



INCREASING COLLABORATION BREAKING DOWN SILOS

The corporate world is changing exponentially, requiring teams to collaborate and innovate. Organizations with cultures that support cross-functional teams' interactions and the breaking down of silos are becoming more effective. Breaking silos is a critical factor in the long-term success of an organization. Still, many organizations are struggling with maintaining collaboration among their teams.

CAUSES OF A SILO MENTALITY

A silo mentality in an organization is the reluctance to share information among employees in different departments or teams. It has the impact of reducing an organization's efficiency and can contribute to a damaged corporate culture. It can lead to duplicated work processes, misaligned goals, incompatible systems, lack of process integration, missed opportunities and more. The cause of this mentality is usually interdepartmental turf wars, which can

trickle down from departmental management. Other factors that can contribute to organizational silos include communication hierarchies, a conflicted leadership team and specialization getting out of control.

The result is sealed off departments where information is trapped, sequestered and inaccessible.



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WAYS OF BREAKING DOWN SILOS TO INCREASE COLLABORATION

Given the negative impact that silos have on an organization, leaders have a duty to break them and improve collaboration among employees. Fortunately, several approaches have proven to be effective in getting people to work together.

1. CREATING AND COMMUNICATING A UNIFIED VISION

When a department or individual's goals become more important than the organizational goals, silos tend to form. Employees start to lose sight of the broader company goals and instead focus on their own individual objectives. Creating and communicating a unified vision can help employees not only understand how they contribute to the overall organizational goals, but also why their individual goals are secondary to that of the organization. If an organization has grown accustomed to operating in silos, there is a need to communicate the vision more frequently and across all mediums. It is only by keeping the vision at the top of employees' minds that people see the bigger picture and channel their efforts in the right direction.

To ensure a unified vision across departments, some companies have established customer experience councils. As departmental managers and team leaders focus on the unified vision, their teams' objectives shift to support that unified vision.



2. GETTING TEAM LEADERS ON BOARD

Unless leaders demonstrate collaborative behavior, people in different teams will remain in silos. Company leaders have a duty of being an example to employees and demonstrating the importance of cross-functional collaboration and information sharing. Team leaders can break down silos by:

- » Talking about the shared goals among teams
- » Regularly communicating and spending time with other team leaders
- » Assigning team members the task of keeping another team in the loop on a project's progress
- » Recognizing and rewarding team players who demonstrate collaboration with other teams



3. BUILDING TRUST BETWEEN INDIVIDUALS AND TEAMS

One of the leading causes of silos in an organization is the lack of trust among employees. This usually happens when people in one team do not know the kind of people in another team. As a result, the question of trust tends to arise when dealing with big projects. By building trust among teams, employees are more likely to work collaboratively in projects. Although building trust takes time, the long-term effects are favorable. Effective ways of building trust include organizing or attending non-work social events and involving multiple teams in projects to encourage collaboration.

Part of building trust across teams is investing in their abilities to build great relationships. Executives need to model and help employees understand effective communication methods and ways of developing rapport with co-workers. This also includes growing the ability of teams to engage in honest and respectful conversations.

4. USE COLLABORATION TOOLS TO PROMOTE COMMON GOALS

Reluctance to share information can occur due to the lack of organizational efficiency. Collaboration tools have the power to bring teams together and encourage them to share information and ideas. In this digital age, a wide range of tools are available. Tools like these unify employee efforts, ensuring they are working toward the same goal. Some of the popular collaboration tools include:

- » Project management platforms with virtual whiteboard and chat capabilities
- » Data management tools that can be integrated with other platforms like CRM (customer relationship management) and company dashboard
- » Shared documents allowing multiple teams to contribute to a joint project plan, proposal or presentation





5. PROVIDE ONGOING LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Providing ongoing learning opportunities can go a long way in promoting collaboration. Such opportunities should be geared toward training employees to engage in behaviors that promote collaboration and teamwork. Examples of useful learning opportunities include conflict management training, team-building exercises and communication skills courses.

By instituting collaborative training within an organization, the silo mentality can be eradicated. A simple training event like a seminar on the dangers of silo mentality will enlighten employees on why they need to collaborate while providing them with real-time opportunities to do so.

6. OTHER WAYS OF BREAKING SILOS

Breaking down silos in an organization cannot be a one-time training, happy hour or project, but rather part of an overall culture to be adopted. Leaders need to model and communicate the unified organization vision into the everyday behaviors and tasks of employees. These changes will underpin organizational values and improve collaboration overall.

BOTTOM LINE

Organizational silos affect the performance and productivity of an organization negatively. They make it difficult for teams to work together, limiting the abilities to innovate and grow. Fixing silos within an organization is a top-down and bottom-up initiative, requiring the buy-in and dedication of all employees. Consider these tips to foster a healthy culture of collaboration and partnership for your organization.

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