



Interdisciplinary teamwork

Liina Hilkamo & Riikka Nieminen



Terminology

Multidisciplinary = involves several disciplines

Cross-functional = represents different functional units

Interdisciplinary = different disciplines collaborate with each other

Transdisciplinary = people from different disciplines have knowledge on other disciplines along their own area of expertise

“Cross-functional teams are a popular structure mechanism for managing new product initiatives in high-tech firms.”

Jassawalla & Sashittal 1999

Cross-functional teams – why?

Aims:

Improved integration of different skills

Team = single collaborative network that works to develop new solutions

Increase of creativity

Reduction of costs

Acceleration of product development

Cross-functional teams – how?

Requires intrinsic motivation

Environments promoting risk taking and tolerating failure foster collaboration

Collaborative behaviour emerges when:

- Participants agree on a common agenda

- Openly share both concerns and power → psychological safety

- Commit to building trust

Six obstacles impending the effectiveness of cross-functional teamwork

Kim & Kang 2008

1. Conflicting organizational goals
 2. Competition of resources
 3. Overlapping responsibilities
 4. Conflicting personal goals
 5. Lack of clear direction or priorities
 6. Lack of cooperation
-

Key success factors of cross-functional cooperation

Kim & Kang 2008

1. Unified vision & goals
 2. Unified culture with partners
 3. Building trust and cohesion
-

Benefits of cross-functional teamwork

“Creativity spurs at the boundaries of disciplines” (Kanter 1988)

The presence of several disciplines enhances team creativity

A broader variety of perspectives

Successful cross-functional teamwork = achieving high performance through effective teamwork

Risks of cross-functional teamwork

Unmotivated team members

Battle of disciplines

Loss of effectivity

Goals not aligned with company goals

Group discussion

“What are the pros and cons of working with people only from your own discipline?”

References

Jassawalla, A. R., & Sashittal, H. C. (1999). Building collaborative cross-functional new product teams. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 13(3), 50-63.

Kim, B. Y., & Kang, B. K. (2008). Cross-functional cooperation with design teams in new product development. *International Journal of Design*, 2(3), 43-54.

Seidel, V. P., & Fixson, S. K. (2013). Adopting design thinking in novice multidisciplinary teams: The application and limits of design methods and reflexive practices. *Journal of Product Innovation Management*, 30, 19-33.

Vissers, G., & Dankbaar, B. (2002). Creativity in multidisciplinary new product development teams. *Creativity and innovation management*, 11(1), 31-42.
