

**white
paper**

collaboration

What is **collaboration**?

Collaboration is often listed as **one of the most in-demand competencies**. This is due in part to the proliferation of global and remote offices, with today's employers relying on their employees' ability to collaborate with colleagues and customers across time zones. When you can do this effectively, bridging that divide, your value is greatly enhanced. So what makes collaboration different from everyday teamworking where people coordinate their efforts?

Where **coordination resembles an orchestra** with everyone simply playing 'their part' alongside one another, led by a conductor or project manager, **collaboration is more like jazz**. Here, no one is conducting, overseeing, or 'in charge' in the traditional sense.

Collaboration may be the ultimate display of mature power because you can't play alone or alongside. Each agent involved shares in the process of defining and co-creating the outcome.



When does it work **best**?

Collaboration is best when people work together on problems that don't have an obvious solution or a familiar process to follow, or where a collective volition is required - some sort of sharing that cannot be mandated.

Good collaboration can lead to better innovation, better sales, better operations, and it seems to look like this: each person listens in a fully present state. They are accountable to one another, they are problem solvers, and they have empathy to see and value the other person's viewpoints without ego (not invented here) or resistance (seeing co-collaborator as a competitive threat).



“No matter how brilliant your mind or strategy, if you're playing a solo game, you'll always lose out to a team”

**Reid Hoffman,
chairman and co-founder
of LinkedIn Corp**

What makes it difficult?

There is a good deal of resistance and fear in people at work making effective collaboration difficult. Firstly, there is a **tendency to hoard what we know** due to a fear of **Loss of value**. For collaboration to happen we must first get over the fear that if we share our knowledge, we lose our value. There is something comforting about individual endeavours – they are personal. Given our success is judged on the basis of our personal achievements, we find it difficult to be dependent on other people who might, whether intentionally or not, let us down. **The need for others to fail in order for us to succeed** is a zero-sum game. It drives much of the mistrust that gets in the way of collaboration.

Next, we believe **we can do it better than others**, and we fear a **Loss of quality**. If collaboration is about the co-creation of value, how do you guarantee the outcome is of high enough quality? We have all witnessed endless meetings that end up with some half-baked compromise solution, rather than a true breakthrough.



Finally, we fear a **Loss of momentum**. For many in everyday corporate life, there is a strong belief that the machine must never slow down. Experience suggests when speed is of the essence, collaboration gets in the way. When there's a deadline you could of course ask someone to help, but even if you were confident they could do whatever needs to be done as well as you, could they do it as fast? You would also have to carefully brief them so the instinct is **'Let me just do it!'**

Our 'always on', constantly connected world requires immediate responses. In such a world, collaboration will only be of value if its benefits can be gained without momentum being lost.

What makes it **difficult**?

Collaboration is also about decentralizing control – that no one person has ‘the answer’ – so it has to start at the top.

Collaboration in the boardroom can be problematic because it requires joint creation. Paradoxically, it demands that people relinquish control over the process yet still be in charge of outcomes. This is a hard state of affairs to accept for anyone whose accountabilities, and ultimately rewards, are individual. The higher up you go in an organization, the stronger that fear becomes.

However, for those companies that have embraced a culture of collaboration and succeeded in changing mindsets and team behaviours at work, the benefits are compelling.

The Rolling Stones are disciplined collaborators.

Mick Jagger, Keith Richards, Ronnie Wood and Charlie Watts have played together for 50 years, but they still recognise the importance of practising together to get their rhythm and unique sound. They practise it over and over, really watching and listening to one another, until it's second nature.

They spend two months rehearsing before a tour to reconnect and become almost telepathic in their communication. Their collaboration comes from each member having a distinctive yet complementary role, and ‘CEO’ Jagger is only partly in control of what happens out there.



Any one of them is talented enough, and has permission to speed up or slow down a song, and that chemistry means everyone achieves their goals, combining individual drive with understanding the importance and power of the team.

Imagine how inspiring your next business pitch could be if you took this disciplined, trusting approach to bring out everyone's strength and creativity.



What are the **benefits?**

1. Engaged employees

Collaboration builds the spirit of camaraderie in your teams, because people and their ideas can be heard.

2. Adaptable processes

When collaboration improves, so too does the organization's ability to handle sudden change. Teamwork makes it easier to pivot when customer preferences change or disruptive technologies enter the scene.

3. Healthier employees

When you create a values-based culture, driven by collaboration and respect, you treat employees as people instead of cogs in a machine. You ensure managers focus on positive interactions.

4. Better meetings

There is more proactive information sharing, more engagement, more support for each other's efforts.

5. Attract best talent

Talented people relish the opportunity to engage, interact and learn from senior management. A collaborative culture is the foundation for this.

6. Speed up

With a collaborative culture you gain the ability to bring products to the market faster. Teamwork and communication speed up the entire process and make it easier to produce anything.

7. Staff retention

It makes for a more open culture within the workplace, keeping people loyal and committed to your organization

8. Innovative ideas

Collaboration can generate friction and distraction as well as productive output, however, the conflict and the energy can generate dynamic, innovative ideas.

9. Customer led

When you leverage their feedback into your product development process, there will be better alignment between the customer's actual needs and your product's features.

10. More profit

When you can hire better people who stay for longer and feel healthier, and are engaged in more productive meetings, you produce more innovative ideas that will impact the bottom line.



Where do we **start**?

We can start with ourselves in any team interaction, because better conversations hold the key to developing a culture of collaboration.

When we speak, we can try not to control the conversation, look good, or keep useful and relevant information to ourselves.

Instead, we can truly focus on building on the ideas of others, without taking credit. When we listen, we can hold a frame of **genuine curiosity, listening fully**, resisting the impulse to interrupt or half listen as we plan our next smart interjection. Where does the 'I' stop and the 'You' start in such a conversation? Like two jazz musicians, we can build on one another's inspiration to co-create the future.

