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Collaboration: How Leaders Avoid the Traps, Create Unity, and Reap Big Results

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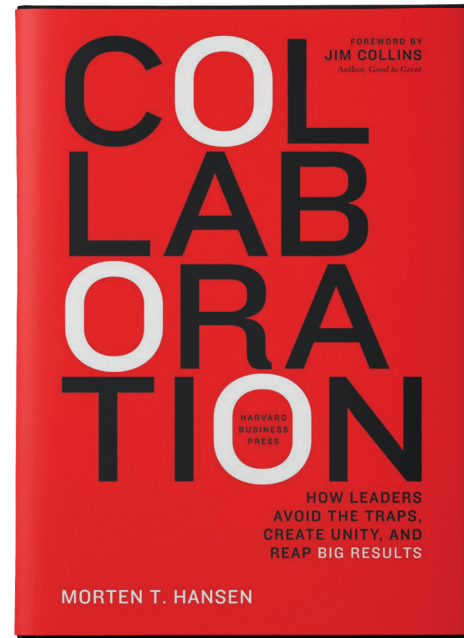
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Collaboration: How Leaders Avoid the Traps, Create Unity, and Reap Big Results

By Morten T. Hansen
Book Review by Ryan Stenquist

Morten Hansen's book, *Collaboration: How Leaders Avoid the Traps, Create Unity, and Reap Big Results*, teaches something many modern government and enterprise leaders seem to have forgotten: running a competitive organization requires cooperating with others. Collaborating, the author acknowledges, often means cutting out inflammatory rhetoric within an organization or even towards competing organizations. Sometimes collaborating well means fewer and smaller meetings. And sometimes it even means uprooting long-standing business structures. The book is, overall, a highly enlightening read that encourages changes towards more intelligent communication. Its most unique and pointed arguments are twofold: (1) T-shaped management, and (2) rewarding collaborative behavior.

T-shaped Management

For the sake of organization, all companies with greater than five employees must have divisions of some sort. To improve results, managers have offered incentives for these divisions to perform well. As Mr. Hansen demonstrates, however, companies with highly independent, inter-competitive, reward-seeking divisions can severely damage the organization as a whole.

Hansen gives a poignant, modern example: "Sony, not Apple, should have given us the iPod. Sony failed miserably because it couldn't collaborate across its many decentralized divisions" (page 168). Sony had every single component of an iPod already in production when Steve Jobs announced the first-ever Apple iPod, a device that they—just like the public—had never before imagined. Sony also had fantastic market penetration at that time, with millions upon millions of users already sold on their Walkman. The problem was, these "iPod" components were manufactured by a variety of different Sony divisions across the world that had never worked together before. Sony's response to the iPod, the Sony Connect, arrived to shelves after years and years of delays and never sold enough for us to even remember the product's name.

While not all organizations are trying to reinvent the way we listen to music or start some other sort of technological revolution, all organizations are dependent on both the

success of its individual divisions and the success of the organization overall. This is where Hansen's idea of T-shaped management comes in. Managers need to be focused on the vertical, direct success of the projects they are involved in (the base of the T), but they also need to collaborate well at the top with company goals and success in mind (the top part of the T). But how can managers be expected to have a team mindset when their pay, performance measurements, and recognition are all based around their unit's performance?

Rewarding Collaborative Behavior

Bain Capital, as the author points out, does an excellent job of rewarding the right behavior. Teamwork and overall company mindfulness must be rewarded to maximize organization synergy. Where some companies turn to offering bonuses and raises for broad, overarching company success that no one employee can influence, Bain Capital collects data that measures what the individual did for the sake of the company and applies that to up to 25% of their salary.

However, one major fault that organizations fall prey to is that of collaborating for the sake of collaboration. Meetings cost money, both in real salary and in opportunity costs. Rewarding groups for simply getting together can do more harm than good and instill unhealthy ideas about what good collaboration looks like. Companies who truly want to "be one" and who truly want to make good on their advertised buzzword of "teamwork" need to be rewarding just that. All team members, no matter how high or low their status and no matter how committed and ethical they are, need to see incentives attached to working well together.

Conclusion

From the federal government to long-standing investment banks to small startups, every organization needs sensible and effective collaboration. Morten Hansen's book, published by the Harvard Business Review Press, offers great frameworks for understanding what disciplined collaboration looks like and how our organizations are performing now. 📖

