



## THE PILLARS OF GLOBAL COLLABORATION



*A Conectys made Whitepaper*



## WHY IS COLLABORATION IMPORTANT?

You likely already know this answer, so we will not waste much time in this section. Think of a basketball game in your mind quickly, though. Can the ball get from one end of the court to the other faster if one guy dribbles the whole way and tries to go through everyone else, or does it make more sense for the first man to pass the ball to others and find the open spot to shoot from? Answer: the latter. That's a micro-level example of collaboration. Many of our businesses are being asked to "do more with less" these days. If that's your case, you can only do more with less if you maximize the value of the team working together.

Google and the Future Foundation combined on a study about the future of work, surveying HR and business leaders from multiple countries. One key finding? There's a .81 correlation between organizations that collaborate and organizations deemed as "innovative" in their field. This is extremely important within the broader idea that work has evolved over 100 years from a strict labor economy to a knowledge economy to -- perhaps one level beyond "knowledge" -- an innovation and ideas economy.

There is an important distinction here, though: many people associate collaboration with the related idea of brainstorming. Brainstorming has been the go-to idea generation method in companies since the early 1950s, [but there are no major studies actually proving its effectiveness](#). It's better to look at brainstorming as one potential step in the collaboration process -- it's an element of, not a synonym for.

## CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE AND PRODUCT

Many of us grew up being on sports teams or being paired with others for school projects, or even having siblings -- in sum, being around others who we had to work with for common goals. But collaboration itself can be hard -- a consultant for PriceWaterhouseCoopers calls it "[the biggest cause of project failure](#)" in business -- which begs the question: why?

- **Ambiguity reigns supreme:** Bringing together people from different contextual areas to solve problems means that each person is going to encounter issues outside of their specific expertise area, leading to ambiguity being experienced by everyone at some level. That isn't always comfortable for people.
- **Potential in-fighting:** When you bring together a cross-functional group, the idea of "political turf" isn't necessarily defined (in fact, many managers will use collaboration as a way to seemingly remove those battles). This can also be tough for people who are used to clearly-defined managerial roles and agendas.
- **Additional work:** "Collaborative efforts" often take place on top of a person's day-to-day responsibilities, which can flummox some.
- **Credit:** If a team achieves its stated goal, then the team receives the credit -- but as you probably remember from any middle-school project, it can be incredibly hard to figure out who should receive the most individual credit. People don't always like this model, either.
- **Not-Invented-Here Syndrome:** This theory actually emerges from collaboration -- [a professor at Harvard and one at LSE](#). New managers often avoid the idea of

collaboration because they want their unit defined as a success; they see overlaps with other units as interfering with that plan.

- **The global context:** Almost every business these days is global in some context, and with “global” comes a host of possibilities -- but also a host of challenges. That means cross-cultural communication, language nuance, tone, time zones, approach to business (Germany, Japan, and the USA are all very different, for example), and more.

We’re going to try and work on the final aspect -- the global context -- and involve the other aspects as we do so.

## WHAT ARE THE PILLARS OF GLOBAL COLLABORATION?

If you try to word-associate “collaboration,” you’ll come to a mix of these terms:

- Teamwork
- Trust
- Integrity
- Transparency
- Buy-in
- Honesty
- Psychological safety ([we covered this in a previous white paper](#))

If you scour Internet research, academic research, forums, professional websites, and more on the value of collaboration, you will come to a mix of these elements as well:

- Set expectations early
- Be completely transparent
- Ask each member what they want their role to be and how much time they have to give
- Set clear standards for behavior in meetings
- Figure out your process flow for work, new ideas, and meetings
- Meet at consistent times, but only meet when there are real discussions to advance
- Make sure to utilize technology to bring in any remote members and capture outcomes
- Don’t be afraid to ask questions or generally fail

If you combine the first list of terms and the second list of executable elements, you come to these pillars:

1. Co-creation and co-strategizing.
2. The building of trust.
3. The setting of clear goals and processes, and unity around data.

## GLOBAL COLLABORATION PILLAR: CO-CREATION AND CO-STRATEGIZING

Our world at Conectys is about delivering outsourcing excellence around customer experience (CX) and user-generated content (UGC). We do this every day, grow at doing it, and are up to 10 global delivery centers, 24/7 coverage, and 35+ languages. We've been at it for 17 years.

