

the navalent quarterly

Winter 2015



RELATIONSHIPS

The secret to productivity, happiness, and success

Stats *Why you need a best friend at work*

The Aisle *Can DC work together?*

Millenials *tips for working across generations*

When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe. – John Muir

NO subject has received more literary, academic, dramatic, or clinical attention than “relationships.” Yet in the modern workplace we have personal computers, private (even remote) offices, and individual performance rewards that trick us into believing that we work alone (or at best with Siri). But do we really accomplish any work alone?

Whether you are on an assembly line, writing code, managing mergers, or scheming strategically, we need others – people, departments, investors, etc - to take our work from concept to customer and idea to implementation.

And it is the work done between these leaders, customers, departments, and even competitors that are the fertile ground for profound human successes and failures. It is the place where we suffer and soar – where we display our best, most dignified selves and our worst.

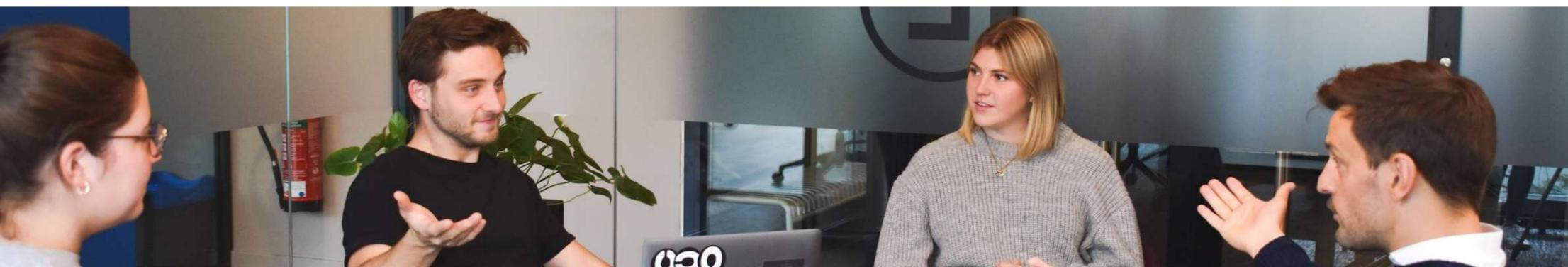
And while we tend to believe that our work relationships are just a means to an end, the average employee spends four times as many hours a week with their colleagues than their family! Now imagine if we approached our work relationships as we do our relationship with our children our spouse?

At Navalent we believe that an organization is only as strong as it’s interconnected relationships and thus worth lots of reflection and intention. And that is why

this month’s Navalent Quarterly, our first, is focused on those relationships between us. In the Navalent Quarterly’s pages we will help you transform the relationships BETWEEN members, leaders, levels, and even departments of your organization so that you can grow to be exceptional.

We write this material as a team of individuals, working remotely and scattered across the country. We are reminded daily of our need for strong relational connection and are fellow journeymen and women trying to live out the ideas found in the Navalent Quarterly as we seek to understand and leverage our deep interconnectedness.

Team Navalent 



Gallup's Q12 Employee Engagement results show that employees with a best friend at work tend to be more focused, more passionate, and more loyal to their organizations. They get sick less often, suffer fewer accidents, and change jobs less frequently. So while employee engagement reports often focus on what an organization can do to increase individual engagement, these studies and statistics show that organization's should be thinking about how to increase relational engagement at the workplace.

IN THE WORKPLACE

A 2013 survey of 2,223 business people across Australia found people planning to stick with their current job because of these reasons.



IN THE HOME

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LET'S DUEL

When our operative narratives collide at work

By Josh Epperson

If you're anything like us, you love a good story. Stories are a central component of how we assess and enact lasting transformation. Not all stories are created equal, some are more central than others. We call these defining stories "operative narratives." Operative narratives reflect, shape, and reinforce our foundational beliefs and values. It is these narratives that 'shape our individual and collective behavior. In a business context, these narratives surface within individual leaders, are held by entire functions or business units, and can even be exhibited across an entire enterprise. Operative Narratives are everywhere! Here are a few familiar examples...

When it surfaces: An individual leader espouses a zero sum narrative

What it sounds like: "If you win, I lose"

When it surfaces: An underinvested in R&D function

What it sounds like: "Why bother with new product development? We'll never get the dollars to market it."

When it surfaces: An enterprise with decades of success becomes arrogant about the value they offer customers

What it sounds like: "If we make it, they'll buy it!"

The good news is that in isolation operative narratives do not interfere with business results. The bad news is, operative narratives never happen in isolation; they're always brushing up against other narratives!

A wildly successful company that holds to a, "our products are the best, of course they'll buy them" operative narrative doesn't run into challenges until it brushes up against a customer's "we expect more transparency from our suppliers" narrative. Herein lies the challenge of dueling operative narratives. It becomes a battle between, "Our products are superior," and, "We want customer intimacy and transparency." The longer these narratives are held and the more frequently they are experienced as true, the harder they are to transform. Left unaddressed, these deeply engrained narratives

render market leaders irrelevant, functions missing opportunistic advantage, and individual leaders exiting. Reconciling the differences between operative narratives is a critical component of lasting positive business performance. This doesn't mean homogenizing narratives or forfeiting what matters. It means finding alignment on a way forward that optimizes the best of multiple perspectives or creating an entirely new perspective altogether. At the outset, conflicting narratives may appear irreconcilable. The difference between reconciled and unreconciled doesn't lie in how compatible the narratives are when they collide, but in each leader's willingness to work through differences, find the common ground necessary to blend the contradictory narratives, and learn how to effectively manage the relationship between them. Here are some approaches to keep in mind when working to manage the relationship between dueling narratives.

