



# 10

## Everyday Issues That Kill Collaboration

**John O. Burdett**



**TRANSEARCH**  
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As we sit at the very edge of an AI-inspired tipping point, three pragmatic realities emerge:

- » To take advantage of the emerging technology means retooling the very way organizations are designed. Five design essentials emerge: Flat, Focused, Fast, Flexible, and Fertile to new ideas. Flat, on its own, amounts to a profound cultural shift. Clearly, we will strip out non-decision-making levels – roles that communicate, coordinate, and connect. Technology will handle part of those, but the vacuum left means that all of those in the remaining leadership roles will have to significantly up their game when it comes to collaboration.
- » In the developed world, work from home – be it hybrid employment or some other form of “virtual employment” – is here to stay. Elvis has left the traditional employment building ... and he ain't coming back. So called, “management by walking around” is quickly becoming a redundant concept. In its place ... clear, creative, and constructive forms of collaboration become a business imperative.
- » Business models predicated on “performance excellence” are losing competitive traction when faced with “customer intimacy.” For the latter read: “partnership,” “provider–customer mutual coaching,” and “collaboration.”

The message is clear ... in the turbulent world we are entering, if you are not collaborating you are not competing. There are a good many team-based tools that will move the collaboration needle. The place to start, however, is to work on the everyday issues, that if not addressed, kill collaboration. Ten such examples follow:

“ ...in the turbulent world we are entering, if you are not collaborating you are not competing.”



1

**Failing to recognise that the leader works for the team**  
– not the other way around.

2

**Accepting “Yes, but”** as a way for a team member to insert themselves into the conversation.

3

**Permitting dialogue along the lines of, “How do we make money from this?”** as opposed to “How do we make the customer’s business better?”

4

**Confusing cooperation with collaboration.** The former is two or more people in pursuit of a common purpose where the benefits are shared equally. Collaboration is two or more people sharing a common purpose but where “your success is more important than mine.”

5

**Promoting people into a leadership role** where it’s apparent that either their collaboration or coaching gene is muted.



6

**Creating imagery (e.g., the website and/or marketing literature) that cameos / promotes the individual** rather than recognises the 21<sup>st</sup> century reality that super teams are much more important than superstars.

7

**Fostering a business model that assumes future success rests on getting better at what you have always done.** Collaboration, by comparison, means building the emerging offering in partnership with the customer. The goal? A distinct point of differentiation that focuses on what tomorrow's customers want to buy and how they want to buy it.

8

**Supporting a performance management process that force fits members of an excellent team into a normal distribution curve.** The result? Conflict and resentment are inevitable. A comparison from sports would be the team that won the World Cup being allowed to award only two gold medals.

9

**Neglecting to differentiate between a “job” and a “role.” In a job, overlap is avoided at all cost.** A role has a requisite core: outcomes that must be achieved. Outside of that core the incumbent can shape/expand the nature of their contribution. The resulting role “overlap” within the team is where collaboration and breakthrough thinking flourish.

10

**Disregarding inspirational language, metaphor – and especially story – that celebrates collaboration everyday ... in every way.**

The good news in all this is that collaboration is a human trait that is woven into our very being. We are here, we outcompeted other genus Homo, literally, because of our ability to forge and work together in large groups. The challenge is, thus, less about teaching people how to collaborate than it is about sweeping the impediments away.



**JOHN O. BURDETT** has worked in over 40 countries as an executive and as a consultant for businesses that are household names. He continues to work on leadership development and organization culture for some of the world's largest corporations. In 2019, his work with ABB's top 240 executives received a major international award for the most innovative leadership development initiative of that year.

His ongoing partnership with TRANSEARCH International means that his proprietary work on talent acquisition, in any one year, successfully supports many hundreds of top leadership appointments on six continents.

He has written extensively on executive coaching and was awarded international coach of the year by the Finnish Institute of International Trade. Business graduates at the University of Texas indicated that his material on coaching was the single most valuable learning source they took away from their undergraduate degree. He has also coached numerous executive teams around the world in how to coach. He currently coaches a select group of CEOs.

Apart from a range of corporate leadership workshops, he has taught at business schools on both sides of the Atlantic. His work on the MBA program at the University of Toronto received a teaching excellence award. John holds a doctorate in management development and is a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.

In addition to numerous business articles and twice being awarded article of the year by MCB publications, he has published 16 books on leadership, talent management, coaching and organization culture. A number of them bestsellers. His Leadership Beyond Crisis Series came out in 2021. In 2022, he brought out a fully revised version of his international bestselling book on executive integration: Without Breaking Stride.

Go to the TRANSEARCH International website to download John's books and articles (gratis). The site also has a number of webinars.

“ Organizations don't have a culture – they are their culture. ”  
– John O. Burdett



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