

CHALLENGE
series

Marketing & the
evolution of
collaboration

- “ Collaboration takes place when people from different units work together on a common task or provide significant help to each other. Most books and research on teams look at how a manager can best manage small teams. Collaboration instead focuses on how to get people residing in different units throughout the company to work together.

Morten T Hansen, 'Collaboration'

What's this issue all about?

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In the commercial world, success has always been built upon good relationships, alliances and the effective management of critical suppliers and important customers.



To create and commercialise dynamic fresh ideas, it is rich, effective relationships – across and outside of the business that are needed. Open innovation needs flexible networks and joint planning as innovation is increasingly recognised as not a game for gifted soloists – but for smart collaborators.

Yet research consistently shows that commercial opportunities are most often lost by poor personal skills (the building blocks of good relationship management) - rather than technical problems. The Journal of Psychological Type (Myers Briggs) reports that the number one cause for business relationships derailment - is a lack of understanding, trust and fairness.

And broader evidence points to a collaborative paradox; at a time when businesses need to be better than ever at managing a diverse set of relationships, research shows that as a whole, we are generally not very good at collaborating.

Rosabeth Moss-Kanter, who famously predicted the importance of marketing partnerships and alliances in her seminal work 'The Art of Alliances' points out that it is poor soft skills that cause potentially rewarding deals to fail. And in 2011 - Forrester Research reported that senior executives surveyed saw poor internal and external collaboration as the two of the biggest weaknesses in marketing teams.

What needs to be done? Morten T Hansen argues in his book 'Collaboration' that successful organisations and brands of the future need more 'T-Shaped' people. These are the managers who can combine their specialist depth of knowledge with an ability to work effectively across the organisation, to share fresh ideas and build better commercial solutions. He points out it does not pay to work in isolation and the ability to manage and work with a network is the only unique career long term career advantage.

So how do marketers create a more collaborative approach in their business? How can they forge the important partnerships that can give their brand a valuable marketing edge? What kind of skills need to be built and nurtured? And what does this mean for marketing resourcing and projects?

So how is collaboration going to evolve?

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Recently, Duncan Thomas, founder of leading digital agency Pomegranate Group, met with collaboration & innovation consultant Andrew Armour of Benchstone and business and leadership coach Steve Hemmings of Realpoint Consulting to ask them ‘How do you build a collaborative advantage?’



Duncan Thomas_ In my view, people should surely be able to meet and work together as a team? It's a natural thing. So – how can you teach collaboration?

Steve Hemmings_ Well, the fact is you can't teach it. And it's important to make a distinction between team work – and collaboration. They're similar ideas but not quite the same thing. In a team, everyone has the same goals, working for the same leader. But if you have 'Team A' and 'Team B' working in different areas – they may have very different goals. And in many

cases, they don't see a need to collaborate and they may not want to collaborate. So there is a difference. Collaboration often does not come naturally to people. As you say, it should be. But it doesn't.

Andrew Armour_ What's interesting is that humans have survived through collaboration, as have businesses – throughout history. It was Charles Darwin who pointed out that those tribes that collaborated best prospered and those that did not, perished. Likewise, from early trade and the industrial revolution to our network economy – it's about strong personal connections. So, you would think it was part of our natural make up. We all have some sales, creativity and collaboration skills that are inherent in us. But it's interesting that much of our education, business courses, organisations and cultures have encouraged us to behave aggressively and reward us to focus on ourselves – not the bigger picture. This is the opposite of what you need to build collaboration which requires people to have empathy, focus on the needs of the other and create a solution where you don't know what it is yet. That's very different from team work or just being an individual driving forward your own ideas and plans.

SH_ The late Steven Covey did some great work around the concept of - 'Win-Win'. He pointed out that most people are scripted to behave in 'Win-Lose' – and so when we come into the workplace and people say they believe in 'Win-Win' – its seldom people really behave like that. More often than not people behave in a 'Win-Lose' style

AA_ There's a lot of recent research from the likes of General Electric, Forrester and Cap Gemini - surveying a lot of senior marketers and business leaders and that has shown that there is a need for organisations to be more innovative and an acknowledgement that it requires a lot more joined up thinking across the silos, collaborating across the business, between say, sales, marketing and operations for example. Yet, in the Cap Gemini report, only 16% of CEO's thought they had the right culture within their organisations to do this. And in 2011 and 2012 GE investigated innovation and reported that whilst only 21% of businesses are forging external partnerships 86% of senior marketers surveyed agreed that you need them innovate. There's a common picture emerging. It's what's called the 'partnership gap': people know they need to develop key relationships but find it very hard to do so.

