MIKAEL KROGERUS
ROMAN TSCHÄPPELER

THE COLLABORATION BOOK

41 IDEAS FOR WORKING BETTER TOGETHER

Translated from the German by Gesche Ipsen

Profile Books

ALSO BY MIKAEL KROGERUS &
ROMAN TSCHÄPPELER
AND AVAILABLE FROM PROFILE BOOKS

The Change Book
The Decision Book
The Get Things Done Book
The Question Book
The Test Book

CONTENTS

FOREWORD: SMELLS LIKE TEAM SPIRIT

This book was written and illustrated by two friends who love nothing more than working together. It all started over twenty years ago, in Denmark, at the Aarhus-based Kaospilot school for creative leadership and meaningful entrepreneurship – which has been described as a Rudolf Steiner school for grown-ups, or a sort of 'creative' MBA.

Two things in particular have stayed with us from our student days:

1. There is your goal, and then there's how you achieve it. Kaospilot's mantra was that the outcome of a project matters less than understanding how you got there.
2. There is no 'I' in 'team'.

The latter is easy to dismiss as merely one of those typical clichéd slogans, but it is worth taking seriously. After all, isn't it true that we rarely achieve anything on our own? If you look closely, everything humanity has ever created is the result of a collaborative process. We hardly ever truly achieve something alone – and even when we do, it's only because other people have made it possible. Perhaps they paved the way for us, or provided their support; or perhaps, with them by our side, we were able to become a better version of ourselves.

Even solo climbers and solo violinists don't really work solo. They too need a team who supports, coaches and looks after

them. Even if you can't afford an entourage, you still need someone to take care of the kids while you train or practise, someone who gives you a hug when you're down.

This is one of the lessons that reproductive labour can teach productive labour. The productive sector – where, in return for pay, workers create goods and services with a monetary value – is based on competition, guided by the belief that the best will emerge the winner. Meanwhile, the reproductive sector – unpaid domestic work, caring for others, cultivating relationships – is based on collaboration, and we instinctively understand that there are no winners. Rather, if we want to make sure that no one loses out, we have to work together. This idea is beginning to percolate into the private business sector too. Individual (and, as a rule, male) genius may still be idealised, but almost all sectors now expect you to be a team player. 'Maverick' or 'lone wolf' are words you'll rarely see mentioned in a job advert.

Being able to work well with others is a requirement for almost every job, but no one ever teaches us how to do it. Crazy as it might be, people assume that it's something you are either born with or simply acquire as you go along – or not, as the case may be. In truth, though, collaboration isn't a character trait, it's a skill.

For this book, we searched for answers to forty-four questions related to collaboration, such as: how can a group of people reach a decision, when everyone disagrees with each other? How big should a team ideally be? Naturally, teamwork also has certain downsides – sorry: poses certain challenges. Who takes the blame when a project fails? What do you do when someone is being a real pain? How does relationship management work in a team?

Here, we focus on three areas that require your constant attention.

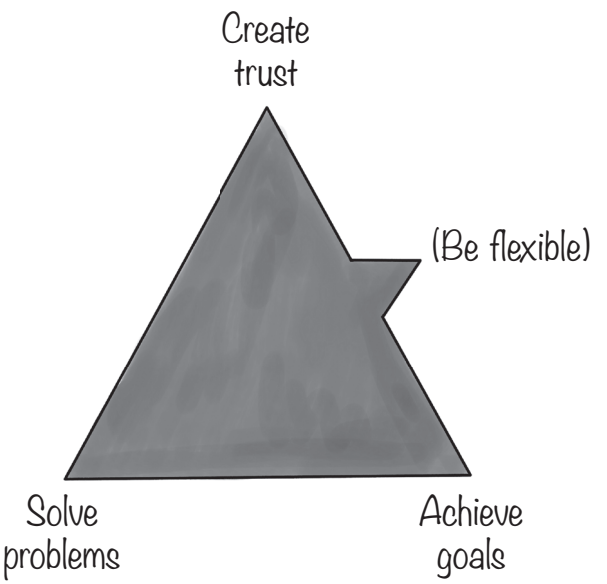
Solving Problems
Let's not pretend: every team, no matter how well it functions, will sooner or later face obstacles, dissent or failure. There is no such thing as a team that never runs into difficulties. What distinguishes good teams from bad ones, however, is that good teams find ways to overcome problems.

Achieving Your Goals
A team is a marriage of convenience. You have come together to achieve something you can't achieve on your own. What connects you is the goal. As everyone knows, there's more than one way to skin a cat.

Creating Trust
Two or more people in the same room don't necessarily constitute a team. They have to coalesce first, find a common cause and a common language, and get themselves organised. Trust is key.

