The Hippo Solution

(book excerpt)

Eliminate Territorial Thinking and Unleash the Power of Teams

Mark Kenny

IGNITE PRESS

Fresno, CA

Part 4: Eliminate Gaps

"Young hippos can be crushed and killed if they get caught in the middle of a violent clash between adult hippos." —San Diego Zoo

$$\text{The Destination} \times \frac{\text{Individuals} \times \text{Teams} \times \textbf{GAPS}}{\text{Organizational Constraints}}$$

CHAPTER 36

THE ACTION IS IN THE GAPS

It was time. Looking up from my watch, I forced my weary legs up. It was just past midnight as I began my journey down the hall toward the office where the software developers were working on a last-minute fix. "Hey guys, how's it going?" I asked, feeling apologetic for bugging them for the status yet again. But that was my job as the project manager to coordinate this late-night software release that was strategically important for the company.

"Pretty good."

"Great!" I replied. "When do you think you'll be done?"

"Oh, we finished up about twenty minutes ago. The code is all checked in."

They know that it's past midnight and we all want to go home, right?

"Okay, I'll let the testing folks know."

"Oh, Sonya just popped in here."

"Okay, good."

As I walked back to my office, I knew I should check in with Sonya, just to be sure.

"Hey Sonya. How does it look?"

"How does what look?"

"The updated code."

"What updated code?"

"The updated code the developers checked in twenty minutes ago. They said you just popped in there."

"I did, but they didn't tell me it was ready."

"It's ready."

"Okay, great. Give me fifteen minutes."

Thirteen minutes later, my phone rang.

"Looks great." It was Sonya.

"So, the release folks can run with it?" I asked.

"Yep, good to go," was her reply.

"Okay, thanks."

I went down the hall to the release manager. His job was to place the software release onto the production servers.

"The release is ready."

"Okay, thanks," was his reply, spoken with very little emotion or excitement. I expected a little bit more, like, "Cool, great! I'll get right on it!" or "Finally! It's about time." Instead, "I'll get on it," was his stoic follow-up.

And he did.

The focus of the action is naturally drawn to the tasks that need to be completed and the people completing them. In my example, the developers tended to get the most attention because they were producing the actual product. At the same time, the testers had to ensure that the software was relatively bug-free, and the release managers needed to release it to the world so that customers can use it without interference from pesky issues such as defects, performance problems, or security gaps.

All of that action is important, but equally important is the action in the gaps *between* these different teams and departments. How does information move between these groups? How well do they share information? Are they willing to listen to each other? How do they make decisions together?

Teams can't work well together across the organization unless we eliminate the gaps between them.

Teams can't work well together across the organization unless we eliminate the gaps between them.

CHAPTER 37

GAPS ARE EVERYWHERE

During a basketball game, the spectator's focus is on the skill of the players—the ball handlers that cross-over a defender, the deadly three-point shooter, the shot-blocker. Of course, you can't go very far if the individual teammates are not skilled individual players. However, to be a great team, the real action takes place in the gaps between the players. How well do they space the floor, pass the ball, move without the ball, and set their teammates up for a shot?

For a number of years, I sold and implemented software into organizations. The purpose of the software was to get information flowing in the gaps between teams. Of course, software isn't going to make that happen unless the right variables are already in place—it's just a tool—but I certainly understand the motive.

Even as I approached the Air Force base on that Florida morning, there were gaps. If I had been working with the controllers, my mishap would have been prevented—a very simple example of the consequences when there is a gap, a lack of information sharing, between two groups.

It's the same with organizations.

It's in the gaps where the speed, adaptability, resilience, and strength of an organization are determined. It's in the gaps where it's determined how quickly we can "permeate new strategic company objectives" throughout the organization, as PricewaterhouseCoopers articulates it.

This topic right here—teams working together—is the core focus of this book. Not only is it the number one issue that leaders and managers bring up to me, but I saw it in dozens and dozens and dozens of organizations I personally worked with.