Understand how they understand the situation

Too often leaders assume that, "if they just understood me better, they'd get on board." Rarely is a lack of information the root problem. It's usually much more personal than that, as operative narratives are deeply personal. A leader feels excluded. A function feels overlooked. A business' confidence turns to arrogance. Your ability to inquire about and listen to these feelings will open a door for you to be heard.

Strengthen your stakeholder relationships

Complete a stakeholder analysis to clearly articulate what is needed between you and your stakeholders. Who are you in good standing with? Which stakeholder relationships need work? Which stakeholders did you overlook? Be brutally honest about the full suite of stakeholders you need to achieve shared success, not just your success. Be honest about the state of the relationship, considering both your view of it, and what theirs might be as well. Make a plan to strengthen the effectiveness of your working relationship.

Surface common ground and leverage differences

When differences create division, the natural tendency is to get everyone believing the same thing – a...

dangerously false notion of “alignment”. The antidote to differences is not sameness. Sameness sacrifices the synergistic benefits true transformation between, can afford. When addressing differences it is important that you can get those involved walking out of the room together, aligned with a shared view and common direction. Everyone must understand all points of view, especially those different than their own, yet agree on the choice that prevailed. Keep the conversation grounded in shared aspirations, and isolate the sources of difference.

The antidote to differences is not sameness.

Create connection on their terms.

Connect on others’ terms by learning what makes them passionate about their point of view. This will be particularly challenging when you have to go out of your way to connect with them on topics, activities, or projects that are foreign, uninteresting, or fail to drive your bottom line. As you learn what makes them tick, take any opportunity you can to advocate for their position. This sets the stage for deep levels of trust and attachment. Meaningful connection is more likely to happen in relationships that feel safe. Don’t hesitate to ask what makes them feel safe in a leadership relationship with you and work to demonstrate those behaviors.

Build relational closeness through healthy conflict and disclosure

Conflict is often misused and underleveraged between leaders. Conflict, even in the best of situations, is abrasive, painful, off-balancing, and disruptive. But healthy conflict is a necessary component of blending narratives. If you haven’t experienced conflict with your stakeholders you’re not getting the most out of your time spent with them. Conflict is a two way street; push back and descent needs to be an accepted norm and vulnerability and disclosure must be expected from those involved.

Reconciling dueling narratives is an act of love if it is genuine - moving from opposition to more than just cooperation to alliance; moving from tolerance to more than just acceptance to honor; moving from favors to more than just support to sacrifice.

What narratives need to be reconciled in your organization? What’s the first step you can take to help move yourself and other leaders in that direction?

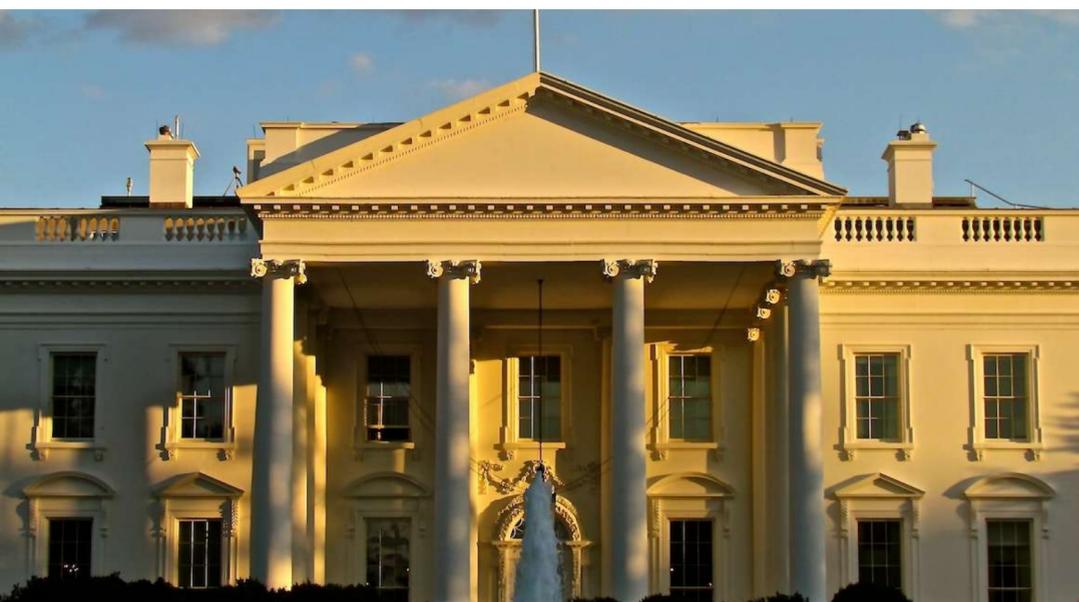
A Unique Responsibility

What the recent midterm election can teach us about the opportunity and responsibility of relationship

The midterm election results are in. The outcome is said to have been fueled by the acute inability of Congress and the Executive branch to work together. And now with a Republican majority in the Senate, the Nation's fingers are crossed that parties will collaborate and pass legislation. The Senate's new Republican leader and President Barack Obama have both promised to end the political gridlock. But will anything really improve?