Writing and illustrating this book has changed us. Anything you work long and hard on changes you. And it wasn't that we became grandmasters in collaboration overnight; it was more like learning a new language. We hope that you'll feel the same way after reading our book. However, don't think of it as a strict template: approach it more like a small toolkit to keep handy at work. Try this or that, find out what works for you, and don't worry about the rest. And most importantly, look forward to working with your team.

THE SACRED TRIANGLE OF TEAMS



Solve problems (p. 5), achieve your goals (p. 69) and create trust (p. 115).

Solving Problems

THE TWO-PIZZA RULE: HOW BIG SHOULD YOUR TEAM BE?

Thomas Widmer, the famous Swiss hiker, was once asked about the ideal size of a hiking group. His answer was: ‘Six people max, or you’ll run into problems. If you have eleven people traipsing into an inn, the landlord will have a coronary.’

Widmer probably wasn’t aware that his words echoed Jeff Bezos’s ‘two-pizza rule’. Bezos came up with the rule not long after founding Amazon, and the company still swears by it today: a team should be small enough that it can be fed by two pizzas. Two pizzas feed roughly four to seven people. If you follow the two-pizza rule, you’ll be able to incorporate very different characters in your team (see illustration), thus gaining a diversity of ideas and perspectives while keeping things manageable and flexible. In small groups, people can’t hide behind anonymity or indifference, so everyone takes a greater share of the responsibility. There will also be fewer political shenanigans, because there aren’t enough people to forge secondary alliances. Finally, small groups make it easier to turn strangers into friends – since everyone has to interact with everyone else at some point.

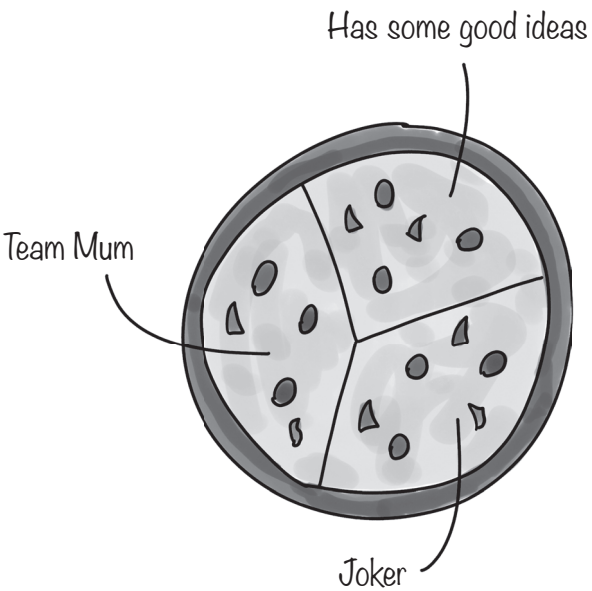
According to occupational psychologist J. Richard Hackman, moderately sized teams also have the advantage that they make communication easier: the bigger the team, the more opinions there are, the longer the meetings and the greater the dissent will be, which slows the whole decision-making

process down. Too many chefs spoil the pizza.

Of course, the two-pizza rule doesn't work everywhere. A philharmonic orchestra can't consist of four people, otherwise it would be a quartet; and a Premier League team by definition has to have eleven players. However, it does work in a surprisingly large number of situations.

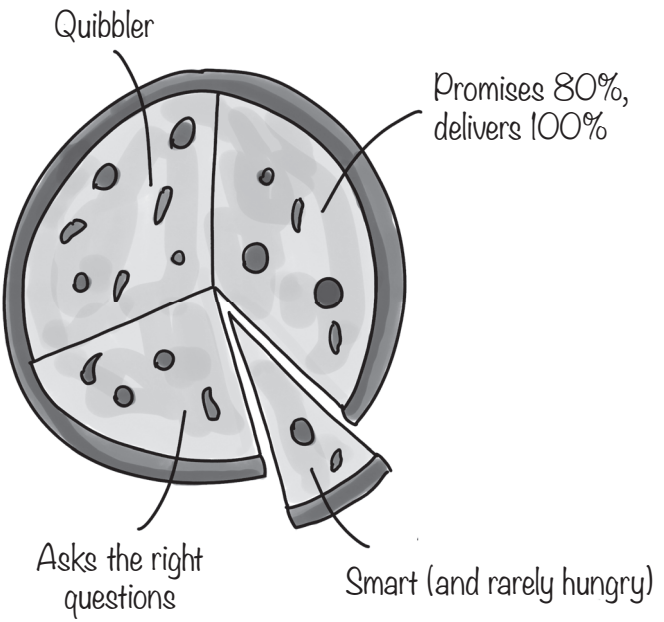
So the first question to ask when a team isn't working as it should is: how big is it?

