

The WIIFM WIIFU Phenomenon

Why is it that even when many people and organisations think that something is an excellent idea that will genuinely contribute to the greater good, a lot of these people have their own 'really good reasons' why they or their organisation can not actively support the collaboration?

Based on many years of fostering collaboration, I suspect that the non supportive behaviour around collaborative opportunities is due to the WIIFM WIIFU Phenomenon.

Some Definitions:

Collaboration: Joint work toward a common end; co-action, cooperation, synergy, teamwork.

Virtual: Having the essence or effect, but not the appearance or form of.

Organisation: A body with an orderly structure, a systematic arrangement.

Virtual Organisation (VO): A group of individuals, organisations and communities that collaborate in their mutual best interests.

WIIFM: What's In It For Me.

WIIFU: What's In It For Us.

Even with the internet well established in the world, the scarcity of successful www-based collaborations in the commercial landscape suggests that people and organisations have a natural preference to work within WIIFM based structures. Is this because, as human beings, each of us operates in our own best interests as the centre of our own universe; fundamentally 'separate-from' rather than a part of the greater whole; and this keeps us each focussed on WIIFM?

It is apparent that WIIFM drives our behaviour and that even WIIFU outcomes are motivated by WIIFM drivers at a personal level. It is also apparent that even when a WIIFU mode operation provides the participants with opportunities to address their personal WIIFMs, the selective and erratic participation of people in active collaborations demonstrates the power of the default WIIFM mode.

The WIIFM mode appears to be such compelling element of human behaviour that even when they have the skills to actively participate, many people will always have the best of reasons for not embracing the WIIFU approach themselves. This manifests at the personal level as behaviour that ranges from a general reluctance to engage with others to a passionate and active resistance to undertaking anything that does not involve a specific and direct WIIFM.

This phenomenon also helps to explain that without some fundamental change in their external or internal circumstances, any organisation, group or individuals that currently operates in the direct WIIFM mode is unlikely to naturally evolve into a successful collaboration. Consequently, we can also conclude that most successful collaborations have been stimulated and subsequently driven by some compelling force or reason that impacts the survival of the original organisation or its people.

What does this mean for active collaboration? It means that in order to have people work meaningfully in a collaborative manner, the collaboration must have a compelling reason to exist; for itself. It also means that the collaboration must provide real opportunities for the participants to satisfy their individual WIIFMs within the collaborative WIIFU framework and operation. Without these two contextual conditions being satisfied, it is unlikely that individual participants will actively and consistently engage their WIIFU mode in a way that will lead to successful long term collaboration.

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