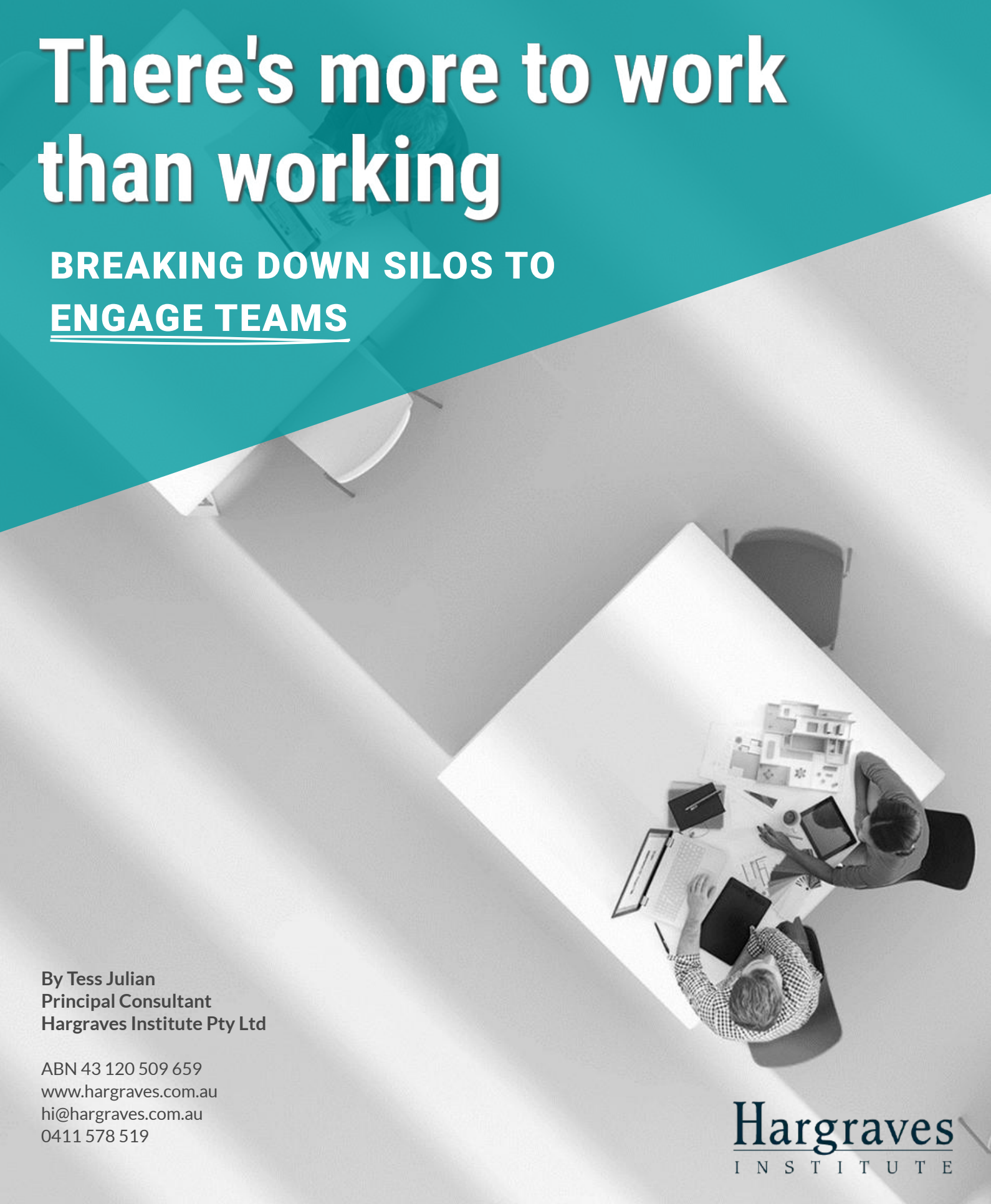
WHITE PAPER

There's more to work than working

BREAKING DOWN SILOS TO ENGAGE TEAMS



By Tess Julian
Principal Consultant
Hargraves Institute Pty Ltd

ABN 43 120 509 659
www.hargraves.com.au
hi@hargraves.com.au
0411 578 519

Hargraves INSTITUTE

Remote work: Good for productivity, but what about innovation?

