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Review of Collaboration: How Leaders Avoid the Traps, Create Unity, and Reap Big Results

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Review of Collaboration: How Leaders Avoid the Traps, Create Unity, and Reap Big Results

Keywords

Collaboration, companies, organizations, management

Review of *Collaboration: How Leaders Avoid the Traps, Create Unity, and Reap Big Results*

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This book focuses on collaborations within companies and organizations. However, some of the ideas presented here can be used for collaborating with outside organizations. Based on the author's fifteen years of research, it is a scholarly book with a practical orientation offering guidelines on collaboration that improves the organization and its goals. Jim Collins, the best-selling author of several books about how good companies can become great companies, says in the foreword: "[This is an] insightful and practical book...whether you lead a business, conduct an orchestra, operate a hospital, command a brigade, run for public office, direct a government agency, coach a sports team—every complex enterprise requires collaboration." (xi) This would certainly include libraries.

The author introduces his subject by saying that bad collaboration is reckless and a waste of resources. He proposes a set of principles called "disciplined collaboration," which is "the leadership practice of properly assessing when to collaborate (and when not to) and instilling in people the willingness and the ability to collaborate when required." (15) Chapter 1 illustrates good and bad collaboration using the story of Sony's failure to compete with Apple's iPod. He lists several collaborative traps and outlines the rest of the book.

Chapter 2 discusses the vital parts of disciplined collaboration with the focus on how leaders can cultivate collaboration in others. These include recognizing and evaluating opportunities for collaboration with an emphasis on only collaborating if there is a substantial benefit to the organization. Chapter 3 outlines four barriers to effective

collaboration: the not-invented-here, hoarding, search, and transfer barriers.

Chapters 4 through 6 focus on solutions discussing three unification mechanisms: creating a unifying goal, inciting a common value of teamwork, and speaking the language of collaboration. The fifth chapter proposes cultivating T-shaped management, a kind of management that encourages both collaboration across the organization and deliverance of the results required from the job. This chapter includes evaluation techniques and methods for transitioning an existing team. The sixth chapter provides six rules for creating nimble networks.

The final chapter of the book is intended for leaders. The author discusses what it means to take on a collaborative leadership style and identifies personal barriers that could block success. There is even a helpful self-test. The author says that disciplined collaboration promotes both centralized and decentralized decision making and that it is best to choose the approach which provides the best solution.

This book is well organized; each chapter begins with a captivating example of the topic and then builds on each of the points discussed. The text uses many ways to focus on the key points: italics, shaded sentences, highlighting, charts and graphs, and, of course, the fascinating examples from his research. The examples are not all from corporations. One uses the FBI/CIA non-collaboration of information about the 9/11 pilots, and another shows Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger changing his style from militaristic to collaborator with the real winner being the state of California. Each chapter ends with a page summarizing key

points. An appendix explains the author's research. There is an extensive bibliography and an index.

The author's credentials are impressive. Formerly a professor at the Harvard Business School, Hansen is now at the University of California Berkeley's School of Information and at INSEAD (the Business School for the World) in France. A worldwide consultant on collaboration, he has published several articles on the topic. Hansen was also a research team member for Jim Collins' bestseller, *Built to Last*.

This book, with its basis in scholarly research and its practical approach, provides a wonderful guide to successful disciplined collaboration. One caveat: because of its base in 1990s research, it does not address the use of technology, how technology has affected the workplace, or even how technology might be used to promote collaboration. However, Hansen's book is the best of its kind, a practical how-to guide about achieving effective disciplined collaboration.

Hansen, Morton T. *Collaboration: How Leaders Avoid the Traps, Create Unity, and Reap Big Results*. Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2009.