Episode 62 Show Notes: How to Unleash Effective Collaboration

While companies today understand the value of effective collaboration within their teams and across organizations, there is usually a lack of clarity as to how to best harness the talent and high performance of individuals within the collaborative process. Carlos Valdes-Dapena is the founder of Corporate Collaboration Resources, an organization, and group effectiveness consulting firm. He has been working with organizations for over 17 years on collaboration and teamwork. Carlos explains why companies are struggling to achieve effective collaboration. He highlights the importance of identifying the underlying cause of team dysfunction and the importance of not trying to solve individual dysfunction with a group intervention. Carlos offers his ‘Radar Screen’ tool and explains how this simple tool can be used to identify high versus low collaboration projects and to ensure meetings focus on the projects requiring the highest team collaboration.

Carlos was recently at Mars, Inc. where he worked on brands including M&Ms, Snickers, Uncle Ben’s Rice, and Wrigley’s Gum. While there, he was awarded the Global Make a Difference Award, for the development of a framework for high-performance collaboration. Carlos’s book (due out in late October 2018) *Lessons from Mars: How one Global Company Cracked the Code on High-Performance Collaboration and Teamwork*. Prior to Mars, Carlos spent three years at IBM as an executive coach and consultant working with their top 35 global leaders. He began his consulting career at Development Dimensions International (DDI), the global talent development firm, where he was a leadership and management performance consultant.

Key Learnings From This Episode

- **Why companies are struggling to figure out how to inspire and unleash more effective collaboration.** Organizations tend to hire action-oriented, results-focused people and all the systems within the company reinforce the drive to get things done. Companies talk teamwork and all the artifacts of collaboration are on display (e.g., posters, Myers Briggs wooden blocks, etc.), but they are still not achieving collaboration. People recognize the desire and need for collaboration but
typically default to what gets results – individual effort. The response at Mars and other organizations has been to focus on relationships and trust in team-building, assuming that familiarity will breed collaboration.

- **The Mars Experience.** At Mars, the tension that existed between individuals being star performers and being collaborative had been unresolved. The question became – is there some way to make collaboration feel like something to be achieved? Collaboration and teamwork tend to be viewed as concepts. How can you make collaboration so clear that achievement-driven individuals will be drawn to it just as they are drawn to the individual work that they are accountable for?

The team at Mars built a framework that addressed high-performance collaboration as being the marriage between individual motivation and group dynamics and effectiveness. The Mars culture and drive for achievement gave birth to this framework, and there was a ‘cultural harmony’ with it. It became embedded in all management training program and it took off. **Mars is not unique in its desire for results and action-oriented people.** This tends to be a Western norm and may not necessarily be true in all national or regional cultures.

- **Team Dysfunction Causes and Responses.** Most of what is labeled as ‘team dysfunction’ is rooted in an individual. Typically, one person may not be carrying his/her weight, or may not have the right skills to be on the team, or may have been a bad hire. Ultimately, the team begins to accommodate the ‘problem’ individual (e.g., backchannel conversations occur, coalitions are formed against the individual, the manager might try to ‘protect’ the individual). The team leader/manager should be the person to intervene, coach and address the issue/person. **Interventions that try to apply a group solution to an individual performance problem will usually**
falter. If you use a team intervention, the team will gang up on the person who has not been performing, and it will ultimately reflect badly on the manager.

- **Team Dysfunction – It’s A Manager Problem.** Often, the performance issue is with the manager – maybe he/she was promoted too soon, or not provided the appropriate development, or was not given the right tools to do the job, maybe he/she was just not set up for success. Whether it’s the manager or an issue with a person on the team, it is still a manager issue because he/she is not doing what needs to get done to help that person get on track, to give them what they need to succeed, or to manage them out of the business. Most team dysfunction boils down to an individual problem, whether it’s the manager of the team or an individual on the team.

- **Dysfunctional Individuals Versus Dysfunctional teams.** What approach can HR leaders follow to determine if there is a team issue or if it is an individual problem? Have individual conversations with each team member. If an issue surfaces with an individual, partner with the team leader to help manage the performance and development of that individual. Do not try to address an individual performance with a team intervention. Address the individual performance problem.

- **Improving Team Performance.** All teams should think about the quality of their collaboration and how to enhance it. Every team has its performance ‘soft spots’. Team performance follows a bell curve in which there are high performers, low performers, and people in the middle. Assess the performance picture of the team. Determine if there is anyone on the team who is at risk. You do not want that person to bear an ‘unhealthy burden’ during a team workshop because they feel like they are in the hot seat. At-risk individuals are those who are driving dysfunctional behavior because they are not carrying their weight, they do not have the skills, and/or they have not been properly prepared. These individuals should be performance managed because they are at potential risk of losing their jobs. Performance is not equally distributed across a group. Know where the strengths are, know the deficits.

- **The Radar Screen. Determining work that requires collaboration versus what does not.** As a team, thinking about the work that requires collaboration can change the way it gets work done.

Map levels of collaboration using the Radar Screen:
- **Inner Ring:** These are a few pieces of work that a team can collaborate on – plot them in the center of the Radar Screen. This is the work that gets discussed in meetings.
Middle Ring: These are projects that involve subsets of the team. There is some collaboration, but not everyone all of the time. These go in the middle circle.

Outer Ring: Finally, there is work that can be handled by individuals.

The few pieces of work that a team will collaborate on should be the focus of team meetings.

Advice to HR. Rethink assumptions about teambuilding exercises that aren’t delivering results. Pause and think about how effective what you are doing is in the space of team building and think about what you can do differently and more effectively for your team-building budget.

Recommended Reading and References From this Episode

- [Lessons from Mars: How One Global Company Cracked the Code on High-Performance Collaboration and Teamwork](https://example.com) by Carlos Valdes-Dapena
- [Corporate Collaboration Resources Website](https://example.com)

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