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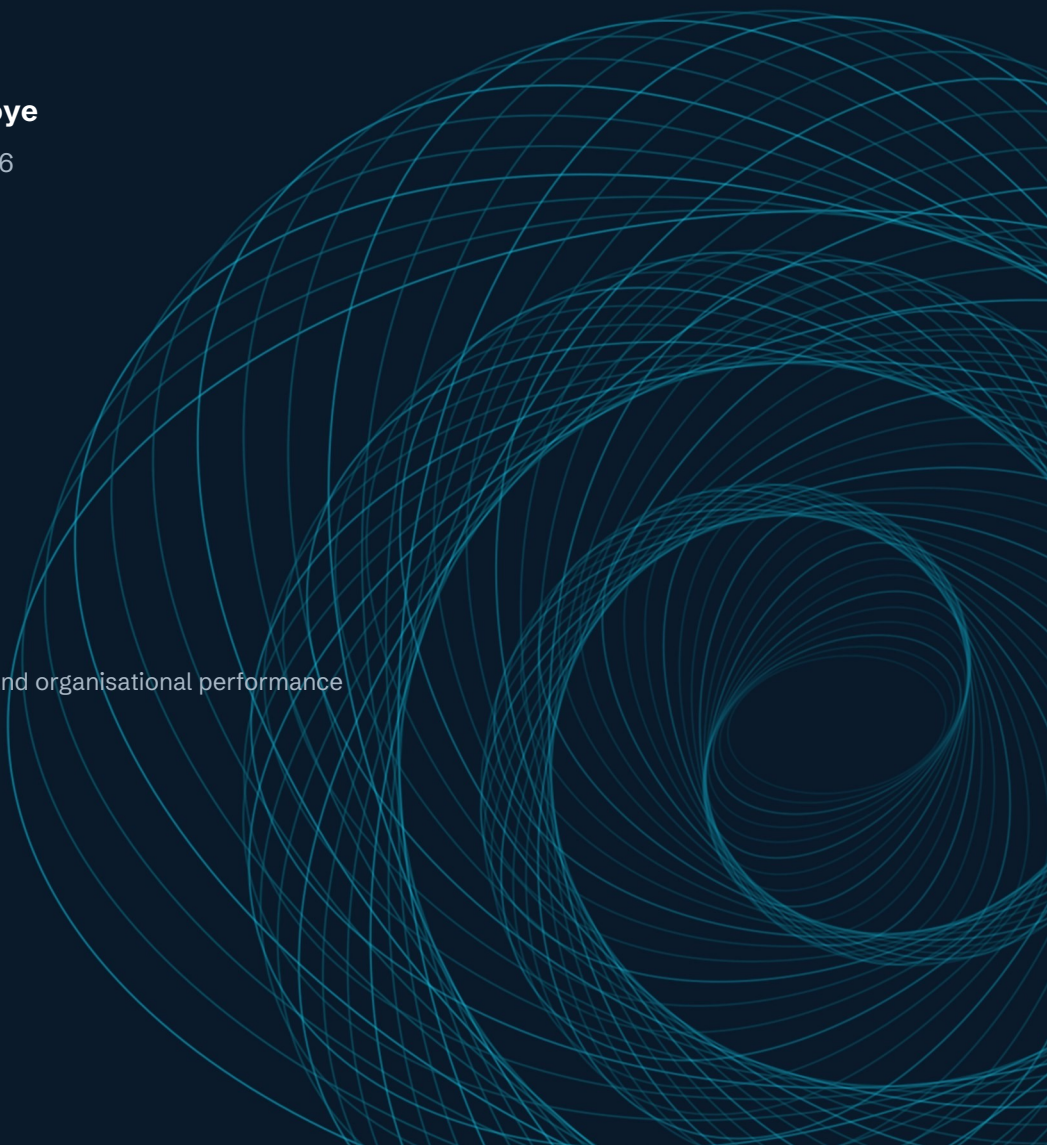
PAPER

Silo Logic

Why sensible people protect their patch—and how to change the pattern

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Executive summary

Organisations give people departmental budgets, targets and bonuses, then ask them to collaborate. Silos become destructive when the parts of an organisation can succeed while the whole fails. Specialisation is valuable; the aim is to stop boundaries becoming barriers to value creation.

Fragmentation is usually a predictable response to responsibilities, incentives and routines rather than a failure of goodwill. A purchasing saving of £200,000 that causes £500,000 of rework elsewhere looks like success until someone counts both sides.

Our ABC model addresses the whole system: an executive team that leads the enterprise rather than representing departments; purpose connected through the customer's complete outcome; structures, measures, rewards, handovers and decision rights aligned with that outcome; skills and networks that work across boundaries, including AI tested on shared problems; and space for people to understand, experiment and choose.

Start with the top team and a few important customer journeys. Over 90 days, give each journey an owner with real authority, correct conflicting targets, test new handovers and track completion, elapsed time, rework and cost to serve. Then keep, change or stop what the evidence supports.

