

# Inside the black box of collaboration: commercial strategy teams in the hotel industry

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## Message to the reader

I have dedicated approximately 325 hours reading, thinking, writing, deleting, drafting, struggling, structuring... working on this thesis. Throughout this process, my primary focus has been you, the reader. I aimed to create a thesis that is easy to understand, interesting to read and insightful. I wanted to avoid writing just another academic paper that is forgotten once assessed.

Therefore, the writing style, language, and structure of this thesis differ from what you might typically see. It includes questions, checklists, analogies, and examples, all explained in simple language while still based on academic research. I strongly believe that if someone cannot explain a topic in simple words, they do not fully understand it, no matter its complexity.

I recommend reading this thesis chapter by chapter, as each builds upon the last. While you can jump to sections of interest from the table of contents, doing so might mean missing out on essential background information and context.

I hope that after reading this thesis, you will become curious about the topic and that it will lead you to more questions.

Enjoy the reading!

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26th May 2024

Lviv, Ukraine

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# **1. BACKGROUND**

## **1.1 Setting the Stage: Commercial Strategy Team**

If you are working in one of the commercial departments in the hotel industry, you've likely heard about the commercial strategy team. With professionals in the field increasingly focusing on this topic, industry articles discussing it have become more prevalent. Despite the growing relevance, it is interesting to note that the term 'commercial strategy team' *has yet to be defined* in the academic literature.

To bring clarity to this thesis, it is essential to define what is meant by 'commercial strategy team' when used in this context. Despite several industry articles discussing commercial strategy teams, no consensus exists on a precise definition. Estis Green (2023) describes a 'commercial strategy unit' as encompassing revenue, sales, digital along with operations teams. Similarly, The Hospitality Sales and Marketing Association International (2023) and Hesel (2020) include sales, marketing, revenue, and sometimes distribution within a commercial strategy team's disciplines. Walters (2023) suggests uniting revenue, sales, and marketing under a single team.

To simplify varying organisational structures in the hotel industry, this thesis defines commercial strategy team as a team of executives in sales, revenue, and marketing at a company's corresponding level (hereinafter referred to as Director of Sales, Director of Revenue, and Director of Marketing, respectively). Commercial director is the person who is responsible for the commercial strategy team at a company's corresponding level. At the highest level of a company in the hotel industry, such a position is referred to as Chief Commercial Officer. However, as this thesis looks into commercial strategy teams at different levels, it is more accurate to use the term Commercial director.

The term "team" is used intentionally in this thesis. Even though "group" and "team" are often used interchangeably and share common characteristics, subtle but critical distinctions set them apart. The differentiation is context-sensitive, varying across domains such as psychology, sports, and organizational behavior.

For the purpose of this thesis, a specific definition of a team is adopted: "A team is a relatively small group of people working on a clearly defined, challenging task that is most efficiently completed by a group working closely and interdependently rather than individuals working alone or in parallel; who have clear, shared, challenging, team-level objectives derived directly from the task; who have to work together to achieve these objectives; who members work in distinct roles within the team; and who have the necessary authority, autonomy, and resources to enable them to meet the team's objectives" (West, 2012, p.28). This definition provides technical characteristics of a team

while remaining neutral about team dynamics. For instance, the definition states that team members “have to work closely and interdependently”, but it does not mention that they do work together, which is an important nuance to keep in mind while reading this thesis.

With critical definitions now clarified and established, let’s look into how the topic of collaboration within the commercial strategy team" gained significance.

## **1.2 How we got here**

Academic articles on the integration of various commercial departments began to appear in academic literature over the past two decades. For example, one of the first academic articles on this subject was published in 2003. Lieberman (2003) identified six criteria for a successful revenue management program which included measuring performance, developing supporting business policies and processes, ensuring decision-making and accountability, providing for career path and progression, knowing the limits of revenue management systems, and integration of revenue management with other departments such as advertising. Noone (2011) discussed the successful application of revenue management to additional revenue sources, such as function space and food & beverage outlets, highlighting the value of integrating revenue management with departments like sales to foster 'reciprocal understanding'.

Despite the existing studies on integration within certain commercial departments, there has been limited research on promoting a more holistic approach. However, over the last decade, different academics have begun to emphasize the importance of such an approach. For example, Kaye (2011) recommended fostering cooperation across marketing, sales, revenue management, customer relationship, and general management to boost customer retention. Additionally, Thompson (2017) highlighted the need for mutual understanding among commercial departments to achieve a holistic view and meet overall business objectives.