Incoming Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell immediately promised to effectively pass bills. Mr. Obama reinforced that he is also eager to make the next two years as productive as possible. They discussed these things over a symbolic pour of Kentucky bourbon.

Just days later, at a White House news conference the President emphasized that both parties must address



the concerns of the American citizens, but added that as president he has a “unique responsibility to try to make this town work”. Subsequently there have been attempts at joint meetings of both political parties, but early results instill little confidence for change. The overriding tone is best characterized by Mr. Obama's refrain that “We can surely find ways to work together,” immediately followed by a warning that where he feels

it is necessary, he will act alone.

A recent poll indicates that 63% of us want and expect our leaders to work together. For those old enough to remember it, there was a time when political leaders who disagreed, also understood the need to move beyond intractable, dueling and polarizing ideologies to find the best argument for the greater good. This is a defining characteristic of effective leaders. Seemingly gone are the days of Tip O'Neill and Ronald Reagan who despite ideological differences, showed a superior caliber of loyalty to the nation's citizens and who relied on the strength of a mutually respectful relationship to make positive change. The same was essentially true for Mr. Clinton and Mr. Gingrich who passed sweeping welfare reform legislation that proved positively beneficial in its impact.

Thoughtful effort to develop positive partnerships is vital to successful leadership

Thoughtful, deliberate and focused effort to develop positive partnerships is vital to successful leadership. In fact, it is our observation that the strength of a leader's relationships is among the strongest predictor of sustained success and influence. Yet, with few exceptions, the lack of effective working relationships tops the list in almost every organization diagnostic we do.

As leaders work to establish positive partnerships, they must keep the following in mind:

Know and understand your colleagues

The tradition of an effective political process requires working across party lines. The work then, after identifying whom it is you need to work with, is to understand them. Leaders who are relationally effective ask: What motivates those I work with? What critical goals and key milestones they are trying to achieve? What challenges might they be facing?

Be loyal while avoiding excessive accommodation

Loyalty manifests as a commitment to the success of others and for the group as a whole. In politics loyalty is to your constituency balanced with the needs of the greater populace and their sustainable prosperity. Loyalty means caring about others' well-being but not with disregard for a higher purpose or commitment to a common future. Building loyalty requires actively managing a breadth of relationships. It demands a measure of sacrifice, even foregoing immediate self-interest at times. Loyalty precludes playing political or power games.



Be trustworthy and trusting, but not naïve

Trust is foundational to all healthy relationships—including political. Being trustworthy is a function of competence, the results you deliver, and your integrity of character. And of important note given our flavor-of-the-month political hot topics, building trust requires hard work and consistent action and effort over a sustained period. Trust does not come quick or easy. But once you have it trust creates a positive multiplier effect, while its absence has an equally debilitating impact. Trust is fragile. One misguided action can erase bonds that have taken years to build.

Develop self-awareness, not self-involvement

Only when you know yourself and what you stand for can you confidently act as a leader with any degree of credibility. While some politicians have mastered the art of sound bites in the 24 hour news cycle, true leadership requires the conscious ability to identify and reflect on what you really stand for, your values and what matters most to you. You must look within and strive for greater self-possession; otherwise, how can you know yourself? And, if you don't know yourself, how can you lead yourself? If you can't lead yourself, how can you possibly lead others? Leaders must develop a third eye—the ability to stand apart and watch themselves and the dynamics they create in any given situation. Through this you develop valuable understanding—the ability to see clearly and have empathy for what it is like for others to have a relationship with you.

Remain genuinely grateful and generous to resist entitlement

Of all the human endeavors where entitlement is a risk, politics certainly tops the list. Gratitude is a tremendously positive and countervailing force. It is a social emotion that strengthens connections because it acknowledges the support and contributions of others. To express gratitude is to recognize that success comes most often with the help of others. Your ability to appropriately express gratitude will engender a chain reaction of emotions among your constituencies—generosity, delight, pride, and passion among them. It is one of the most generative expressions in any communal endeavor and is one of the most underutilized postures of a leader.



WHAT THE BEST FOIE GRAS IN THE WORLD CAN TEACH US ABOUT TRUST

By Jarrod Shappell

With its silky texture and deep flavor, foie gras is one of the most prized culinary ingredients. So why then is it banned in the culinary centers of San Francisco, Chicago, and New York?

Foie gras is banned because of the way it is made. Foie gras literally means “fatty liver.” This 3000-year-old process of fattening is done by force-feeding birds unnaturally – through a metal tube, in mass quantities, and with irregular ingredients (corn mash boiled in fat), just days before they are slaughtered. Some in the food industry consider these methods torture, and yet others do not believe the method is torturous and would hate to lose such a storied and valuable ingredient.

But according to Dan Barber, the best foie gras in the world is not made that way.

In Dan Barber’s book *The Third Plate*, he travels to southwestern Spain and visits farmer Eduardo Sousa. Sousa makes natural foie gras by taking advantage of the fall’s temperature drop when geese and ducks gorge on food to prepare for the winter. Additionally, he does not require they eat corn or grain. They roam

his land and eat whatever they want, in this case a lot of tree nuts and olives. He pays little to no attention to the gastronomical expectations of foie gras’ taste, texture, color, or the process by which it is made. In his words, “I just trust the geese.”

