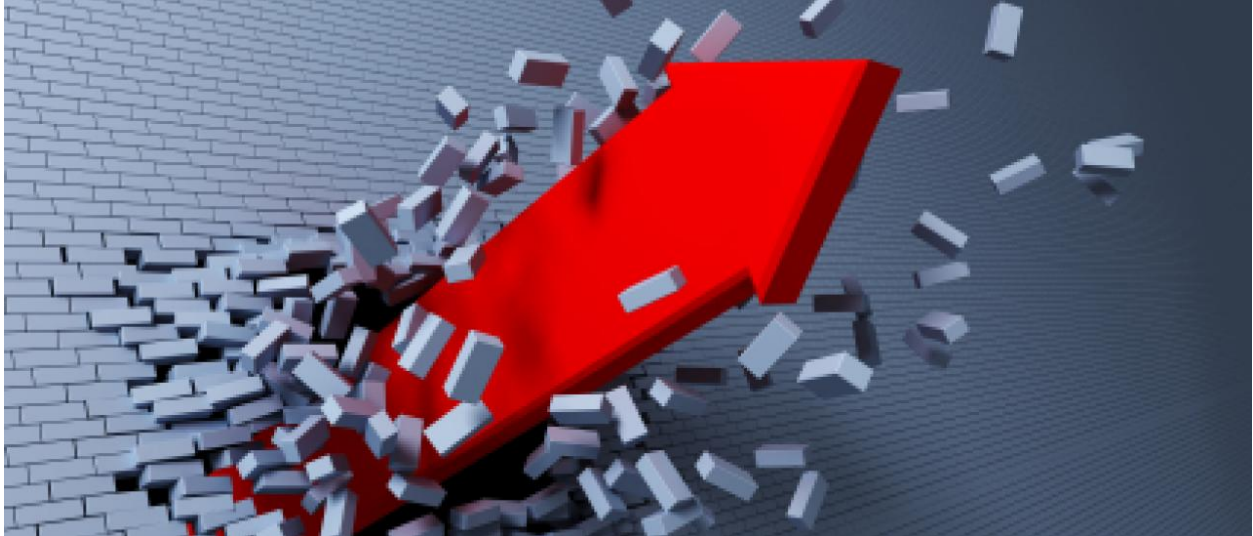

Leadership: Are you connecting and collaborating?



By Shellie Karabell with Herminia Ibarra, INSEAD

New research shows that unless you venture beyond your corporate walls, you'll fall behind the competition.

Where do the ideas in your organisation come from? And from whom? If you're not taking advantage of new sources of inspiration - sources outside your organisation, outside the management suite - to facilitate growth and change, you could be in trouble.

“Organisations that have been pioneers have found that their lunch is eaten by competitors that didn't even exist a few years back,” says Herminia Ibarra, INSEAD Professor of Organisational Behaviour and Cora Chaired Professor of Leadership and Learning. “Change is always from the outside... if you want to innovate, if you want to be at the forefront of the trends, the only thing you can do is talk to people, to groups, to constituencies, to stakeholders outside your organisation.”

Ibarra's latest research on leadership and the methods that CEOs use to keep their teams connected is featured this month in the Harvard Business Review (HBR) article, “Are You A Collaborative Leader?” written by Ibarra and

University of California (Berkeley) management professor Morten T. Hansen.

“Collaborative leadership,” Ibarra told INSEAD Knowledge, “is the kind of leadership that allows organisations to identify interesting opportunities, to bring the best talents to those opportunities and then to lead the process so it reaches an effective result.”

From mailroom to boardroom

In a corporate environment, this can mean connecting people from the mailroom to those in the boardroom, or people working in Manhattan with those working in Mumbai so that ideas that previously may have gone unnoticed by top management are recognised

But how do you become “friends” with your boss? Moreover, would your boss want to be “friends” with you?

Ibarra tells the story of social media group Salesforce.com, a listed company that produces a kind of Facebook for internal corporate use called Chatter. The CEO was concerned because he had not been able to find within his own company ways of connecting top management to the people who were actually creating and using Chatter, and whose understanding and suggestions were not being included in corporate strategy. So he invited the entire company to attend a management offsite meeting using “Chatter”. Instead of 200 people, there were several thousand.

“They equipped the meeting rooms with iPads and computers and people were able to join in, phone in and participate in that conversation, and it was a learning experience for everybody – a high-tech company that is in that particular business,” she remembers.

Four pillars of collaborative leadership

Today’s myriad interconnected social networks – Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter etc – mean that most people are already connected in a collaborative way to others beyond their traditional domain. It’s a question of how to leverage that in the office. In their HBR article, Ibarra and Hansen suggest four pillars:

1. Play global connector. “The first piece is really how you yourself build a network that allows you to add value collaboratively because you can connect,” says Ibarra. “If you are stuck in your function, in your group, in your business unit, in your country, how can you see what’s going on out

there? How can you see the array of opportunities that could be passing you by?”

2. Engage talent at the periphery. “How do you think about the talent that you are bringing to the table?” Ibarra asks. “Everybody espouses the value of diversity, but saying it and doing it are very different things. We see very clearly that leaders who engage talent from the periphery – and that periphery could be geographical or generational or gender diversity – are going to be much better placed to collaborate.”

3. Collaborate at the top first. “A lot of times, collaborations get mired in politics, or groups have great ideas that don’t get accepted because the top is divided politically into turf wars,” points out Ibarra. “You cannot encourage collaboration on the front line and then not collaborate with each other as a top team.”

4. Show a strong hand. “Collaboration doesn’t mean consensus on everything,” says Ibarra. At some point, the discussion has to end and someone has to make a decision. “You need to understand as a leader when you step back, and then when you do come back in make sure people know who’s got the right to make the final decision.”

Quicker results down the line

It wasn’t so long ago that “command and control” was the preferred management style: decisive, efficient, clear-cut. Doesn’t all this collaboration slow things down to a dangerously slow pace? Is it really that important to have buy-in from the troops?

“It is true that collaboration takes more time [than command and control],” admits Ibarra. “But [with command and control] you haven’t built the platform for the actual faster results down the line. You collaborate because not any one person has what it takes to produce something, to do what it is you’re trying to do.”

Find article at

<https://knowledge.insead.edu/leadership-organisations/leadership-are-you-connecting-and-collaborating>

About the author(s)

Shellie Karabell is Director and Executive Editor of INSEAD Knowledge. [View full profile](#)