Has hybrid and working from home left you feeling like a stranger in your workplace? If so, you're not alone.

A significant aspect of our working lives is other people - old friends, new friends and strangers who become friends.

During lockdowns, our focus was on a narrow group of people and our day-to-day work. This paper explores why and what you can do about it - now hybrid is here to stay.

We've seen lots of research about the productivity gains of working from home (WFH) - how we're working harder and achieving more because we save time not travelling, not taking lunch breaks and without the distractions of other workers. In addition, we have greater flexibility, can work when we want and have greater autonomy.

But perhaps we need to ask: Is there a cost? While you might be more productive now, could you be losing your future advantage?

Research[1] into Microsoft's companywide WFH policy during the pandemic lockdown has shed some light on this question.

Interestingly, it showed that WFH business groups within Microsoft became more siloed. As a result, collaboration occurred within teams, not across teams; strong bonds got stronger, weak bonds diminished, and new bonds didn't form.

> "Our results show that firm-wide remote work caused the collaboration network of workers to become more static and siloed, with fewer bridges between disparate parts. Furthermore, there was a decrease in synchronous communication and an increase in asynchronous communication. Together, these effects may make it harder for employees to acquire and share new information across the network." [1]

(1) nature.com/articles/s41562-021-01196-4, p. 4

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A similar insight comes from Collaborizza and our Thriving Teams program. (Collaborizza[2] - our 'workshop in a box' - uses proven strategies to improve team performance and explore the habits and behaviours that underpin healthy collaboration.)

In these sessions, participants engage in activities to build relationships, think creatively and agree on actions to improve overall team operations. With hybrid working now well-established, participants commonly prioritise three ongoing actions for improving collaboration across organisations. These are:

- Clarify the roles of team members and other teams.
- Develop more contact points across the organisation.
- Get greater clarification of organisational purpose, systems, and processes for collaborating.

Because connections across teams have decreased, we're missing out on the bigger picture — the links between projects – how we fit together. We might be connecting with our team, but we're not talking to people who are different – people from other teams, companies, cultures, and perspectives who bring intangible benefits for innovation and personal growth.

In addition, recent years have been difficult. With fewer people relating to people they didn't know, isolation eroded our social confidence and affected our resilience and well-being. Rebuilding relationships in and between teams takes time, effort and practice.

"Collaboration, it turns out, is not a gift from the gods but a skill that requires effort and practice."
Douglas B Reeves

(2) hargraves.com.au/how-to-transition-to-a-new-post-covid-workplace/

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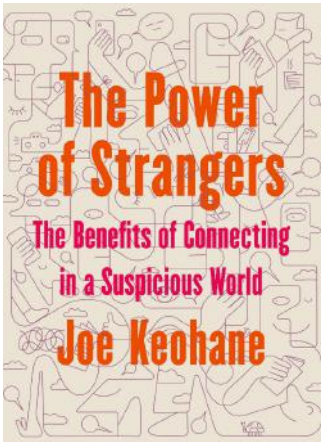
In his book, **The Power of Strangers: The Benefits of Connecting in a Suspicious World**[3], Joe Keohane explores why we should connect with those outside our in-group (strangers). Keohane presents ample evidence to confirm that when we talk to new people:



"We become better, smarter and happier people and strangers — and by extension, the world— become less scary to us."[4]

The book provides a potted history of human evolution. It shows that our ability to co-operate and collaborate with people outside our tribal group is critical to our progress.

Interacting with strangers has been the primary fuel for innovation for humanity. Without exposure to other people, perspectives, and ideas, we stop evolving. Sociability is what sets us apart in the animal kingdom.