While sitting here writing these words, I can look back on just the last two weeks and relay different versions of the same story:

● Different managers and supervisors that have their own methods, practices, and agendas, resulting in their teams unintentionally being pitted against one another

● Different teams that are not willing to help and cross-train with each other

● Teams that resist working together even when a major goal requires collaboration

● Information hitting the wall of a "silo" and simply not passing through that wall

There are many high-profile examples of gaps, such as engineering teams not coordinating together on Boeing's Starliner capsule, resulting in delays and problems. The documentary *Challenger: The Final Flight* documents the sometimes catastrophic results of such gaps. For every high-profile example, there are many, many low-profile yet equally detrimental examples.

Gaps are everywhere.

When I played on our school soccer team in the seventh grade, our coach had a favorite conditioning drill that would pit one player against another. One player would start on one corner of the soccer field. The other player would start on the opposite corner of the same soccer field. When he blew the whistle, we would start running in the same direction. Our goal was to catch the other person while not getting caught ourselves.

You don't have to have played soccer to know that a soccer field is pretty big. I can tell you from personal experience that it's even bigger when you're forced to run around its perimeter.

There were only three possible outcomes from this drill:

1.   You caught the other person and could stop running.

2.   You were caught by the other person and had to keep running.

3.   You threw up.

That's how the people on your teams feel. Even though teams are *technically* "running" in the same direction, they are actually operating alone and positioning themselves against each other so that they look better, never, ever get caught, and, most importantly, don't throw up.

==Even though teams are *technically* "running? in the same direction, they are actually operating alone and positioning themselves against each other.==

It's like a manager from a large federal agency that spoke up during a leadership meeting I was observing and bravely said, "Why can't we just be one [insert undisclosed agency name]? Why can't we just work together?"

They don't want the organization to be re-structured or the office environment opened up or competition added between teams. They just want to function as a cohesive team.

When I speak to audiences of leaders, this is a fun topic to demonstrate, through interactive activities, both the nature of the problem and how the formula really comes into play. Often, the thinking is solely focused on "breaking down the silos" and getting information flowing. If that is the core focus, it is going to be difficult because it is one-dimensional thinking. You have to think about it multi-dimensionally. For example, if you have established and communicated a distinct destination with a cohesive and aligned leadership team, giving teams a reason to work together, if you have made the lives of your individual people better, if you have strengthened your teams, if you are looking at this multi-dimensionally in the context of the entire formula, this gets much simpler. You've already laid the groundwork.

Obviously, even when you have laid the groundwork, gaps still don't always close by themselves. It takes intentionality to put in place the right components to eliminate those gaps. When you have laid the groundwork, there are still two components needed to eliminate the gaps between teams.

Before we look at the two components, however, we first need to re-frame the question.

CHAPTER 38

REFRAME THE QUESTION

The question we frame is usually around silos—referring to teams that are working in isolation from one another. The question is typically something like, "How do we break down the silos?"

PricewaterhouseCoopers has said that "silos are stubborn obstacles to creating an effective path to growth and profitability." I agree with the substance of this and similar statements; however, I have found that it is helpful to re-frame the question. Here is what I mean. Silos are important. They are good. They provide a home for people—a place where individuals have connections and teammates and comfort. They maximize specializations. They add efficiency. They're healthy. There is a reason you built them in the first place. What we don't want to do is break things apart or reorganize the organization to fix silos and create two to three new problems. Re-organizing may be useful in some cases, but it takes a long time to see benefits. The solution is often much simpler.

Instead, re-frame the question to, "How can we eliminate the gaps between the silos?" How can we both maximize the efficiency of each silo while improving the ability of each silo to work *together*? It's like creating a cohesive, fast-moving, quickly adapting "team of silos."

> The solution is often much simpler. Instead, reframe the question to "How can we eliminate the gaps between the silos?"

That's our goal.

Now for the two components.

The *Harvard Business Review* reports that there are two problems with teams: They have an us-versus-them mentality, and they have incomplete information. The two components to eliminate the gaps between teams address these two problems. They are:

1. Create authentic relationships between teams.

2. Create collective awareness.

These two components are simple and easy to implement. They focus on changing how people behave, not implementing some fancy cultural initiative or fluffy collaboration language. You can implement these now, today. With intentionality, they will produce results in days so that no one ever thinks or blurts out, "Why can't we just be one [insert your company name]?"