DT_ That's an interesting point. If I need to bring together a team, say involving sales & marketing (and I agree, they're always

bad at talking to each other) - and then let's throw in finance into a project too, is that an organisational collaboration, business units to business unit - or is it the individual level?

SH_ There are all sorts of reasons why collaboration may not happen across a business. There are substantial barriers to collaboration. The larger the business the more difficult it becomes as you often find that finance, sales, marketing teams have their own objectives. So it's difficult to build the collaboration needed because it comes back to that 'Win-Lose' not 'Win-Win' relationship again. You have to change the mentality and change what the goal is. Where great leaders do well is that they can bring people from diverse departments and different goals together, they can work to a new, combined, greater goal.

AA_ There are some companies doing this very well at the moment. For example, Proctor and Gamble have a whole Open Innovation model, which works right across the business and with suppliers and customer groups too. And General Electric and CISCO (Cisco Systems), traditionally a very strong, command and control type companies, have both acknowledged they have to build more collaboration across their businesses. In fact, John Chambers from CISCO, one of the most successful CEO's in the world, said recently that to build that culture inside CISCO – it has to start with him and

his behaviour, to be less the commander and controller and more collaborator...

DT_ OK, so what you are saying is that you have internal collaborations working across the business and you also have what you would call partners, working externally with specialist suppliers, like say Proctor and Gamble. But I suppose this all comes back to the relationships? How can collaboration help in really difficult client relationships?

used to think we could do it all ourselves, that's just not how the world works anymore'. She's pointing out the only way to survive and innovate, even for a business as large as GE, is to get the latest ideas, technology, software – and that means forging allies for your business. The flip side for those suppliers is of course that the best way to get new business is to maintain the relationship with the existing business and as Steve says that comes back to a lot of those tricky, hard to manage soft personal skills, such as awareness.

DT_ So, you talk about the personal, the soft skills. And yet there is this big departmental and supply chain stuff too. So, where does it start then? Is it top down?

AA_ In the organisations that are doing this stuff best, it's the leadership behaviour that creates the climate for collaboration and innovation. You cannot just say 'everyone needs to be collaborative but we will just stay as we've always been' – and remain quite distant and not engaging with the rest of the business, suppliers and customers.

SH_ There's hard skill stuff and the soft skill stuff. In the UK, we're actually quite good at all the hard stuff; the business processes, creating metrics, writing the agreements. But research shows it's not those things that lead to key business relationship failure. What does is that

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We used to think we could do it all ourselves, that's just not how the world works anymore.

SH_ Well, nobody said it was easy. It's difficult. To start with it's about self-awareness. This means how we communicate with other people and our credibility. Relationship building is not achieved overnight – it takes a long time to build trust and credibility and without that trust and credibility you can't really collaborate.

AA_ And, in terms of innovation, it means building those really strong supplier relationships. Beth Comstock from GE, summarises it beautifully when she said 'we

we don't communicate very well. We have not built the trust. And it's all that soft stuff that lets us down – every time. How do you manage trust? It's something that is very personal, tricky to manage and hard to measure.

DT_ You make it sound like a married couple, not an enterprise?!

AA_ Yes, that's true. A lot of the language in partnership and alliance discussions is very similar to the language of personal relationships because the common problems are so true! Its human relationships and you have to understand the other person and seek to know the other business through them. As Steve said, it's about getting all the real basic relationship stuff right; building trust, honesty, turning up, doing what you said you were going to do. You still have to get all the simple, little things correct if you're going to move on to develop a dynamic relationship.

DT_ So, if you can't measure trust, how do you measure the impact of collaboration training or programme?

SH_ You have to come back to what the business wants from collaboration. You have to look at the fact that it is soft skills that cause relationships to fail. And, yes it's still important to build the right KPI's. You can measure those, in terms of ideas, competitive skills, increased

business etc. But again remember, most key relationships fail because of a lack of those tricky soft skills - which as we say, are hard to measure around.

AA_ In partnership work, we often use third party surveys of the parties; say measuring the relationship satisfaction, between the key supplier and provider. And you can do that pre and post any training or major implementation for example...

DT_ So, some kind of review framework that fits with what the business needs?

SH_ Yes, you can rate the programme. So for our collaboration skills training we can build pre and post programme surveys to test how confident and skilled people are at managing some of the difficult relationships they are managing, either across the business or outside of it.

DT_ Can you give us a good example of how collaboration works?