If you need more than two pizza



Good teams musn't be too big, and should have the right ingredients.

pizzas to feed your team, it's too big



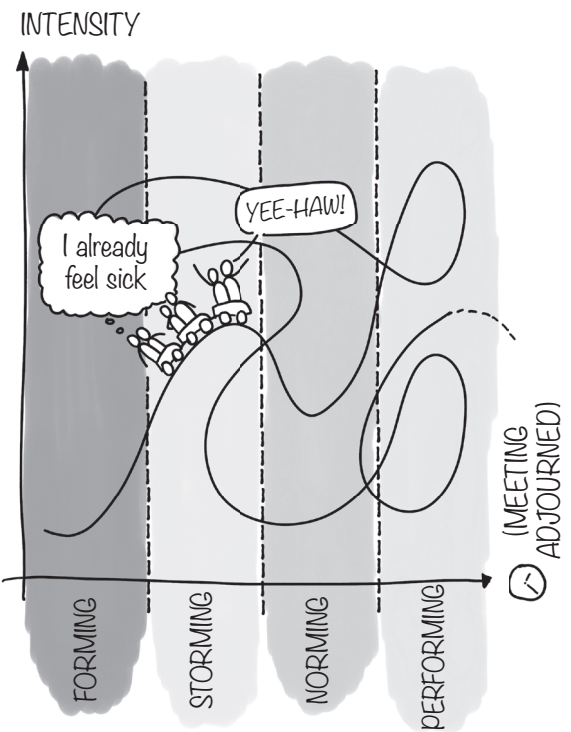
TUCKMAN'S STAGES: HOW A GROUP BECOMES A TEAM

Teamwork is a rollercoaster ride. A team's mood will go up and down, as will its team spirit and, needless to say, its output. At times you want to squeal with joy; at others you almost feel like throwing up. During the ride, you regret ever having got on, but as soon as it stops you're desperate to get back on (or tell yourself: 'Never again').

Yet not all teams are the same.

We often react passively, even to the atmosphere in a group: our attitude is that things either work or they don't – it's a question of luck, that's all, and there's nothing we can do about it. However, studies have shown that teams aren't a lottery. You have to work at them. They don't simply come together: turning a loose array of people into a strong team is a process. In the 1960s, psychologist Bruce Tuckman came up with the following model for the typical stages of group development:

Forming
The group comes together. Getting to know each other is often underscored by a sense of insecurity. What will the others think of me? Will they accept me? What role will I play? During this phase, the relationship between the various team members is still completely undefined and unclear. They don't trust each other yet.


INTENSITY
I already feel sick
YEE-HAW!
FORMING
STORMING
NORMING
PERFORMING
(MEETING ADJOURNED)

Storming
Following the first stage of uncertainty, everyone in the team finds their role. Some actively take it on, others have it assigned to them. During this stage, you constantly need to balance your own interests with those of the group. There will be power struggles and other conflicts. Be warned: some teams never make it past this stage.

Norming
As the team members resolve any remaining disagreements, start thinking about their shared goal, agree on the rules and core values, and work together to define the various roles, their confidence automatically grows and everyone feels motivated.

Performing
Now the real work can begin.

Adjourning
The team members say goodbye to each other and their common endeavour. Ideally, they will reflect together on their experience working as a team, and learn some useful things for next time. Occasionally, teams will find themselves in the adjournment phase before the project has even ended.

Although Tuckman's model has become a popular way to describe team development, it does have its critics. First among them was Tuckman himself. He believed that his model 'cannot be considered truly representative of small-group developmental processes […] rather, it must serve as stimulus for further research'. Furthermore, he observed these stages not in work settings but in therapy groups. Now, you might look at a team and say, yes, it definitely displays some pathological traits – but still, proceed with care.

In 2007, Kate Cassidy re-evaluated Tuckman's work and concluded that although the stages are essentially right, the line between them is blurred. There's a certain amount of overlap and repetition – and conflict can occur in all phases, not just the 'storming' one. Ah well. Still, it's worth showing Tuckman's model to your team before they start on a project, and to regularly ask the team members:

a. 'How far along are we with the project?' (i.e. which stage you're at), and
b. 'What do we need to get to the next stage?'