We give people departmental budgets, departmental targets and departmental bonuses. We promote them for building their functions. We require decisions to climb two reporting lines before they can cross the corridor. Then we take everyone to a hotel and ask them to behave as “one team”.

They generally manage it until the taxi home.

The difficulty is that we are asking people to collaborate despite the organisation we have built, rather than because of it. We treat fragmentation as a failure of goodwill when it may be an entirely predictable response to responsibilities, incentives and routines.

Our central argument is straightforward: silos become destructive when the parts of an organisation can succeed while the whole fails.

That distinction matters. Specialisation is not the enemy. We would like the finance director to understand finance, the engineers to understand engineering, and the risk function to retain the ability to say something inconvenient.

The objective is not to remove every boundary. It is to prevent boundaries becoming barriers to value creation.

In *Complexity Costs*, we distinguished complexity that creates value from friction that consumes it.[1] The same discipline applies here. A specialist boundary earns its place when it protects expertise, judgement or necessary independence. It becomes costly when it makes the customer carry the burden of connecting the business.

Think of silos as a tax on interdependence. The tax is paid whenever work needs several parts of the organisation but nobody can make those parts deliver together. It appears as delay, rework, duplicated analysis and promises that other people cannot fulfil. Cutting a departmental budget can even increase this tax if the savings remove the people who were quietly holding the system together. That is our interpretation, rather than a separate accounting measure. It nevertheless gives leaders a better question: where does cooperation fail, and who pays?

> **The parts can succeed while the whole fails.**

Specialisation needs integration

This is not a new discovery. In their 1967 study, *Differentiation And Integration In Complex Organizations*, Paul Lawrence and Jay Lorsch examined how specialised organisational units developed different orientations and ways of working.[2] Their central finding concerned the need to achieve both differentiation and integration: effective organisations could preserve the differences required by their work while coordinating those differences successfully.

That is a more useful starting point than “break down the silos”.

“Differentiation” is an academic word for a familiar necessity: people facing different problems develop different priorities, language and time horizons. “Integration” means making their contributions work together. Confusing the two produces an organisation in which everyone is expected to have the same perspective, usually the perspective of whoever has the largest budget.

A useful boundary therefore has two qualities. It preserves a distinctive contribution and makes that contribution accessible to the rest of the business. A risk specialist who challenges a proposed sale is doing useful work. A process that introduces the challenge only after the customer has been promised delivery is doing that work at a needlessly expensive moment. Earlier involvement changes the sequence without weakening the judgement.

A research team and a sales team should not think identically. One may need to explore uncertain possibilities over several years; the other must respond to a customer this afternoon. The leadership task is to reconcile those perspectives, not declare one of them culturally defective.

In *Beyond Performance*, Scott Keller and I (Colin) argued that sustained performance depends on organisational health: the capacity to align, execute and renew.[3] Reducing silos builds that capacity by making different contributions work together repeatedly.

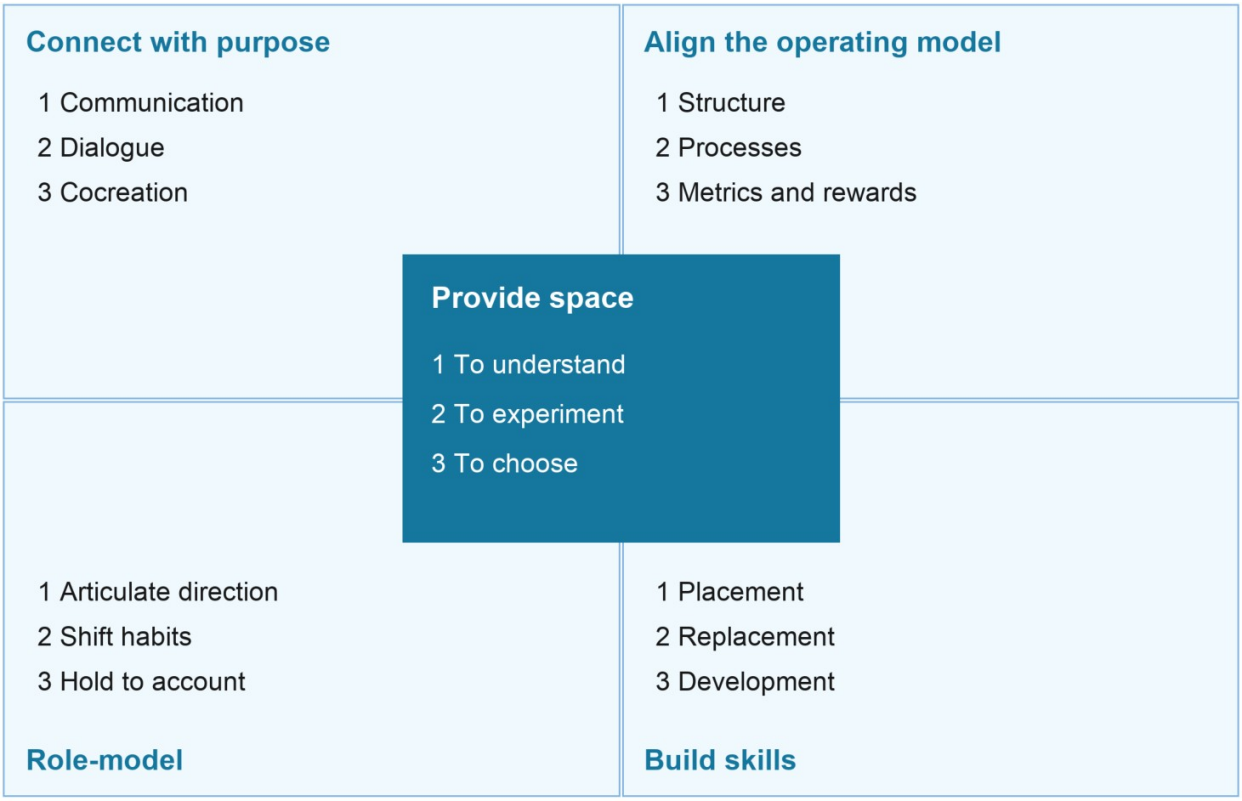
The practical question is how to make these differences work together. In *Accelerating Performance*, we (Colin Price and Sharon Toye) developed the Any Behavior Change model, or ABC, to turn an organisational ambition into specific changes in what people do.[4] Its five arenas connect purpose, the operating model, skills, role-modelling and space for people to engage with change. Applied to silos, it gives leaders a way to change the conditions sustaining territorial behaviour, as well as the behaviour itself.