Casual interactions hone our social skills, which help us interact in other contexts. However, technology and remote work have decreased the frequency of our day-to-day interactions because they have moved online. As a result, people have lost confidence in their social abilities.

Within our "in-group" (immediate team, family, circle of friends), we have shortcuts for connecting, making conversation flow easily. We feel safe because we can predict reactions, and we assume mutual liking. With strangers, we feel anxious because we don't share the same social cues, we fear rejection, and most falsely believe that the other doesn't like us as much as we like them. This makes starting and maintaining a conversation emotionally and cognitively demanding.

However, when we connect with strangers, we feel a sense of relief; both parties benefit, creating greater understanding, empathy, new ideas and a healthier culture. Also, it doesn't take much to develop a sense of belonging. Finding something in common — a shared passion, a favourite food, the same birthday— can create a connection that can progress to form a deeper bond. Nevertheless, we need permission, triggers and rituals to start a conversation with people we don't know well or at all.

Collaborating with people outside our group is clearly a good thing, and yet we struggle. If it feels too hard, we baulk. Is this why reaching out is especially challenging when we rely on technology and remote work?

As work becomes more and more about technological and hybrid working options, it's time to think about building healthy outreach and collaboration.

(3) joekeohane.net/ *(4) The Power of Strangers: The Benefits of Connecting in a Suspicious World, (p. xviii prologue)*

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How we make strangers of colleagues

Strangers are people we don't know well - or at all. They are those who are not in our group or tribe and who feel distant or different.

Work teams form to focus on a specific function, which is good. However, the risk is that they will bond to the exclusion of others. When a team develops greater loyalty to itself than to the organisation, its' members may see other teams as threats rather than allies. As a result, distrust grows, we make strangers of people in different teams, and the organisation develops silos.

Most leaders acknowledge the importance of breaking down silos and encouraging collaboration across the organisation but are unsure how to make it happen. And working from home has exacerbated the problem.

Chance conversations at the lift, the coffee shop or the water cooler have all but disappeared. Yet, these interactions help remove the interpersonal barriers, open our minds, and give us confidence in our social skills.

While video meetings can work for small groups who are comfortable with each other and allow time for a chat and a joke, creating the same comfort level with strangers requires a particular skill. In addition, casual video conversations with people we don't know can feel inauthentic, or like a waste of time.

Without external influences, teams become insular and susceptible to "in-group favouritism"[5], a pattern of favouring your team over others, believing yours to be better, more critical to the organisation and more effective.

Psychologists have shown repeatedly[6] that even under the most minimal conditions, people more positively evaluate their in-group members, allocate more resources to them, and hold stronger implicit favouritism towards them. Minimal in-group bias has been found in children[7] - even as young as age three[8] - highlighting the deeply ingrained nature of this bias among humans.

(5) blogs.scientificamerican.com/beautiful-minds/in-group-favoritism-is-difficult-to-change-even-when-the-social-groups-are-meaningless/
(6) sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S136466131830144X (7) srcd.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2011.01577.x (8) eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/105861/1/44_420_1_PB.pdf