CHAPTER 39

COMPONENT #1: CREATE AUTHENTIC RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN TEAMS

My very first job out of college was as an IT technician and eventually a network administrator for a publishing company. I helped to keep all of the technology running, and I was proud of our team and our work.

One morning, I was called to help a manager who was having a problem with his computer. He was a friendly sort, and as I was working on his computer, we engaged in small talk until he said something that surprised me.

"Hey, did you hear we hired a webmaster?"

My head popped up.

"A webmaster?"

"Yep, he's going to help us move into the digital age."

"Oh?"

This was back at the very beginning of the world wide web when companies were beginning to grapple with if and how this new technology would fit into their businesses. We were no exception. As an IT group, we would occasionally huddle in a conference room to look at this or that website and click around to get ideas for how this technology could work for us. We were taking a lead on it and working to understand it.

We were a centralized IT group supporting three different "companies," one of which now employed the new webmaster.

My first reaction to the news was one of which I am not proud. It wasn't rude or mean so much as it was... protective.

But that's what *our* group does.

You pay *us* to do that.

We're the experts.

That's what *we* are good at.

Won't that make *us* irrelevant?

So you don't like working with *us*?

Why didn't you come talk to *us* first?

A few weeks later, while in some sort of company meeting where new employees were introduced, this gentleman was introduced as "The Webmaster!" A cheer rose up! I felt jealous. Where's the love for all the work *we* do?

At that point in my young career, no one had sat me down and said or intimated that we should control all the technology, that it was our domain, that there were lines in which to stay. Our director certainly wasn't communicating this to us.

The protective reaction just came naturally.

It was a simple, human reaction, an us-versus-them mentality that is all too common.

The real problem is that we *artificially* put up barriers between ourselves and other groups, like I did. In a fascinating study by the *South African Journal of Industrial Psychology*, we find that these gaps are artificially created and actually just constructs of our own minds. They are "invisible barriers." We develop our own judgments and perceptions about other people and groups, which affect our behaviors.

Bottom line: Whether it is marketing vs. sales, engineering vs. operations, marketing vs. underwriting, IT vs. business, or central office vs. the field, we naturally create artificial barriers between ourselves and other teams.

Whether it is marketing vs. sales, engineering vs. operations, marketing vs. underwriting, IT vs business, or central office vs. the field, we naturally create artificial barriers between ourselves and other teams.

Interestingly, we don't put up artificial barriers nearly so much with people on our own teams. We know them, and in many cases—not all—we trust them: They're *our* team. Have you ever watched a football game where the quarterback was hit hard? His teammates inevitably rise up and protest to the offending player. Why? Because he's on *their* team. He's *their* teammate.

We want the same thing.

To do that, we need to follow human nature and create the same type of relationships.

This is the first component: *Create relationships between teams* (or departments or divisions or silos or whatever distinction you want to insert).

A good, practical goal comes from General Stanley McChrystal in his book *Team of Teams*: for "everyone to know *someone* on every team." What he means is not that everyone knows everyone, but that on each team, there are a number of relationships with members of other teams in the organization. That way, when your team has a need to work with another team or to get information from another team, someone on *your* team already has a relationship with someone on the *other* team.

When there are established relationships, it's harder to develop us-versus-them thinking.

How do we create relationships between different teams? Find a reason for them to do something together.

Ralph Perrey is the Executive Director of the Tennessee Housing Development Agency. His agency does vitally important work to promote the production of affordable housing and preserve and rehabilitate existing housing. Mr. Perrey emphasizes the importance of good leadership practices, such as encouraging candor, making sure everyone understands their role, and catching people doing things well. But he also highlights the importance of frequent, clear communication and deliberate meetings to develop "smoother working relationships" between business units. This has become especially important for his agency because it is launching more and more initiatives that require multiple business units to work together in order for those initiatives to be successful. I suspect your organization is experiencing something similar.