An ABC map begins with an observable change. “Be more collaborative” is too vague. “Before committing to a delivery date, sales and operations confirm capacity and agree who resolves an exception” gives people something they can actually practise. Figure 1 shows the model that organises the argument which follows.

The ABC of reducing silos

Any Behavior Change is the model’s name. The five arenas shown below work together; they are not five phases to complete in sequence. Within each arena, the three levels show ways of deepening the intervention. The centre matters: people need space to understand, experiment and choose to engage.

Figure 1 The ABC model



Source: Price and Toye, Accelerating Performance, chapter 11, Figure 11.1, p. 183. Original model labels retained. Numbers identify the three levels within each arena, not a sequence across arenas.

Consider the same illustrative sales promise. Purpose connects the commitment to a customer who needs a working service. The operating model supplies a capacity check, a decision owner and measures of successful delivery. Skills enable people to negotiate the trade-off. Leaders demonstrate the behaviour by challenging an unrealistic promise, even when the sale would improve this month's numbers. Space allows the teams to test the new approach and help make it workable.

A useful map is specific enough to reveal a missing ingredient. If people understand the customer problem but still lose their bonus for helping to solve it, the operating model is misaligned. If they have authority but cannot negotiate a commitment, skills are missing. If leaders insist on a change while making exceptions for themselves, the credibility of the whole effort is at risk.

We begin with role-modelling because the executive team sets the conditions in which everyone else works. The remaining arenas must be addressed alongside it. An announcement followed several months later by changes to rewards leaves people with plenty of time to learn that the announcement was optional.

Role-model the behaviour at the top

The ABC model distinguishes three levels of role-modelling: articulate direction, shift habits and hold to account. For silos, that means naming the enterprise behaviour required, visibly changing the executive team's own routines, and responding consistently when commitments are broken.

Is your executive committee a team leading the enterprise, or a collection of ambassadors representing their departments?

Ambassadors have an important job. It is not, however, to run a company.

Enterprise leadership means delivering your own objectives while contributing to the performance of other parts of the business.[5] Before defending a departmental preference, ask what the enterprise needs. That may mean deferring your project, sharing your strongest person or releasing budget to a more valuable opportunity. The obligation is to make the whole business more successful, as well as your part of it.

Patrick Lencioni's "first team" principle makes this concrete.[7] For decisions affecting the enterprise, your primary team is the leadership group you belong to, comprising your peers and the leader you share.[6] This changes the conversation. You bring your function's knowledge and constraints to a collective decision, then take responsibility for the outcome even when your department does not get its preferred answer.

That does not remove your responsibility to the people you lead. Coaching them, maintaining professional standards and handling a local crisis still require your attention. The distinction matters when choices affect several functions, when strategy is being set and when resources must move. Represent your team's needs honestly; judge the decision by its consequences for the enterprise.

Our research offers a useful caution. In *Accelerating Performance*, we described research involving 3,000 teams.[8] In the distribution reported for 1,118 teams, only 13% met our strongest acceleration threshold, with favourable assessments across all four respondent groups: team leaders, members, the leaders' line managers and external stakeholders. Roughly 27% were classified as lagging or derailing. These were survey-based classifications, not experimental proof of causation, but they underline how unwise it is to assume that assembling capable individuals automatically creates an effective team.

The LEGO Group offers an example from this decade. In 2021, it announced accelerated investment in digitalisation across the business. A 2023 McKinsey account described how its top leaders collectively owned the transformation.[9] Each business domain had an executive sponsor, while business and technology leaders jointly owned its outcomes. Product teams shared performance measures and incentives.