Trusting wild geese? We have a hard enough time trusting fellow humans!

There has been much written about trust in the workplace and whether it is given, granted, or earned. Regardless of which of these you agree with, what is universally true is that trust is crucial to strong relationships that must support ongoing levels of conflict, dissent, and complex choices. It is a leader’s job to create the context for this trust to occur whether it is ever returned or not.

Perhaps if we look more closely at Sousa’s foie gras practices, we can see that there are commonalities between trusting the geese and trusting one another: establishing trust requires uncommon advocacy, place-based wisdom, belief in others, and a will to protect.

Advocacy – In 2007 Sousa won the Coup de Coeur, the famed French culinary award. A Spaniard winning this award would be like an Italian winning a Southern BBQ competition. Shocked by the award (but pleased to anger the French), Sousa deflected the praise and noted that the geese were the real creators of the prized delicacy. It is easier to give trust and receive trust if it is clear that you are not in it for yourself. When people know you value them and advocate for their interests as much as your own, they will trust you and give you their loyalty. If they know you are out for yourself, their internal alarm sounds, and they will say to themselves, “Watch out for that person.”

Contextual Wisdom – Sousa knows the geese, the land, the grazing patterns of other animals, and how the weather impacts all of these variables. He has a deep understanding of what makes his farm an area “that is conducive to life” so that the geese won’t leave. This is no different in the workplace. You must know

your business, its trends, and threats. You must build your understanding of how your stakeholders uniquely give and receive trust, as well as the currency they use to give and receive it. Each organization, business unit, and leader will have different “trust currencies,” and so deeply mining your context will help you be more credible and trustworthy. In doing so, you will create a work environment that is “conducive to life” and increase your organization’s retention.

A Will to Protect – On the perimeter of Sousa’s land there is a fence that is electrically charged; different from most farms, however, this fence’s electrical charge is on the outside, so as to keep the geese in but to keep the predators out. According to Sousa this is the reason that his geese stay. Many executives use benefits packages, amenities, and bonuses to retain employees, when it may be true that what employees really want is a sense of safety so that they feel comfortable to open up, take appropriate risks, and expose vulnerabilities.

Belief in Others – It is not always safe to trust people. We’ve all been burned by a colleague, teammate, friend, or even spouse; but believing in the inherent goodness of others allows people to do what they have been hired to do. Sousa shows this belief in his geese by simply letting their seasonal eating fatten their liver. And it does just that.

Leadership Behavior	Response
Advocacy	Loyalty
Deep understanding of context	Credibility
Will to protect	Sense of safety
Belief in others	Confidence

As with the making of Foie Gras, there is the way that we believe we are supposed to build trust and the way that is actually most effective. We believe that if we pay a little more attention to trust making and the processes by which we do so, we will find the same rich and deep goodness of Sousa’s foie gras in our workplace relationships.

TEAMS: Necessary evil or secret to success?

All of us have wanted to sneak silently out the back door of an unproductive meeting. These awkward and unproductive meetings are often the stage for our interpersonal or inter-departmental tensions and thus are the crucibles for improving these relationships. Here are a few tips and techniques that we believe can help you and your team hold better meetings and simultaneously increase your connection.

TRY THIS: Amazon founder Jeff Bazos always makes sure that his meetings follow the “2 Pizza Rule”: never have a meeting where two pizzas couldn’t feed the entire group. It works with the assumption that the more people who are in a meeting, the higher the risk for groupthink and poor individual contribution (“social loafing”).

TAKE A HALFTIME: The purpose of meetings is not to talk; the purpose of meetings is to arrive at ideas or solutions, but have you ever walked out of a meeting wondering how that solution was actually reached? What is often lacking in meetings is the actual space to thoughtfully synthesize the information that has been presented. Halfway through your next meeting, schedule in a two-minute break so that individuals can collect their thoughts and establish an informed point of view before moving toward a solution.

