

Collaborative Overload

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As business becomes increasingly global and cross functional, teamwork and collaboration are being considered key to organizational success. At many companies, people spend up to 80 % of their time in meetings or responding to queries from colleagues. Clearly, collaboration yields benefits, but comes with associated costs. When there is too much demand for collaboration and the load falls on a small number of people, the result is workflow bottleneck and burnout.

There are three types of resources which create value through collaboration. **Informational resources** refer to knowledge and skills. **Social resources** refer to one's awareness, access and position in the network. **Personal resources** include one's own time and energy. For collaboration to be cost effective, these resources must be managed effectively.

Informational and social resources can be shared without depleting the collaborator's supply. But personal time and energy are finite resources. Unfortunately, in companies today, there is too much demand for personal time. People directly contact others without referring to existing repositories or knowledge libraries. Those in demand as the best information sources and the most helpful people, become frustrated and have low engagement and career satisfaction scores. This often leads to their leaving the organization, taking valuable network and knowledge resources along with them.

To deal with this problem, leaders must distribute the responsibilities for collaborating and knowledge sharing. They must also reward effective contribution. People most at risk because of the collaborative overload must be identified. They should be helped on how to filter requests, say no and make an introduction to someone else when the request does not merit their own involvement. Instead of responding to ad hoc requests, the natural collaborators can be encouraged to devote more of their time to training, coaching and mentoring. Leveraging technology for knowledge sharing/online discussions is another way to reduce the load. Co-locating interdependent employees and encouraging brief and impromptu face to face interactions is another useful step.

Leaders should also measure and reward the right behaviours. Tools such as network analysis can be used to measure collaborative contributions. Efficient sharing of informational, social and personal resources should be a prerequisite for promotion and pay rises.

To conclude, it is necessary for companies to foster a culture that encourages a healthy balance between individual accomplishments and collaborative contributions.