The useful lesson is the connection between executive commitment and operating design. Shared ownership at the top was translated into responsibilities and measures below it. This is a documented management approach, not proof that one governance choice caused LEGO's performance.

We would ask each executive three questions. What are you doing that makes another part of the business more successful? What should you stop because it matters less than an enterprise priority? Which valuable person or resource should you release?

These are more revealing than a general declaration of commitment to teamwork.

In our jointly authored *Leadership Alpha*, we have emphasised leadership's contribution to accelerating execution, not merely articulating strategy.[10] Applied here, executives should be judged partly by what they enable outside their own territory.

A leader who delivers their numbers by exporting problems to colleagues has not necessarily created value. They may simply have relocated the cost.

This begins in the executive meeting. Put one unresolved enterprise decision on the table before the departmental presentations. Identify the customer consequence, the available choices and the resource each choice requires. Record who will do what, what has been deprioritised and when the decision can legitimately be revisited. The absence of an objection is not a commitment.

There is also a test for the chief executive. When a colleague sacrifices a local result for an agreed enterprise priority, do you defend that trade-off at the next performance review? If you praise cooperation in September and penalise its consequences in December, people will draw a sensible conclusion about which conversation mattered.

None of this requires executives to become agreeable. It requires them to make disagreement visible while there is still time to act. A polite meeting followed by six incompatible sets of instructions is not alignment. It is deferred conflict with additional stationery.

The commitment must survive the meeting. Explain the agreed decision to your own team without presenting it as something imposed by colleagues. Give peers credit for their contribution and offer help when delivery becomes difficult. If new evidence changes the trade-off, bring it back to the leadership team. Quietly reversing the decision in your department teaches everyone else to do the same.

The last level is often the uncomfortable one. When an executive withholds a resource they agreed to release, establish what happened, resolve any real constraint and renew the commitment. Repeatedly accepting the breach teaches the organisation that enterprise decisions are negotiable after the meeting. Holding to account should make the truth discussable and the response predictable; it should not make people conceal a problem until it is too late to help.

Connect with purpose through the customer

In ABC, connecting with purpose deepens from communication to dialogue to cocreation. Explain why the change matters, listen to what people believe it will cost them, and involve them in designing the new behaviour. This is more demanding than finding an agreeable phrase for the annual report.

“Collaborate more” is an incomplete instruction. Collaborate on what, with whom, and to achieve which result?

Start with something that matters to a customer.

Consider a hypothetical business selling a complex service. Sales celebrates the contract. Legal celebrates completing the documentation. Technology celebrates closing its tickets. Operations celebrates processing the application. Each department has met its target.

The customer is still not operational.

The dashboards are green. The customer is purple.

The missing measure is the complete outcome: the time, cost and quality involved in getting that customer successfully using the service. Departmental measures remain useful, but they must be subordinate to an intelligible definition of success for the whole journey.

Communication makes the customer’s experience visible. Dialogue brings the constraints into the same room: sales is protecting growth, operations is protecting delivery, and each may have a legitimate concern. Cocreation asks them to design a workable promise together. The aim is a shared understanding of the problem and a commitment people have helped shape, rather than reluctant assent to someone else’s solution.

Ask the people doing the work to trace a recent customer journey with the relevant colleagues. Where did the customer wait? Which promise was made without the information needed to keep it? What would each team need to do differently next time? A shared purpose becomes useful when it changes the next decision. The workshop is not the outcome; the behaviour it enables is.

For most organisations, we would begin more narrowly. Select three important journeys—perhaps onboarding, resolving a serious complaint and launching a product. Identify where the work waits, where information is recreated and where ownership becomes ambiguous.

For each journey, describe the behaviour to stop and the behaviour to start. A team might stop passing an incomplete case onwards to clear its queue, and start confirming that the receiving colleague has enough information to act. Keep the language concrete enough for someone to notice whether the change happened.

Align the operating model with the promise

ABC moves from structure to processes to metrics and rewards. All three matter. A cross-functional team can still inherit contradictory targets; a new process can still lack an owner able to resolve a dispute. The operating model must make the desired behaviour possible and worthwhile.

DBS launched Managing Through Journeys in 2021 to break organisational silos.[11] Its cross-functional squads worked around customer needs, supported by shared data. The bank reported expanding from 25 customer journeys in 2021 to more than 60 in 2023, alongside improvements in customer satisfaction and turnaround times.

The point is to organise interdependent work around the customer's complete outcome, with information that helps teams see and resolve problems across departmental boundaries.

These are the bank's own reports, not a controlled evaluation. DBS also acknowledged digital disruptions and governance weaknesses in 2023. Customer-journey teams do not remove the need for strong operational controls.

Then appoint an accountable owner with sufficient authority to resolve the relevant trade-offs.

This person must not become a ceremonial "journey owner" who can convene meetings but cannot change priorities. Responsibility without authority is not an operating model. It is a particularly elaborate way of expressing hope.

The practical design should distinguish the permanent home of expertise from the temporary or continuing ownership of an outcome. Engineers still need professional standards, development and a career. A customer journey needs decisions across engineering, operations and commercial work. Moving everyone into a journey team without protecting their craft can exchange one weakness for another.

