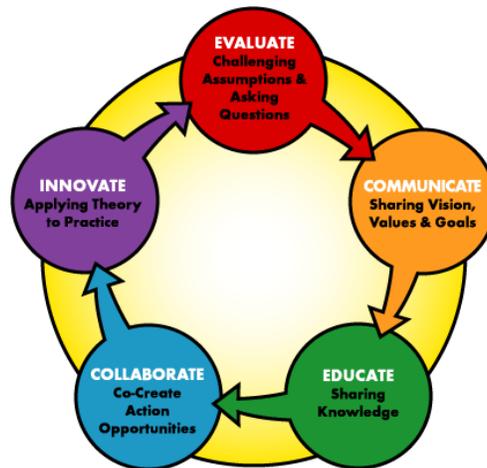


The Spirit of Collaboration: Creating and maintaining a culture of innovation



Framework

The Spirit of Collaboration framework is supported by research-based evidence, biblical principles and values-aligned business ethics. The Spirit of Collaboration framework dovetails Knowledge Management (KM) and Socio-Technical Systems (STS) within the structure of Action-Science (Praxis) supporting end-to-end enterprise-wide “on-demand” knowledge creation, co-creating a cycle of sustained innovation and actionable knowledge. Spirit of Collaboration empowers organizational leaders to make values-aligned decisions for optimizing competitive advantage.

Overview

Innovation is the lifeblood of twenty-first century organization and authentic, honest and open (AHO) communications represent three legs of the collaborative framework, which is essential for developing and maintaining a perpetual cycle for innovation and competitive advantage. Collaboration is essential for co-creating new knowledge. Socio-technical systems (STS) enable collaboration. (For the purposes of this discussion, new knowledge is defined as that which occurs when learning becomes situated in a moment of action requiring a novel response [actionable knowledge], where work groups think together, organizing innovative work patterns, co-creating a cycle of sustained innovation). There are three critical constituents of the Spirit of Collaboration framework: The Spirit leader, the learner and the technology and the practice draws from the traditions of the bible, leadership theory, and socio-technical systems (STS).

Co-creating a cycle of innovation involves an integral and transformational journey of joint discovery—understanding self in relation with God and His creations (John 15:15, NIV). Accordingly, as the graphic illustrates, the Spirit of Collaboration is *integral*, linking the interaction of people (a social system) with tools and techniques (a technical system)—a *Socio-technical System (STS)*. It is *transformational* in that collaboration requires participants to acknowledge each member interdependent and not independent from other members (1 Corinthians 12).

Here, we approach the twenty-first century “living” organization as a socio-technical ecosystem focusing wholly on group relations on three interrelated and reciprocally connected systems including:

- *Individual systems (Me)*
- *Workgroup systems (We) and*
- *Community-wide systems (Us)*

Socio-technical systems are extremely rich, flexible and adaptive, self-organizing collaborative communities of practice whose members share common values, vision and goals. The associated STS tools are capable of making the connection between culture and technology.

Worldviews

Spirit of Collaboration enables leaders at the top of the enterprise ecosystem to make better decisions faster, mitigate risks and redundancy of effort, and ultimately develop and maintain a sustained cycle of innovation—productive workplace comprised of decisive, committed and engaged people.

Research indicates that ineffective decisions often result from lack of collaboration.¹ Highly effective organizations and their leaders create an intentional space for: evaluation, communication, organizational learning, collaboration and knowledge sharing. *Spirit of Collaboration helps create community in the workplace, optimize individual and workgroup learning, values-aligned decision-making, communicating and performance optimization* (Romans 12:3-5).

Integrating a system for collaboration in organizations not only leads to competitive advantage, but the most immediate effect is better employee and customer-centered relations. We call this effect the Total Buy-In Factor (TBIF). Business enterprises that provide the mechanism for better collaboration can experience the competitive advantage of having their people aligned with values that help organizational members help themselves, their work group, and their company to perform better.

There are five stages to the Spirit of Collaboration Framework

1. EVALUATE (Situation Analysis):

The Evaluation stage is almost always preceded by a “recognition of needs phase”. The individual, workgroup, department or project manager becomes aware that there are some problems (critical issues or constraints) with the present situation that needs to be resolved. There is a noticeable “knowledge gap” and/or, growing pattern of dissatisfaction with the existing situation. There is, therefore, very low resistance for proposing a situation analysis. Evaluation can be formal or informal. In this phase involves both self-assessments, team and organizational. *Uncovering the true nature of the discontent(s) is the first step in properly and effectively evaluating what to do about the situation.*

2. COMMUNICATE (Unfiltered Conversation):

The sharing of knowledge can be referred to as “environmental scanning” and this simply means authentic, honest and open (AHO) unfiltered conversation around the issues. It’s the kind of discourse that commonly takes place between friends over coffee or, around the water cooler. Within the workplace, employees need to perform tasks with competency and in compliance with established ethical standards and criteria. This kind of knowledge is easy to codify, transfer, and manage. At a higher level, business intelligence is more abstract and requires critical epistemology and disciplined inquiry. In this phase we want to answer the following key questions:

- What do we know?
- What don’t we know?
- How do we know what we know?
- How do we validate what we know?