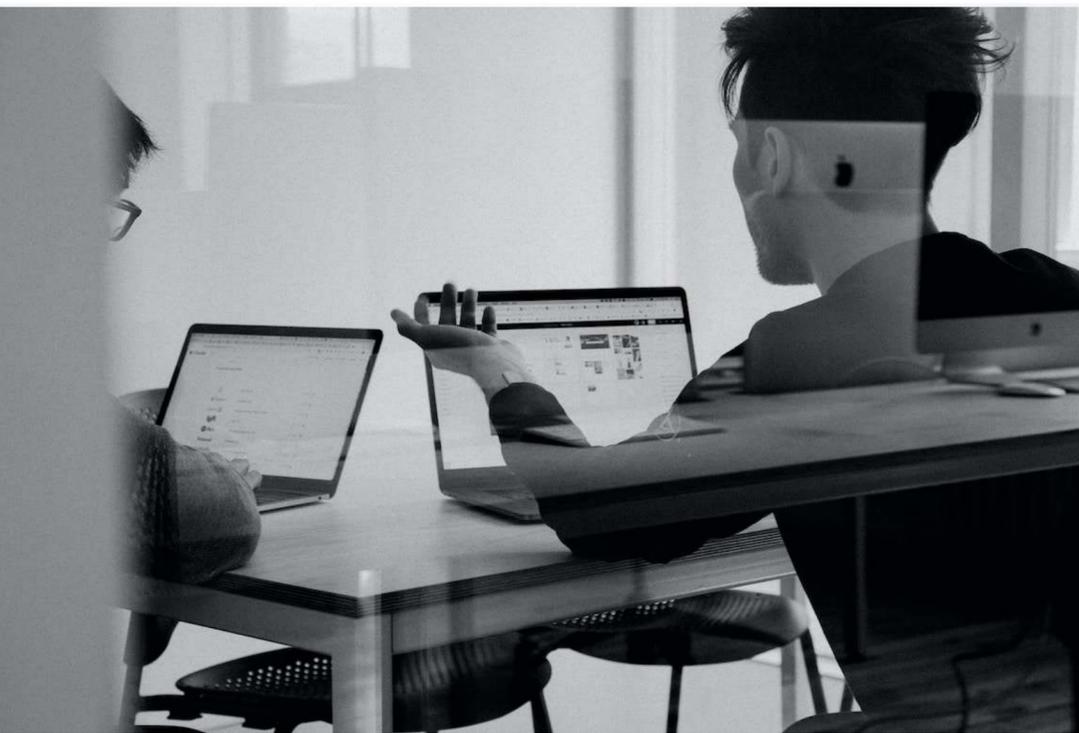
LEARN ABOUT THIS: Kevin O’Connor originally wrote about BPT (Brainstorming Priority Technique) in 2003, but the need for its implementation is being felt more than ever, as our abundance of data leads to endless ideas. Whether you love or loathe brainstorming meetings, BPT will draw out all possible answers, weed out any bad or unfeasible options, build consensus within your team and save time. To summarize:

1. Figure out which team members should be involved -- no more than 10.
2. State the specific problem and allow everyone to shout out possible solutions without taking the time to analyze each option. Write down all the ideas for everyone to see.
3. Now the hard part. Once you have 20 to 100 ideas, the BPT leaders should divide the number of possible solutions by three in less than ten minutes.
4. Then the BPT leader should read each idea out loud, take a vote, and write the number of votes next to the corresponding ideas.

DOWNLOAD THIS: A new Bay Area startup called WorkLife recently launched a web and mobile service that streamlines the way teams create and share agendas and meeting notes. As much research has noted, technology can actually shift human behavior, and we believe that a tool like this can reduce the friction that hinders meaningful boardroom conversations. This app and its email reminders help make sure your meetings have published agendas, are focused on substantive topics, and conclude with action items.



worklife



WE'RE COMING APART AT THE SEAMS

By Mindy Millward

No work is done alone. This is true for the individual employee and perhaps more true for the individual function. Value is created interdependently across an organization. The C-Suite, HR, IT, marketing, finance – they all need each other. We know that in theory but often fail to practice it, causing stalled-out projects and frustrated employees. So what can be done to stitch these seams more tightly?

Here are a few things organizations must do to successfully manage the seams and realize their value:

Identify strategic crossroads

Not all boundaries are meant to be crossed. However, if for example, legal isn't involved in M&A activity, a major piece of due diligence will be overlooked. That is an essential seam, but does IT need to hear about your marketing plan? Maybe not. Identifying which boundaries must be crossed and effectively stitching them together is a critical starting point. Ultimately, the seams that must be stitched are those that enable the strategic requirements of the business. To assume all boundaries are created equal fails to take into account the asymmetric requirements of strategy.

Get the right leaders involved

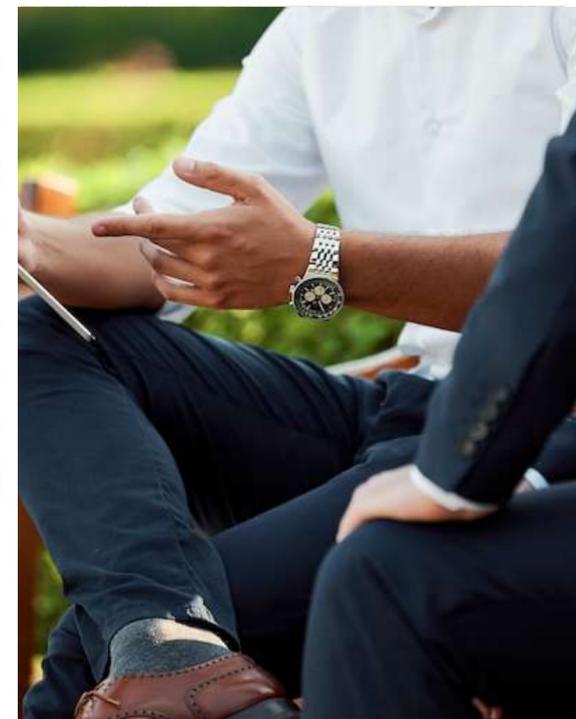
Every seam has a critical number of leaders on each side of the boundary who must effectively work together. Once identified, the goal is to create a common understanding of why they need each other, when their participation is needed, and what they will contribute to realize the strategic value of their seam. Beware that over-inclusion to make people feel important or under-inclusion as a power move can cloud the transparency between critical leaders and erode trust.

Keep the interaction two-way

Often seams are made up of stakeholder sets consisting of business leads and functional/service-oriented roles -- or the opposite: functional experts and businesses that feel subservient in the relationship. An imbalance of power can affect communication at the seams. When it goes unchecked, the interaction becomes one-way and collaboration wanes. Effectively managing the seams means that everyone involved has a voice, can push others' thinking, and genuinely informs one another's approach as needed to realize their goal.