Nor does every interface require a permanent cross-functional squad. A stable, repeatable handover may need a clear specification and an agreed response time. A novel product with uncertain requirements may need specialists working together daily. Match the intensity of coordination to the interdependence of the work. An organisation can spend so much time integrating itself that it has little time left to do anything worth integrating.

For the hypothetical onboarding journey, define completion in customer terms: the service is working and the customer can use it. Start the clock at an agreed event and keep it running through internal transfers. Otherwise departments can improve their numbers by changing the point at which they claim to have finished. A closed ticket and a working service are occasionally acquainted; they are not the same thing.

Metrics and rewards must support the same promise. A speech about enterprise leadership will struggle against a reward system that makes enterprise leadership personally expensive.

Suppose a purchasing team saves £200,000 by changing a component, but the change creates £500,000 of additional rework, warranty claims and expedited deliveries elsewhere. These are illustrative figures, but the arithmetic is unambiguous: the purchasing saving is not an enterprise saving.

The £300,000 net loss is only visible if someone counts both sides. A shared outcome does not mean distributing a general corporate profit target so widely that nobody can influence it. It means connecting the purchasing decision to total cost, quality and service, while retaining responsibility for the price negotiation.

Three distinctions matter when calculating the cost. Rework that disappears may release capacity without reducing payroll. Earlier completion may accelerate cash without increasing total revenue. A lost opportunity is an estimate of what might have happened, rather than an invoice already paid. Keep those categories separate and avoid counting the same hour once as a cost saving and again as extra output. The point is to improve the decision, not produce a heroic spreadsheet.

Rewards also include access to interesting work, promotion and the right to keep talented people. If your best managers build successors whom other teams can use, recognise that contribution. If promotion depends on building the largest personal empire, do not be astonished when the map acquires more borders.

Yet a narrowly designed scorecard could still recognise the purchasing manager as an outstanding performer.

The same logic applies to talent. A manager who releases an excellent colleague to a more important initiative should not be penalised for missing an unchanged local target. Otherwise, we have made talent hoarding the sensible response and then criticised people for displaying it.

Applied to silos, this means retaining individual accountability while introducing a few meaningful shared outcomes wherever interdependence is real.

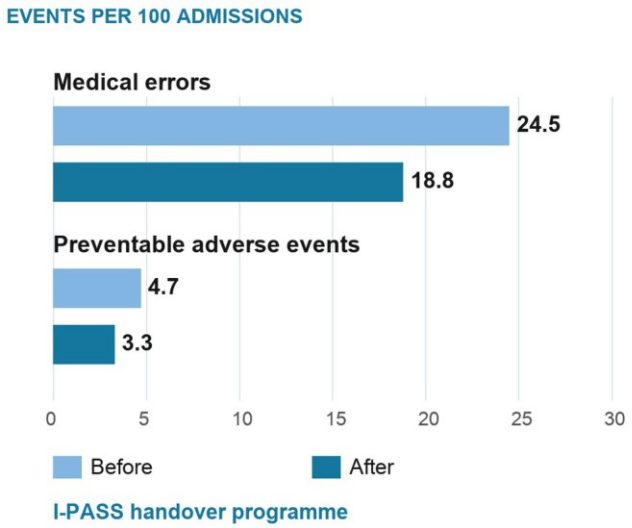
It also means making contribution beyond the function visible in promotion decisions. Ask peers for concrete evidence of that contribution. Who develops people that other teams want? Who transfers knowledge without being chased? Who resolves a cross-functional problem rather than writing an impeccable explanation of why it is not theirs?

Avoid making everyone accountable for everything. That creates universal involvement and nobody responsible.

The aim is more precise: people should know both what they personally own and which enterprise outcomes their work must serve. Where those requirements conflict, there must be a practical way to resolve the conflict—not an expectation that managers quietly absorb it.

The operating model also needs reliable handovers. Some of the strongest evidence concerns the point at which work passes from one person or team to another.

Figure 2 Better handovers were associated with fewer errors



Source: Starmer et al.[12] *(2014). Nine hospitals; 10,740 admissions. Before-and-after observations, not a randomised estimate. Preventable adverse events are a subset of errors; do not add the series.*

A 2014 study of 10,740 patient admissions across nine hospitals examined a structured resident-doctor handover programme, I-PASS. Medical errors fell from 24.5 to 18.8 per 100 admissions; preventable adverse events fell from 4.7 to 3.3. These were reported relative reductions of 23% and 30%. Oral handover duration did not change significantly.

The programme combined standardised oral and written handovers, training, observation and implementation support. It was a before-and-after study, not a randomised trial. The results in Figure 2 support improving a specific handover; they do not establish a universal financial return from collaboration.

The organisational application is clear. At an important handover, specify what information must travel, who accepts responsibility, what remains unresolved and what happens when the expected sequence breaks down.

