

# THE COLLABORATIVE WORKING POCKETBOOK

Douglas Miller

*Drawings by Phil Hailstone*

"As an HR Manager working across units, countries and with many different teams, this book provides me with great support and inspiration in creating foundations for a collaborative working environment. I can immediately apply some theoretical arguments to my daily challenges, and see the positive outcomes."

**Jeanette Broberg, Human Resources Manager, Iggesund Paperboard**

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## WHAT IS COLLABORATIVE WORKING?



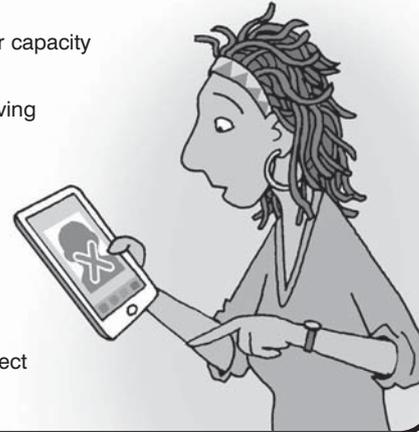
### 1. IT'S PEOPLE-CENTRED

Before we explore each of the seven habits, let's look at the bigger picture, with some definitions.

Collaborative working emphasises people and their capacity for escalating brilliance when together.

**It's interactive** – it's a dynamic social activity involving two or more people. This means:

- **Productivity** – your social interactions emphasise the use of skills that generate ideas and put them into practice
- **Diversity** – it thrives best when there is a mix of knowledge and skills in the collaborative group
- **Connectivity** – the only limit on collaborative possibility lies in any lack of willingness to connect with others – face-to-face or online



WHAT IS COLLABORATIVE WORKING?

## 2. IT'S OUTPUT-FOCUSED



Collaborative working emphasises ideas and results – the outputs of people:

**Newness** – what's there now wasn't there before.

**Problem solving** – the collaborative group's ideas solve problems.

**Opportunity** – the group explores and exploits opportunities.

**Value** – having two or more people together produces a multiplier effect – we get greater value from the interaction than we would have done had they been working alone.

**Understanding** – the openness that exists in an effective collaborative group creates a mutual understanding of other people's worlds that itself presents huge opportunity.

## WHAT IS COLLABORATIVE WORKING?



### 3. IT'S OFTEN INFORMAL

Collaboration needs formality and informality. People who like structure (and organisational psychologists tell us that those working conventional hours in conventional cultures mostly do) might struggle with the informality. Nonetheless, there are three informal aspects to collaborative cultures to highlight:

**Adhocracy** – a culture where flexibility, experimentation and prototyping are valued.

**Moments of spontaneity** – where the little moments can be just as significant as the big strategic ones.

**The collaboration premium** – where social interactions have the potential to explore the limitless 'white space' of opportunity. A collaborative approach brings a meaningful premium.

## WHAT IS COLLABORATIVE WORKING?

### A SIMPLE DEFINITION



One of the most well-known definitions of collaboration featured in the mission statement of soft drinks giant Coca-Cola:

***'Leveraging Collective Genius'***



This captures the 'spirit' of collaboration well. In the context of collaboration these words mean:

**Leveraging** – influencing a process, a system, an environment in a way that multiplies the outcome of individual efforts without a corresponding increase in the number of people and/or physical/financial resources. A way of making one plus one equal three or more.

**Collective** – a group of people working together towards a shared goal. The shared goal creates a purpose – essential for collaborative working.

**Genius** – solutions rarely come from one person's genius. The 'genius' solution is far more likely to appear when you bring diverse minds together **in the right way.**

## WHAT IS COLLABORATIVE WORKING?

## WHAT IT ISN'T



Collaboration is not:

- ✘ Something that automatically happens when you bring two or more people, or two or more groups of people together. People can come together to co-operate better, to co-ordinate activity or to collaborate. They are not the same things. They shouldn't be done at the same time either
- ✘ Just another fashionable word for team working. Sometimes it goes against the norms and conventions of team working, eg in a really dynamic collaborative group you should expect creative conflict
- ✘ Cost-free – collaboration means an investment of time as a bare minimum. Your time, as well as your commitment, is essential
- ✘ About exchange of information. While sharing information may be a catalyst, the emphasis is on social interaction for added value

## WHAT IS COLLABORATIVE WORKING?

### WHAT IT ISN'T – THE 'C's



Given that there is some confusion about the difference between collaboration, co-operation and co-ordination, let's define the other two 'C's:

**Co-operation** – in co-operation, standard team behaviours come to the fore. As expert Leo Denise describes it, *'Co-operation too often becomes a call for increased socialisation to a culture, not a prompt for high performance.'* Collaboration, on the other hand, often needs divergence and disagreement to fire new thinking – even competition.

**Co-ordination** – author James Surowiecki says that in co-ordination *'a person has to think not only about what s/he thinks the right answer is, but also about what other people think the right answer is. And that's because what each person does affects and depends on what everyone else will do and vice-versa.'*

While co-ordination demands that what we think and do fit together in a neat and orderly way – jigsaw-like – it doesn't allow for speed, breakthrough thinking and new opportunity. It's routinely effective but uninspiring.

## WHAT IS COLLABORATIVE WORKING?

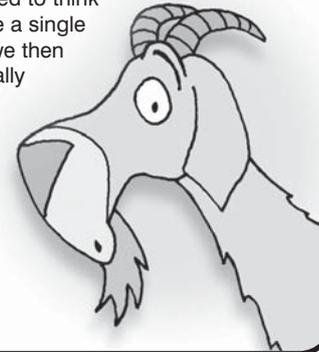
### MANY RIGHT ANSWERS



The story of guessing the weight of the animal at the country fair, on page 9, is an example of a 'cognition' problem. Cognition problems have one or a very small number of possible answers.

Unfortunately many of us behave, often because we are trained to think this way, as though the challenges we have at work also have a single right answer out of which will spring the perfect plan, which we then execute. It's a search for perfection. In truth there are potentially many right answers to many of the challenges we face.

If you and your collaborative group can liberate yourself from this right answer restriction, you will find that you become alive to a huge number of solutions and opportunities, many of which might never have been hatched if you hadn't been together. As this pocketbook progresses we will show how individually and collectively, through the seven collaborative working habits, you do this.



## About the Author

### Douglas Miller

Douglas is a trainer, team retreat facilitator and author who has worked in 30 countries across 4 continents over the last decade. He is the author of ten other books including three pocketbooks: *Engagement*, *Nurturing Innovation* and *Positive Mental Attitude*. His book *'The Luck Habit'* has been published in fourteen languages.



As a trainer he works extensively for United Nations agencies, especially UNICEF, The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and The European Central Bank, as well as for a number of private sector firms in the legal and finance sectors. His specialist subjects include collaborative working, leadership, team building/working, communication, problem solving and positive psychology. He is an avid swimmer, music collector and reader of political biographies.

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### TESTING YOUR TEAM

A well-researched questionnaire is now available online for teams who want to test their suitability for collaborative working against the seven habits featured in this pocketbook. The questionnaire identifies strengths and vulnerabilities, and makes recommendations for tightening up vulnerabilities and enhancing strengths. These seven habits are further sub-divided into 24 behaviours – hence the questionnaire is called 'Team Collaboration 24/7' or 'TC247' for short. To test the team you lead or are a part of please go to: [www.teamcollaboration247.com](http://www.teamcollaboration247.com)