Identify commonalities between the stakeholders

Left unmanaged, organizational seams can become organizational fault lines. It's easier for sales to explain how its goals and objectives differ from marketing, but those differences only serve to deepen existing fissures more than bringing those functions into an integrated working relationship. Start with what you can align on; begin getting traction there.



Manage the inevitable tension at the seams

You must surface and manage conflicts at the seams. The reality is that differences do exist. There's tension around how resources get allocated (or don't). There

are tensions about how the realization of your objectives makes the realization of mine more complicated. Tensions abound. The goal isn't to get rid of the tensions and just ensure everyone plays "nice." Quite the contrary. The goal is to ensure there is a methodology for effectively managing those tensions so that the organization can execute its strategy. Identifying which seams are most contentious and what must be overcome to ensure a more effective working relationship is a necessary step in bringing fractured boundaries together. Furthermore, creating rules of the road or other behavioral norms for leaders to abide by when working the seam is another way of ensure value from the seam.

Manage multiple seams simultaneously

Any strategy worth its weight presumes multiple seams across the enterprise. Executing that strategy in the marketplace requires an enterprise to regularly assess the health and effectiveness of each seam that drives that strategy.

Organizational groups, teams, and boundaries and the seams associated with them are a given. How leaders manage them and the value they ultimately create (or erode) is not. We believe the relationships at the seams will make or break the interdependent value an organization is able to create.

Which boundaries are particularly difficult for your organization to manage? Why? What's at risk if leaders are unable to manage this seam more productively? What role do you play in helping your organization make needed changes at this seam?



LIMBIC LEADERSHIP

by Jarrod Shappell

I'm a consultant, not a ceramist, but I knew in my gut I had to start a mug company. Well, it wasn't just my gut. There was another guy's gut, too.

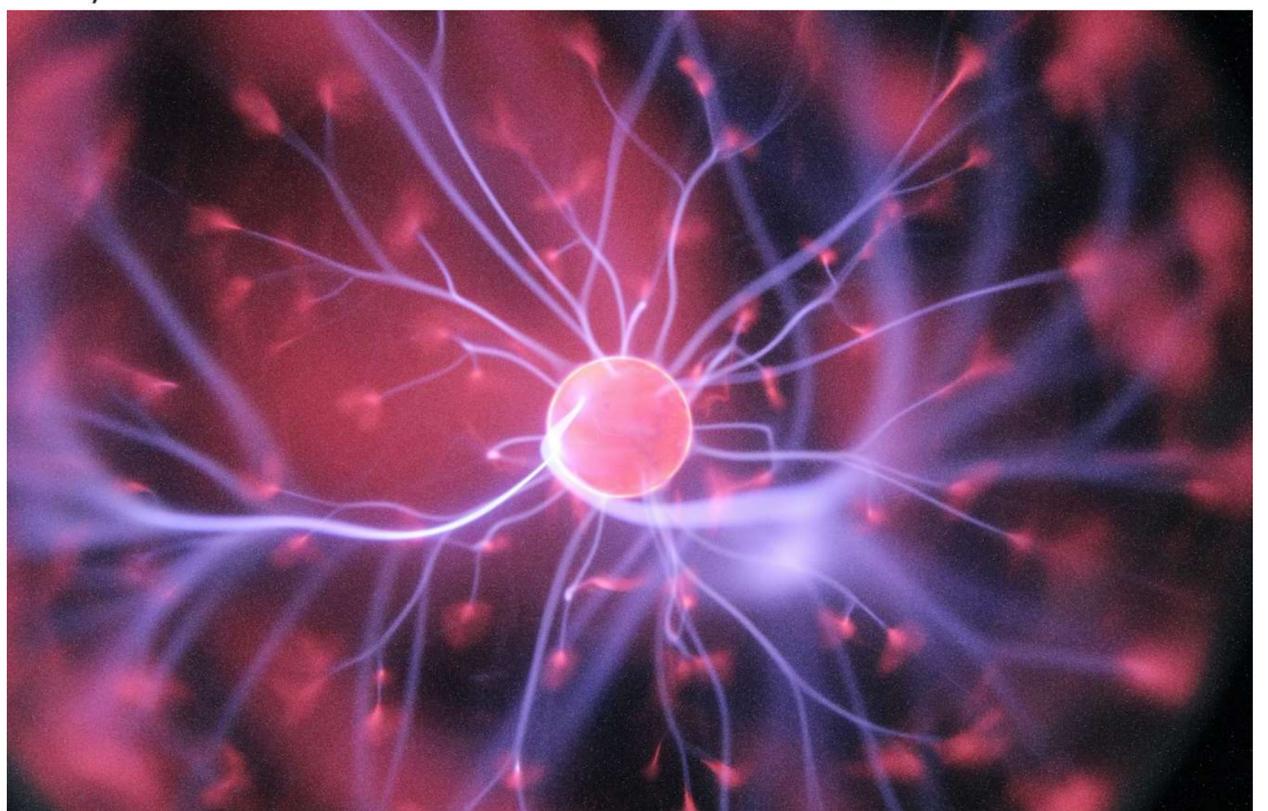
My friend Blaine and I started Our Common Mug almost a year ago. The premise is simple. We are good friends who met in grad school. Our lives have taken us 2,000 miles and two time zones apart. As we struggle to stay in touch, we long for the everyday rituals we once had -- like morning coffee. We made a mug, only sold in pairs, that would help remind us (and others) of our connection.