For a product launch, that might mean engineering, sales and service agreeing on readiness criteria before the launch date becomes an immovable promise. For a complex customer complaint, it might mean one accountable case owner coordinating specialists, rather than requiring the customer to become an unpaid project manager.

Decision-making deserves the same treatment.

There is a peculiar organisational ritual in which two capable people cannot resolve an issue together until both have asked their bosses, who ask their bosses, who eventually discuss it at a meeting neither original participant attends.

Sometimes that is necessary governance. Sometimes it is an expensive postal service.

For recurring decisions, define who decides, whose advice is required, what constraints apply and when escalation is genuinely necessary. Consultation should not quietly become a universal right of veto.

In *Accelerating Performance*, we distinguished intelligent acceleration from indiscriminately making everyone work faster. Removing organisational drag is as important as increasing effort. In our jointly authored *Speed Wins*, we argue for raising the organisation's corporate metabolic rate, not merely filling its calendar.

A file may require two hours of useful work but spend ten working days moving through the organisation. Halving the drafting time helps. Removing several days of avoidable waiting may help considerably more.

The customer experiences elapsed time, not departmental busyness.

> **The customer experiences elapsed time, not departmental busyness.**

A boundary should have an acceptance condition, not just a sending condition. The team passing work on must know what the receiving team needs; the receiving team must confirm that it can act. For exceptions, specify a short route to someone authorised to make the trade-off. A document in an inbox is evidence of transmission. It is not evidence of shared understanding.

Consider a hypothetical service contract requiring an unusual security review. Standard work can proceed within agreed limits. The exception goes promptly to the named specialist, who either approves it, specifies a remedy or refers it to the authorised decision-maker. That is different from adding legal, compliance, finance and operations to every email in the hope that responsibility will eventually crystallise.

The control deserves scrutiny too. Ask which risk it addresses and whether the decision changes when the same evidence is reviewed for the fourth time. Preserve independent challenge where it matters. Remove duplicated handling where it adds no judgement. Speed achieved by concealing uncertainty is an advance booking for a later delay.

Build skills across boundaries

The three levels in ABC are placement, replacement and development. Placement means assigning capable people to the cross-functional work that matters. Replacement means addressing a persistent mismatch between a role and the person doing it. Development means building the judgement and skills that the new behaviour requires. A training course alone cannot settle all three questions.

Even a genuinely integrated executive team cannot personally coordinate the entire organisation.

The practical burden falls on managers who translate priorities, allocate capacity, negotiate commitments and decide whether to resolve a problem with a colleague or escalate it.

These managers need more than encouragement. They need the capability and permission to make sensible trade-offs.

Put a manager with credible enterprise judgement in charge of the customer journey, and give the role enough time to be real. If a leader repeatedly blocks agreed priorities, distinguish a capability gap from an unwillingness to change. Give clear feedback and practical support. If the mismatch persists, change the assignment or the person in the role. Moving someone who raises a legitimate risk would teach precisely the wrong lesson.

There is a relevant example in Colin's 2012 *McKinsey Quarterly* article, *Leadership And The Art Of Plate Spinning*.[13] He described an automotive company in which functions had introduced changes independently: finance, HR and manufacturing each pursued worthwhile initiatives, but middle

managers experienced the combined effect as a blizzard. The company moved to coordinated quarterly change packages, resolving inconsistencies before wider implementation. The account reported shorter product-development cycles, improved quality and an organisation operating with 20% fewer managers. That was a case account, not a controlled estimate of the effect of coordination alone.

The important point is where integration occurred. Senior leaders stopped sending unresolved contradictions down the hierarchy and expecting middle managers to reconcile them.

Capability development should rehearse these actual tensions. Ask a manager to negotiate a service commitment with a colleague whose targets conflict with theirs. Review how they surfaced constraints, made a trade-off and secured a decision. The point is not to teach a pleasant conversational style. It is to make difficult coordination possible before the problem requires the chief executive's intervention.

We would therefore make cross-functional work a central part of management development. An essential starting point is learning how other parts of the business work. Spend regular time with peers understanding their goals, constraints and measures of success, and how their contributions combine to produce the enterprise's results. Give managers genuine problems involving customers, budgets and capacity. Ask them to explain a trade-off from the whole business's perspective before arguing for their own function.

Make assignments and rotations purposeful. Watching another department work is less valuable than sharing responsibility for an outcome with it.

And do not confuse collaboration with harmony. Our team research identified rigorous, constructive challenge as one of the areas showing the widest differences between stronger and weaker teams.

The goal is not to make disagreement disappear. It is to make disagreement productive—and to stop the same decision being reopened in six departments after it has supposedly been settled.

Building skills also means learning to find and use expertise beyond your own group. A team can become more cohesive while the wider organisation becomes more fragmented.

The Microsoft remote-working study provides an instructive example.[14] Researchers analysed communication and collaboration data from 61,182 US employees during the first six months of 2020. They estimated that firm-wide remote work reduced the share of collaboration time spent on cross-group connections by approximately 25% relative to the pre-pandemic level. Groups became more internally connected but less interconnected, and employees formed fewer new collaborative relationships.