In that time, we can tell you that there are two essential models of any business partner, be it outsourcing or something else: Model (1) is an order-taker. In an order-taker model, the company who hired that partner probably has very strict budgets and deadlines, and they already know how they want everything done (processes). They don't want new ideas, innovations, pilot programs, or anything else. They just want the work done, with cost efficiency, and the numbers/targets achieved. An order-taker model does work in many cases, but it's not going to create collaboration or trust. It's just one group working for another group; you cannot even really call it a "partnership."

Model (2) is co-creation or co-strategizing. In this model, you find a partner and you have researched their background and expertise, so you bring them in on bigger decisions. You ask their advice on programs, strategy, launches, rollouts, timing, staffing, and more. You might be using the partner as customer support agents, but you roll those support agents into product meetings, sales meetings, and marketing meetings -- you let them inform other teams as to what they are hearing from customers.

Model (2) is what we do. It's ultimately more valuable for the company hiring for it (and you still receive the cost efficiencies). You cannot "collaborate globally" if the main company and the partner are not on equation footing in terms of communication, strategy, and development of programs. That's the essence of global collaboration.

## CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE AND PRODUCT

Trust is the root of everything in business. If a partner doesn't trust you, that partnership will end. Maybe not today or tomorrow, but it's ending soon.

In an outsourcing model, you build trust in these core ways:

- Deliver on the work asked for
- Deliver on the work in a timely fashion
- Deliver on the work while providing some cost benefit
- Offer strategic guidance and advice to the client
- Help them develop new programs and revenue streams
- Respond to any and all challenges/flare-ups quickly

This is different in a standard company-to-employee model, where trust is typically frayed because of poor communication, gossip, under-cutting, or unfair compensation models (too much work for too little pay).

The *similarity* between an outsourcing partner model and an employee-company model is that trust is built at the 1-to-1 level, between people working side-by-side on projects and growth goals. Deliver for the other person in your foxhole and they will come to trust you. We write whole books about this, but it's essentially that simple.

## GLOBAL COLLABORATION PILLAR: ALIGNEMENT AND AGREEMENT

[The three biggest impediments to collaboration](#), according former Cisco executive Ron Ricci ([author of a book on the subject](#)), are:

1. Unclear goals
2. Lack of a transparent decision-making process
3. Top management not sticking to their processes

As such, the first key step to effective collaboration is setting clear goals: why is this specific team working together? What is the ultimate goal? What would success look like? And who is in charge of each aspect?

You also need to set norms and processes between the main company and the outsourced partner. How important is transparency and [getting things out in the open](#)? How often will the team meet? How will the meeting be structured? What will be the follow-up process on action items? Who will be checking on these things? In sum: what are the [communication protocols](#)?

Finally, use metrics, data or some form of analysis as the group begins to work together to ascertain how successful the group is at the ultimate goal. This doesn't mean analyze one thing and then immediately change course if it isn't working. Rather, it means having checkpointed goals (three weeks, six weeks, etc.) so that the collaborating group can make sure they're on track and not getting too far from goals. When we work with clients, [we use various customer success metrics that can be scaled](#), but we tweak the reporting of them -- and which metrics get reported -- based on what the clients value the most. We need to be on the same page about what metrics constitute great delivery, or else the potential for collaboration isn't there.

## CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE AND PRODUCT

The tenets are simple, but not easy to execute.

We all have a lot going on with our days -- projects, deadlines, meetings, calls, metrics to report, and oh yes our families and friends and pets -- and trying to manage all that, globally, can become a mess of tasks and due dates. We have all experienced this.

Try to understand, above all, what your collaborative partner values the most. What do they want to see from you and see executed and reported on? If you can consistently achieve what they expect, you build trust, and as you build trust and have more time with a partner, collaboration becomes better and better.

It's not easy, and we'd never claim it's easy. But the backbone steps of global collaboration are relatively simple, at least in theory.

If you ever need any help with co-creation, trust-building, or any other attempts at outsourcing collaboration, we'd welcome a conversation.



Contact us at [sales@conectys.com](mailto:sales@conectys.com)

Or learn more from our [Blog](#).