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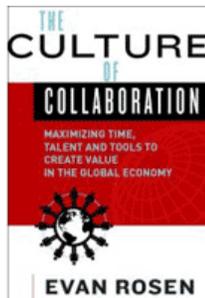
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# In Today's Process-Driven Workplace, Collaboration Is King

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"The in-box culture is dead," says Evan Rosen in his new book, "The Culture of Collaboration: Maximizing Time, Talent and Tools to Create Value in the Global Economy."

This may come as a surprise if you're one of those people who start work every day facing 500 e-mails begging ASAP replies. If, however, your company embraces a collaborative culture, those 500 e-mails can be addressed in minutes or even seconds using the appropriate tools of collaborative technology.

Rosen, a former network news reporter who consults with Fortune 500 companies on communication and collaboration strategies, has written a guide for managers and employees who want to foster a more collaborative culture within the framework of their companies. Using examples from such wide-ranging companies as Dow Chemical, Boeing and Mayo Clinic, Rosen tells the stories of specific productivity and communications problems -- in-house, regional and global -- that were solved by innovative people who introduced collaborative practices into their everyday work styles.

This book is a deep-dive, employing flow charts, lengthy chapters and many business buzzwords -- not for the casual reader. But if you are committed to understanding exactly how and why collaborative tools will motivate your employees and drive your business, this is the book for you.

## What smokers can teach us

Rosen uses some strikingly illustrative examples to explain his ideas. In his chapter on the "Silo Syndrome" (in which employees in different departments, hierarchical levels or functions have little to do with one another), he uses smoking as an example of a method which has proven to break down communication barriers.

No, he is not encouraging us to start smoking. But, just as smokers congregating in outdoor enclaves strike up work-related conversation and get to know their roles and focal concerns within the company -- forming a kind of club of common interests -- today's technological tools can help employees find common ground. Instant messaging, video conferencing and other communication tools bring people together in a quick, casual exchange of information and ideas.

Managers who fear IM and other tools requiring free Internet access -- as well as telecommuting (which requires such tools) -- are indulging in old-school thinking, Rosen says. Benefits far outweigh the risks, as many successful companies have found.

## The four key trends

Four key trends are changing the business landscape and are fueling the demand for richer interactions within and among companies of all sizes, Rosen says. They are:

- Technological: convergence of video, voice and data over Internet protocol
- Economic: exploiting the best talent at the best price regardless of geography
- Cultural: the desire for instant feedback and the expectation of immediacy
- Regulatory: complying with scores of new federal, state and local laws

These trends are freeing up the employment marketplace, allowing talented people access to the best jobs, regardless of their location. Industries are finding that workers from the entry-level jobs can generate ideas to benefit the company, with their new ability to communicate at every level.

Workplace design is opening up the physical space, bringing people from marketing, accounting and the executive offices

together on a daily basis. The technology that facilitates the global economy is opening doors to understanding and knowledge of other cultures and modes of thinking.

It is an exciting time for the company willing to abandon the status quo and embrace flexibility and new methods of collaboration.

**The Mayo Clinic: a collaborative culture**

Dr. William Worrall Mayo and his sons founded the clinic that bears their name in 1883. Its mission from the beginning was to deliver health care in a collaborative method involving nurses, doctors and staff. You can see the results today in what is among the top health care delivery systems in the world. Mayo calls their method "integrated clinical practice."

A patient checking into Mayo is delivered into a seamless world where all health examinations and tests are coordinated in (usually) a single day. Collaborative teams of specialists and technicians meet either in person or through videoconference to agree on a diagnosis and treatment strategy. All Mayo doctors are salaried, so there is no profit motive defending turfs. The CEO is a practicing doctor who serves a fixed term and then typically returns to full-time work.

When Mayo leveraged its brand in the mid 1980s, opening clinics in Jacksonville, Florida and Scottsdale, Arizona, there suddenly appeared a disconnect not only geographically but culturally. In order to encourage the continuation of its integrated practice and consensus leadership, it became necessary to implement better communication tools. First, Mayo began a customized paging system which allows every employee to reach another employee in any location by dialing five digits. Soon the need for frequent and urgent voice and visual communication became evident. Today the Mayo Clinic uses satellite-based videoconferencing, which is not charged by department but available to all in a way similar to basic utilities like water and electricity.

**Bottom Line:**

There are 10 cultural elements that are typically present when collaboration works, Rosen says. These are:

- **Trust** -- To exchange ideas and create something with others, we must develop trust. This is a challenge, especially in competitive organizational cultures. Nevertheless, we must get over our fears and develop trust if we are to collaborate freely.
- **Sharing** -- Hoarding information prevents the free flow of ideas and therefore sabotages collaboration. Sharing what we know improves collective creation by an order of magnitude and therefore makes everybody more valuable.
- **Goals** -- Taking the time to agree on goals at the beginning of a collaborative project pays off exponentially by providing the impetus for shared creation.
- **Innovation** -- The desire to innovate fuels collaboration. In turn, collaboration enhances innovation. After all, why collaborate just to maintain the status quo?
- **Environment** -- The design of both physical space and virtual environments impacts innovation and collaboration.
- **Collaborative Chaos** -- While all people and organizations require some order, effective collaboration requires some degree of chaos. Collaborative chaos allows the unexpected to happen and generates rich returns.
- **Constructive Confrontation** -- Great collaboration requires exchanging viewpoints, and sometimes that means construction confrontation -- expressing candor about ideas. Collaborators must confront each other so that they can hash out their differences and make their shared creation better.
- **Communication** -- Collaboration is inextricably linked with communication, both interpersonal and organizational.
- **Community** -- Without a sense of community, we often lack comfort and trust. Therefore, community must be present for effective collaboration to occur.
- **Value** -- The primary reason we collaborate is to create value -- reducing cycle or product development time, creating a new market, solving problems faster, designing a more marketable product or service, or increasing sales.

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