records of their actions (Argyris & Schon, 1975; Le Fevre, Robinson, & Sinnema, 2015; Robinson, 2016). One approach could be to record their interactions with others and check whether they are aligning to their actual goals (Le Fevre et. al, 2015; Robinson, 2016). Another approach is to invite external experts to highlight problems and provide guidance towards the goal of creating an environment for effective collaboration (Earl & Katz, 2010). By using evidence and records of their actions, it allows people to be aware of their behaviour and it is a good way to begin and make changes. It will also allow people to focus on fixing the problem as it will highlight the issues that first hinder the ability to effectively collaborate

Finding out the underlying reasons to correctly address the problem

Le Fevre et. al.(2015) suggested that people have a high tendency of being judgmental without testing the validity of their beliefs and it can lead to ineffective collaboration. The judgmental thinking is driven by confirmation bias which make us tend to believe what confirms, rather than disconfirms prior assumptions, and attribution bias which makes us try to find reasons for our own and others' behaviours without seeking evidence to support the reasons behind our actions (Manusov & Spitzberg, 2008; Lilienfeld, Ammirati, & Landfield, 2009). Argyris and Schon (1974) described that if one holds such bias, one is not willing to take the risks of upsetting the relationship and of being challenged. This will lead to asking

disingenuous questions with no desire to learn anything from others, and maintain unilateral control to communicate their own point of view instead of consulting or collaborating with different ideas. It is important for people to be aware of these biases so they can make genuine inquiry with open-mindedness. Eliminating these biases will lead to asking genuine inquiries which can improve effective collaborations as it promotes open-dialogue and communication between team members. It also allow learners to know what they need to learn and teams to recognise what they need to address, thus effectively identifying the main issues.

Closing Thoughts

Ineffective collaboration can be improved through a change of interactions between people and teams. This can be done through using a change management model, such as the ADKAR model. It highlight the need to be Aware and have a Desire to fix the problem, and that teams have the Knowledge and the Ability to make the change. Then, there should be an incentive and a support system to Reinforce and sustain the change (Hiatt, 2006). The researches mentioned in this review highlights the awareness, desire, and knowledge when addressing the problem of ineffective collaboration, however, it does not mention the ability and the reinforcement of the change. It does not discuss how to get teams to have the ability to practically use the knowledge to implement changes, and how to prevent them from resorting back to their old habits. This can be done through trainings in order to help teams to apply skills, and provide sufficient support and possibly an incentive scheme to reinforce and sustain the change.

Conclusion

Collaboration is key to foster learning and effective collaborations require people to make genuine inquiries with open-mindedness to accept challenges and different ideas. People who are not actively participating and people who are not aware that they are not making positive contributions results in ineffective collaborations. There is a need to inquire them genuinely about their underlying reasons of their actions as those could be more complexed than our prior assumptions, and provide them evidence of what needs to be changed, and invite external experts to provide necessary guidance to support the change process. Furthermore,

there should be a need to check the teams' ability and introduce an reinforcement scheme to sustain the new actions to perform effective collaborations.

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