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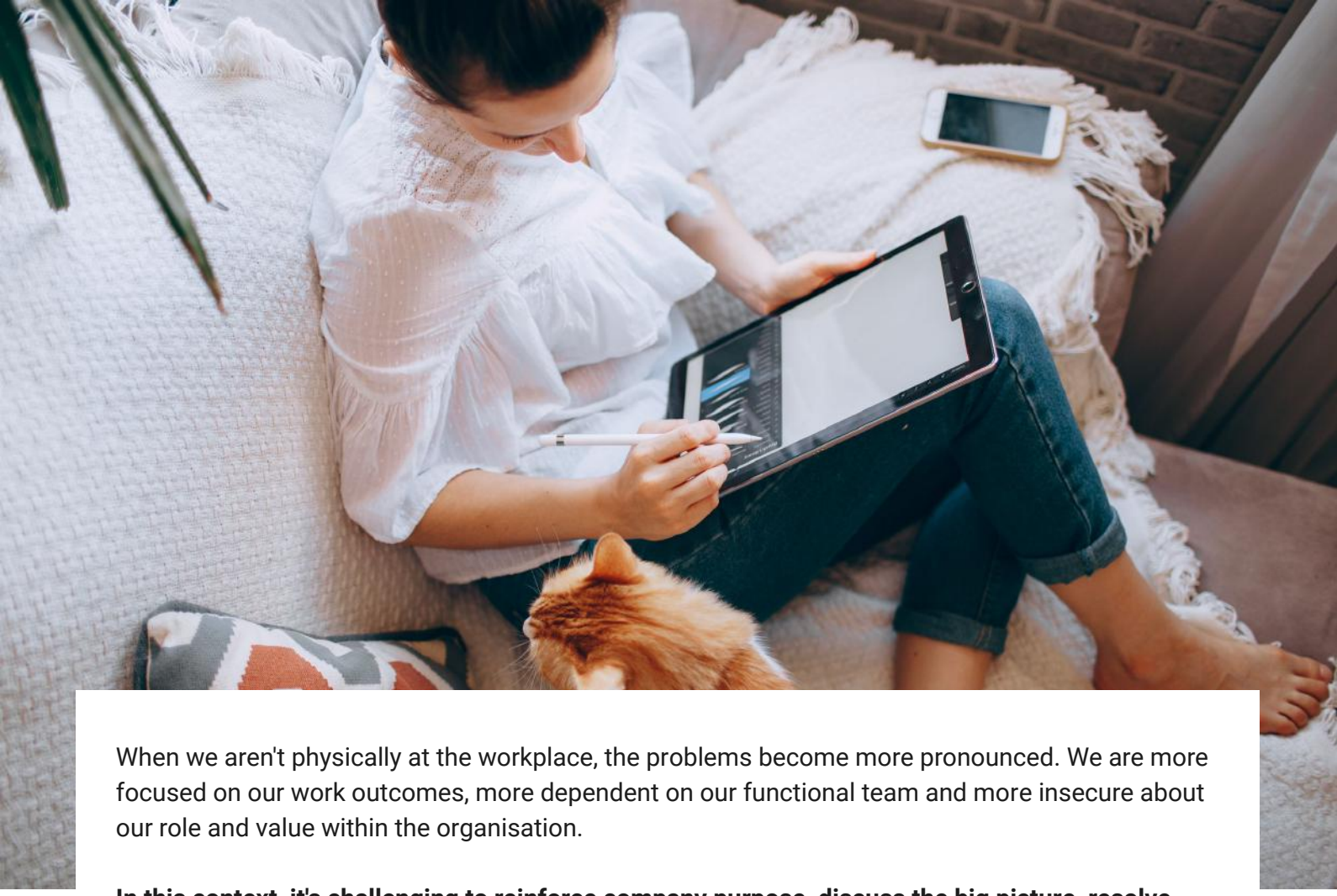

When we aren't physically at the workplace, the problems become more pronounced. We are more focused on our work outcomes, more dependent on our functional team and more insecure about our role and value within the organisation.

In this context, it's challenging to reinforce company purpose, discuss the big picture, resolve conflict, generate ideas, network, and cross-fertilise insights. Suddenly, all that is left is day-to-day work and the immediate team. So while productivity might rise, collaboration and innovation suffer.

These problems aren't intractable even in a hybrid working environment. While there are significant advantages for employees in having greater autonomy through some level of work from home, the challenge is to find the right balance of both flexibility and collaboration.

Hi, we're Hargraves Institute, Australia's first innovation consultancy founded on community and collaboration.

Our 'People-First' approach empowers you, emphasising the importance of healthy collaboration and thriving teams while leveraging novel tools to enhance performance and embed innovation and mindset into your everyday. It's our tried and tested approach, delivering real benefits for you, your team, and your organisation.