CHAPTER 40

METHODS OF CREATING AUTHENTIC RELATIONSHIPS

Here are some examples for how to practically develop those relationships.

Forums

Plan regular forums for people from multiple teams to get together and talk about something meaningful. For example, the British Society for Immunology held a forum with representatives from multiple departments to share views on inflammation. You could plan a forum to talk about how to improve your engineering process or how to improve customer service or how to get everyone involved in marketing. Better yet, empower them to make decisions or craft recommendations.

Cross-Integrated Groups

In a situation where certain teams must work together, create a group of individuals from each of the individual teams that meets regularly. The goal of the integrated team could be to solve problems for members of each of the individual teams, coordinate efforts, and share information.

Heather Gahir, Ph.D., is the Vice President of Talent Strategy and Organizational Development for Jackson National Life Insurance Company. According to Gahir, "It's especially difficult for teams to work together when they have common responsibilities. When their scope is clearly different, it's easier." In this type of situation, she recommends creating a group of individuals from the teams that need to work together. The purpose of this group is to solve problems for

the two teams. For example, if a member of one team needs access to a resource and can't get it, they can put it in the queue for this cross-integrated group to solve. If the group cannot solve the issue, they can bump it up to a higher power or to the teams themselves. "In my experience, this works best and is faster than waiting for the results of a restructuring."

Integrated Group Lunches

Integrated group lunches are as simple as what a hospital I worked with does: Their leaders are broken up into smaller groups and placed with others they may not work with on a regular basis. They meet together, many times just for lunch. The goal is to get to know other leaders.

Leader Lunches

Leader lunches create relationships and close the gaps between two leaders by getting them to spend more time together. A leader lunch is simply spending regular time with another leader from another team or department to talk through your perspectives and differences. It's a valuable leadership rhythm that has been leveraged by many leaders to create relationships between not just the leaders but the departments they represent. Model it yourself and encourage your direct reports to do the same. Intentionally invite leaders with whom you do not see eye to eye as well as leaders you wouldn't think about asking to lunch. Perhaps they have a different background or style or personality. Look for leaders that, for whatever reason, you may not initially think to invite.

Work-Outs

Jack Welch championed the Work-Out approach at GE almost 30 years ago. When there was an issue that needed to be resolved or a solution found, a "Work-Out" session would physically bring together key people from various functions with a neutral facilitator. Today, of course,

while in-person is best, you could do it virtually. They would form a small group to explore various alternative options and come up with a solution. This was just part of their culture. You can use a similar approach to get people working and creating solutions *together*. Google "Jack Welch" and "Work-Out," and you'll find a wealth of information to get you started.

If you leverage this type of approach and there are some politics at play, you may also benefit from advice by PricewaterhouseCoopers: Have a neutral facilitator or consider employing co-leaders (otherwise, the group may be misunderstood and not trusted). And pay attention to the group size—too large of a group dilutes decision-making.

Rotating Jobs

Disney is an example of an organization where people rotate jobs—in their case, every two years. There are multiple benefits: There are always people you know or worked with on other teams, it breaks down the us-versus-them mentalities, and you don't get too comfortable and narrowly focused staying at the same place.

Many other organizations employ a similar tactic. Various agencies in the United States Federal Government rotate leadership posts regularly. Nissan North America has a program in which rising managers rotate job assignments between different departments and organizations. Managers then become leaders who already have relationships and experience in multiple departments and organizations.

Required Training

Many organizations have training requirements, whether they involve compliance, safety, ethics, regulatory, or whatever. Never just look at this as simply training. This is a prime opportunity for relationship-building. If every participant has not connected with other participants from other teams in the "class" and walked away with some new relationships, you've lost a golden opportunity. Build in time for intentional networking and working together on training exercises in order to build relationships. This one is easy because you have to do it anyway. All it takes is just a little more intentionality. I know that many of these types of trainings are online or in an eLearning format. Even then, simply insert an assignment to work with someone else to come

up with an answer to a problem, or interview someone to see how this applies to their department—anything!

