Chapter 2
The Evolution of Collaborative Work

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ABSTRACT
Organizational designs and the organization of work have evolved over time, but the essence of collaboration has always been paramount, especially for organizations seeking efficiency, effectiveness, and survivability. Starting with a biblical reference, then reviewing animal pack mentality, and thoroughly detailing the innovativeness of human interaction, this chapter explores the evolution of collaborative work.

“In the long history of humankind (and animal kind, too), those who learned to collaborate and improvise most effectively have prevailed.” – Charles Darwin

INTRODUCTION
Attempting to define the need for work and the workplace is ancient and can certainly be vast in depth and breadth. Therefore, to adequately chronicle the evolution of either requires delimitation and discretion. To dispense with such formalities straight away, suffice it to say this chapter starts with broad-brush strokes to illustrate the similarities and disparities of the landscape of work and the workplace over time. As the discussion approaches present day, finer strokes are added to illustrate details of processes, practices, and personalities associated with modern workplace dynamics. As such, let’s start at the beginning.

THE BEGINNING
In Genesis 2:15 (NIV, 2002) God took man, Adam, and put him in the Garden of Eden “to work.” As idyllic as working a garden may be imagined, we are living the result now from Adam’s work in the first workplace then. Due to his poor performance,
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sin, Adam was fired from the Garden, cast out to fend for himself. On his way out, he was told, “By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food” (NIV, Genesis 3:19). And so the notion of work was established. If you are going to eat, you are going to work. Alas, “the sweat of your brow” image suggests it to be hard work. However, we were assured that hard work would yield profits (NIV, Proverbs 14:23).

And so we work, for food and profit.

As Adam went about his work, the organization of activities and duties followed in an effort to sustain food and profit – albeit resulting from the ‘sweat of the brow’ declaration. Within this context, the workplace can be understood. There are a number of biblical stories to share about organized work. For purposes here, let’s leave Genesis and move onto Exodus.

Nearly 1500 years B.C., Moses was working to lead hundreds of thousands of Israelites out of Egypt. While Moses worked for the people he led, efficiency in his approach was strained due to the sheer number of people and human tendency. Everyone sought Moses out to mediate issues, concerns, and general necessities. Although there were no Lean leaders to point out waste for Moses to eliminate from work processes at that time, Moses did have some consulting support. With the help from his father in law, Jethro, Moses established one of the first workplace organizational structures. Hierarchical in nature, Jethro established an organizational structure to help expedite work, communication, dispute resolution, and facilitate decision-making. This led to workplace and community efficiencies.

In true consulting form, Jethro diagnosed the current state of the Israelites’ situation, created an attainable vision of a new and highly desired future state situation, and then helped bridge the gap and lead the transition between the two. This work has gotten Jethro noted as one of the first organizational change agents in history (Burke, 2002).

If you have spent any time thinking about work and workplace dynamics, you no doubt have come to understand that at the root of organized work is survival – remember, if you are going to eat, you are going to work. Burton and Obel (1998) equated survival as viability and offered two other primary concerns for designing organized work: efficiency and effectiveness. To eat and profit, organized work is necessary. To be more precise, collaborative work is necessary.

COLLABORATING WORK FOR FOOD AND PROFIT

Organizational designs have evolved over time, but the essence of collaboration has always been paramount in any work aimed at survival and continual improvement. Before moving into much detail, the notion of collaboration warrants a practical definition and needs to be differentiated from coordination and cooperation. In short, collaboration is about ‘co-laboring’ together and in a process – a core process – for advanced organisms (Miles, Miles, & Snow, 2005; Jassawalla, Sashittal, & Hemant, 2006) and the most interdependent of the three (Phillips, Hardy, & Lawrence, 1998).

Gajda (2004) noted that collaboration “has become a catchall to signify just about any type of interorganizational or interpersonal relationship” (p. 66). Certainly collaboration, coordination, and cooperation all have the potential to increase the skills and resources of any one individual alone. Collaboration, however, is the only of the three that contributes to both individual capital and the capital of participating others. To that end, the uniqueness of collaboration is its reciprocating relationship among participants – a reciprocation that requires an investment in the capacity of one another (Himmelman, 1996). This value, the enhancing of all parties’ potential effectiveness, is the distinguishing value of collaboration from coordination and cooperation. It is only from collaboration – not coordination or cooperation...