

RealizePerformanceTM

Questions Addressed In This White Paper:

- What does optimal collaboration look like?
- What are the common attributes of successful collaboration?
- Are we being exclusive or inclusive?
- Are we being constructive or destructive?
- How do I create an environment for collaboration within my organization?

The Sum of the Whole

Even as many companies have streamlined departments, reduced work forces, and merged functions, we are consistently asked to accomplish more with less. It is more important than ever that resources are optimized, inefficiencies identified and redundancies eliminated. One key to achieving these aims will be increased effective collaboration.

Within teams and throughout organizations, collaboration - the ability to work together effectively – can make the difference between excellence and mediocrity, between efficiency and waste, and ultimately between success and failure.

Case Study: The Value of Collaboration

Rio Tinto, “one of the world’s leading mining and exploration companies,” provides an inspiring case study that highlights the power of effective collaboration. (To view a video presentation of this story, [click here](#).)

In Bengalla, New South Wales, a Rio Tinto mine found itself dealing with an ongoing problem: the brakes on one of its bulldozers was continually failing. The problem was bad enough that workers repeatedly had to walk the machine away from work. Despite the team’s best efforts, they were unable to solve the problem. Brad Austin, the Benaglla mine’s Superintendent, Planning and Engineering, explains, “We seemed to be going back over the same information time and time again and still not resolving what the core issue was.”

Rio Tinto has communities of practice in place across the globe, sharing information and best practices via collaborative forums. A community of practice is “... simply a group of people who share a passion for something they know how to do, who want to interact regularly to learn how to do that thing better,” according to Mark Bennett, Principal Advisor, Communities of Practice Rio Tinto Technology and Innovation.

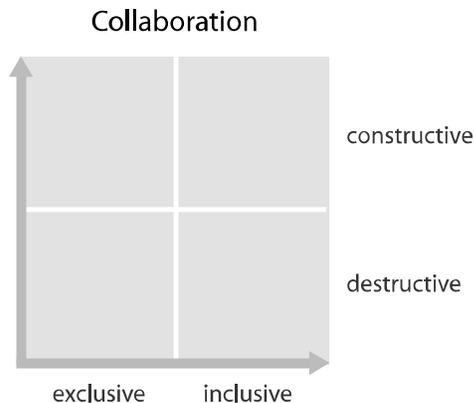
Searching for a solution to the recurring problem with their bulldozer’s brakes, James Davidson, Production Superintendent for the Bengalla mine, went to the collaborative forum seeking help. Shortly, he received a response from Tom Ross, a Maintenance Engineer in California. “The value of collaboration for us was that we were able to share something that we had spent almost a year trying to diagnose and send it to these folks who were just getting into the problem. And it probably saved them as much time as we spent trying to work it out.” (endnote, YouTube – original source?)

By fostering and facilitating a culture where collaboration was not only encouraged but supported, Rio Tinto gained a year of productivity through their Communities of Practice. A bulldozer that had been sidelined frequently could now be used consistently for mining. Countless work hours that would have been devoted to frustrating trial and error diagnostics could be devoted to new challenges, opportunities that might move the organization forward in myriad other ways.

Clearly, the boost to the bottom line was immense. However, we should also consider some of the immeasurable benefits. Rio Tinto has developed a culture where employees are willing to ask questions and share answers rather than hoarding information while operating within bunkers and silos, a culture where employees across the globe actively develop a sense of community and shared purpose rather than one of territorial isolation.

We can consider Rio Tinto an exception, a positive deviation, an aberration. The truth, though, is that all organizations can – and, as discussed earlier, must! – move toward the kind of collaborative culture that led to this colossal success. How? We simply need to focus our attention on two critical components of collaboration.

What Should Collaboration Look Like?



In evaluating the quality of our collaboration, there are two key questions we must ask whether evaluating an entire culture or a specific action:

- Are we being inclusive or exclusive?
- Are we being constructive or destructive?

In order to optimize the benefits, we need to collaborate from the Upper Right. Looking at the Collaboration Quadrant above, optimally we would be inclusive (vs. exclusive) and constructive (vs. destructive).

Inclusive vs. Exclusive

In terms of collaboration, we define “inclusive” as that which optimizes the talents, skills and knowledge of the team. By definition, then, any action, approach or even attitude which withholds (or limits) our contribution is fundamentally “exclusive” and a detriment to productive collaboration.