Visit Other Departments

Schedule some time for representatives of teams to regularly visit other teams and departments to learn what they do and vice versa. HCA Healthcare does this. They periodically take members of their IT team to visit clinical settings so they learn how people are using their technology tools. At the same time, they are developing relationships with people in those clinical departments.

Briefs and Debriefs

In his book *Fearless Success*, John Foley, a former Blue Angels pilot, emphasizes how important briefs and debriefs are to a team's success. With the right parameters, they can be valuable tools to bring different teams together to work on getting better. Leverage these for projects, milestones, deliverables, events, and launches on which multiple teams are working. Read Foley's book to learn how the Blue Angels conduct their briefs and debriefs.

Joint Training

Some organizations conduct joint training exercises. The military comes to mind. They train jointly with other services, other groups, sometimes even other countries. In addition to benefiting from the training itself, it builds relationships that are key for people to break down those artificial barriers and create a desire to work with one another. It builds camaraderie as well as sharpens skills.

Don't forget to include briefs and debriefs—that's where you'll find much of the magic happening.

Place people in temporary assignments in other teams and departments. Have them work embedded for two weeks/two months/six months. This is real work, not just observational. Doing someone else's job changes your perspective. Disney is an example of a company that implements this model.

Your original reaction might be "no way we're doing that," maybe because you believe that "we can't lose this person" or "that would disrupt everything." Rethink it. This is a powerful tool. Not only will your team members have a much clearer understanding of what is done and how, but they will have established deeper relationships with that other team. The other team will benefit from the thinking brought in by the newly embedded team member and vice versa. It's powerful. Don't send your weakest employee. Send your strongest.

These examples should spark your thinking. The question now is: What could you do to build relationships between teams? It doesn't have to be complicated or time-consuming. It just takes intentionality.

CHAPTER 41

COMPONENT #2: CREATE COLLECTIVE AWARENESS

"Cessna 180 Papa Alpha, traffic is at 4:00, a Boeing 737 on a four mile final to runway 01."

My instructor and I whipped our heads to the right and there they were: the landing lights of a Boeing 737 airliner that looked awfully bright and awfully *close*. I'm sure the pilots of that 737 were more than a little concerned that they were flying anywhere in the vicinity of our little four-seat Cessna 172.

"Cessna 180 Papa Alpha, this isn't going to work. Make a left 360-degree turn."

My instructor in the right seat turned the yoke to the left and quickly started a full 360-degree turn to allow for spacing between ourselves and the 737 jet, which was landing on an intersecting runway. My instructor was "driving" because I was not experienced enough for this level of intensity.

"Nice job, Cessna 180 Papa Alpha!" the controller exclaimed after my instructor had almost finished his turn. "Cleared to land runway 04."

And so he did.

We landed at Reagan National Airport in Washington and headed to the general aviation terminal to pick up my instructor's mom who had just flown in to visit.

It was a fun, intense experience that I will never forget because it gave me a real appreciation for the communication and the level of situational awareness that are necessary to fly safely and capably.

Communicating and situational awareness are two skills that are just as important as flying the actual airplane. In fact, you cannot earn a pilot's license without them.

You have to effectively communicate with air traffic control (ATC) to inform them exactly where you are and where you are going. You have to interpret their instructions and follow them. You

have to talk to other airplanes, especially when you are flying into or out of an airport that does not have a control tower.

You have to take that information and constantly create a mental picture of your location, the location of every other plane, and where everyone will be in the near future. All of this is to create a collective awareness so that everyone can properly and safely complete their flight. Your teams need the same level of situational awareness, which brings us to the second component to eliminate gaps between teams: create collective awareness.

The Problem

Teams don't work well together if they don't know what other teams are doing. I didn't need to know all of the details of what other pilots were doing in their own cockpits, but I did need to have a good general picture of where they were and where they were going. Same for teams. I don't need to know everything that every other team is doing. I do need to have a good general picture of what every other team is doing. Otherwise, teams tend to focus on their own agendas, their own goals, and their own initiatives, which is like flying without communicating.

