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Gartner for Marketing

CMO Guide to Successful Cross-Functional Collaboration

3 actions to break through
dysfunction and drive growth



Introduction

Chief marketing officers (CMOs) and their teams are increasingly involved in complex initiatives that require high cross-functional collaboration. However, cross-functional work has problems like conflicting priorities and dysfunctional group behaviors. CMOs must equip their teams to overcome organizational barriers to productive collaboration.

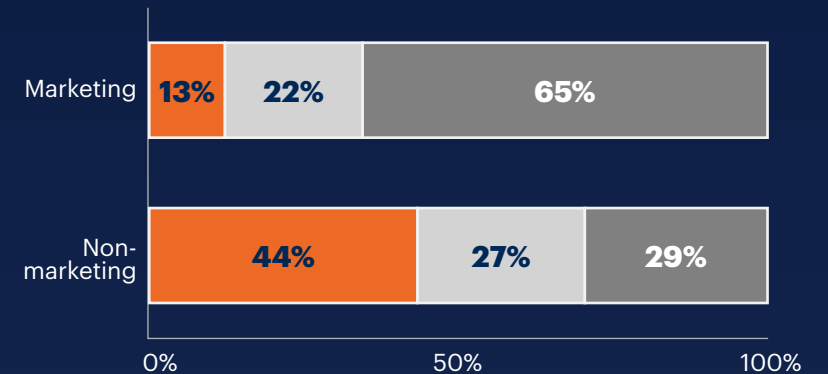
Use this eBook to reduce collaboration drag and boost performance outcomes through the following actions:



Marketing leaders' experience of cross-functional collaboration

“There are too many cross-functional initiatives happening at my company.”

Disagree Neither Agree



Marketing leaders spend **17% more time** at work collaborating cross-functionally than their nonmarketing counterparts.

Source: Gartner

Collaboration drag impedes profitable growth

Companies rely on cross-functional collaboration to drive revenue growth — and even more so for new commercial opportunities enabled by digital innovation and AI.

However, 82% of marketing employees report experiencing high collaboration drag: too many meetings, too much feedback from colleagues, unclear decision-making authority and too much time spent getting buy-in from stakeholders to make decisions.

Collaboration drag is pervasive in companies' most important growth initiatives (see figure). Companies where leaders report high collaboration drag are 37% less likely to exceed revenue and profit objectives.

As if missing objectives isn't bad enough, the experience of collaboration drag also has lasting negative effects on employees, making it harder for CMOs to retain and develop key talent.

Marketing employees who experience high collaboration drag are **15 times more** likely to feel burned out and **9 times more** likely to plan to leave the company in the next year.

Source: Gartner

Prevalence of collaboration drag

Percent of leaders reporting high collaboration drag by program

83% Omnichannel orchestration

68% Digital revenue strategy

81% Commercial team integration



Source: Gartner

1 Extend the impact of top-to-top collaboration

Can collaboration be saved? The answer is yes, but not in the way most people think. The first response, when cross-functional efforts stall, is typically an attempt to improve executive alignment. Widespread agreement on goals and priorities is, of course, crucial, but it's not enough on its own to dissipate the friction that breeds drag. In addition to looking outward and upward, CMOs should look within their functions.

The challenge becomes how to extend that alignment well below the C-suite, while still prioritizing the hard work of within-function enablement.

Take these actions to get more impact from executive-level engagement:



Segment stakeholders by their level of influence in, and support of, marketing's high-priority initiatives.



Match your stakeholder management techniques to each segment.



On an ongoing basis, monitor the strength of relationships with key C-suite collaborators, especially technology and innovation leaders.

Source: Gartner

Identify stakeholders and determine commitment by their level of support of marketing's high-priority initiatives

Cross-functional collaboration requires an understanding of key relationships and power dynamics across the enterprise. For marketing objectives and enterprise objectives in which marketing plays a role, map the teams or individuals who are responsible, accountable, consulted and informed (RACI).

Once you have identified all relevant marketing stakeholders, determine each stakeholder's level of engagement and support for marketing initiatives based on these criteria: awareness, desire, understanding, participation and advocacy.

To easily monitor stakeholder support, you can observe interactions with stakeholders and evaluate their behavior against the spectrum of buy-in.

Spectrum of buy-in

Supportive

-
- 5. Advocacy**
Sample indicators: Communication and reinforcement of the initiative's importance across all levels of the organization
 - 4. Participation**
Sample indicators: Active stakeholder engagement and provision of support to the initiative
 - 3. Understanding**
Sample indicators: Understanding of cross-functional requirements and functional expectations
 - 2. Desire**
Sample indicators: Willingness to learn more about the initiative and recognize benefits to the function
 - 1. Awareness**
Sample indicators: Awareness of initiative goals and who is sponsoring the initiative

Not
Supportive

Source: Gartner

Ask these questions to determine stakeholder commitment

To determine the level of commitment for each stakeholder, ask yourself the questions shown in the table below on an ongoing basis, tracking your perceptions (using “yes/no/unknown”) to determine where you need to focus your communication efforts.