In some ways, the product that we created was irrelevant. We simply wanted to create something -- a product, book, experience -- together because we believed that our relational chemistry was capable of producing great things.

Many "experts" advise against this. Some tell us to avoid working with our friends, and many more say that work should not be expected to feel like a family. I beg to differ. In my experience (and in a growing body of neurological research), working with those you love or loving those you work with is the key to sustainable, fulfilling work -- and leaders should take note, because it may help the bottom line.

Our need to connect is biological. Just as we have a need to eat, drink, and sleep, we have a need for meaningful social interaction. This need is different from those aforementioned physiological needs, as it comes from an entirely different part of our brain -- our limbic system.

Our brain is made up of three parts -- reptilian brain, neocortical brain, and limbic brain. The reptilian brain controls our survival functions like breathing, eating, etc. The neocortex is the big grayish matter, and mammals have a lot of it. This is where we form language and do critical thinking. The limbic system is our emotional center. This is the place in the brain that allows two human beings to connect. You can think of them as Eat, Pray, Love. The three systems work in harmony.



But it is the limbic brain, which lizards and other creatures lack but all mammals share, that is the hub of all of our instincts, hormones, deep preferences, and deep feelings. It is the limbic brain's chemicals -- serotonin, opiates, and oxytocin -- that are the largest contributors to what makes us happy. The trigger of the limbic system? Social connection.

Yet our WEIRD (western, educated, industrialized, rich, democratic) culture overvalues the neocortical problem-solving brain and has given little thought or attention to our limbic needs. This is especially true in regards to the modern workplace. We work longer hours, spend more time working alone, telework more -- and it's all making us literally sick. Oh, and we hate it.

For whatever reason, we have come to believe that we can enter our high-rise buildings, start-up dungeons, and home offices and simply cut off our need for connection. We presume that just as we can fast from a day of meals, we can fast 50 hours a week from meaningful human connection. We tell ourselves that work is solely about getting a paycheck and adding value to the company.

Unfortunately we don't stop being human when we go to work. Our deepest human needs are always there. In their groundbreaking neurobiological work *A General Theory of Love*, authors Lewis, Amini, and Lannon say the following:

Even after a peak parenting experience, children never transition to a fully self-tuning physiology. Adults remain social animals: they continue to require a source of stabilization outside themselves. That open-loop design means that in some important ways, people cannot be stable on their own — not should or shouldn't be, but can't be. This prospect is disconcerting to many, especially in a society that prizes individuality as ours does. Total self-sufficiency turns out to be a daydream whose bubble is burst by the sharp edge of the limbic brain. Stability means finding people who regulate you well and staying near them.

Have you ever met a coworker and thought to yourself, "My throbbing limbic system believes that you can be someone that regulates me"? Of course not. It is safe to say that most of us walk into our workplaces believing that it is our self-interest that will help us succeed. We rarely think of our organizations as communities that can care for us and in which we can care for others in return. At best we have HR departments that orchestrate faux connection through trust falls and happy hours. When was the last time that you randomly fell backwards and your drunken colleague caught you? Exactly.

I am not suggesting that all of our social needs must be met in the context of work--our romantic interests and partners would be quite upset;but I am suggesting that if the bulk of our time is spent in the work place, we should acknowledge our deeply human needs and listen to them, as opposed to pretending they are not there.

Well before people learn to hide the need for others, you can see the limbic system very clearly. Infants, without a fully formed neocortex (which isn't done until 25 years of age --now do you understand Bieber's poor judgment?), have a limbic system that is both evolving and their driving force. Attachment Theory is a vast body of work that looks at this time in a human's life and at how caregivers activate the growth of the limbic region through emotional availability and reciprocal gestures, sounds, etc. Attachment Theory states that everyone is either 1) securely attached (that's what we want), 2) anxious-avoidant, 3) anxious-resistant, or 4) disorganized.

Why does any of this matter? Psychologists now claim that our attachment experience influences thinking patterns, physical growth, emotional capacity, life satisfaction, relationships, and work performance. [...]

Like a child securely attached to its parents, employees who are attached to a leader, coworker, or organization are more willing to take risks on behalf of the whole. They work harder, are less likely to bore, and are more likely to defend the integrity of the organization.

to be Type A executive types, we tried to be more like supportive and available mothers and fathers?

Love my co-workers? Start something with those I love? Even as I type this, I hear my inner voice saying that all of this is “soft” and irrelevant to business or our happiness; but that’s my big, squishy, culturally informed neocortex talking. As the aroma of the familiar Sumatra coffee hits me, awakening my limbic brain, I take a sip of coffee from my familiar mug, and I recall the goodness that can come when my whole brain is engaged in my work -- and I realize how deeply I want the same for you.



I never would have started a mug venture without Blaine; but because of our secure connection to one another, I felt safe to put in my own money and

time to create something that we were unfamiliar with. Because we were strongly attached, I worked harder than I would have with others. Because of the base of trust we built, I felt confident in giving of my time and energy without concern for getting something of equal or greater value in return.

Researcher Adam Grant agrees with this. In Give and Take he discovers that doing something meaningful for others is where the giver finds happiness. In other words, happiness at work, just like happiness anywhere else, comes when we meaningfully love.