Focusing on your own agenda may work fine for individual team projects. However, when the activity and intensity increases, when initiatives require coordination, when conditions are changing quickly, when you need to think bigger, when decisions need to be made now, when change needs to be coordinated, if everyone does not have that collective awareness, you are inevitably going to run into the other "planes." As one person put it in a recent session of mine, "You're going to have a lot of sheet metal strewn around the ground."

We've all experienced the lack of collective awareness. Even my nephew, only a few years into his career, has experienced it. When I explained to him the premise for this book, his response was, "Oh yeah, we need better teamwork. We have no idea what other teams are doing." Indeed.

The Solution

"There's another one," I remarked after hearing the radio call. I strained my neck looking through the windshield, trying to locate the airplane that may be intersecting our flight path. Accidentally flying into another airplane was not on my list of things to do this Saturday.

"There he is," I said. "He won't be a factor." We continued on.

The radio chatter was consistent as we flew across middle Tennessee, heading back home. It required vigilance to make sure that we did not intersect another airplane's flight path.

This time, it wasn't me sitting in the pilot's seat. It was my son, who had recently earned his pilot's license. I was just along for the ride. Unlike my trip to Washington Reagan Airport years ago, this radio chatter was because we were flying past several uncontrolled airports and airspace in this part of the state. There are no air traffic controllers to guide us here.

However, there is a handy tool that makes it a lot easier: the common traffic advisory frequency. It is a single radio frequency that every airplane uses in uncontrolled airspace to call out where they are, at which altitude they are flying, and where they are going. It provides every other airplane in the area awareness and a mental picture of what's going on around them. Multiple airports use it. Every airplane in the vicinity uses it. As my son and I flew across middle Tennessee, all we had to do was listen to that frequency to maintain awareness.

Your teams need a "common traffic advisory frequency." The goal is not for every team to know every detail of what every other team is doing. The goal is to give every team a mental picture of what's happening across the organization.

==The goal is not for every team to know every detail of what every other team is doing. The goal is to give every team a mental picture of what' s happening across the organization.==

General McChrystal calls this "shared consciousness." *Harvard Business Review* dubbed this a "shared mindset." I call it "collective awareness."

A word of caution: For whatever reason, we all develop a tendency to withhold information. It makes me think of Emily Dickinson's poem "Tell all the Truth but tell it slant." So remember Bethune's law of communication: Unless it's dangerous or illegal to share, we share it. Otherwise, teams will inevitably run into each other, or worse, expend needless energy doing needless activities. The benefits of sharing far, far outweigh the risks.

How do we create this collective awareness?

Simple. Put in place a rhythm to share information: a regular, constant source of information in which everyone participates to both share and receive information.

CHAPTER 42

METHODS OF CREATING COLLECTIVE AWARENESS

You will have to create your own rhythm that makes sense for your business and culture. Naturally, I cannot tell you exactly what that rhythm should be. What I can do is provide several examples to spark your thinking. Adopt one of these examples or use them as a spark to create your own.

Alan Mulally's Business Process Review

Every Thursday for two hours, Alan's management team would meet to review the business. By "management team," don't think just a handful of people. There were a lot of people in this meeting to be sure that every team knew what was going on.

They would start with a review of the overall plan. Every person knew the plan. It wasn't complicated. In fact, the plan fit on a business card-size piece of paper. During the Thursday meeting, each leader would report on their part of the plan, including a color coding to designate their current status.

When he started this rhythm, it took a while before leaders had the confidence to be vulnerable and share what was really going on. Mulally has told the story of how he clapped when the first red status finally appeared. Mulally says that, "If it's not a shared environment, people are not going to have the confidence to share how it's really going. Then you're just managing a secret—you don't know what's going on."

This level of awareness and information-sharing turned Mulally's organization into a cohesive network of teams that was working toward a common goal: the survival and turnaround of Ford Motor Company, in this case. Teams could see what other teams were doing. Teams would start to offer help to other teams that needed it. It became a true "team of teams."

And it worked. Ford Motor Company turned around.

David Fox has been an executive focused on customer-focused cultures for over twenty years. One day, as he was driving to the office, he received a phone call from a colleague telling him about a system issue. As soon as he arrived, David sprinted into the building, bypassed his office without checking email, grabbing coffee, or chatting with co-workers, and ran up two flights of stairs into the company's war room. Thankfully, he arrived just before the CEO, who looked at David and said, "Where is everybody else?"

