Collaborating for Results
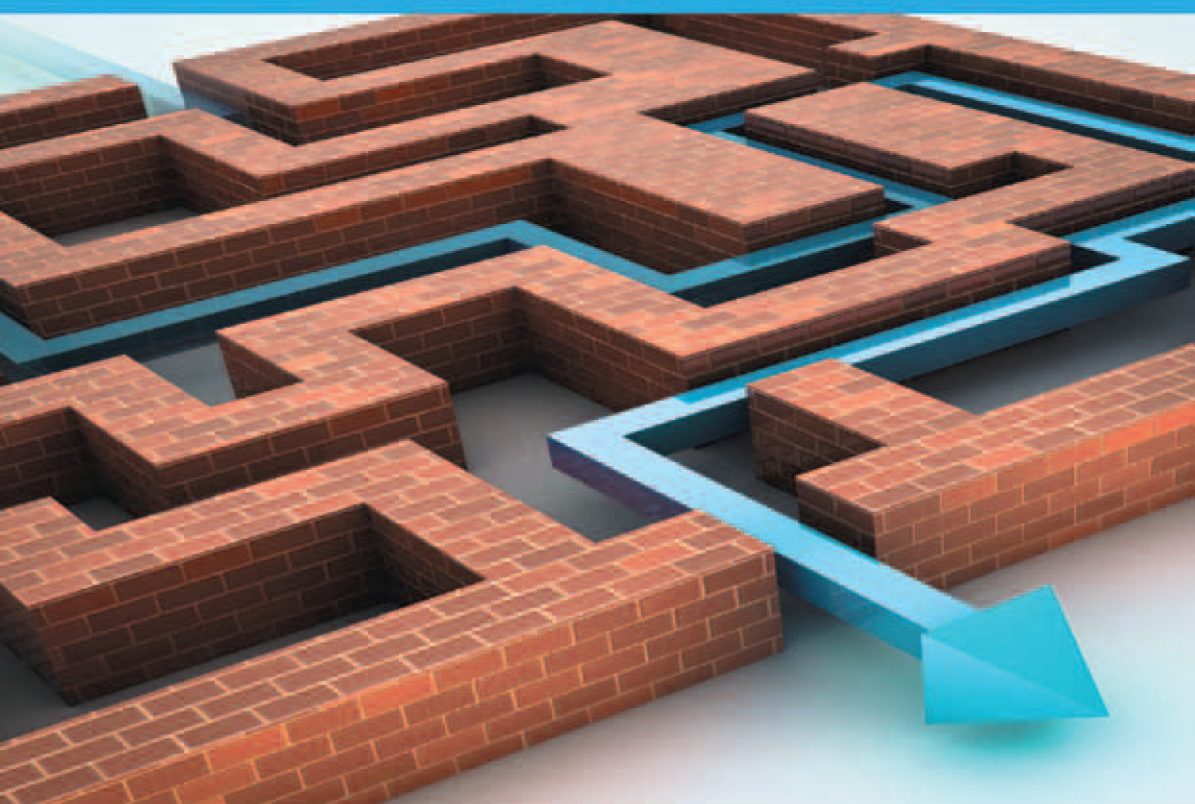
Silo Working and Relationships that Work

DAVID IAN WILLCOCK

Collaborating for Results

This book is dedicated with love to my wife Maria
and daughters Evie and Lara

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About the Author

David has been helping people in organisations overcome unproductive silo working and build better working relationships for over 25 years. He started his career in general human resource management in the public and finance sectors before specialising in people and organisation development work whilst working with a leading global finance company. After a 15 year in-company career he started his own organisation development consultancy, now Liberating Potential Ltd., coaching and developing leaders and their teams across a range of sectors in the UK and abroad.

David is a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (Chartered FCIPD) and an Accredited Master Executive Coach with the Association for Coaching. As well as broad business HR experience and qualifications, he trained in psychology and has specialist skills in supporting personal and organisational change. He combines this with experience and expertise in organisation and leadership development to improve results through people and relationships. He also trains other change agents, consultants and coaches on public and in-house programmes.

In this his first book David pulls together his years of experience and training combined with more contemporary research and examples to help fulfil his core purpose – to liberate potential wherever it is to help people and organisations thrive.

For more information and to contact David visit www.liberatingpotential.co.uk.

www.gowerpublishing.com/ebooks

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Our blog www.gowerpublishingblog.com brings to your attention the articles and tips our authors write and, of course, you are welcome to comment on anything you see in them. We also use it to let you know where our authors are speaking so, if you happen to be there too, you can arrange to meet them if you wish.

