

Dilemma Flipping and 7 Factors Derailing Collaboration

By Debbie Craig

Introduction

In this fast paced, crazy world of disruptive change and uncertainty, we are faced with many dilemmas that require us to think and act differently in order to navigate uncharted waters and find a way forward. This often requires a BOTH/AND stance and allowing some evolution over time. Some of these that I have faced in my own growing business include:

- How to let go and empower others AND ensure a commitment to excellence and value to customer
- How to build psychological safety through some level of certainty AND stay flexible and agile enough to respond with the right skills to the evolving demands
- How to utilise the power of a known brand AND give others wings to fly with their own dreams, passion and identity

In the book “Leaders Make the Future: Ten New Leadership Skills for an Uncertain World”, Bob Johansen describes the skill of Dilemma Flipping.

Dilemma Flipping: Ability to turn dilemmas - which unlike problems cannot be solved – into advantages and opportunities. how can you improve your skills at dilemma flipping so that you succeed with challenges that cannot be solved and won't go away?

- Hold opposing ideas at the same time
- Flip dilemmas over and find opportunities (a problem that cannot be solved and won't go away) – reframe an unsolvable challenge as a threat and an opportunity – and put together a viable strategy
- Have an opposable mind
- Remake a situation

The Dilemma of Collaboration vs Autonomy

The most challenging dilemma I have been exposed to recently in my client environments is the dilemma of shifting from an autonomous (federated, empowered) operating model to one that requires significantly more collaboration and alignment. This becomes more and more important as organisations face shared stakeholders, a shared brand, shared challenges, shared resources or services across common customers or shared technology. As economic and competitive pressure mounts, leaner structures are required, resources become stretched and the cost of going it alone is prohibitive necessitating some form of collaboration to achieve common objectives.

The big dilemma here is how to find the time it requires to collaborate with others AND remain agile and responsive to own customer and stakeholder needs. Collaboration by its very nature requires slowing down, meeting regularly and many robust conversations to find alignment and win-win solutions. Does the additional time and effort (and the delay in delivery) really justify a more aligned solution in the longer term?

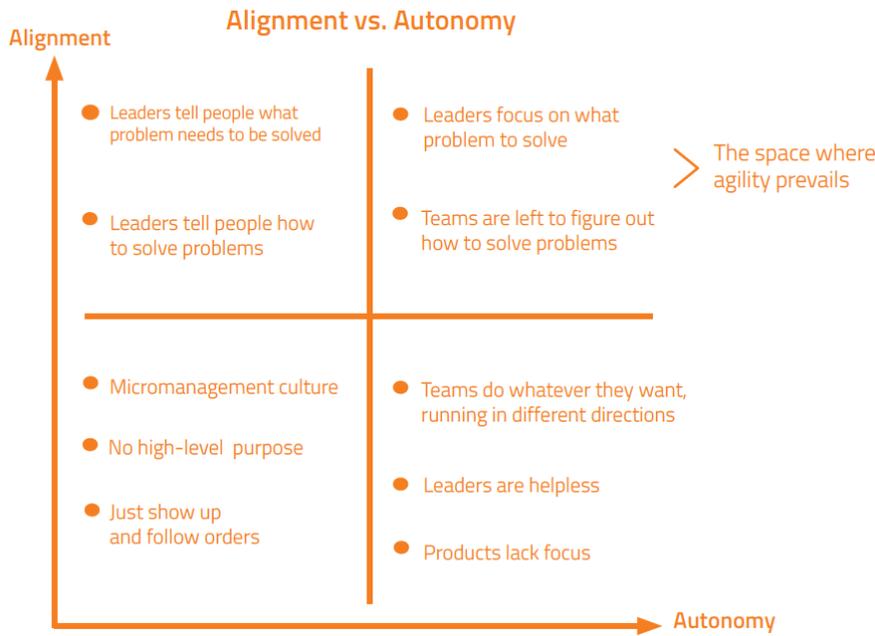
7 Ps derailing collaboration

Whilst many organisations start off with the right intent to collaborate and set up structures to do so, the reality is often frustrating, the results disappointing, and the waste of resources significant.

From many interviews, discussions and experience we find the following 7 factors that seem to derail collaboration.