You see, when there was an issue, every executive was expected to be in the war room, focused on the issue until it was resolved. The war room was a physical room lined with computers and monitors so that every executive and manager had all of the information necessary to solve the problem quickly. The war room was not just active during an issue—it was active 24/7. The war room constantly provided the information needed for everyone to create a great customer experience. The war room provided collective awareness.

You could employ a similar approach.

By the way, don't miss a key insight from his story.

You see, David's story not only illustrates the use of a war room but reveals an important truth for what actually made the war room effective: the CEO's hyper-focus on a great customer experience. Sure, the war room was a method to achieve the goal but would not have been effective without the clear focus on what was more important than anything else: providing a great customer experience. It was a clear reference point, a distinct destination and articulation about what was ultimately most important for the organization.

If you put two variables of the formula together—a clear reference point and a method of providing collective awareness to achieve it—like David's CEO did, you start to unlock the power of the formula.

Intentional Leadership Rhythms

An executive with a nationally recognized insurance company relayed to me how they conduct weekly CEO meetings with senior leadership, bi-weekly meetings with mid-level leadership, and monthly meetings with everyone. It's a good example of an intentional leadership rhythm to create collective awareness.

1x1 Meetings

Don't forget the power of your 1x1 meetings with direct reports. Leverage them to drill into their heads the need to share information proactively.

Rebecca Hunter, former Chief Human Resources Officer for 40,000+ employees in the State of Tennessee government, says that the reason why people don't share information and work together across teams is usually *not* because people flat-out refuse to share information. While that certainly occurs, more often than not, people don't share information and work together because they just don't think about it.

Hunter emphasizes the importance of one-on-one meetings with her immediate team. During these meetings, she routinely asks the question: "Who else needs to know what you know?" She does this because she's found that people just didn't think about sharing information. They weren't against sharing it, they were just busy and focused on their own work, which is why she continuously ingrained the concept of sharing information and collaborating with other people—inside and outside their team boundary—who "need to know."

NASA's Teleservices Network

Everyone knows about the tremendous success of the Apollo project back in the 1960s and 1970s. What you may not know is how collective awareness played a significant role in its success. As described in his book *Team of Teams*, General McChrystal explains how NASA brought in George Mueller to connect their teams. He built a "teleservices network" to connect engineers and managers from NASA and different contractor organizations. They would simply tune in to the real-time feed.

How can you create a continuous cross-feed across your teams that need to work together? I don't mean just passing information—I mean data plus real human-to-human interaction. Of course, we have tremendous technology platforms to aid in this today, such as Slack, Microsoft Teams, and a myriad of other tools. You could set up a regular Zoom meeting that runs every day at a specified time, perhaps even continuously, depending on your project and domain. Just remember, it's not just data—the key is to facilitate real human-to-human interaction.

Daily Check-In/Check-Out

Software development teams often employ a habit of conducting a daily ten-minute standing meeting. Usually, these are in the mornings so that everyone knows what everyone is doing, what the issues are, and what the plan for the day is.

Daily check-outs at the end of the day can also be helpful, especially if many are working remotely: what happened, what was done, what remains, what is the plan for tomorrow, what's most important? Consider implementing your own daily check-in/check-out, perhaps even with a broader audience.

This type of constant communication is important, even if you don't think you need it.

Heather Gahir, Ph.D., Vice President of Talent Strategy and Organizational Development for Jackson National Life Insurance Company, emphasizes this when she says that "It is important to have intense communication while you are figuring out how to get teams to work together. You have to keep people in communication with each other. That's where collaboration breaks down: because they don't communicate with each other often enough."

The Scoreboard

Sometimes, collective awareness can be physical in nature. A couple of years ago, I visited a Lifeway Christian Resources distribution center. I remember the big electronic scoreboard on the wall that told every single person in the building what was going on, what the goals were, how much had been accomplished, and what was left to be done. All they had to do was look up. It's not unlike my basketball teams—we could always look up on the wall and know *exactly* where we stood. How could you implement a similar resource, such as a balanced scorecard?