This is not a universal verdict on remote or hybrid work. It concerns one company, a particular period and an abrupt shift in working arrangements. It measured collaboration patterns, not a corresponding 25% fall in productivity.

Its significance for this discussion is narrower: stronger local relationships do not automatically produce stronger enterprise coordination.

A separate study by Tiona Zuzul and colleagues examined more than 360 billion emails across 4,361 organisations. Communication became more concentrated within groups after the onset of Covid, while group membership became less stable: what the authors called dynamic silos.[15] The analysis concerns communication patterns during the pandemic, not a measured loss of business performance or an experiment isolating a single workplace policy.

Together, these studies challenge a convenient assumption: high communication volume means good coordination. People can exchange more messages while a smaller share of their attention

reaches outside the immediate group. The implication is to examine which connections carry useful knowledge, rather than to demand more contact indiscriminately.

We would ask whether people know whom to approach outside their immediate team, whether useful knowledge travels between units and whether cross-functional problems depend on a handful of exceptionally well-connected individuals.

Create repeated opportunities to work across boundaries: shared customer reviews, joint problem-solving, carefully chosen rotations and professional communities that exchange practical knowledge.

Do not respond by inviting everyone to everything. The number of people in a meeting is not a measure of integration.

Where network analysis is used, it should have clear safeguards and focus on legitimate organisational questions, not become a surveillance exercise or a league table of how many messages people send.

The desired outcome is reliable access to the right expertise—not more communication for its own sake.

Pay attention to the few people everyone relies on to connect the organisation. They may be exceptionally effective, but a business that depends on their personal address books is fragile. Make expertise easier to find, give connectors time for the work and spread the relationships through shared assignments. Otherwise your operating model has acquired a single point of failure with an impressive diary.

Some relationships must develop before they are urgently needed. A short, regular review of customer failures across sales, service and engineering can create the shared context that makes a later problem easier to resolve. Its value is the decisions and learning it enables. If neither occurs, cancel it.

AI adds another possibility to this capability agenda. There is emerging experimental evidence that technology can help people cross professional boundaries.

In *The Cybernetic Teammate*, published in *Organization Science* in 2026, Fabrizio Dell'Acqua and colleagues report a preregistered field experiment at Procter & Gamble: 791 professionals completed the workshop, with 776 providing complete data including post-task surveys.[16] Participants tackled product-innovation problems alone or in pairs, with or without generative AI. AI-assisted individuals scored 0.37 standard deviations above unaided individuals and performed comparably to unaided pairs.

The study also found that AI helped commercial and research-and-development specialists produce proposals combining both perspectives. This is evidence about bounded innovation tasks, not proof that AI removes persistent organisational barriers or replaces established teams.

Our implication for organisational design is that AI should be tested on shared problems, not only deployed as a private productivity assistant inside each function.

For example, a product team could use it to examine the same proposal through customer, engineering, service and financial perspectives before making a decision. Specialists would still validate the relevant assumptions, and accountable leaders would still make the trade-offs.

The danger is equally easy to imagine. Sales generates proposals faster, legal reviews them faster and operations rejects them faster. Every function becomes more efficient at its own activity, while the underlying contradiction remains.

We have not reduced the silos. We have increased their processing speed.

Test AI on one complete workflow. Can the team discover a material inconsistency earlier? Can a service colleague understand a technical constraint well enough to ask a better question? Does the final proposal survive expert review with less rework? Measure those outcomes, alongside errors, rather than celebrating the number of drafts produced.

Shared information must also have agreed definitions, provenance and access. An AI assistant cannot settle an unresolved argument about which revenue forecast is authoritative. It can, however, distribute both versions with remarkable confidence. The leadership obligation to decide remains stubbornly human.

These technologies belong inside the capability agenda. They can help people consider another specialist's perspective, but they do not remove the need to place the right people in critical roles, develop judgement or address leaders who refuse to share responsibility.

Provide space to understand, experiment and choose

The centre of the ABC model is easy to overlook because it looks less tangible than changing a structure or a bonus scheme. Yet it addresses a central problem: a change can be administratively imposed without being meaningfully adopted. People need space to understand what is being asked, experiment with a different way of working and choose to commit to it.

Understanding includes the losses people anticipate. A manager asked to share talent may fear missing a target. An expert asked to make knowledge widely available may fear losing status. Someone asked to raise problems earlier may remember what happened to the last colleague who did. Treat these concerns as information about the change, not evidence of a defective attitude.

The first-team shift has a personal cost too. Leaders may have built their careers by protecting their people and may know their direct reports far better than their peers. Sharing a valued colleague can feel like a breach of loyalty. Make room to discuss that tension and build trust through shared work. The chief executive helps by acknowledging their own dependencies, asking for help and dealing with conflict openly.

Middle managers are often the shock absorbers of a fragmented organisation. Each new initiative arrives looking modest when viewed from its sponsor's office. The receiving manager experiences all of them at once, alongside customers, vacancies and yesterday's unfinished work. Asking for resilience can become a tactful way of refusing to prioritise.

