

# BUSINESS LEADERS:

Without You, There Is No  
Collaborative Advantage



*To put it simply, there is no collaborative advantage without you.*

As a business leader, you may be aware of the growing body of work devoted to “collaborative advantage,” the strategic and competitive benefits gained by individuals and organizations that work together effectively. You might also be aware of the powerful ways that this synergy enhances performance, improves productivity and increases profitability. But are you aware of the critical role *you* play in cultivating your organization’s collaborative advantage?

To put it simply, there is no collaborative advantage without you.

“Whether you’re a CEO, VP, director, manager, project manager or supervisor, your words, actions and leadership style are all crucial to successfully cultivating you and your company’s collective ability to cooperate efficiently and effectively,” says Kevin W. Grossman, a Glowan principal who recently joined the firm. “Everyone in your organization needs to share authority, responsibility and accountability. All team members must trust one another and freely share information—both to an extraordinary degree—as they work toward a unified vision: yours.”

Clearly, none of this can happen without your guidance and open support, so you must develop a capacity to lead in a collaborative manner within and across departments, teams and work cultures, inside and outside of your organization. You must also acquire, model and help to instill in others the skills and techniques that transform mere teamwork into true collaboration. This is the only way to create an environment that achieves the broad participation, heightened creativity and superior performance that constitute collaborative advantage—and that sustains a competitive advantage in the marketplace.

## ACHIEVING COLLABORATIVE ADVANTAGE

True collaborative advantage requires that people agree to work together to achieve what’s best for the organization rather than what’s best for themselves, their group or functional area—even when it means giving up time, budget and other resources. They work to advance the organization’s overall cause because they understand the “big picture.” This is no accident, of course. It’s the result of inspired leadership and a clearly articulated and shared

**Are These Four Barriers to Collaboration Present in Your Organizational Unit?\***

*Unwillingness to seek input and learn from others*

*Inability to seek and find expertise*

*Unwillingness to help*

*Inability to work together to transfer knowledge*

*Glowan's L3 Leadership Learning program's foundational and sustaining elements help address these collaborative advantage barriers.*

*\* How To Build Collaborative Advantage. A special monograph produced for distribution at the World Economic Forum, Davos, Switzerland, January 2008.*

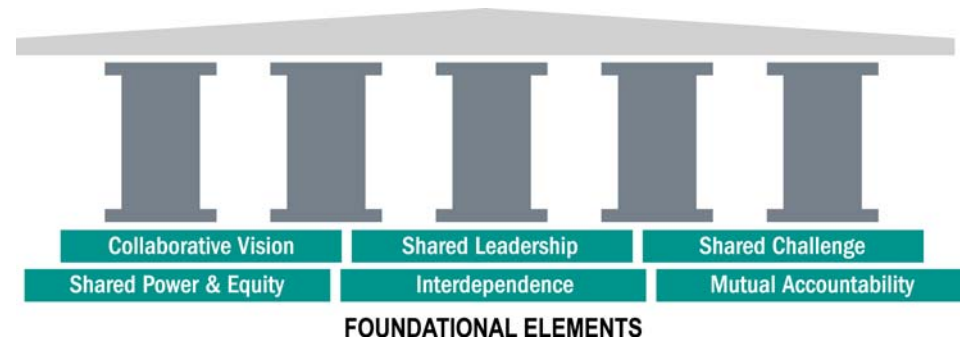
vision. Your guidance and your own willingness to collaborate are essential to attaining collaborative advantage and the generative learning and higher levels of creativity that accompany it.

Frankly, in many teams and organizations people cooperate but few collaborate, and there's a big difference between the two. One way of expressing this difference is that cooperation is required to achieve what "I" want or need ... but collaboration is required to achieve what "we" need.

According to Glowan principal Marc Michaelson, "For an organization to achieve and sustain collaborative advantage, certain elements must exist within its culture. These elements fall into two broad categories: Foundational Elements and Sustaining Elements. Foundational Elements are actions and behaviors that need to be addressed in the initial stages of a collaborative partnership. When established effectively, these elements help to form a climate of openness and trust."