Buy-In Stage	Questions
Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the stakeholder aware of the initiative’s goals and overall strategy? • Is the stakeholder aware of who is sponsoring or leading the initiative?
Desire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the stakeholder acknowledge the initiative’s benefits to their function/team? • Does the stakeholder want to learn more and be involved in the initiative?
Understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the stakeholder understand expectations for their function and for cross-functional collaboration? • Does the stakeholder understand expectations for the feasibility of the initiative?
Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the stakeholder actively participate in, engage with and make resources and budget available to support the initiative?
Advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the stakeholder advocate for the initiative to others in their function and to peers across the organization?



2 Invest in developing your marketing talent

Our research finds that most marketers want to develop critical skills in the next 12 months. However, employees may not have a complete picture of the skills they will need for successful collaboration. There are three unique skill types that marketing leaders must invest in to enable productive collaboration with other teams:

- Interpersonal influence skills
- Critical thinking skills
- Technical skills

Each of these skill types is useful in cross-functional contexts. For instance, developing critical thinking skills helps support marketing's evolution from order-takers to strategic business partners who understand how their work connects to enterprisewide business objectives.

When CMOs make talent development a priority, their teams are more capable of productive collaboration.

Take these actions to upskill marketing talent for the rigors of cross-functional work:



Coach your managers to emphasize the importance of building interpersonal skills to overcome collaboration drag.



Encourage all marketers to develop a baseline proficiency in influence, critical thinking and technical skills.



Build on-the-job learning programs to unlock practical mastery in must-have skills.

Source: Gartner

Case study: Raiffeisen Bank International (RBI)

Building an on-the-job learning program

RBI underwent a major tech transformation to achieve data-driven customer engagement. However, simply introducing employees to the new CRM platform and martech tools wasn't enough. To reach company goals, RBI developed a comprehensive learning program.

This program is available to all employees involved with CRM, not just marketers. RBI determined that to get employees to collaborate and think differently, they all must partake in the training together.

A key unique selling point of the learning program are the practice learning sessions, where marketers work with peers from other areas to practice real-life scenarios on new platforms with guidance from a coach.

RBI has seen positive results from this investment, with program graduates collaborating more effectively, completing more technical work in-house, and driving cost savings and revenue growth.

Essential program components for employee skill development

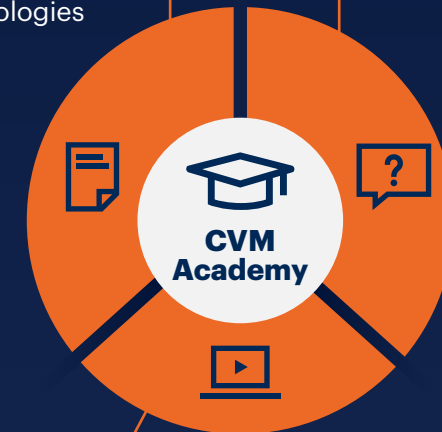
Illustrative

Theory sessions

Designed to familiarize employees with new tools and/or methodologies

Ask-the-expert sessions

Functioning like group Q&As, staffed by experts



Practice sessions

Structured as do-it-yourself learning sessions to help marketers work alongside cross-functional peers to practice real-life use cases on new platforms

Source: Adapted from Raiffeisen Bank International



3 Improve internal workflows and clarify marketing's role

The final piece of the solution is optimizing internal marketing workflows, clarifying the scope of marketing's involvement in cross-functional programs and defining how decisions should be made. This, in turn, requires a dedicated approach to managing change within the marketing function.

Take these steps to improve how marketing work gets done:



Guide your marketing operations team to audit all committed projects, map key processes and understand pain points.



Document shared goals, checkpoints and charters for complex projects to provide strategic clarity about marketing's role and the decision-making process.



Structure your team's participation to more easily track and demonstrate concrete impact on initiative results.

Source: Gartner

Template for auditing the work the marketing team is doing

Marketing operations leaders are often responsible for process improvements, but are not sure where to start given the scope and scale of marketing work. Begin by auditing marketing work with an inventory and analysis using the criteria below.

Work	Initiator	Owner	Priority	Effort	Scope	Functions
Identifier for the work (i.e., project name)	Who is requesting or initiating the work	Who is responsible for delivery of the work	Relative priority of the work	Estimated level of time, budget and resources required	Scale and frequency of work: initiatives, projects, ad hoc requests, recurring tasks	Marketing function participation required for work delivery

- First meet with designated individuals from each team to inventory work across all of marketing.
- **Tip:** Focus on capturing the key kinds of work the team delivers, not every one-off task.
- Example: "Create new collateral for product launch" is relevant. "Rotate an image by 90 degrees" is not.

- Gaining agreement on relative priority is more important than the definition of levels. Levels can be as simple as high, medium or low. Define priority relative to impact on business objectives, not seniority of initiator.
- If you do not have well-defined estimation practices, you can use "t-shirt sizing" for effort: x-small, small, medium, large, x-large based on perceived level of effort.

Actionable, objective insight

Position your marketing organization for success. Explore these additional complimentary resources and tools for marketing leaders:

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Marketing Talent Trends

Learn how CMOs should hire and upskill their teams to be future ready.

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CMOs, Break Through Dysfunctional Collaboration to Drive Growth

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