1. **Purpose:** there is no clear purpose or mandate for the collaborative structures. There may be an intent and a good business case, however, there is insufficient clarity on strategic alignment, terms of reference for each forum or committee and which decisions are required to be made by when and by whom.
2. **Process:** often forums and committees are set up with people having other full-time roles and are expected to make time for preparation, consultation, documentation and reaching agreement. Sessions become too short, are often postponed due to no quorum, or do not have all the representatives that need to be there to progress important decisions.
3. **Power:** representatives on collaborative forums come with their own power bases from number of staff, size of budgets as well as personal expertise or influence. When this power is not recognised or managed effectively, there is much energy utilised in managing the politics rather than being focused on the mandate and results.
4. **Priorities:** many members of collaborative committees are faced with conflicting priorities on a daily basis between their own stakeholders (direct boss, internal or external customers) and their committee role. Divisions may require a shorter-term solution for an immediate business crisis or opportunity whilst a cost-effective collaborative solution make take far too long to realise.
5. **People:** the right people with the right skills may start off on committees but as frustrations, delays and other priorities compete, other people are seconded to these committees which may not necessarily have the organisational experience, technical depth or maturity to contribute at the level required. Messages back to business units can get diluted or confused, slowing down progress even more.
6. **Principles:** the time required up front to set up principles and ways of working is often recognised but then pushed out due to time pressures. Principles need to include the type and level of collaboration required as well as the behaviours needed for success. Accountability processes need to be outlined for people renegeing on commitments made.
7. **Practices:** for collaboration to be effective, certain minimum standards across divisions or brands need to be agreed i.e. what we will collaborate on and what we have the freedom to do in our own way. This is particularly important when a common technology platform or processes are being used across businesses.

A useful framework that I have found recently is the Alignment vs Autonomy matrix from the Employer Branding Academy of Universum. It outlines the continuums of alignment vs autonomy and the space where agility prevails. Finding that unique balance of BOTH/AND is a journey of many facilitated conversations to ensure agreement on the most important problems and dilemmas to solve, the business rationale for these, and the time and resources required to address them in a collaborative yet agile fashion. Each of the 8Ps need to be unpacked, agreed to and then specific plans and milestones committed to with leadership and joint accountability mechanisms clearly defined.



Building our collaborative muscle

The way we work has changed. Harvard Business Review surveyed business leaders worldwide about how collaboration is changing within their organizations.

- 72% say “effective team communication” has become more important over the past two years.
- 54% are investing in easier-to-use collaboration solutions.
- 64% report that collaboration with external parties has increased in importance.

Over and above the 8Ps required to find the value in collaboration, there are a number of mindsets and skills that can facilitate collaboration. I will cover more of the benefits, advantages and skills of collaboration in my next blog.

For more information on how we can assist with facilitating future fit collaborative approaches, contact us at debbie@catalystconsulting.co.za or view our website www.catalystconsulting.co.za



About the Author:

Debbie Craig – a passionate adventurer, global traveller and mountain climber, curious dolphin swimmer and ocean lover, philosophical dreamer, hopeless romantic, dysfunctional over-achiever, compulsive seeker & sharer, courageous difference maker, patriotic South African, author, facilitator, yoga nut, wine snob, dog lover, guardian mom, step mom, wife and friend

Some interesting tit bits: travelled to more than 60 countries, hiked to Machu Pichu, Kilimanjaro and Everest Base Camp, over 60 swims with dolphins, over 5 trips to India to explore her inner world, facilitated over 50 personal transformational workshops, facilitated business workshops with people from over 30 countries in 5 continents, written 3 books, guardian mom to 3 kids, step mom to 2 kids

Also: adventured through life’s darker parts including divorce, unhealthy relationships, sequestration, retrenchment, loss of loved ones, betrayal, broken bones and inner struggles to over-come self-doubt and be our best selves

The usual stuff

Debbie has over 20 years' experience in the field of strategy, leadership development, change management, talent management, high performance teams and organisational development. She has worked and consulted at leading local and global organisations in the private and public sector throughout Southern Africa and internationally in the UK, Australia, South East Asia, South America, Mexico, China, Canada, Europe and the USA. Debbie is a skilled strategist, design architect, team builder, a powerful facilitator, change agent and executive coach. Her passion is transformation and empowerment which she facilitates through individual coaching and empowerment workshops, team-development workshops, corporate training and consulting assignments and organisation wide strategic change interventions. Debbie is the founder and Managing Director of Catalyst Consulting which she has grown into a successful consulting company (now 21 years old). She is also the founder of World Alive, a personal empowerment and transformation company. She is a registered Master HR Professional through the SA Board for People Practices (SABPP).

Debbie has published 3 books "I am Talent", "I am Alive" and "Accelerated Learning", written numerous articles, appeared on radio talk shows, presented at conferences and does public talks. Debbie is a warm and down to earth facilitator, leader and life coach. She has many real examples in her own life and in many of her delegates on creating a fulfilling life of abundance. She is an engaging presenter with practical advice and information that is easy to apply.

Some unusual stuff

Debbie is a regular hiker and has hiked to Machu Pichu, Kilimanjaro and Everest Base Camp. She swims regularly with dolphins in the wild and resonates with their playful, sensual, energy, their intelligence, their focus on protection and survival and their complex yet fluid social patterns. She looks after 3 guardian children and 2 step kids. Debbie is passionate and deeply committed to her own personal development journey, reads extensively and has participated in numerous in-depth transformation experiences including many trips to India where she has studied mindfulness and living a life of fulfilment, abundance and flow including mediation, dance, yoga, tai chi, art and experiential workshops. Debbie has designed and facilitated over 50 Personal Transformation workshops. She is passionate about South Africa and making a difference to people's lives.