

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 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 their own WIIFM frameworks. Is this because each of us, as human beings at the centre of our own universes, always operates in our own best interests; fundamentally 'separate-from' rather than part of a greater whole?

It is apparent that WIIFM drives our behaviour and 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 and opportunity to actively participate for the greater good, 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 satisfy a direct WIIFM.

Whatever the causes, this phenomenon helps to explain why, without some fundamental change in their external or internal circumstances, an organisation, group or individual who is driven by their own WIIFMs is unlikely to naturally evolve into a successful collaborator. Confirming the wisdom that 'necessity is the mother of invention,' we can also observe that many successful collaborations have been stimulated and driven by some compelling reason or event that compromised the survival of the original organisation or its people.

What does this mean for active collaboration?

It means that in order to have people and organisations really work well in a collaborative manner, the collaboration's WIIFUs must include a compelling, even passionate, reason that appeals to the participants. It also means that in order to prosper, the collaboration must always provide ways for its participants to satisfy their own WIIFMs. Without these two contextual conditions being satisfied, it is unlikely that individual participants will consistently engage successfully with the collaboration and consequently, the collaboration will fail.

WIIFM Rules, O.K.

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