The Foundational Elements include:

- Collaborative vision
- Shared leadership
- Shared challenge
- Shared power and equity
- Interdependence
- Mutual accountability

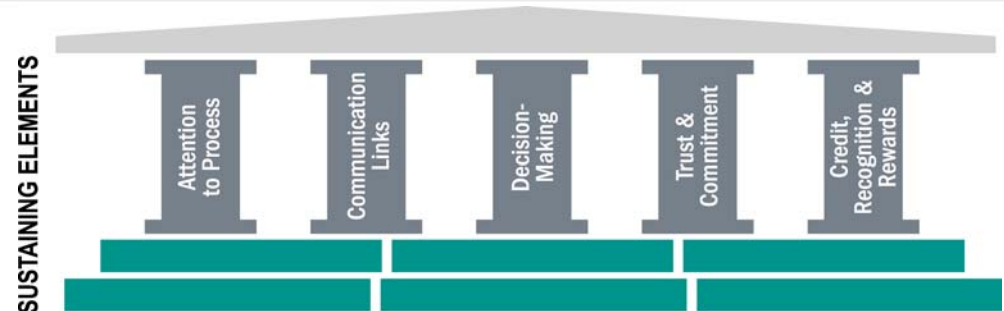


Glowan's overall L3 Leadership Learning program addresses each of these elements in great detail, notes Michaelson, because they are crucial to the birth of a collaborative organization, especially the L2 portion of the program which is all about cultivating collaborative advantage. "As research has shown, the time and effort invested in building a strong foundation for a partnership directly correlate to the partnership's future success."

Sustaining Elements, on the other hand, are those actions and behaviors that need to be addressed in the ongoing process of sustaining, expanding and developing collaborative advantage, Michaelson says.

The Sustaining Elements include:

- Purposeful attention to process
- Strong communication links
- Explicit decision-making
- Trust and commitment
- Credit, recognition and rewards



Again, the Glowan model explores all of these elements in detail, as the omission of any one of them puts the organization and its collaborative advantage at risk.

## THE POWER OF SMART SKILLS™

So, how do you ensure that these Foundational and Sustaining Elements become engrained in your organization's culture? How do you make certain that you and your people have the appropriate knowledge and attitudes necessary to build a collaborative environment? The Glowan process begins by helping leaders develop a specific set of skills we call Smart Skills™. They include:

- Emotional intelligence
- Influencing with integrity
- Interest-based negotiation
- Stress and change management
- Appreciative inquiry
- High-level communication skills

Smart Skills™ enable leaders to do several critical things: exercise influence within the organization rather than wield authority; remain emotionally intelligent in the face of ongoing challenges; utilize negotiation skills to create win-win solutions; and improve the overall performance of the organization. These are the skills required to build collaborative



- *Emotional intelligence*
- *Influence with integrity*
- *Interest-based negotiation*
- *Appreciative inquiry*
- *Life, stress and change management*
- *High-level communication*

advantage and to sustain it day in and day out. The fact is we're not collaborative by nature. We *learn* to collaborate—but only under the right circumstances and with the right skills.

In today's flatter organizations, one Smart Skill in particular has become as indispensable as it is challenging for some leaders to embrace: influencing with integrity.

Unfortunately, some very gifted leaders still operate under the assumption that they have to lead by wielding supreme authority. They don't do this because they're poor leaders. They do it because they believe it's what they're expected and paid to do. It's an understandable point of view—but Glowan asks leaders to consider this alternative: you are *not* expected to wield supreme authority but rather to get the best possible results from your organization. You're expected to maximize your competitive position in the marketplace. The better method to accomplish this is to influence with integrity—and with high emotional intelligence.

In the Glowan L3 Leadership Learning model, leaders are taught to influence with integrity through a variety of strategies. (In fact, the entire L2 portion of the model focuses almost exclusively on collaborative advantage.) It also offers a careful distinction between the two styles of influencing with integrity: formal and informal.

“An example of formal influence,” says John Anderson, Glowan principal and founder, “would be when a manager takes on a new project and begins his work by creating a matrix designed to help discern the importance and priority of influencing certain individuals on the project team. This enables the manager to craft a plan for the impending ‘formal’ influence process even before the rest of the team begins its work. The formal approach to influencing builds intentional relationships and results in better-managed projects and initiatives.”

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Informal influence, Anderson continues, is called for when a formal plan may not be developed and at the ready. “But any manager who is cognizant of the value of influence uses it in virtually every interaction with team members to build relationships, thereby becoming a more competent leader and a more effective manager,” he states.