According to Talón (2021), the industry transition toward a holistic approach among revenue, sales, marketing, and finance departments has gained momentum since the COVID-19 pandemic. Singh (2020) mentioned that companies need to break down silos between departments because of the challenges caused by shutdowns. Following this idea, Biddle (2021) explained that commercial strategy teams were formed out of necessity during Covid-19 mainly because of limited resources that led to downsizing teams. This transition aligns with findings from the Flywheel Model of marketing management, which integrates operations, revenue management (RM), marketing, and communication into its analysis. The model revealed that revenue managers' strategies for navigating the COVID-19 crisis extended beyond revenue management to include operations, marketing, and communication.

Despite academic literature dating back over two decades about integrating some of the commercial departments, it is only recently that the industry has started to embrace a *holistic approach* on a large scale bringing revenue, sales and marketing under one commercial strategy team. Supporting this observation, Robert Gilbert, the Executive Director of the Hospitality Sales and Marketing Association International (HSMAI), a global association for hospitality industry revenue, sales, and marketing, discussed this commercial transition in his article. He noted an increase of more than double in the use of 'commercial' in titles as companies integrate commercial disciplines into a single team (Gilbert, 2022).

Both industry and academia acknowledge not only the importance of the commercial strategy team, but also the challenges of adopting this approach. At the same time, studies highlighting the benefit and importance of integration across commercial departments stress the accompanying challenges. For example, the study done by Noone (2011) reported two main challenges mentioned by sales and revenue managers: unstable markets and interdepartmental communication issues. Specifically, interdepartmental relationships include misunderstanding functions, conflicting performance measures, and misaligned goals. Even though the study was done more than a decade ago, the industry still reports the same challenges when it comes to interdepartmental relationships. For example, Thompson (2017) and Denizci Guillet and Chu (2021) identify the silo mentality as a primary obstacle to implementing a unified team approach. Strikingly, the word 'commercial' oftentimes appears hand in hand with terms such as 'silo' and 'collaboration' in industry articles (as shown below) indicating a recognized need to address this topic :

- [“From Silos to Synergy: Getting Commercial Teams on the Same Page”](#) by Lynn Zwibak
- [“How to execute a commercial strategy, break down silos and increase efficiency with the new overview”](#) by Phocus Wire [“Harnessing a holistic commercial strategy to break the ‘silo mentality’”](#) by The Hotel Year Book
- [“Hotels prioritize commercial strategy, benefit from cross-disciplinary approach”](#) by Hotel Dive
- [“A commercial team generates more profits than functions in silos”](#) by eHotelier

### **1.3 It is all about people**

The Covid-19 pandemic appeared to have accelerated this commercial transition. Many companies adopt a more holistic approach that involves creating a commercial strategy team. While undoubtedly beneficial, there are also challenges that come along with it. Firstly, it requires people to work in new ways, which can be difficult. As Denizci Guillet and Chu (2021, p. 624) aptly state, collaboration will require “leaders to step out of their comfort zones and work together”. Secondly, the challenge for Commercial directors

leading those teams lies not only in cross-functional understanding of various commercial disciplines but in getting these different departments to work well together. Moving away from a silo mentality to a collaborative approach is a change in how people behave at work. This also means that Commercial directors are challenged with a task that goes beyond expertise in commercial disciplines. It requires an understanding of human behaviour in organisational settings, in other words, organisational behaviour.

Teams are composed of "people who have a variety of emotional, social and other human needs that the team as a whole can either help to meet or frustrate. The idea that we can create effective teams by focusing simply on performance and ignoring the role of our emotions is based on the false premise that emotions can be ignored at work." (West, 2012, p.6). This also means that the challenge of collaboration in a commercial strategy team is not only a structural one. It is also a challenge that needs to be explored from the perspective of organisational behaviour, as collaboration is about people.

HRH The Duke of Edinburgh, as cited in Mullins and Dossor (2013, p. 342), states that "In the first place, good management depends on the acceptance of certain basic values... Secondly, it is the understanding of human foibles that we all share, such as jealousy, envy, status, prejudice, perception, temperament, motivation and talent, which provides the greatest challenge to managers."

#### **1.4 Research aim**

This thesis aims to explore why members of commercial strategy teams in the hotel industry might fail to collaborate effectively. Collaboration is examined through the lens of organizational behavior, specifically focusing on what can undermine the collaboration process. Unlike studies that investigate team composition, rewards systems, or leadership characteristics, this research explores potential pitfalls during the actual process of collaboration (in other words, when team members interact with each other).



