

Collaboration - a game changer



By [Daniel Munslow](#)

22 Apr 2015

Comment8, a UK internal communications consultancy, hosted its third annual iCollaborate conference in London, focussing on key trends impacting practitioners...

Despite the majority of businesses recognising the importance collaboration, few do it really well and embrace it as part of their culture. True collaboration entails a fundamental cultural change within a business and acceptance to do things in a progressive and transparent way.

Nick Jankel, the CEO of WeCreate Worldwide, kicked off the conference, highlighting statistics we know all too well - 70% of employees are disengaged; 84% of employees feel trapped in their jobs and are on the market to move; 54% of employees report ongoing stress and 75% of top-scoring university graduates will turn down high-paying salaries in large firms to accept jobs in smaller organisations and start-ups.

There is also a growing mismatch between human beings and entrenched organisations' processes. In other words, there is a disconnect between what people expect and what organisations can provide by virtue of a changing world and often inflexible corporates.



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In any organisation, the best brand ambassadors are those who believe in the organisation. They are the ones who, when asked if the company is a place worth working in and doing business with, the answer is yes. This is the bottom line measure of engagement. Collaboration is becoming a fundamental driver of engagement within business, and it's largely an internal communication function to embrace, introduce, and drive it within an organisation.

Matching people with culture is becoming more important in some instances than merely reviewing the skills set of a candidate. Prospective employees are becoming more discerning, looking for the right fit for them as well as the right fit for the company.

'Teaming'

Lane4 Group research shows that approximately 38% of internal communicators admit to working in silos, despite 85% saying this needs to change. When it comes to cross-functional collaboration, a staggering 53% of internal communicators

said they were unaware of what other business areas could offer should they collaborate.

The answer in a changing world is 'teaming'. Who is in your IC team? Have you included HR, OD, change, business, and more? Collaboration isn't just a function for employees to engage with one another, but a business challenge to ensure a collaborative workforce.

This requires 'ego-less leaders' who can drive collaboration but then step back and allow others to come to the front... delegation and empowerment are the cornerstone of collaboration.

Having said this, collaboration will backfire if a business drives collaboration, but then rejects or fails to report on results and suggestions taken on board and executed.

Collaboration

Travelport's VP of Corporate Communications, Kate Aldridge, then addressed collaboration challenges and successes during communication of the organisation's IPO last year. Technologies don't change culture, and there are no quick fixes to introduce collaboration and alignment. Many organisations think that by installing a new enterprise social network, collaboration will simply emerge. In real terms, what you see on a technical platform is in fact a mirror of the organisation's culture.

Leaders are the drivers of culture... when leaders are visible, collaborate and walk the floor, employees feel more engaged and willing to take part in organisational initiatives.

At the beginning, human resources typically sees communication as a mouthpiece rather than as a strategic partner. They are briefed on messages to communicate, but usually at the last minute. When the IPO took place, internal communication was brought on board from the beginning on a true collaborative partnership, which allowed the organisation to do things right from the beginning.

For this to happen, internal communication needs to elevate their role to a strategic positioning that adds to the bottom line of the business by driving engagement that leads to productivity. When this happens, internal communication can be seen as a values-trusted expert that can be partnered with. In many organisations, leadership communication is built into KPIs to ensure it is driven on a regular basis to become part of the fabric of the business.

Storytelling

Storytelling plays a key role in driving collaborative networks, says Paul Jewitt-Harris of Lane4 Group. Stories are everywhere - in newspapers, books, on TV and the internet. Every day conversation is full of anecdotes and real-life stories, and every individual has those stories to tell - if only people would listen. The emphasis of storytelling is as much on the telling as it is about the story itself - it's the ability to grab people's attention by describing a situation rather than diving into a PowerPoint slideshow. After all, nothing beats the experience of a live storytelling performance that brings a person's

experiences to life and creates a closer connection.

In many organisations, internal communication practitioners are using these tools to host open sessions to engage employees at a less formal level, to drive improved engagement and performance.

Measurement

Measurement isn't so much about collaboration, but it keeps coming up every time internal communication practitioners are asked about their priorities and challenges. Some 50% of communicators say measurement is a nice to have, and yet there is a disproportionate representation at business level, where communicators are not represented.

Often, the barriers to rolling out measurement are lack of knowledge and how to do it; fear of the results they might get; data overload in the business and not knowing what to do with the results; difficulty in securing budget, because no ROI has been presented; and isolated impact by not following through on annual surveys.

Despite this, companies that do measure it enhance the role of their communication practitioners and, as a result, elevate measurement to a business outcomes level. The challenge, however, is also in recruiting the right specialists for these roles, as the landscape changes from generalists to specialists in specific fields.

Groups handling internal communications within their organisations experiment with engaging employees through virtual forums, lunch sessions, and CEO discussions. These forums create space for collaboration and improved engagement as a result, which can improve productivity. In time, meaningful collaboration drives a true culture of innovation. How might internal communication practitioners secure deeper engagement? It's a game changer.

ABOUT DANIEL MUNSLOW

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