

Behavioural Digest

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The Right Language By Walter Hufnagel

Dr Scott Geller always used to include a piece in his speeches about using the right language. He made the point that using the word 'accident' was wrong when describing injuries or incidents in the workplace. We seem to be entering that fray again with the word 'collaboration'.

This word means 'working together to achieve a goal'. Plenty of clients out there are asking for collaboration from suppliers tendering for work, they don't actually mean collaboration, they really mean co-operation. In all cases to my knowledge, these clients want a master/servant relationship with their suppliers. They want to decide what happens and when, and they want to call the shots - all the shots.

Clients should be asking for co-operation, not collaboration; at least that would be an honest view of what's happening. Behaviourally speaking, clients set the tone of a supplier relationship. They decide if things are going to be co-operative or aversive. Suppliers will always do their best to deal with whatever workplace environment the clients design and maintain for them.

Mirror Neurons By Howard Lees

Neuroscientists talk about 'mirror neuron' systems in the human brain. Mirror neurons enable humans and primates to imitate others and learn from demonstration and modeling. They are the neural basis of the human capacity for emotions such as empathy. They can help us understand the actions and intentions of other people and also help us develop feelings of reinforcement and security from our emerging empathic relationships. In turn, these relationships can thrive as we satisfy the need to create a solid and friendly camaraderie. In turn, a 'comfort zone' can be generated within our groups of work teams, friends, and families. A focus on empathy helps us learn others people's perspectives and it can help us develop enough information to understand their world better. If we can do that in the workplace then 'solutions to suit everyone involved' should emerge. A good question to ask people might be "Could you get a better understanding of all the other performers world in your workplace?"

Too often, people don't ask properly for what they want, then they get mad when they don't get it. People often jump over too many steps in the minimum set of shaping steps that would deliver a successful outcome. They move too quickly through the steps and don't stop to see if their assumptions are correct. They should work to get feedback from the performers and inspect what the actual obstacles to performance are. The solution? Well I guess our mirror neurons need to be exercised as much as many other parts of the human body, I never thought I would say this, but have you exercised your mirror neurons today?



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5 Steps to Collaborative Heaven

By Garry Sanderson

It is now almost a cliché to say that the need for better collaboration to meet the challenges of our modern world has never been greater. Yet how do we ensure that our collaborative efforts yield the outcomes we need?

Let me offer a simple framework for effective collaboration to ensure the high performance, innovation and change we require. This is based on the metaphor of a ladder in which each rung is a critical set of behaviours and must be climbed in turn.

The most basic requirement for collaboration is mutual responsiveness between the involved parties. Does everyone involved respond to emails and phone calls? Do they turn up to meetings on time?

The next level is meeting commitments. Do people do what they say they will do? Do they follow up on actions? These first two rungs may seem simplistic, given the sophisticated nature of the challenges we face. Yet, without these foundational basics in place, we cannot cross the gap to the higher-level collaborative rungs.

High performance relies on feedback and this is the central rung of the ladder. Observing and measuring the right things; proactively sharing perspectives and experiences; making iterative improvements and course corrections; how much is all this happening?

Creating an environment high in psychological safety is critical to achieving the collaborative creativity we need. In a psychologically safe environment, any team member can bring forward an idea, a concern or a criticism, without feeling the personal risk of retaliation or embarrassment. Creating such an environment is a leadership imperative that is not yet widely enough understood or practised.

Finally, the cumulative effect of the first four rungs allows the team to capitalise on the benefits of the whole group's experiences. The best thinking and the most innovative ideas cannot be created by people who all have similar backgrounds and experiences. If there are no disagreements, dissenting opinions or heated debate, the collaboration simply won't achieve the optimal level of results.

The rungs are held in place by the twin stringers:

- Clarity of intent
- Clarity of priorities

These ensure that our ladder is leaning against the right wall!

Shades of BMT

- You can only fully price something that is fully scoped.
- Clients cannot transfer risk to a supplier. Only the client needs the end product; everyone else can walk away.
- Every time a client inputs a threat, suppliers start building in mitigation. As a result, the final costs go up.
- Relying on complex contracts to 'secure' certainty just increases the overall price of the product.
- Collaboration - some clients should give that a try sometime!

The Hierarchy Effect...

Extended

By David Lees

We've written previously about the effect of a person's organisational status on a room full of subordinates. I think it's worth taking this further. Think about a supply chain. There's an upward view of the hierarchy, from suppliers up to clients, and there's a downward one.

Some supply chains are long, so the impact of how the superior behaves towards the subordinate can echo down the chain quite a long way. If a person believes they are in position of relative power, they will tend to behave differently – they might not be as likely to return a supplier's call as they would a client.

Isn't that just the way of the world? Well, the suppliers are usually the people who deliver the actual work that the clients want in the first place. Shouldn't they be the people who should receive higher weighting when you're considering the hierarchy of required responses?

Is It Safe To Talk?

By Howard Lees

Business leaders have to ensure that it's safe to talk about safety. If leaders get too emotional regarding any incident or injury, they risk shutting down the flow of information and also shutting down honesty in investigations. Keeping dialogue safe is the route to safety excellence. Don't be too observably disappointed if something goes wrong. Focus on the message 'thanks for telling me; this is a learning opportunity'. Yes, be caring, yes be concerned, but don't let any of your managers get too emotional and spoil the future. Information must flow freely and honestly for a safe place to be maintained.