

How to break silo's and improve collaboration

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SPEAKERS

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Welcome in this 13th episode about how you can break silos and spend less time in meetings.

So do you spend a lot of time in meetings aligning with your colleagues? Do you face communication or collaboration issues in your organization? Do you want to break silos? And do you want to actually be customer oriented? In this episode, I'm going to share with you why you're facing these issues and what you can do about it, but also the biggest hurdles you will face if you want to break silos.

And let me first share with you the story of Nicole in customer service. So Nicole, she's helping the customers with their problems regarding their IT platform. And lately, it developed a new version of that platform. But unfortunately, like every new version, there are bugs. But this time there are so many bugs that Nicole and her colleagues from customer service are really submerged by questions and by angry customers because a lot of things are not functioning. But unfortunately, she cannot solve her own issues. She has to meet with IT and wait for them to change their bugs in the platform. But it there are already busy with a big project that is crucial for the organization as well. So they don't really have time to fix those bugs. So every time Nicole goes back behind her phone and gets a customer on the line, she gets stressed because she cannot do anything about the problems that these customers are facing. She can do whatever she wants to manage her stress, she can meditate, she can go for a walk, she can spend time with her children go into the forest, but every time she picks up her telephone, again, her stress spikes up.

And that's what I want to talk about in this episodes.

And it's called organizational stress because there is a kind of stress that you cannot really do a lot about as an individual. For that kind of stress, you have to change the organizational structure.





And so why do so many organization face communication and collaboration issues? Why do they have silo thinking? Why don't they manage to be really customer oriented? And why do you spend a lot of time in meetings?

It's because having a functional organization, in Fast Times, is really counterproductive. And what I mean by that is that, in the past, organizing yourself around specialties, like marketing, sales, IT, customer service was really helpful. And you could really become specialized and deliver great processes.

But today, the speed of change has accelerated. And so that often means that your process changes as well. And so the people in these different departments they have to ask Line, if they want to solve their issues, a lot of these departments have become interdependent of each other. They have to align with these other departments to solve their own issue. And that's why people spend more time in meetings trying to align them doing their actual job. And what also happens then, is that people from different departments, they blame each other. So in this case of Nicole, Nicole will blame IT for not solving her issues because she's facing a lot of problems. Or it will blame customer service because they come up with all these issues. Well, they have already so many things to do, that they are almost burning out.

Also what is happening is that they all have different objectives. The objectives of customer service is of course to have happy customers, but the objectives of it might be to lower capex or to deliver Products fast enough or to deliver things for other countries. So they might have other objectives. And so what we see in fact happening in many organizations because of the speed of change that is digitalization and all these things is that most jobs are becoming more complex. In the past, your job was probably a little bit more delimited. But now the complexity has increased. But what we then see is that the autonomy stays very low. And that means that you don't always have the power to change the things for your department, or you don't have the authority, or the problems are caused in another department. So you're dependent on them. So your autonomy is low, but your complexity is high.

And that's also what's characteristic describes. So if you have high complexity, but low job autonomy, To me because of this functional structure, where you cannot solve your own issues, you become a high risk of burning out and it has nothing to do with you as a person, it has everything to do with how your organization is structured.

So, what should you do instead? What can you do as an organization?

Well, you should remove the interdependencies by changing the structure from a functional organization towards a cross functional organization. So in this case, because what I was describing was something that happens in my organization. So we had the IT department that were coming up with





new software or with a new versions of software. And then we had another customer experience department that was fixed. Seeing the problems with their customers. And so by removing these interdependency, we did that by In fact, merging IT customer service together. So those were not separate departments anymore. These became one departments. But another issue that we face is that we had a lot of problems between publishing because I was the CEO of an educational publishing company.

So we had a lot of issues between publishing who came up with new products, marketing who had to sell and to communicate about these new products and sales who really visited the schools to sell these new products. There was a lot of there were a lot of problems because things were coming late. They were not adapted to what the customer wanted, because the the process of publishing was a very long process. It took three to five years to develop a new course for the schools. Well, in these three to five years, a lot of things have changed. And so they were not always meeting the needs of the customers.

So we had a lot of problems between publishing, sales and marketing. And so to solve these problems these departments had constantly to align and to align. But of course, they weren't always agreeing on everything because they had different objectives. Publishing, they had to really be aware of the costs and to try to lower their costs sales, they had to increase revenues, marketing also had to increase revenues with low marketing budgets. And so they were constantly blaming each other.

And so instead of having a marketing, a sales and a publishing department, we transform the organization we transform the organization into cross functional teams organized around customer. So in fact, what we did is instead of having an organization with 130 people that are divided in different departments, we created many corporations that operated pretty independently.

So we had a department primary education, where you had marketing sales and publishing in one team, still with very defined roles, it doesn't mean that everyone has to do the same thing. But they were in the same team. And we had that for French education, for secondary education. And even in secondary education, we had two teams because otherwise, the teams were too big. So instead of dividing the process of delivering and selling our educational content to schools, instead of dividing this process, in functionalities, we divided them in mini departments organized around the customer in mini Corporation and also what we did is that we integrated customer service for the IT products into it as well.

So, what is happening in fact, because of course, you cannot have a big department of 100 person, what you need to do is to paralyze your process instead of segmenting it, so segmenting it is in fact cutting your process between marketing sales and publishing for instance. well parallelizing it is





creating a marketing sales and publishing departments around customer type A around customer type B around customer type C.

