

Cross-functional collaboration: How to manage key challenges



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CROSS-FUNCTIONAL COLLABORATION HOW TO MANAGE KEY CHALLENGES

CHALLENGE # 1

Setting realistic targets

CHALLENGE # 2

Dealing with
workload prioritisation
and diverse teams

CHALLENGE # 3

Setting team leadership,
breaking stereotypes
and limitations

To start, cross-functional collaboration can be defined as a formal (or informal) collaboration between individuals (or teams) representing different business units, specialisations and hierarchies.

In other words, cross-functional collaboration means working in diverse teams to define complex goals and avoid misaligned decisions; this comes with its own challenges.

Below, we provide an aggregated list of three common challenges and offer respective solutions.

Challenge # 1. Setting realistic targets

Let's consider the most prominent challenge of any business – how to remain competitive and generate healthy revenues. In this regard, a company may want to target an X% increase in revenues per year.

There are at least three key questions which need to be addressed:

1. Is this a realistic target?
2. If so, how can this be achieved (i.e., what resources must a company utilise)?
3. This comes down to the third question – can employees across various departments work collaboratively to achieve set business targets?

Challenge # 2. Dealing with workload prioritisation and diverse teams

Presently, almost every company operates across different geographical regions and time zones resulting in a more diverse culture. Such a combination of team 'inputs', among others, creates two simultaneous challenges – how to organise common time efficiently and how to cope with different business mentalities (personal and yet professional views, individual emotions and departmental capabilities).

The solution could be found through setting clear deliverables and receiving overall buy-in from team members (so that each one can feel his/her value added). For example, a buy-in into the cross-functional collaboration can include a high-level demonstration that simulates the workload requirement of each team member and shows the overall process and set results. Through this approach, each team member, prior to starting the actual collaboration, can already identify his/her own input potential and weak points, if any.

Challenge # 3. Setting team leadership, breaking stereotypes and limitations

The common challenge for the collaboration team is to make well-formed decisions by avoiding misaligned decisions and recognising individual (or departmental) limitations in achieving set results.

The answer is that the team leader has to become a recognised leader. He/she should lead by example, establish synergy and serve as a catalyst between set tasks, individual expertise, personal beliefs and departmental limitations. In addition, the leader must be able to break stereotypes to avoid misaligned decisions (i.e., same-way thinking).

All in all, cross-functional collaboration is a complex process which, on one side, involves corporate requirements, set targets, preferred decisions and external business environment conditions. On the other side, it involves real people with their own professional limitations, workload priorities and ways of thinking. By working as a team, with a trusted leader and with set clear deliverables, well-formed and sustainable decisions can be established and efficiently realised.