



# CUTTINGS...

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Articles that have appeared recently continue on the subject of team working, with a reflection on how some great companies manage to create cross functional capabilities through using teams; a comment on why we still fail to manage to create successful organisation change despite the human brain being wired for adaptation; and an interesting piece of research from Harvard that shows that long term productivity falls when workload is increased - and not just because of overload and work stress..

Enjoy,

*Geof Cox*

## In this edition

**Great Capabilities through Real Teams.** Some reflections about how to develop great cross functional capabilities.

**If old dogs can learn new tricks, why does organisation change still fail?** The brain adapts to change so why not here?

**The short term and long term effects of increased workload.** Long term productivity falls as workload increases

Plus details of **Public Courses**, **Book Sales**, and **Snippets** to further provoke your thinking and reflection.

## Great Capabilities through Real Teams

Great companies need great capabilities. And inside every company that does things exceptionally well are teams of people working across functional boundaries, year after year, doing things together they couldn't do alone. Apple, for instance, is known for its product development teams, which bring together people from a variety of disciplines, including engineering, design, and marketing. CEMEX, the Mexico-based cement company, uses its sophisticated knowledge management systems to bring people into continual contact with each other, to talk about capabilities at a global scale.

Capabilities like these have to be cross-functional. They have to assemble specialists in diverse fields — such as information technology, finance, learning and development, design, and marketing — to create offerings that deliver spectacular value to their chosen customers. They have to do this time and time again, not just for a one-time success. They have to instill these cross-functional capabilities deep into the enterprise, which is difficult and time-consuming. If these skills were easy, they wouldn't be distinctive, because every company in the industry would have them.

## Snippets

*A collection of thought provokers and quotations...*

"In a hierarchy, every employee tends to rise to his level of incompetence."

*Dr Laurence J. Peter*

"I never teach my pupils; I only provide the conditions in which they can learn."

*Albert Einstein*

"What you seek is seeking you."

*Jalaluddin Rumi*

"Your attitude, not your aptitude, will determine your altitude."

*Zig Ziglar*

"Let us all be the leaders we want."

*Simon Sinek*

"It's a very important thing to learn

What kinds of teams can develop capabilities like these? In a recent article, strategy+business authors cite Jon Katzenbach's long held view they have to be "real teams", defined as having these three characteristics:

- all members of a real team have an equally high level of emotional commitment to the team's purpose and goals
- the leadership role shifts easily among the members based on the skills and experience they have and the challenges of the moment, rather than on any hierarchical positions
- the team members hold one another accountable for the quality of their collective work - they subordinate their formal affiliations, personal prejudices, and loyalties to the team's purpose and goals.

Notice that Katzenbach does not include internal competition in his description of real teams. In many companies, there is an ongoing debate about the role internal competition plays in the organisation's effectiveness. Some argue that it drives innovation, accountability, and personal ambition. But in reality internal competition discourages meaningful collaboration and increases employee dissatisfaction. It also wastes valuable resources and energy in fighting the wrong battles. The real competition is outside your firm.

So, strategy+business suggest that instead of internal competition, focus on developing real teams. Team members come from different specialisations, but they will work easily and closely together if they are achieving a single powerful purpose. And articulate a clear understanding of the role each team plays in ensuring that success.

When people see how their efforts make a difference, they create the kind of cross-functional teams that work.

### USEFUL LINKS

[Click here](#) to read the complete article in strategy+business

**New Directions** offer workshops and consultancy on building building high performance teams. For more information [Click here](#).

## If old dogs can learn new tricks, why does organisation change still fail?

The adult brain can, and does, change in response to its working environment. This 'neuroplasticity' misdescribed by the eminent psychologist Dr Walter Mischel as the most significant discovery in social science of his lifetime.

So if the human brain is wired for change, how come organisational change still has such a poor track record? Consistently over the years, studies of organisational change projects report a 'success' rate of only around 30-40%. So, can we learn a 'brain friendly' way of introducing change that will increase success? According to change facilitator Gary Huffman, there is, and he outlined his thinking at the recent Behavioural Science at Work conference in London.