Preface

My interest in writing this book came from me reflecting on over 25 years of experience developing individuals, teams and organisations. Throughout my career I have been working to improve relationships between people in organisations and sometimes between separate organisations wanting to work together. Facilitating improved working relationships between organisation silos has been a big part of this.

So what is silo working? I describe it as:

When people in organisations focus on their own needs and goals to the exclusion and sometimes detriment of the wider organisation and its aims – a lack of joined up, systemic or holistic thinking and behaviour.

Organisation silos can be like different countries, or even parallel worlds. Even in a single organisation, people in separate divisions or teams can talk a different language and have different work cultures that they each find difficult to understand and relate to. Add to that the multitude of different individual personality traits, behaviours and styles and it is easy to see why busy people may not take the trouble to involve others on a wider basis when they feel they can do a job quicker themselves.

That is not to say that silos cannot be helpful, for example where people need to focus on targets or get specialist results. Organisation structures after all are meant to be helpful. They group specialists and functions into learning communities, focus people on results and orientate them as to who does what and where. However, organisations, like living organisms, require work, information flows and relationships across boundaries in order to grow

and thrive. This includes the boundary between the organisation and its environment.[1] To quote Capra (2003: 103):

> *Living organisms need to be open to a constant flow of resources (energy and matter) to stay alive; human organisations need to be open to a flow of mental resources (information and ideas), as well as to the flows of energy and materials that are part of the production of goods or services.*

Where people identify too much with the particular space they occupy and boundaries become rigid and impervious then problems can and do occur. Where cooperation and collaboration is needed and there are barriers to achieving this, the cost to the organisation can be very high.

Some of the costs of not collaborating that I gleaned from interviews and other research include:

- lack of shared learning/knowledge transfer/innovation;

- missed opportunities;

- delay in getting work done;

- mistakes being repeated and wheels reinvented;

- wasted time and energy due to unproductive conflict;

- decisions having adverse impacts across the organisation;

- lack of engagement and motivation;

- difficulty in changing;

- downstream time and cost implications;

- significant financial costs due to programme failures;

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1   Fritjof Capra (1997, 2003) and Margaret Wheatley (1992, 2007) make the links between scientific research and human relationships. They explain how interdependent and self-organising communities of people are.

- impact on customer perceptions;

- impact on results.

Interestingly, two of the key personal benefits of silo working mentioned in the research interviews – what people hang on to – were belonging and control. These are fundamental desires that people have at different stages of relationship development (Schutz 1979).[2]

Some of the things they don't like about 'out of silo' working are:

- the potential lack of clarity;

- increased work load;

- trusting others that they perceive as less capable;

- the complexity of dealing with different people;

- compromising on preferred ways of doing things.

In short, it's about comfort with the familiar, including relationships, and retaining a sense of control. People get into a comfort zone of contact and prefer to retain control over their work. They want to do what they came to do, such as focus on their specialist work and deliver results. This affects the level of contact and degree of openness that people need to work together within teams and across an organisation.

There are many ways in use today to increase collaboration in organisations, yet somehow they don't always succeed, become sustainable or inform the learning of others who inevitably share the same fate. There are numerous examples in organisations and in the public domain of breakdowns that occur within and between organisations and the cost this can bring about.

On Wednesday 20 April 2011 Sony's PlayStation Network, with around 77 million users, was hacked into by criminals who stole personal information. A report in *The Guardian* newspaper on 27 April 2011 explained that:

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2   I explain more about Schutz's research and ideas throughout the book.

> *Since Stringer's appointment in March 2005 he has struggled to break the company out of its 'silo' organisation that has prevented coordination between different divisions. (Arthur and Stuart 2011)*

The impact of the security breach on Sony's share price and reputation are well known and data protection law suits were also filed.

In a different case Chris Patton, Chairman of the BBC Trust, blamed silo working at the BBC as one of the reasons for the editorial crises that have seriously damaged the organisation's reputation – a view subsequently confirmed in The Pollard Report (*The Andrew Marr Show* interview with Chris Patton, 2012: 12, The Pollard Report, 2012: 39–40, 185).

These examples happened many years after the publication of Peter Senge's seminal work on the learning organisation, *The Fifth Discipline* (Senge 1992), that explained how organisations are like systems and people and events are interconnected. They also happened several years after the publication of Will Schutz's *The Human Element* (Schutz 1994), a book outlining his teachings over 30 years that point towards personal rigidity and defensiveness as the main causes of ineffective teams.

Capra (2003) and Wheatley (1992, 2007) have expertly translated the discoveries in the scientific and philosophical fields into the organisation arena, explaining the interdependent and co-created world we live in. We also live in an age where we are all a lot more aware of the interconnectedness between people and events on a global level. Witness the impact of the recent financial crisis across the world.