Further, it is the responsibility of each member of the team to orient what they are doing and who they are being to the creation of an environment where contribution from every other member is not just tolerated, but welcome. When James Davidson sat and took his dilemma to the collaborative forum, he was, in fact, actively optimizing the talent, skills and knowledge of every member of the entire organization. When Tom Ross responded, he did more than help to solve the problem at hand. He intentionally reinforced the inclusive nature of their global community.

Through their communities of practice, Rio Tinto institutionalized this approach and the results, as outlined above, were positively staggering.

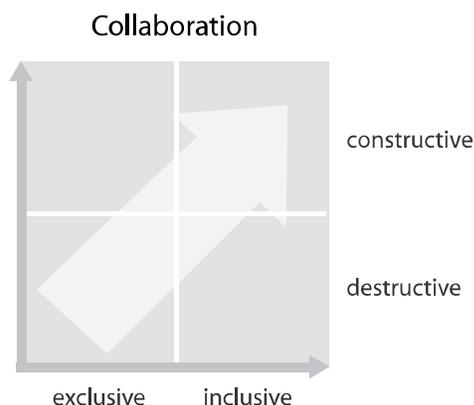
Constructive vs. Destructive

So, how do we define “constructive?” Simply put, actions which advance the project at hand are constructive. When working in collaboration with others, any action which advances personal agendas - as opposed to the collective goal – or which detracts from the group aim is destructive.

“What is right is more important than who is right.” – John Wooden

Though it may seem self-evident that we should be constructive rather than destructive, there is an important point that we should not overlook. When we, as Coach Wooden suggests, focus on “what is right,” we avoid identifying personally with a given position, thought or idea. By avoiding this association between people and points, the assignment of right vs. wrong, good vs. bad, smart vs. dumb, competent vs. incompetent is no longer a part of the collaborative process. At that point, finding the right answer is no longer a pursuit that lends itself to destructive competition and personal conquest; It is a truly collaborative endeavor.

Collaboration From The Upper Right



With these performance-focused definitions in mind, we can evaluate the quality of collaboration that would be the result of operating from each of the four quadrants.

Exclusive/Destructive (Lower Left)

When operating from the Lower Left, our tendency to be exclusive likely hinders performance by fostering a divisive culture, one that limits contributions from potential partners and pits those whose input is welcome and valued against those who are excluded. Those negative effects are probably compounded by a destructive approach that generally slows or stops progress making achievement of goals – much less high performance - exceedingly difficult if not impossible.

Inclusive/Destructive (Lower Right)

From the Lower Right, our performance is aided by an inclusive approach that gets the most out of partners. At the same time, by being generally destructive, we impede our progress and likely erode much of the good will we create with behaviors like assigning blame and dismissing successes, behaviors that amount to – conscious and unconscious – sabotage.

Exclusive/Constructive (Upper Left)

Conversely, when we operate from the Upper Left, we take actions that move the team forward on a given initiative. Unfortunately, the positive impact of our constructive actions is potentially nullified or muted by the negative impact of our exclusive approach. We may be moving the project forward, but until we optimize the potential contributions of the team, we can never be sure that we are doing so as efficiently and effectively as possible.

Inclusive/Constructive (Upper Right)

When we operate from the Upper Right, we are being both inclusive and constructive. As a result, we are most likely to consistently maximize utilization of our resources – including human resources. By simultaneously aligning our energies and actions with the stated goal and creating an environment where others are most likely to do the same, we foster a culture where productive collaboration is the norm.

“Teamwork is the ability to work together toward a common vision. The ability to direct individual accomplishments toward organizational objectives. It is the fuel that allows common people to attain uncommon results.” – Andrew Carnegie

The evolving business landscape demands that we get the most out of our resources. The green movement has opened our collective eyes to the bottom-line benefits of conserving energy, paper, water, etc. The time has come, though, that we apply that same logic to our personal resources and to those of potential partners throughout our organizations and around the world. When we collaborate from the Upper Right consistently and persistently, we will move beyond working together effectively to performing at the highest levels. When we collaborate from the Upper Right, we give ourselves an opportunity to achieve uncommon results.

To find out what quadrant you and your organization are collaborating from, go to realizeprograms.com and take our (Performance Survey).

Realize is a boutique consulting firm committed to helping organizations quantify the experience and the outcomes of positive organizational management as a distinct approach to achieving high performance. This paper reflects our current thinking on the concepts and principles underlying the Realize methodology. Realize Programs is a suite of performance programs focused on making practical and usable the principles of positive organizational management.

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