Time Outs

When I coach basketball, we could have the best plan, but the other team doesn't always do their part and let us execute the plan. We get out of our rhythm, get flustered, or lose our focus. That's where time outs come in. It's an opportunity to reset. Sometimes, we just needed to get back to the plan. Sometimes, we needed to adapt the plan. But we often needed to step back and reset.

If you are going 100 percent and never have a "time out," you will not reach your destination, at least not without completely wearing yourself out. Implement "time outs."

> If you are going 100 percent and never have a "time out," you will not reach your destination, at least not without completely wearing yourself out.

These time outs could be retreats, leadership meetings, offsites, weekly debriefs. These are not team-building activities. You may employ some team-building during your "time out," but it's important to re-establish collective awareness: What is our plan, what is most important, what are the current realities and issues, what do we need to change, and how do we move forward?

Software Productivity Tools

Software productivity tools are not effective.

Gulp.

I personally developed project management/productivity tools for teams, and I believe in them, so hear me out.

For our purposes here, we need collective awareness—what everyone else is doing, how that fits into the vision, what the issues are. That is best done live, person to person, with real human interaction. Not necessarily in-person—virtual can work—but live.

There is absolutely no substitute: If you want people to work together, you have to insist that they work together. Not typing words into a software system. They need to hear each other, ask questions, even challenge each other.

<mark>If you want people to work together, you have to insist that they work together.</mark>

There is no substitute for people actually working together.

Having said that, software productivity tools have their place. They are great at managing the actual detail and execution of what was decided. Use them for managing tasks that have to be done that day, notifying people when tasks are done and their tasks can begin, tracking issues in a central location so they don't get lost, recognizing how much work everyone has, interacting with questions on how to complete a task, etc. These are related to execution *after* teams have higher-level clarity and awareness. Software productivity tools should be used to track and document the teamwork, not build it.

<mark>Software productivity tools should be used to track and document the teamwork, not build it.</mark>

Let me give you an example. Army tanks have sophisticated technology systems that link tanks together, meaning every tank commander knows exactly where their fellow tanks are on the battlefield. It's a technology tool that gives them a clear picture and advantage as they are

executing the battle plan. But that is not a substitute for the discussion that takes place to create the battle plan, to provide updates as to each tank and commander's intentions, and to make decisions and adapt as the battle unfolds. In other words, the tool greatly helps the execution—it's not a substitute for the conversation.

I cannot stress enough that working together is a multi-dimensional issue. You have to consider all of the variables of the formula. If you just start throwing people in a room and expect them to use one of these formats to start working together, good luck. If your people do not understand that debate around ideas is critical as one of the key behaviors of a high-functioning team, this is going to be difficult. If they do not have clarity on what is most important, this isn't going to work, because everyone is looking through a different lens. When you consider the entire formula and work on the other elements, this becomes much, much easier.

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

The real action that dictates an organization's health, speed, and ability to adapt is in the gaps between teams. Teams can't work well together unless we eliminate the gaps between teams and departments.

Reframe the question from "How do we break down silos?" to "How do we eliminate the gaps between silos?" When the rest of the formula is put in place, there are two components needed to eliminate the gaps between teams:

- Creating real relationships between teams

- Creating collective awareness across the organization

Visit TheHippoSolution.com/bookresources for assessments, downloads, and additional resources.

IMMEDIATE ACTION STEPS

Take one of these quick action steps to take immediate action:

- Visit the book resource page to assess this variable for your organization.

- Read *Silos, Politics, and Turf Wars* by Patrick Lencioni with your leadership team.

- Ask another leader, with whom you don't agree, to lunch once a week for the next month.

- Schedule a forum around a specific topic important to multiple teams.

- Schedule a Work-Out session with representatives from multiple groups to solve a particular problem.

- Start your own Business Process Review.

  Leverage Alan Mulally's model and invite more leaders and managers to join a weekly review meeting. Encourage vulnerability, information sharing, and helping each other.