And it's how we help you make change happen.

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Why making friends with strangers is good

The ability to easily connect with people outside your team is crucial for a healthy organisational culture and individual well-being.

It's in our nature: Humans are sociable creatures. The ability to co-operate and collaborate is what sets us apart within the animal kingdom.

For example, trading with and learning from others helped us progress from being hunter-gatherers to the agricultural, industrial and digital ages.

It makes us feel better: Joe Keohane chronicles several research studies in which participants interact with strangers or those with weak ties in various ways. Overwhelmingly, the results show that both parties felt the positive benefits.

"Like food for the hungry or water for the parched,
interaction with a weak tie on a solitary day felt nourishing." [9]

It expands our capacity: In an uncertain world, it's easy to become suspicious of others and feel uneasy with strangers. The world becomes smaller, and we feel alone.

"But that's not to say we're independent. We know that our hunter-gatherer ancestors became social because they recognised that they were dependent on one another for survival …socialising was survival and survival was socialising." [10]

It gives us new ideas: Interacting only with people like ourselves restricts our scope and lens. People unlike us are doing, seeing and living a whole range of different experiences from which we can learn.

And in **Where do Good Ideas Come From: The Natural History of Innovation**,[11] Stephen Johnson points out that the most significant fuel for innovation in our society was the formation of cities. When people organised themselves into settlements, they formed networks that generated and diffused new ideas.

Teams not connecting?
People not engaged?

Discover Collaborizza, a fresh, new approach to team building.

(9 & 10) The Power of Strangers: The Benefits of Connecting in a Suspicious World, (9) p 18; (10) p 292 *(11) penguin.com.au/books/where-good-ideas-come-from-9780141964591*

It creates belonging: We know that expanding social connections is good for individuals, the organisation and society. A healthy conversation and finding some common interest can dispel assumptions and create friendships. And it might not take that much. For example, Gregory Walton and Geoffrey Cohen have identified a subset of social belonging, referred to as "mere belonging".[12]

"By contrast (with social belonging), mere belonging is a minimal, even chance, trivial, or potential, social connection with unfamiliar others."

They found that if we have something in common with a stranger, however insignificant, we will be far more likely to like them, trust them and talk to them because we consider them one of us. Thus, even meaningless things in common make strangers like - and even help - one another more.[13]

As leaders strive to balance employee interests with the success of the organisation, investing in relationships to nurture a healthy culture and thriving organisation is critical.

We need others to help us function in a myriad of ways - and other teams and people in your organisation can help your team succeed.

In our experience, collaboration thrives on two key attributes – confidence and connectedness. If everyone in your team feels confident about their place and purpose, and understands how to connect with others – face-to-face and online – collaboration will be more successful.

(12) s3.wp.wsu.edu/uploads/sites/2111/2018/05/Walton-Cohen-Mere-Belonging1.pdf
(13) The Power of Strangers: The Benefits of Connecting in a Suspicious World, p 55

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How to develop an "open to strangers" mindset

Silos emerge because of both cultural and systemic issues. Organisations address it strategically by:

- Creating and communicating an organisational vision, purpose and goals.
- Putting systems in place cross-team collaboration.
- Establishing cross-functional teams for strategic projects.
- Rewarding those who collaborate.
- Training people in collaboration skills.
- Making helpfulness a company practice.
- Offering organisation-wide events and forums.
- Encouraging and rewarding knowledge sharing.
- Removing incentives for competition between teams.

Then there are the people issues. To encourage an "open to strangers" mindset, employees need permission and modelling to start reaching beyond their team and organisation. They also need opportunity and ability. The organisation can set up campaigns and activities to encourage outreach and develop the necessary skills. **Here are some ideas you can try.**

LEND AN EAR

Listening to people with whom you might disagree, not understand or know can be challenging. Usually, we make assumptions about what the other person thinks, jump to conclusions, relate to our own experience and let those things crowd out what is being said and meant.