AA_ In innovation, there are some fantastic examples where someone was brave enough to pick up the phone and make the call to a different organisation to create something new. The Senseo coffee system is collaboration between Douwe Egberts and Phillips which resulted in the sale of 20 million coffee machines



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and four billion coffee pods in eight years. That commercial success and the system relies on the two brands working together. In the same way, Nike and Apple – creating the iPod Training system where the shoes communicate with your iPhone. In entertainment, there has always been the need for rights owners to collaborate and work together – movies, music and book publishing for example. In the end, they can all benefit from a shared hit. It's the old adage I learnt when I first worked in entertainment licensing, do you want to work alone and keep 100% of nothing - or work with the right partner and get 12% of a lot?

DT_ What is the difference then between partnerships and collaboration?

AA_ A marketing partnership or joint marketing initiative is the deal where the two brands or organisations come together for the campaign, the outcome – but you need collaboration as part of the skill and process to build those sorts of deals.

DT_ So, to get that innovative partnership you have to collaborate?

SH_ Yes, exactly. To get an important partnership to work effectively it's all about getting the people involved to work collaboratively. If you have key relationships with allies, suppliers and customers – you need stronger relationships and to maintain those you need people who are strong collaborators...

DT_ So, I can see why it's important but what kind of steps do you go through with a client then?

SH_ Well our CollaborativeEdge Programme starts with Self Awareness. How do others perceive you? And how do you look at other people? What difference does that make when you're communicating with them? We then get on to Conversation skills. Most people talk but we are very bad at listening. Even when we do listen how do you do that properly so that you get the important issues, questions and answers? Effective conversation is so important...

AA_ Part of our process is running a Café Workshop that focuses on sharpening up two very simple but such valuable skills. Listening to other people - and asking them the right questions. Questioning and listening. It sounds so simple doesn't it? It's something that great marketers, business people, artists, doctors,

lawyers are all very good at. Questions and listening. Yet many people and business meetings really lack good questions and listening. It's something we do not get time to think about and practice and that's what the Café is all about, practicing and sharpening up those skills. So that the next time they meet with a key colleague, client or supplier, they can build a better relationship.


SH_ The really common ground is Awareness and Conversation Skills. Every business is slightly different and so after that we look at the particular opportunities and issues they have and how they can create innovations by working collaboratively.

AA_ And as part of that we also explore the myths of innovation and we look at how genuine innovation is built from networks, sharing information, tapping into new markets, suppliers and ways of doing things. It's important people realise it's not all up to them to have that one blinding moment of genius. As the science author Steven Johnson says; 'chance favours the connected mind'

DT_ So, I can see idea generation being a really valuable output of that. But once you have that idea how do you turn that into a successful innovation?

AA_ Well, that's a pretty big question...

SH_ And that really needs a whole new big conversation...

DT_ OK. I agree. Sounds like we leave that there and explore that next time. Thanks Andrew, thanks Steve. 



Duncan Thomas

Pomegranate Group

Duncan Thomas is the founder and M.D. of Pomegranate Group, a leading agency that start every engagement project with the people, the audience the community and the culture. The objective is always to build experiences that attract, inspire and evoke meaningful interactions. Today Pomegranate sees Gamification as a methodology with powerful benefits to enhancing the practice of engagement and motivational design, focusing on three key areas: innovation in marketing engagement, motivation through business applications and evolution in the socially impactful applications.

For more on how the latest digital technologies can be used in your next campaign get in touch via email: Duncan@pomegranate.co.uk or call **0207 336 7322**



Andrew Armour

Benchstone

Andrew Armour is the Founder of Benchstone Limited, a marketing consultant and a specialist advisor and trainer in the areas of collaboration, partnerships and innovation. He has held senior marketing and innovation roles with Yell.com, Walt Disney and Television New Zealand. He writes about modern issues of marketing in his blog www.andrewarmour.com. If you would like to discuss how collaboration can give your marketing efforts an edge, email Andrew: Andrew@benchstone.co.uk or call **07971 231 025**



Steve Hemmings

Realpoint Consulting

Steve Hemmings, the founder of Realpoint Consulting, is a business consultant, coach and trainer specialising in the areas of strategic sales, relationship building, and collaborative leadership. He is also the co-producer of the CollaborativeEdge and CollaborationCafe training programme. Prior to launching Realpoint, Steve had a thirty year career in technology, telecoms and media, with senior UK and international sales & marketing positions at Cisco, Lucent Technology and VeriSign.

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ADDITIONAL READING

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Thanks for reading

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