The key to both styles of influence is that leaders learn to present ideas in a way that gains the commitment of others, inspires better ideas from others and, when necessary, diffuses emotionally toxic situations.

Influencing with integrity makes more and more sense for today's leaders, who often need to get results not only by strengthening internal relationships but also by improving relationships with external partners, suppliers and, in some cases, even competitors.

In this new era of interconnected workflows and processes, the most effective leaders refrain from “throwing their weight around” to make things happen, even with their direct reports. Influential leadership trumps heavy-handed authority, particularly when the goal is to create collaborative advantage.

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### **Does Repeated Collaboration Kill Creativity?**

It might, say researchers at Arizona State University, who penned the report, “The Effects of Repeat Collaboration on Creative Abrasion,” which appeared in the January 2010 *Academy of Management Review*. According to the authors, a growing body of evidence “suggests a negative relationship between repeat collaboration and team creativity.” In other words, the longer a team works together, the less “creative abrasion” there is, and less creative abrasion equals less creative results.

Does that mean that you, as a leader, should dismantle your teams after one or two successes? Certainly not. However, you do need to monitor your teams' performance. You must understand and prevent the challenges that can undermine their results, including the dulling of their “creative abrasion.” One way to do that is to bring new members into your teams from time to time. But that's not the only solution to ensure continued creativity. (Glowan's L3 Leadership Learning and Smart Skills™ programs address this issue in great detail.)

It's important to note that creative abrasion is not about personal friction among teammates; it's about creative friction—the rubbing together of varying opinions and points of view. Creative abrasion is not about a clash of wills; it's about a clash of ideas in order to arrive at the best possible outcomes. As a leader, your goal is to influence the group to leverage their collective intelligence, not pit them against one another to achieve some kind of mysterious creative spark. The creative spark will come about naturally by bringing together talented, enthusiastic people in an environment that nurtures true collaboration.

Yes, personal disagreements and friction will arise from time to time even among the best collaborative teams. But the notion that they are *necessary* to ensure a team's continued creativity and effectiveness is simply wrong. In fact, great teams minimize personal abrasion and maximize creative abrasion through the use of key skills including influencing with integrity, interest-based negotiation, appreciative inquiry, and high-level communication skills.

So, does repeated collaboration kill creativity? Not if you're doing your job as a leader ... and not if your teams are putting Smart Skills™ to use.

Glowan hears repeatedly from companies they work with on Smart Skills™ that “our people are more engaged, focused and thoughtful about developing themselves – and that team members are coming to meetings better prepared and ready to give their all.”

That's the collaborative “creative” advantage.

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## CREATING THE COLLABORATIVE WORK ENVIRONMENT

It's important to note that the Smart Skills™ you embody as a leader are the very same behaviors and abilities that you want *every* member of your organization to apply to their own work. Smart Skills™ are essential to creating a cooperative work environment. As a result, the next step in the Glowan approach to cultivating your organization's collaborative advantage is to instill Smart Skills™ at all levels of the organization, right down to front-line employees, through formal training.

By doing so, you're giving collaborative advantage the best chance to take root in your organization. Again, your open support of these skills and of the collaborative environment itself is necessary to successfully achieve the competitive advantages you seek. And, as noted in the Sustaining Elements above, employees must be rewarded for developing collaborative skills and behaviors.

One reason that collaborative advantage is so powerful is that it can't be purchased like hardware or duplicated easily like a Web site. Competitors who wish to cultivate this advantage must do just as you did—from scratch, step by step, overcoming all of the natural resistance and the barriers inherent in creating a synergistic environment. This means you'll enjoy a substantial head start in solidifying your leadership position in the marketplace. And even when competitors do succeed in creating their own collaborative environment, your organization and your people will have already evolved.

## ABOUT GLOWAN CONSULTING GROUP

The Glowan Consulting Group is in the business of transforming individuals and organizations utilizing its L3 leadership development and executive coaching activities. Our network of experienced business professionals are skilled not only in all facets of developing leaders and managers, but also in operating businesses and preparing organizations to gain competitive advantage in the rapidly changing global environment.

For more information, contact John Anderson, Glowan Consulting, at 626-914-1545 or email [info@Glowan.com](mailto:info@Glowan.com).

For more information on Glowan's Smart Skills™, Total Life Leadership and L3 Programs, visit [www.glowan.com](http://www.glowan.com).

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