The skill is to listen without judgement, understand - not counter, and to hear - not respond.

In this exercise (adapted from the work of Ben Mathes, Urban Confessional), the discipline is to listen completely, without allowing our thoughts, experiences, and assessments to intrude. It's more complicated than you think!
Of course, a conversation is two-way, but this exercise is predominantly one way and designed to practice better listening or provide an ear to a person who needs to be heard.

Take 10 minutes just to listen and follow these guidelines:

- It's not about you; it's about them. You're the servant, a conduit for others.
- It's an imbalanced conversation. Free listeners are discouraged from talking about themselves - the 80%-20% rule.
- It's about empathetic agreement, i.e., the free listener is trying to understand the other's point of view, not counter it or change it.
- It's about asking open-ended questions and not offering opinions or advice, arguing or judging.
- Listeners practice nonverbal attentiveness, i.e., making eye contact and giving cues that you are listening.
- Respect silence. When someone pauses, don't jump in to fill the space. Instead, let them think and sort it out.

Try this Deep Listening Assessment designed by Oscar Trimboli [14]

(14) oscartrimboli.com/listening-quiz-questions/?gclid=CjwKCAjw4qCKBhAVEiwAkTYsPBQ_8S1nO9JjeptQ0VwsplU0ELGcTp6EruppXqMfQJoROxfnd61qChoCL1UQAvD_BwE

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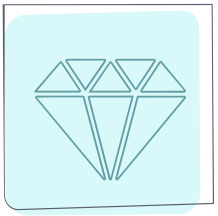
TREASURE HUNT



Over a week-long campaign, take a group of diverse people in your organisation through exercises to seek out people they don't know and make meaningful connections. Ask them to follow the instructions below and run a debrief session to hear their stories at the end of the week.

- Find people they don't know with whom they have any sort of connection. For example, support for the same sports team, have travelled to a particular country, like a type of music, or share a middle name.
- When the connection is made, use the Hargraves Questions Cards to have a conversation. Each person selects a random card from the pack and starts a discussion. Alternatively, use your Collaborizza picture cards and select a card to prompt a story about yourself, an insight or an idea.
- Participants identify a skill they want to learn, and from a pool of participants (who've provided a brief description of their expertise), approach someone to learn from and apply the skill.

The Treasure Hunt activity could be run like a team sport. Create cross-organisation teams, give them a week to make the connections and give points for different interactions. Have a debrief workshop to hear from participants and create more connections across the organisation.

ASK AND YOU WILL RECEIVE

In our Innovation Mindset workshops, we ask participants how often they give help compared to how often they ask for help. Givers always outnumber askers, sometimes by 2-1. It seems we don't ask for help because we don't like to be a burden or show weakness, and when we do, we favour asking our "in-group".

According to Adam Grant,[15] organisations realise significant economic benefits by encouraging a culture of helpfulness. Moreover, he has shown that people who ask for help and give help are more successful. But we need permission to overcome our embarrassment or fear.

To encourage a culture of helpfulness, organisations should:

- Establish helpfulness as a value.
- Model asking for help and giving help.
- Add an item in your staff meetings for people to ask for help.
- Establish a norm of responding to help immediately before continuing own work

To permit and reinforce asking for help and making connections, try using prompts, such as:

- Question cards to get the conversation started.
- Picture cards to prompt stories about yourself and the other person.
- Activities to complete together.
- Small talk to start the process.

(15) adamgrant.net/book/give-and-take/

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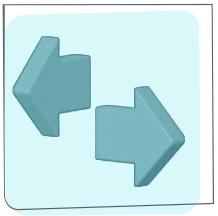
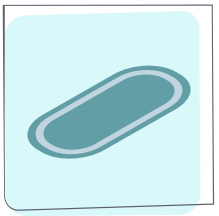
PAY IT BACK AND FORWARD



Reciprocity is essential for creating a culture of trust. However, it doesn't always need to be one-to-one. If someone helps you, you can reciprocate by helping the helper, a different person or a group of people. Ask people to identify the help they've received and reciprocate by helping someone else. Then, collect the stories and promote them.