One final suggestion: people frequently think that good teams never experience tension, but in fact the opposite is true. Good teams merely understand that tension isn't a problem – rather, it's an opportunity to put your heads together to find a solution. Therefore, don't shy away from uncomfortable conversations; and when conflict arises, be transparent. One thing to remember is to make sure you distinguish between relationship conflicts and task conflicts. Relationship conflicts – me versus you – are about a clash of personalities. They are usually unproductive and draining. Task conflicts, meanwhile – my idea versus yours – can promote creativity and enjoyment.

RUN THE BANK VERSUS CHANGE THE BANK: ARE YOU A VISIONARY OR A CREATOR?

In most companies, project teams and committees, you will find two factions: one that always wants to change something, and one that wants to keep the status quo. While the first is thinking about the day after tomorrow, the second is thinking about the day-to-day business. The first wants to evolve, the second wants to preserve and manage.

In the corporate world, these divergent attitudes are called 'change the bank' and 'run the bank'.

The friction between the two factions can have various causes. Perhaps the 'changers' are making decisions that negatively affect the 'runners', or have bold ideas but aren't interested in how they're implemented. Conversely, changers often regard runners as chronic naysayers (see *Saying No*, p. 112) and albatrosses round their necks. Then again, changers are usually more highly regarded than runners – someone who suggests a different way of doing the washing-up is respected more than the person who does the washing-up every day.

Of course, we need both people who come up with new ideas and people who carry them out. But how can we ease the tension between the two camps?

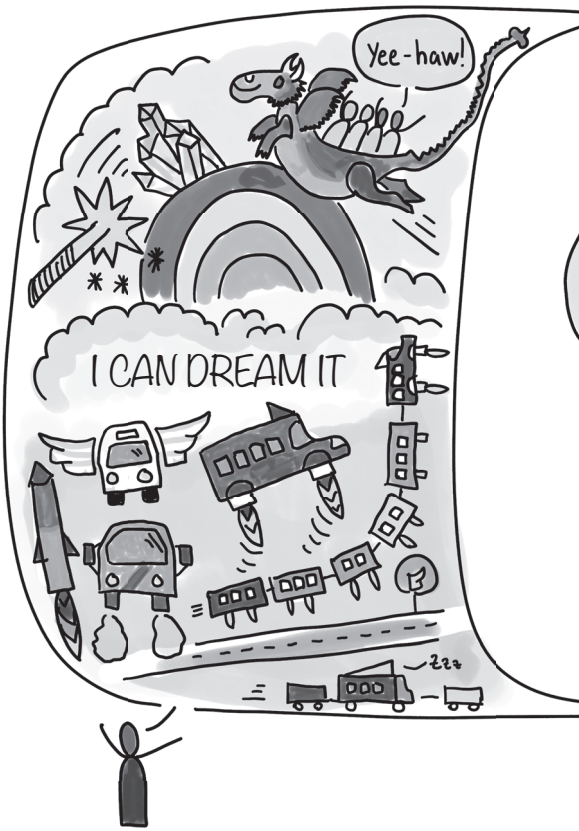
People involved in IT have given this matter a lot of thought. One solution they've come up with is DevOps teams, a

contraction of the terms ‘development’ and ‘operations’. The theory is that when developers and programmers work together, there is less friction and greater mutual understanding. The DevOps mantra is: ‘You built it, you run it.’ When someone has an idea, they should be the one to implement and maintain it. People who take the initiative are respected, but they also have to accept responsibility for what they do. In other words, you should bear the consequences of your decisions. Why is that?

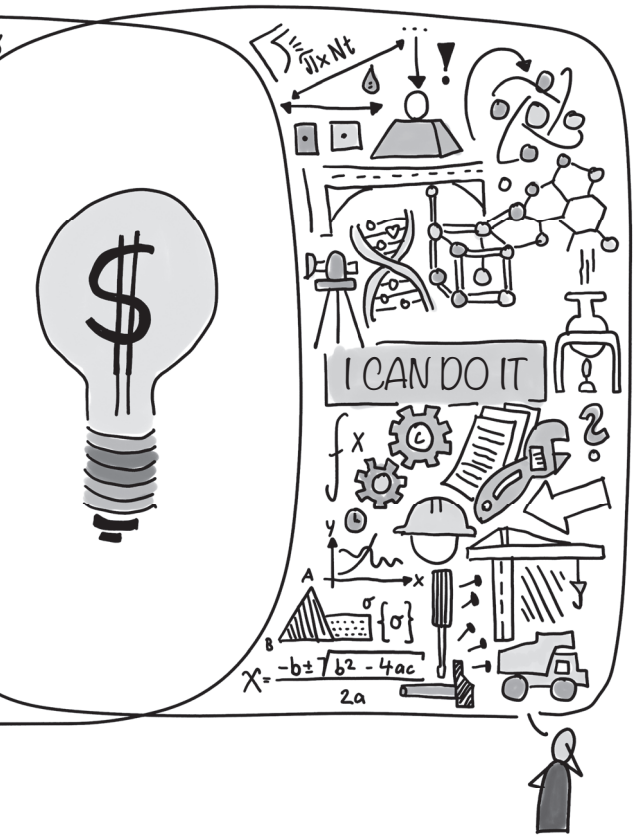
In large corporations, the changers often don’t find out the result of their decisions, because several office floors and many months lie between the idea and its execution. The further you distance yourself from the concrete effect of your decision, the easier it is to convince yourself that it was the right one. At the micro level, though, you can see the immediate results.