So why is it that our offices look like cubicle farms? Why is it that we’ve presumed that work is not to be like a family? That value is economic and not collaborative? By refusing to acknowledge our most basic human needs, we are ensuring that for 40+ hours a week we will struggle to find happiness.

So what if, instead of learning each other’s Myers Briggs, we learned about each other’s families? What if, instead of just sharing our goals and objectives for our business unit, we shared our goals for our lives? What if, instead of just collaborating on the next product launch, we collaborated to more deeply understand what makes one another feel safe enough to risk designing an innovative product? What if, instead of trying



Watching the airline attendant's inner struggle of what to do with the very large passenger over in 12C was painful.

It was clear he needed the seatbelt extender and wasn't asking for it. The passenger in the middle seat was obviously contemplating how to ask for reseating without making a scene. And the cabin attendant was doing all she could to avoid eye contact with either of them for fear of getting dragged into the middle. Everyone knows the new rule about having to buy two tickets if you take up two seats. But how do you enforce that rule after the fact? Then, fascinatingly, she makes her move. She discretely "drops" the seatbelt extender on the floor, pretends to bend down and pick it up coincidentally right in front of 12C. And while she's down, she gently and discretely places it on the lap of the struggling large passenger who seems thankful for being spared the embarrassment, and as she stands up, subtly nods to the passenger in the middle seat to come with her. Without saying one word, she conveys some awkward but important messages to people who needed to hear them.

Would that the rest of the world could find ways to get past their discomfort for the sake of conveying truths others needed to hear.

The last few years have produced a spate of "how to" books on various kinds of painful conversations – crucial ones, fierce ones, difficult ones, courageous ones. At their core, they are intended to provide instruction to those who must engage in relationships where there are natural tensions and complicated conflicts.

What relationships would that not apply to?

Whether between colleagues, leaders and their directs, consultants and their clients, parents and their kids, or spouses, we all inevitably get to the place where we have to say something to someone we'd rather not say, knowing that the person to whom we're saying it would probably rather not hear it. So common is the lament of this situation

In relationships the truth is not always universal.

that an entire set of clichés has risen up to comfort us:

"It's not what you say, it's how you say it."

"One dumb shit wipes out tenatta boys."

"You catch more flies with honey than vinegar."

"The harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph"

"Women marry men hoping they will change. Men marry women hoping they will not. So each is inevitably disappointed."

"Relationships give us a reason to live: revenge."

Most of us would readily admit that if someone had important information that could help us be better leaders, friends, professionals, or parents, we'd want to hear it no matter how painful it was. But given the opportunity to deliver that vital information to someone important to us, that's a different story. [...]

MUSINGS FROM GATE 44 CONT.

Why we'd rather not: the excuses

Most of us have spent our waking lives perfecting the reasons why it would be better to circumvent or altogether avoid these hard truths. However our rationales are often only surface deep. Underneath the surface lies a deep-seated fear that speaking up will forever alter the relationship in unknown ways, which is exactly the point. Here a few we frequently hear, and sometimes revert to ourselves.

Fear of estrangement and causing someone to feel badly/rejected – None of us like feeling the tensions of a distressed relationship, so we avoid them at all cost. We rationalize withholding hard information under the guise of not wanting to hurt others' feelings. We minimize the impact of bad behavior. "They didn't mean it," "They're under a lot of stress," "It's not my place to tell them how to do their job."

Fear of others' defensiveness – We've seen others react when they get bad news or hard messages about how others experience them. They erupt in angry defensiveness and sometimes shoot the messenger. If they are someone in authority, we fear such reactions that much more. It is understandable to feel anxious about such a perceived risk and inadvertently make sense of the situation being one better left avoided.

Fear of saying the wrong thing – some of us bumble our words, especially under stress. We fear "saying it wrong" or rambling on incoherently. The false rationale is that is that saying nothing is better than saying something incoherently, which is often code for not having to say anything ever at all.

There are many reasons to avoid speaking hard truths, you most likely have your preferred set. Yet, withhold information (whatever the reason) that could lead to another's transformation isn't kind, it's cruel. If your motive is to make them feel bad or judged, then you shouldn't do it. But if you genuinely care, the receiver

will know that too. Sometimes feeling badly after hearing hard messages is an appropriate response. That's not in your control. But having the care and courage to alert someone to an unintended impact of their choices is what helps build great relationships, even if it happens more awkwardly than you might like. And if that's your concern, then practice. Write out what you want to say and rehearse the message. Yes that takes time, but if it's an important relationship, the investment of time is well worth the time to prepare for an important conversation. Eventually, you'll gain facility with the skill and won't need to pre-



pare and rehearse as rigorously.

Why we must: the mandate

Sometimes fighting for someone means fighting with them, and trusting that you, and the relationship, can withstand the heat, and even grow stronger as a result. Here are a few motivating ideas that ought to compel you to step in and speak up in those relationships that really matter.

Avoid Hypocrisy - Who of us hasn't uttered the words to someone of importance, "I've got your back," or "You can count on me to tell you like it is," or "I want total honesty between us," and yet so much of what needs to be said in those same relationships remains unexpressed. We justify our choice to withhold the truth because it's not the right time, or it's probably just me or they're in a bad place right now, they don't need to hear this or any number of excuses that makes their well being the primary source of [...]