You can also gather people from across the organisation to participate in a Reciprocity Ring[16]- a one-time, face-to-face or virtual exercise that makes asking for and offering help easy.

RED CARPET



According to Keohane, a great evolutionary leap in our life among strangers and our next social renaissance was 'hospitality'. For our distant ancestors, "(it) started as a practical solution to a novel problem (travellers) and, in time, became so integral to the success of humans that it eventually became simply part of our morality and DNA. "[17]

Keohane argues that sitting with a stranger, looking each other in the eye, and sharing food and drink helps overcome tension and create a small "us" through which something special could happen. Likewise, being hospitable at work means being receptive to others, understanding their needs and going out of your way to meet them.[18]

Anthropologist Professor Andrew Shyrock[19] says: "My own hunch is that human sociability is impossible without hospitality."

Think about how your employees can demonstrate hospitality to others in your organisation, especially new employees or visitors. For example:

- Organise lunch events between teams, where people share food from different cultures.
- Welcome families in to the company to share food and fun. Mix them up and develop new relationships.
- Invite other teams into your meeting for idea generation, problem-solving, constructive feedback sessions and provide food and special treats.
- Always offer newcomers and visitors refreshments.
- Ensure that refreshments are available in training sessions and workshops.
- Brainstorm how you can show hospitality to overcome silos and improve internal and external networking.

Conversations at work don't always flow easily.

Discover FLOW Conversation Cue Cards.

(16) giveandtakeinc.com/reciprocity-ring/

(17 & 18) The Power of Strangers: The Benefits of Connecting in a Suspicious World, (17) p 91; (18) p 92

(19) lsa.umich.edu/anthro/people/faculty/socio-cultural-faculty/ashryock.html

Hargraves Institute

Hargraves Institute specialises in community, diversity, and collaboration.

Our People-First approach focuses on people skills to improve relationships and culture in organisations, fostering innovation, collaboration and thriving teams.

Draw on our unique experience to deliver an innovative approach with real benefits – for you, your team, and your organisation.

Since 2006, we've been researching and developing tools and programs to help individuals, teams and organisations collaborate in healthy and productive ways. **We believe that the keys to deep connection are:**

Collaboration skills — our collaboration framework identifies the habits and behaviours necessary for healthy collaboration under six pillars - Autonomy, Competence, A Sense of Progress, Belonging, Trust, and Engagement. Using this framework will help you pinpoint areas for improvement, start feedback conversations and identify strategic needs.

Open questions — listening is important, but first, you must ask the right question. So we've developed a Question Canvas approach, using open-ended question canvasses and cards to explore and improve leadership, resilience, collaboration, diversity, innovation and digital collaboration. These question sets give people permission to raise issues - safely - and plan actions with an open mind and in good faith.

Serious fun — Hargraves workshops and tools are designed to create "serious fun". Fun - because we engage people in happy activities to build stronger relationships, creativity and innovation. Serious - because participants focus on real issues, develop outcomes and commit to actions and change.

Digital comfort — having great collaboration tools is only a small part of the equation. How people use them is what guarantees success. Based on over a decade of practical experience, Digital Team Builder tools provide a simple, engaging, action-oriented approach to quickly and easily embed healthy and productive online collaboration behaviours in and across teams.

Diversity — developing each individual's capacity to make change happen is key to creating a more inclusive and collaborative workplace. Our Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging resources (and Women@Work Program) provide tools to lead change, with up-to-date research and practical strategies to make a genuine difference at work.

Get in touch to learn more about our People-First approach.

Hargraves Institute Pty Ltd (ABN 43 120 509 659)
m: +61 411 578 519
e: hi@hargraves.com.au
w: hargraves.com.au
hargraves-institute
@hargravesinst