DevOps teams are an attempt to combine the micro and macro levels. The thinking behind this is that if changers are made to execute their own ideas, they’ll inevitably acquire a better understanding of the challenges their implementation presents. At the same time, the runners will discover that not every change is a threat.

DevOps doesn’t mean that everyone has to do everything. It doesn’t mean saying goodbye to the division of labour. All it means is that change and implementation go hand in hand, and that there is no theory without practice, no creator without a client.



When visionaries and creators collide, trouble ensues – or it might generate some great ideas.


I CAN DO IT
A
B
x
y
$x = \frac{-b \pm \sqrt{b^2 - 4ac}}{2a}$

HYBRID WORK: WHAT'S BETTER – WFH OR WFO?

The Covid pandemic has revealed an interesting fact about office life: many staff prefer to work from home – but managers like to have them in the office.

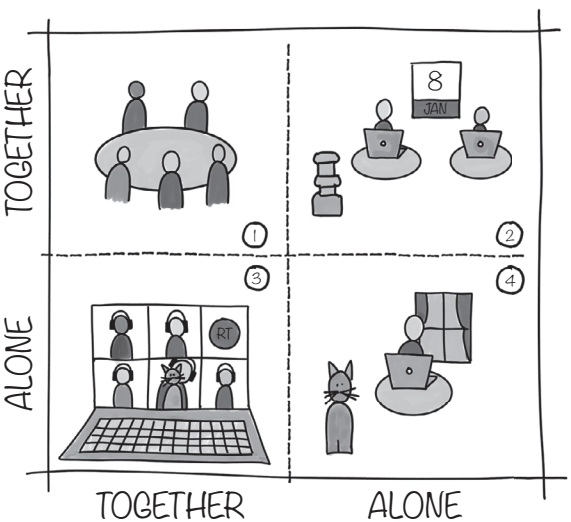
But which is better?

Both are.

Microsoft once conducted an investigation which showed that WFH is usually fine for existing teams, where everyone knows each other and is familiar with the processes, company culture and expectations. The problem, however, is the company's future: when people work remotely, relationships stagnate, and work becomes static and isolated. You end up with a silo mentality, which is bad for innovation – and really bad when it comes to onboarding new recruits.

The solution is a combination of WFH and WFO – working from home *and* working from the office. You can already see it happening in lots of companies, but what is the best way to deal with it? By way of an answer, Gartner, the consulting firm, suggests you ask these two questions: does everyone have to be in the same **place** when they work, and does everyone have to work at the same **time**?

Here is a matrix that shows four different working styles:



Knowing when to work with others and when to work alone is a useful skill to have.

Together together
Teams meet physically in the same place. Meetings, workshops and kick-off sessions are key to creating collective experiences and memories. For new staff, they are crucial for networking and familiarising themselves with the corporate culture.

Together alone
The teams are in the same place, but everyone works on their own. This means that they can focus on 'deep work', i.e. immerse themselves in one thing, without interruptions. At the same time, though, interactions with other people are definitely allowed, because you can't do deep work for ever. To facilitate both focused work and interaction between colleagues, office planners and interior designers have to think differently. What if we put an end to open-plan offices, and reintroduced doors?

Alone together
Teams work in different places, e.g. from home, but are connected virtually. Ah yes, the good old Zoom meeting. But here too we should open ourselves up to new possibilities: maybe not everyone needs to sit at home in front of a laptop in their pyjama bottoms – why not walk your dog during meetings, or hit the treadmill? One advantage of being physically in motion during meetings is that you won't be able to send emails or check social media at the same time, meaning that you'll pay more attention. (But don't do anything that will distract the other people on the call; turn the camera off if necessary. And always use the mute button.)

Alone alone
Teams work remotely and in shifts. If someone likes to start work early, they can, and if someone prefers to work through

the night, that's fine too. That way, everyone can get down to deep work whenever they like. To facilitate this way of working, though, we need to consider no-meeting days, no-message days and offline hours.