¹ Evans and Wolf (2005). Collaboration rules. HBR #R0507 H

Effective decision-making requires evaluation of options including the steps of benchmarking, determining best practices, and coming up with innovative approaches. This phase often includes a review of current policies, operating procedures and confirmation of values, vision and goals.

Through heartily comparing, observing, reading, discussing and soliciting the advice of subject matter experts (SME's) and other professionals, information is harvested and assessed. This is the science and art of collaborative inquiry. *As the flow of authentic, honest and open (AHO) communication increases, all facets of the situation become clearly visible allowing people to make better decisions faster.* Hidden agendas and sidebar conversations are minimized as objective evaluation is valued and rewarded.

3. EDUCATE (Breakthrough Learning):

Many organizations jump right into training without fully evaluating possible barriers, obstacles or constraints that keep organizational members from learning new practices and co-creating innovative work patterns. This is where breakthrough learning becomes important. Traditionally training and development are designed to shrink the knowledge gap. However, Spirit of Collaboration is also designed to expand the knowledge gap. This is new!

Spirit of Collaboration helps create an intentional space for breakthrough learning—a place between what is known (benchmarking) and what is yet to be known (innovative practices). Breakthrough learning results from the willingness to plunge into the creative chaos of unexplored territory. Once we have faced our brutal reality through assembling valid, reliable data and unbiased information—that is, by understanding “the way we do business around here”—it becomes possible to see how a change in behavior, system or process would be of value to the individual, the workgroup and entire enterprise.

4. COLLABORATE (Actionable Knowledge):

Collaborative systems have a solid track record for distributed intelligence—knowledge sharing. However, sharing information is easy to do. Co-creating something of value with this information requires some cultivation and effort. After all, information is useless until someone does something with it. This is called *actionable knowledge*.² One of the most valuable benefits of collaboration is synergy. Examples are everywhere and include emergency rooms, air traffic controllers, five-star kitchens, and, of course, open-source developers—all working in concert, establishing and maintaining very high standards because they are motivated by each other's open, honest and genuine feedback. The quality of workmanship is extraordinarily high because the system is self-regulating, in other words, stands up to peer review.

“Collaboration rules” is the title of a Harvard Business Review case study that illuminates the benefits of creating and maintaining self-organizing communities characterized by engaged and motivated people who value knowledge sharing and collaborative competition. This represents an organization's cultural intelligence (CQ) and is a key organizational asset for recruiting, retaining and developing talent and in building a culture of decisive, committed and healthy individuals. *Getting the right people on board (recruiting, training and retaining) is a key feature of collaborative learning.*³ Collaborative environs attract very high quality people who feel confident and secure in their roles and are comfortable learning innovative practices—to lead in times of extreme uncertainty.

5. INNOVATE (Implementation):

This is a natural extension of the collaboration stage and where the rubber meets the road. It is here the organization optimizes its competitive advantage. Reflection, peer review and debriefing help to filter new knowledge from best practices. *In addition to identifying actions that are truly innovative, the organization's leaders are able to make confident decisions - even in times of*

² Morgan, K. (2004). Creating Actionable Knowledge within the Organization to Achieve a Competitive Advantage. Academy of Management.

³ Collins, J. (2001). *Good to great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap... and Others Don't*. New York: Harper Collins Books.

uncertainty. This is because an organization's intelligence is its greatest asset. Knowledge that has stood up to peer-review reinforces collaboration and TBIF. Subject matter experts have stepped forward and offered opinions rather than flying below the radar. Collaborative learning is what competitive advantage looks like.

SUMMARY

Creating an intentional space for collaborative learning is a critical executive skill for the twenty-first-century organizational leader. Spirit of Collaboration by design provides real-time end-to-end metrics for initiating, managing and measuring innovation, this helps organizational members track progress and measure outcomes. The whole process has a clear beginning, middle and end. It's cyclical, integral and transformational. Every ninety days the whole cycle starts over again allowing participants to track progress alongside quarterly financial statements, linking organizational learning with bottom line ROI.

Spirit of Collaboration provides a roadmap that will help:

- Optimize resources; people, time and money
- Manage and measure competency and compliance
- Metrics for real-time feedback
- Training is valued--learning is a way of being
- Appreciate and value differences; culture, workgroup or division
- Performance Improvement; track (project) progress 24/7
- Achieve higher levels of commitment and cooperation
- Inspire and reward knowledge creation and innovation
- Grow the organization, acquire, service, and retain employees and customers