Despite this awareness and all the approaches and tools available – and there are many – something seems to be missing. As one board director who contributed to the research pointed out: 'In most companies silos haven't changed, yet everything else has. Why not this?'

I feel as though we need a 'subtle knife', like the one in Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy (Pullman 1998), to cut through the divide that separates people in different teams, functions and departments. Places like Human Resources (HR), Operations, Marketing, Sales, Accident and Emergency, Government ministry or other departments and teams that make up the organisation structure.

Writing this book was for me a journey to better understand how we can reduce the downside of silo working and achieve greater collaboration within and between organisations. It has evolved over a three-year period of research and writing as I sought to answer the questions:

- Do we really know why silos develop?

- Why are they so difficult to break down?

- Why has silo working been so prevalent for so long?

- Why is it so difficult to get joined-up thinking and integrated working in a team and even more so across an organisation?

- What influence does the senior leadership team have over this phenomenon?

- What are the best ways to approach this problem – at individual, team and organisation levels?

One thing that became clear to me, perhaps not surprisingly, is the complexity of the issue. Not surprising because people and organisations are complex. One contributor to the research even suggested that there isn't a problem with 'silo working', just complexity. Recognising the complexity, I continued with the belief that some 'joined-up' thinking could emerge that would build on current knowledge and practice, challenge existing approaches and point towards some more sustainable ways of tackling the problem. One of the key arguments resulting from this is the need for more joined-up thinking and working in how we approach the issue of collaboration.

My journey through the different levels of individual, team and organisation led me to the need for an integrated approach that works at all three levels, as well as combining the task, process and relationship elements of organisations. The emphasis throughout the book is on the relationship element, as it is the complexity of people and human relations that is often ignored on the grounds of 'keeping it simple'. I reference and take into account a lot of human relations and psychology thinking from the last 80 years. At the same time I recognise that we all exist in a context that includes the task we are there to achieve and the ways we organise ourselves to do that. I make practical recommendations for improving collaboration, but recognise that the approaches and methods

used to achieve them need to fit the circumstances of each individual, team and organisation. Most important is the context provided by the leadership of the organisation, including the need for a relationship agenda that is both supported and lived at the most senior levels.

Part I begins with the individual where I describe some of the complexity and richness of the human personality. Next I consider the potential barriers this presents for people working together. I then move on to define what a good working relationship is before providing an approach to reviewing working relationships and some steps people can take to overcome the barriers.

In Part II my focus shifts to teams and group dynamics. Building on Part I, I describe how the personality of the team develops through a dynamic relationship between individuals, and the central role of identity in the formation of individual and team boundaries – boundaries that determine the level of collaboration that is possible. This informs the description of the barriers to good quality relationships within and between teams. A central argument is how under or over identification with team boundaries can hinder collaboration and three dysfunctional team archetypes are described. Finally I present my argument for a more integrated approach, working at different levels. The main recommendation is the need to develop 'open' teams that maintain their identity and boundaries at the same time as responding and adapting to the context they are in. People need to connect and identify at different levels, preserving individual and team boundaries as well as collaborating with multiple teams across the organisation. This requires work at the individual, team and organisation levels to improve collaboration. Practical approaches to doing this are provided.

In Part III I describe how the process of forming team identity described in Part II occurs at an organisational level between teams and functions to determine the identity and boundaries of the organisation. The implications of this for organisations and leadership are explored. I continue the argument for an integrated approach to developing collaboration across organisations – combining task, process and relationship agendas at individual, team and organisation levels. To tackle the downside of silo working and develop collaborative relationships business planning and review needs to be connected with organisation development on an ongoing basis. Central to senior leadership efforts is the development of Open Teams at the top of the organisation. I also argue the case that the concept of Open Teams and collaboration is just as valid in an environment where change leads to redundancies and closures and what leaders can do.

Acknowledgements

I have many people to thank for contributing to the research and writing of this book.

Firstly, I drew a lot on my experience of developing individuals, teams and organisations over more than 20 years of my career. I provide examples of this experience throughout the book, particularly of executive and team coaching. All examples, including names, have been changed to preserve anonymity. Without these illustrations the book would have lost a lot of its richness and the learning intended for other practitioners and leaders.

I have also synthesised some of the writing of psychologists, organisation development specialists and members of the human relations movement over the last 80 years. When I started on this project I was concerned that what I wrote built on and acknowledged relevant work. It is difficult to read and acknowledge everything but I hope that the extensive referencing and bibliography demonstrate my intent to give credit where possible. My thanks go to the following publishers for their support in this regard:

- Princeton University Press for Psychological Type theory (Jung 1921)

- Souvenir Press for Gestalt therapy theory (Perls, Hefferline and Goodman 1994)

- The Perseus Books Group for Existential Psychotherapy (Yalom 1980)

I started the contemporary book research with a questionnaire and followed this up with interviews with managers and practitioners across a number of different organisations and sectors. This included organisation development

consultants, HR Directors and other senior leaders up to board level. My agreement with them was to preserve the anonymity of the organisations they worked for and the examples provided, which I have honoured.