Give that manager a single view of committed change and available capacity. When a new priority enters, identify the work that moves out or the resource that moves in. Do not leave the subtraction as an optional exercise for the person furthest from the original decision.

Experimentation gives people a way to discover whether the new behaviour works. Test the capacity check on one type of customer contract. Let sales and operations adjust the questions, identify exceptions and review what happens to delivery promises. Provide time for this work by removing a less valuable demand. Adding a pilot to an already impossible workload is a rather literal interpretation of asking people to change in their spare time.

Choice means allowing people to exercise judgement and take ownership of how they contribute. Leaders must be clear about the required customer outcome and necessary controls, while making room for teams to shape the route. Inviting ideas after every material decision has been settled is an announcement wearing a listening badge. Tell people what is open to influence and then demonstrate that their contribution can change it.

Space also requires a response to the evidence. If the pilot reveals an unrealistic target, adjust it. If a manager reports that the new handover creates duplicate work, inspect the process with them. When feedback produces no discernible response, the organisation quickly learns that participation is ceremonial. The point is to make engagement consequential.

> **People need room to understand the change and help make it work.**

Build a coherent ABC model

The five arenas need to form one coherent design. In *Accelerating Performance*, we recommend a separate ABC map for each major behavioural change, then combining those maps into an overarching design. For silos, map the changes needed to make reliable customer promises, transfer complete work and honour enterprise resource decisions. Look across the maps for actions that help more than one change: a common view of capacity, for example, may improve both customer commitments and the allocation of people.

Apply the book's four Cs: complementarity, comprehensiveness, coherence and capacity. In practice, we would ask whether the actions reinforce each other; whether they cover everything needed for the intended shift; whether they form a consistent whole; and whether the organisation has room to carry them out. A reward for speed alongside a punishment for reporting uncertainty deserves attention before it becomes someone else's behavioural problem.

These are design checks, not a new set of scores to average into a reassuring percentage. A map full of communication activity and empty under metrics, role-modelling or space is incomplete. So is one that asks already overloaded managers to attend three new forums without stopping any existing work. Work across all five arenas together, with the intensity appropriate to the change.

Use real work to change behaviours

Use the first 90 days to put that design into practice. Begin with the top team and a small number of important customer journeys. Use the first month to agree the observable behaviours to change, establish baseline outcomes and build the ABC maps with the people who will use them. Executives should begin demonstrating the new behaviour immediately; dialogue and practical experimentation should begin alongside the design work.

In the second month, put the connected changes into everyday use. Give the work a named owner and sufficient authority, correct conflicting targets, develop the relevant skills and release time to test the new handovers. The top team should review outcomes together, resolve resource disputes and hold one another to their commitments. Each review should ask which of the five arenas is helping or hindering the desired behaviour.

In the third month, assess customer results and behaviour together. Did teams check capacity before making promises? Did receiving colleagues accept the handover? Did executives release the resources they had committed? Compare outcomes with the baseline and, where feasible, an unchanged process. Keep quality, risk and workload alongside speed. Use what people learnt to revise the ABC map before extending it.

A small pilot will not establish universal causality. It can, however, provide considerably better evidence than an engagement survey asking whether people now feel more collaborative.

Use a modest scorecard that follows the whole problem. Track successful customer completion, elapsed time, rework, cost to serve and a relevant risk or quality measure. Look at the slowest cases as well as the average: routine work may improve while complicated customers remain stranded. Add one leadership measure, such as the age of unresolved resource decisions, so the people sponsoring the change are also inside the experiment.

Write down the predicted mechanism before starting. For example: checking implementation capacity before a contract is signed should reduce repeated rescheduling. If rescheduling falls, examine whether demand, case mix or staffing also changed. If it does not, inspect whether the new check was used and whether anyone acted on it. A disappointing result is useful if it tells you what to change. It is less useful when it is renamed a success to protect the programme.

At the end of the period, decide what to keep, change and stop. Stop a review that duplicates an existing decision. Extend a handover standard that demonstrably helps. Revise a target that still encourages teams to export costs. Make these decisions through the normal management system so the improvement survives the departure of its most enthusiastic sponsor.

The test is not how many collaboration activities took place. It is whether fewer customers fall between departments, decisions happen sooner and the organisation delivers more value with less avoidable effort.

Reducing silos involves several deliberate balances: specialisation and integration, local accountability and shared outcomes, autonomy and control, constructive disagreement and coordinated action.

Those balances will not be solved permanently by one reorganisation. They require continuing management attention.

But the starting point is refreshingly practical. Stop asking people to compensate indefinitely for contradictory instructions, fragmented processes and incentives that reward the wrong thing.

We will not reduce silos by asking people to ignore the organisation we have built. We will reduce them by changing what that organisation makes possible, sensible and worthwhile.

> **Change what the organisation makes sensible and worthwhile.**

The awayday can still happen.

What matters is whether your leaders return ready to put the whole business first.

Sources and further reading

The following sources provide evidence and prior writings cited in the article. Figure 1 reproduces the ABC framework. Its application to silos and the illustrative examples are the authors' interpretation.

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