



SECOND TAKEAWAY

PARTNERING UP

by Cherielyn Leong

Prof Hawkins gave a perspective to think about partnering with employees, stakeholders and even with the community at large. He shared his realization that the main challenge for collaboration and partnership work lies in the interfaces and relationships between people, teams, functions and different stakeholder needs¹, or the spaces in between groups.

Once we recognise that our focus lies in building quality relationships with our stakeholders, Prof Hawkins urged us to consider the view that our stakeholders and community out there are in fact “untapped cognitive (and creative) capacity” that we can tap into. Using a couple of organisational examples, let’s unpack what he shared.

An internal OD practice team tasked with doing employee engagement work may

naturally map senior leaders, Divisional Directors, OD champions and a few “visible” employees to serve as informal “influencers” for the employee engagement initiatives the OD team plans to roll out. While this is a useful way to gain quick wins for the engagement messages, it is easy to feel like this group of leaders and OD Champions are the only ones involved in the efforts.

There are still the rest of the Organisation who could be roped in or involved further, as they are afterall, part of the Organisation. To enable the rest of your Organisation to be more involved, one way is to clarify the challenge that the Organisation is facing about employee engagement and what resources you are missing, like ideas and help for well-being, innovation, prioritization etc.

¹ Hawkins, P. (2011), “Leadership Team Coaching: Developing collective transformational leadership”; Kogan Page Limited, London, UK

Next, develop an objective statement to clarify what and why you need the partnership of your employees to achieve. A sample purpose statement for your potential partners can look like this



BY DOING ____(*INITIATIVE*)____, THIS PARTNERSHIP OR
COLLABORATION WITH THE OD TEAM WILL HELP _____ WITH
_____, LEADING TO ____(*DESIRED OUTCOME*)____.²

Telling your employees clearly what is needed and how they can help is a powerful way to get them involved. You would have enabled people to take responsibility, instead of doing everything by yourselves and feel burdened, or that you are just spoon feeding your system.

You can apply the same principle to recruitment, where sharing the challenge with your potential hires in a recruitment drive can get the candidates involved to think about how to collaborate. Some may even come up with ideas, solutions and in turn, you can hire the ones who are motivated to help address your challenges.

The other aspect Prof Hawkins suggested was to consider looking for collaborative opportunities at where the “in-between” spaces are. What does this mean? Spaces in between collaboration points meant that collaboration bridges have not been formed up yet and the challenge is how to design the partnership that will benefit both parties?

There are a couple of options if you are looking to build bridges which we gleaned from Prof Hawkins’ sharing. One is to invite the people who need to be in the room to create solutions with you. We usually think of our immediate team or bosses when doing brainstorming or designing work. However, there are others (like consultants, training providers, ‘sister teams’, etc,) whom we can tap on to build partnerships. These partners can be roped in early, especially if they are end users, vendor stakeholders, cross Ministry or Agency counterparts who would be impacted by our efforts.

² TPI Associates and Thuy Nguyen (2020), “Four top tips for simple, fast and effective partnering”;
<https://thepartneringinitiative.org/news-and-views/tpi-blog/four-top-tips-for-simple-fast-and-effective-partnering/>

The other way is to change up the type of questions we use in engagement to transform the relationships. Prof Hawkins suggested using an inquiry like “**what can we do differently to create value together?**” This line of question is aimed at breaking down silos between teams or parts of the Organisation that may not have had a chance to collaborate yet. It is an invitation for them to make a choice to get involved in a meaningful way. This is more effective than simply telling people what to do.

In fact, partnership building is about finding a way to work more effectively together. By getting people into your project or cause in a collaboration driven way, it sets the tone for the nature of the relationship. OD practitioners can build on this relationship regularly with clear processes for working together, win-win group decisions and identity creation etc.

Partnership is built when someone takes the first step to connect and share their needs and requests. This sets the stage for other parties to respond by offering either their presence, assistance, ideas or even simply by not disrupting you.

Being clear on what kind of partnership responses you need for your change work is a good start. It leads to identifying and connecting with who you will need to work with and persuading them to get with your cause. These are the steps effective practitioners and leaders can use to energise their Organisation systems to partner them for impactful change and development work.

Learn more about developing sustainable organisational learning practices in the third and last instalment.

CSC Visiting Fellow Peter Hawkins, Emeritus Professor of Leadership at Henley Business School, Chairman of Renewal Associates, co-founder of the Global Team Coaching Institute is a leading consultant, coach, writer and researcher in organizational strategy, leadership, culture change.

He visited CSC recently and conducted an Organisation Transformation Clinic for OD and Transformation practitioners. Among several key points he shared, three stood out particularly in association with the OD community's work in our Public Service Agencies.

If you missed the Clinic, no worries. We distilled three takeaways and will elaborate further with research references on the topics to support practitioners to apply the insights to work. Read on to find out.