There are some specific people I need to thank for their help. I have trained in the use of several personality questionnaires with Team Focus Limited (www.teamfocus.co.uk) and I am grateful to Roy Childs, Managing Director, for the information that has helped me write the sections on personality traits. Roy has been an inspiration to me in the area of personality and relationship development over many years. My thanks also go to Ethan Schutz, President and Chief Executive Officer, The Schutz Company (www.theschutzcompany. com), for commenting on the Fundamental Interpersonal Relations Orientation (FIRO®) model descriptions based on his father Will Schutz's work (Schutz, W. 1958, 1979, 1994, Schutz, E. 2009).

I am extremely grateful to Ron Down who has challenged and supported me through all the highs and lows of writing this book and securing my first publishing contract. He has been a friend and coach from the start, edited the manuscript comprehensively and helped me get it into the required format for Gower. Many thanks.

I also thank Jonathan Norman and other commissioning staff at Gower Publishing for spotting the potential of this book and making my first publication possible.

Finally I'd like to thank my wife Maria Willcock for her support, patience and faith in me whilst I researched and wrote this book alongside the 'day job'.

David Willcock
March 2013

List of Abbreviations[1]

15FQ+™	Fifteen Factor Questionnaire Plus
16PF®	Sixteen Factor Personality Questionnaire
CIPD	Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development
EQ	Emotional intelligence
FIRO®	Fundamental Interpersonal Relations Orientation
HDS	Hogan™ Development Survey
HR	Human Resources
IT	Information Technology
MBTI®	Myers–Briggs Type Indicator
NEO PI-R®	Neuroticism, Extraversion and Openness Personality Inventory Revised
NLP	Neuro-Linguistic Programming
TDi®	Type Dynamics Indicator
VBiM	Values-based Indicator of Motivation

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1   15FQ+™ is a trade mark of Psytech International Ltd. (www.psytech.com)
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    TDi® is a registered trademark of Team Focus Ltd. (www.teamfocus.co.uk)

Reviews for
Collaborating for Results

Leaders at all levels in complex organisations know the difficulties of achieving truly effective cross-functional and cross-business team working. High performing local teams can themselves become the stovepipes and silos that inhibit broader collaboration and innovation. Here is a book to help you – starting with the characteristics and behaviours of individuals and working through to the concept of Open Teams and how to develop them, as an integral part of your business and organisational development.

Professor Dame Julia King, Aston University, UK

Wide-ranging and comprehensive. Willcock provides an excellent explanation of how change can really occur in organizations. He simultaneously illustrates the details of the change process and provides relevant examples from his considerable experience while keeping the big picture squarely in view. This is an immensely valuable roadmap for people in organizations and professionals alike.

Ethan Schutz, President and CEO, The Schutz Company

This is a practical guide to harnessing the power of relationships between people and teams in organisations to achieve strategic vision and to be future-capable in a fast-changing world.

Dr Mike Clarke, CEO, RSPB

This is a thoughtful and very perceptive examination of our natural tendency to want to work within silos and the problems this creates for businesses, small and large. The strategies suggested for encouraging collaboration both within and across different organisations are practical, sensible and easily implemented. They should be widely and universally adopted.

Alan Cook CBE, Chairman, Highways Agency, UK

PART I
The Individual and the Organisation

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1

Factors that Influence Behaviour

You are in a Silo

We are all in silos at the same time as being connected with each other; it's a natural state of affairs.

As a human being I have a physical boundary to the outside world. My contact with the environment is mediated by my senses (touch, taste, smell, sight, sound, feelings) and the sense I make of these through my beliefs, values and self-concept – my 'sense of self'. I can choose to be in contact or out of contact with others. I can include or exclude myself. I can move towards people, away from them or against them. I can be more or less open with other people in how I communicate. I can try to control, be equal or be submissive. My face can be fixed or relaxed. I can be rigid, flexible or somewhere in between. What balance I strike in my contact with others will be based on several factors including those which I now describe.

MY PHYSICAL HERITAGE

My physical heritage is the inherited genetic makeup and the physical disposition I am born with. This will influence my level of physical and psychological comfort or discomfort and therefore the choices I make. Genetics and physical disposition are outside of the scope of this book, although it is important to recognise their influence on our psychological makeup. My focus is on the social and psychological domains and the behaviour of people to explain silo working and how to improve the quality of relationships people have. You cannot change the spots on a leopard, but you can influence how it behaves!