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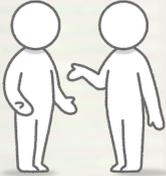
HUMANdynamic

THE POWER OF CROSS-FUNCTIONAL COLLABORATION:
Breaking Silos for Agility

Dear Coach,

My company talks a lot about collaboration, yet in practice, teams still work in silos. Projects slow down, and people seem disengaged. How can leaders make cross-functional collaboration work?

What you see is usually not just a commitment problem. Often, there are underlying psychological drivers behind the behavior. People focus on what is measured and rewarded, protect what they own, and avoid sharing issues that might bring blame. This can result in duplicated work, slow decisions, and lower morale.

A practical way forward is to understand what the barrier is and respond to it.

Type	Observation	Possible underlying psychological factors
Goal driven	Teams protect their own targets	Measures and rewards push local optimization
Expertise driven	Information and knowledge stay within one group	Control, status, or fear of being misunderstood
Emotion driven	Risks and issues surface late	Concern about blame, budget, or consequences

Considering starting with these 3 principles. First, make sure everyone is aiming at the same priorities and measured in a way that encourages shared success. Second, help teams understand each other's work through regular cross-team dialogue and increase work transparency. Third, enhance psychology safety where people can raise issues early without fear.

Here are some practical moves that can be helpful,

1. **Shared outcomes:** Agree the top priorities, tradeoffs, and decision owners. Review monthly.

2. **Cross functional check-in:** Short check-in to understand any issue and necessary decisions needed.

3. **Shared dashboard:** Set clear milestones and metrics visible to all teams involved.

4. **Increase role and work transparency:** Short shadowing or rotating roles on key projects to reduce assumptions.

5. **Humble inquiry:** Leaders can model open, non-blaming questions that help people share what they know early, such as "What are you seeing from your side?" or "What might we be missing?"

Start small but stay consistent. Align with what matters, connect with people across boundaries, and respond well when problems surface. When teams see that cooperation is supported and rewarded, they stop working around each other and start working with each other.

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