## **2. FUNDAMENTALS**

"Fundamentals", is like the foundation for a house, essential for understanding the results of this research. Chapter I explains what teams are and how they differ from groups. It discusses why teams are formed, what types of teams there are, and the advantages and risks of teams. Then, the thesis shifts focus to its main topic: collaboration. Chapter II outlines the differences between collaboration and other ways of working together, such as cooperation, coordination and integration that are often mistakenly used interchangeably. The chapter explores how collaboration can vary depending on the context and introduces a team effectiveness model to help understand this complexity. Chapter III examines one part of this model called "Mediators," which covers team processes and emergent states.

### **2.1 Chapter I: Teams**

#### **2.1.1 Football team vs Tennis club**

*Opening question: What is the difference between a football team and a tennis club?*

One of the most important questions we need to address before proceeding is differentiating between teams and groups. Due to frequent interchangeability of these terms, understanding the difference is crucial. Specifically, this thesis focuses on collaboration within teams, not groups.

Although there is no universally accepted definition of a team and a group there are characteristics typically associated with each in the realm of organizational behavior. Let me remind you of the definition of a team adopted in this thesis: "A team is a relatively small group of people working on a clearly defined, challenging task that is most efficiently completed by a group working together rather than individuals working alone or in parallel; who have clear, shared, challenging, team-level objectives derived directly from the task; who need to work together to achieve these objectives; whose members occupy distinct roles within the team; and who possess the necessary authority, autonomy, and resources to meet the team's objectives" (West, 2012, p.28).

In this context, a team resembles a football team. Just as in a football team, where each player has a specific position with unique responsibilities, members of a team also have distinct roles based on their skills and the task's requirements. Whether it is winning a match on the playing field or achieving business objectives in organizational settings, a team's success relies on working together.

Alternatively, 'a group' is defined as two or more individuals who are connected to one another by their social relationships (Timothy, 2012).

Here, a group could be compared to a tennis club in individual competition. While tennis players may compete under the same 'flag', their success is measured individually. Each player's performance does not directly affect the others' outcomes. This illustrates the idea of groups where members might share a common identity or affiliation but work independently towards their own goals.

In our context, if the Director of Revenue, Director of Sales, and Director of Marketing do not need to work together to accomplish a common task that is best completed together rather than individually or in parallel, it forms a commercial strategy group. Conversely, if the Director of Revenue, Director of Sales, and Director of Marketing do need to work together to accomplish a common task that is best completed together rather than individually or in parallel, it forms a commercial strategy team.

This thesis focuses on 'a football team' because their success depends on working together, unlike in a tennis club, where members do not need to work together.

### **Closing question:**

Does your company have a (commercial strategy) team or a (commercial strategy) group? If you can tick off all the boxes, then it is a team.

Small group size

Clearly defined, challenging task

Task best completed by a team

Clear, shared, challenging objectives

Need to work closely and interdependently

Distinct roles within the team

Necessary authority, autonomy, and resources

### **2.1.2 Building a house vs Painting a wall**

*Opening question: Why do teams exist?*

An important aspect of a team is that it works on tasks best completed by working together rather than individually or in parallel. To illustrate this point, let's examine why teams are formed in the first place. Put simply, we create teams because they enable us to accomplish what would otherwise be unattainable (West, 2012).

Teams provide numerous benefits on individual, team and organizational levels. Working in teams fosters a sense of belonging and community, fulfilling individuals' innate needs for social interaction and affiliation (Khawam et al, 2017). This sense of community can lead to increased job satisfaction and well-being, reducing workplace stress and turnover. The mere existence of team-based organisation is linked to innovative performance (Hoegl. and Proserpio, 2004). West (2012) suggests that organizations characterized by strong teamwork are quicker at decision-making and problem-solving in fast-changing environments. Organizations anticipate enhanced performance, creativity, learning, and employee engagement when working in teams. As Mullins (2013) pointed out, teamwork is not optional anymore, it is necessary in a successful organisation”.

In the organizational context, teams play a crucial role as they are expected to execute tasks more effectively and efficiently than individuals working alone to achieve organizational objectives overall. They have become a way to combine efforts to achieve common goals. Therefore, the sole purpose of creating a team is to get a task completed in the most effective and efficient way. Creating a team just for the sake of it is like setting out to sea to sail, but without a clear destination, the team will end up just drifting aimlessly. As West (2012, p. 251) stated, “The point of having a team is because there is a task that requires a team.”

