

Foreword

Some think that the trajectory of human progress has been fuelled uniquely by competition and creative destruction. For me the human capacity to relate, co-operate and collaborate has been just as fundamental a driver at the heart of our progress as a species. Indeed as the world we live in becomes progressively intertwined and interdependent our continued prosperity depends increasingly on our willingness and ability to collaborate effectively.

In business, collaboration has been at the heart of our organisations for centuries. Joint stock companies evolved to enable individuals to combine intellectual and financial capital to pursue ventures that required collective action and shared responsibility for risk to be successful. In today's economy the confines of a single organisation often does not provide sufficient capacity to make progress. In the global beverage business, where I have worked for more than 35 years, this need for effective and efficient collaboration has never been more apparent. But the need for leaders to work together across organisational and cultural divides is a growing phenomenon in all industries and is arguably even more of an imperative in the delivery of public services, particularly since the advent of the financial and economic crisis. Often the requirement is to be able to quickly mobilise a team, harnessing resources from several disciplines to find a solution. While the technology helps it is the attitude of the individuals, their willingness and ability to collaborate that determines that speed of response and the capacity to resolve the problem.

Collaboration is not the soft option

I've known David and Alex for more than a decade now and they have been pioneers in this field for even longer - long before concepts like Collaborative Leadership became fashionable. The first edition of their book was my own initiation into the emerging consensus from biology, social psychology and behavioural economics of the human capacity to collaborate. It also introduced me to a set of skills that facilitate collaboration, practices that have become even more critical and relevant since that edition was published in 2008.

The rhetoric of markets can make words like collaboration, partnership and co-operation sound like soft options in a world that can seem increasingly competitive, uncertain and hostile. But the reality is that collaboration is demanding relying on a set of sophisticated skills to be successful. Collaboration is initiated by leaders who see an opportunity and who are determined and capable to do what is required to bring it to fruition. It is not simply about people getting on better or having more fun working together – it's about aligning disparate interests into a common purpose, it's about building trust, it is about working with each other to create something new together. It's also about managing conflict and often ceding control. Unless leaders are willing and able to see beyond their immediate self interest the default position can easily become competition and conflict. Successful collaboration requires difficult conversations with partners you can't control. People who don't think like you, don't have the same history as you, and don't have all the same objectives as you – but partners you depend on and who depend on you to make progress.

One example from my own career may help to illustrate the point. For Diageo water is a critical resource. It is a primary ingredient in the company's products, a critical component of the production processes and a fundamental requirement for the provision of the agricultural raw materials on which the company depends. Diageo recognises water as central to the sustainability of its brands and its business and is collaborating more and more with a range of stakeholders to address the challenges of availability. Conserving water and using it responsibly in all geographies is important but this is particularly true in areas of high water stress such as parts of Africa. In Kenya the business is growing rapidly in a region that faces long term water

supply issues to meet the needs of a burgeoning population and rapid economic growth. To safeguard its own interests and support the needs of the community in which it operates Diageo has been working in partnership with NGOs, local governments and other large commercial water users to develop a sustainable water supply infrastructure. But the relationships required to make a real difference can take years to build – you’ve got to sustain the focus on the long-term gain, and be prepared to work at the pace of the collective. And that brings its own tensions with managing the levels of internal impatience and the need for year on year results within your own organisation. But as David and Alex would advise – *‘you can’t hope to collaborate successfully with external partners unless you can build the necessary coalitions within your own organisation.’* In the end we often have to accept that we may be taking a lead but we are not in control.

It’s human nature – one way or another

Human nature has evolved to be tribal; we band together and imitate those with whom we identify. At the same time we are intensely competitive with those we see as different from us in some way, even those in very close proximity. You can see these dynamics at play in football grounds up and down the country every week – and you can see it in business life too. People like to stick with their own, look after their own, and beat the competition where they can. But tribalism at the small group level is no longer sufficient to address the challenges we face in business far less at the level of society. Like it or not we are dependent on each other in more and more ways. And leaders need to enable their ‘tribes’ to see beyond the confines of what they can achieve alone – inspiring individuals to look beyond their own boundaries and work collectively to maximise the benefits for the whole system. This will ultimately be the best for their own tribe too.

In this book David and Alex address this fundamental human dilemma head on. They combine their own expertise developed over many years of working in a range of sectors with the latest thinking about human motivation that has emerged from academic research to paint a path forward for leaders. They see people as having the intrinsic capability to both collaborate **and** to compete conditioned largely by the environment they perceive themselves to be in. And it’s the actions of leaders that can create and shape that environment. Leaders have the job of analysing the many relationships they are in to find the situations where the greatest needs for collaboration lie, and then building the right framework of behaviours, processes and rules to enable collaboration by stimulating our natural ability to find common cause given the right circumstances.

Why read this book?

For those of us who forage for our living in organisations this book provides us with the tools and skills required to develop and deploy some of our most critical skills. So if you are a leader who has to break down internal silos or to build coalitions of common interest in environments where you don’t have control you should read this book.

Working as a collaborative leader is challenging – but there is an emerging body of knowledge of how to make collaboration work and many of the skills and capabilities are explained in the pages that follow. I encourage you to read it and, more importantly to learn the lessons it offers to enable us all to prosper.

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