And of course, these departments that still to align because we wanted to have a corporate image. We wanted to use certain suppliers. The This alignment happens less often than the previous alignment when we had the different departments around specialties.

And now because of that change the people in the organization and in each team, they not only own their problems, they could do something about it. So they had, they owned the problem, but also the solutions.

So the benefits of this transformation because it was a big transformation. The benefits is that people were spending less time in meetings, they could finally really do their job and try to deliver what the customer needed.

The other benefits is that we had less stress because people were not constantly running, trying to get what they would need it trying to solve their issues and going from one meeting to the next one. There was much less stress because they could do something about trading. They would stay with C and about opportunities they would see.

What also happened is that our costs decreased. Because now every department could really see the benefit, for instance of decreasing one year the marketing costs because they believed that was really necessary to develop this new method for the customer. And then the next year, they would increase marketing and decrease the publishing budgets, because they believed it was really important to do a lot of communication to increase sales, they could make these decisions themselves without having to ask another department without having another director deciding about lowering their costs to in fact, increase the costs of another department. They own those decisions. And so at the end, the costs decreased also because they were much less alignment costs much less things that you needed to correct. Because they could really align and do the jobs like they wanted.

And because of that, our customer experience really increased because for instance, know, when IT was releasing a new version of a platform, and they were bugs, they were facing the issues of these bugs themselves. And so they really wanted to do something about it, because it gave them a lot of extra work. And so because of that, the customer experience increased and we had much more satisfied customers.

Of course, the revenues increased as well because people could know, not only fix their own issues, but they could see opportunities and they could do something about these opportunities by themselves without being dependent of other departments. And at the end, everyone was also happier because everything was going more smoothly.





So when I talk about it's no like this, it seems like yeah, this is something that everyone should do. So why do so many organizations still not see the benefits of organizing themselves in cross functional teams around the customer.

And I see, in fact, four big hurdles of the success of transforming your organization from a functional one, to a cross functional one or to an agile one.

And the first big hurdle is the management team or the directors themselves. Because in our case, for instance, we didn't have a publishing director, a marketing director and a sales director anymore. Those roles disappeared, because we didn't have these departments anymore. We had a primary education, secondary education and French education departments and so we needed new roles we needed a director of primary education of Secondary Education of French education of higher education. And so that is a big hurdle because the people who will probably make that decision of transforming the organization will be the first ones to lose their job or to lose their current role. And if for instance, you have been in marketing for 20 years, and suddenly you realize that you should transform your organizational structure and that your job disappears. Even though there is another job coming in the place, you're not sure that you will be able to handle also production and sales that you will be like a mini CEO of your mini Corporation because it requires new skills. And that's the biggest hurdle that I see a lot of organizations, they don't transform their organizational structure because the management team and the directors are afraid of losing their current role. And in our case, we of course, those functions disappeared. But we gave the directors this new role, and we helped them and we coach them, and we supported them. But of course, not everyone can handle this change. And so, unfortunately, not everyone could stay in the management team. And so that's the biggest hurdle for transforming the organization.

And no, I'm talking about the directors, but they have to change their role. But then of course, also the middle management will have a big impact, their role will probably disappear as well and they will get new roles within the organizations as well. And that creates a lot of uncertainties and that's the second big hurdle those uncertainties because you don't know if you will be able to handle this new role. And uncertainty creates often resistance to change and fear. And so you will not want to change towards this new organization. Even if at the end it will bring a lot of benefits not only to your customers to your financial results, but also to the people themselves that will be happier.

Then the third thing I saw is that people had to change teams. And remember in the previous organization, for instance, between it and





customer service, there was a lot of resentment and anger and blame they were blaming each other for not delivering what the other department needed. And so often, these departments were a little bit seen as enemies. And now, I was telling them that they would form one department and that they would join the enemies, and that was creating also a lot of resistance to change because suddenly, no, we don't have an issue. No, in fact, we will be able to solve our issues ourselves is not that bad. And that's creating a lot of friction as well, because people had to change teams and join what they saw as their enemies. Of course, not real enemies, but they were the people that were blaming for not delivering what they needed.

And then the process change and you form all these new organization, all these new teams, and people need time to adapt the processes to adapt themselves to these to the new team, and that requires time as well. And what I see sometimes is, is that because it's not working immediately because it requires time, you have to sometimes pivot maybe you made a mistake somewhere That you have to adjust. And because of that some people they think, well, it's not working. So let's go back to the good old times, and go back to what we know. And that is the functional structure.

So those are the four big hurdles, why organizations don't transform towards agile teams or cross functional teams. It's the management team, and the other middle manager that lose their role, and that are uncertain because of that and resisted change. It's people that change teams and have to join their enemies or the departments that they blamed for their issues. It's the time necessary to adapt to all these new processes to your new team, to your new colleagues. And then that's creating uncertainties and we know that it's not easy to manage uncertainty, we all want to be in control and we Feel better when we are in control.

And that will be then the topic of my next episode is how to manage in times of uncertainties. Because I know a lot of you are managing in times of uncertainties and often you ask yourself, but how can I, we assure How can I motivate the people when I don't have the answers myself. And so that will be the topic of my next episode.

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So thank you for listening to this podcast and I'll see you in the next one, where we'll talk about how to manage in times of uncertainty.