Huffman's experience, which mirrors John Kotter's famous research

to talk to people you disagree with."  
*Pete Seeger*

"No man can be successful, unless he first loves his work."  
*David Sarnoff*

"Everyone is the architect of their own learning."  
*Appius Claudius*

"Coaching requires the manager to replace authority with a strategy that lets the employee take control."  
*Neil Stroul*

"Live as if you were to die tomorrow. Learn as if you were to live forever."  
*Gandhi*

"I like to listen. I have learned a great deal from listening carefully. Most people never listen."  
*Ernest Hemingway*

"Knowing is not enough; we must apply. Willing is not enough; we must do."  
*Goethe*

"Consistency is the last bastion of the unimaginative"  
*Oscar Wilde*

## The short term and long term effects of increased workload

A fascinating piece of research from Harvard University shows that under conditions of increasing workload, after individuals have exhausted the speed of task completion to get the work done, they start to select different tasks in order to manage their workload.

The researchers found, in both field and lab studies, that individuals may then choose to complete easier tasks in order to get the positive feelings

many years ago, is that too many organisations spend extensive time with the senior leadership team to refine and understand the change plan and then give the rest of the organisation a quick 'town hall' broadcast session and a soft copy of the slide deck. In these situations, it is little wonder that employees struggle to engage with the new approach; they weren't given the framework, time or space to do so. Being told to engage with change is unlikely to provide employees with sufficient motivation to do so. We need to give all those effected by organisation change a framework through which to consider it, its implications for them, and how they can adapt to it. They require time and space which is too often overlooked.

If we provide the framework, time and space we create a 'calm, safe brain' and a 'state of relaxed alertness' which allows adapting and learning processes to flourish. This brain state behaves in a very different way to an 'anxious brain' which develops from a 'threat response' mind-set which is inherent in most organisation change communications. From my own experience, the use of strengths based, participative and whole system processes to engage employees creates the frameworks and opportunity for change to be introduced in a brain-friendly (and person-friendly) way.

#### USEFUL LINKS

**New Directions** offer workshops and consultancy on designing and introducing positive organisation change, often using highly participative, whole system processes. For more information [Click here](#).

that accrue as work is finished.

However, although this selection process improves performance in the short-term the researchers found that this task selection strategy can hurt performance – as measured both by speed and revenue – in the long run.

The negative effect here is not driven by the stress caused by overwork (which has been shown in other studies) but from a lack of learning arising from completing easier tasks. If there is no learning, then long term performance will suffer.

The implications for managers is to make sure that individuals have a clear focus on priorities and get feedback on effective task selection, not just on task completion metrics. The research also suggests that 'chunking' harder tasks may also be beneficial in generating more 'completion highs'.

#### USEFUL LINKS

[Click here](#) to read the research article from Harvard Business School

## Public Courses 2017

New Directions runs a small number of public training programmes in association with partners. 2016 dates are below.

### Human Competency and Capability Development

A 4 day course in human resource development strategy for the oil and gas sector.

**Kuala Lumpur** [3-6 October](#)

### International Oil & Gas Executive Programme

An intensive 5 day workshop in strategic management.

**Kuala Lumpur** [9-13 October](#)

#### USEFUL LINKS

[New Directions consultancy and training services](#)

## Cuttings

**Cuttings** is a bi-monthly collection of ideas and comments published elsewhere which have attracted my attention over the past couple of months. It is designed for readers who are interested in individual, organisation and management development and is free. It has been published continuously for more than 20 years by *New Directions*, an international network of consultants and trainers who work together to learn, research, design and provide consulting and training in individual, management, and organisation development.

#### USEFUL LINKS

[Past issues of Cuttings](#)

[New Directions website](#)

[Getting Results Without Authority](#)

## Book sales

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