*Consider the case of building a house:*

Why do we use construction teams instead of individuals? Because building a house is a complex task that is most efficiently and effectively completed by a team working together, leveraging their diverse skills and expertise. Each member of the construction team brings a specialized skill set—carpenters, electricians, plumbers, and architects—all working together not just for the sake of it, but with the specific task of constructing a house.

*Now consider the case of painting a wall:*

While building a house is a complex task and requires a team effort, painting a wall is best done by an individual. There is no need to create ‘a painting team’ because the task is best completed individually.

**Closing question:**

Is your (commercial strategy) team building a house or painting a wall? It will give you the answer whether you need a team in the first place (based on the current task).

### **2.1.3 Commercial Strategy Team**

*Opening question: What dictates team characteristics?*

According to Katzenbach (1993), each type of team encounters a unique set of challenges. Thus, identifying a team's characteristics is essential for understanding its potential challenges. Despite the increasing application of teams in organizational settings, no widely accepted typology of teams exists (Dunford, 1999). This variability arises because different researchers propose team types based on different factors. For instance, Katzenbach (1993) classified teams based on effectiveness, identifying three types: teams that recommend things, teams that make or do things, and teams that run things, with this classification largely centred on the team's task and composition. Guzzo (1996) organised teams based on the work they perform, thus focusing on tasks for research purposes. Later, Cohen and Bailey (1997) acknowledged the lack of a single team typology but noted overlapping ones, suggesting four organizational team types: work, parallel, project, and management teams, based on duration, composition, and task. Abbott (2006) differentiated teams into two broad categories: consultative and substantive, with the key distinction being the members' authority to implement solutions. The previously cited book "Effective Teamwork" by West (2012) identified four key dimensions on how teams differ: degree of permanence, emphasis on skill/competence development, genuine autonomy and influence, and level of task from routine to strategic. Alblas and Wijsman (2019) in their textbook "Organisational Behaviour", categorize teams into administrative/management, executive, self-managing, and virtual teams from an organizational structure perspective, focusing on task, duration, composition, and proximity to one another.

As there is no exhaustive list of team types, identifying the type of a commercial strategy team is not feasible. However, it is possible to identify the main characteristics of a commercial strategy team. One common element across all these studies is the inclusion of a task to define their team typology. Task is the most crucial aspect of a team, as it is the sole purpose of why teams exist, and it dictates other characteristics such as size, duration, level of difficulty, etc. For instance, a team task like writing an organization-wide strategy already dictates the team composition, requiring various functions and high-level executives.

Therefore, in order to identify characteristics of a commercial strategy team in the hotel industry we need to look at the team task first.

As mentioned earlier, the term 'commercial strategy team' is not coined in academic literature. Therefore, to understand the task of a commercial strategy team, I explored industry articles and reports, consulting the insights of commercial strategy team members. Although responses varied, several recurring themes emerged.

According to McGuire and Guglielmetti (2023, p. 98), a commercial strategy team "strategizes things like special event periods, long-term planning, marketing initiatives and needs and group prospects and the impact". Hill and Green (2021), when discussing the commercial strategy team, refer to the integration of revenue generation, profit contribution, commercial analysis, and sales deployment, among others, to align strategic and tactical actions. Helsel (2021) mentions that the commercial strategy team needs to pursue common revenue goals to contribute to gross operating profit and revenue per available room (RevPAR) index. Green et al. (2023) add that members of the commercial strategy team should expand their roles to participate in strategic decisions regarding planning and resource allocation.

Also, the job description of Chief Commercial Officers provides insights into the team's task. For example, CCOs are tasked with aligning functional areas to drive the overall strategic direction of revenue. This role requires a "long-term strategic view of sustainable revenue generation from their best customers, as opposed to short-term revenue maximization" (McGuire, 2016, p. 212).

**Closing question:**

What is the task of your commercial strategy team? Does it share the same characteristics?

*The next chapter will look into on an important concept: collaboration. Now that we understand what a team is, let's look at how it looks in teams. Collaboration is more than just people working together; it is different from cooperation, coordination and integration. Although collaboration can happen between individuals, teams, organizations, or even countries, this thesis will specifically explore how it happens within teams.*

## 2.2 Chapter II: Collaboration

### 2.2.1 Ways of working together

*Opening question: What is the difference among cooperation, coordination, collaboration and integration?*

Collaboration is one of the most commonly used terms to describe 'working together'; however, it is just one of the ways. Cooperation, coordination, and collaboration are often used interchangeably to describe people working together towards a common goal (Keast et al., 2007). Integration is another term that has been diversely understood and conceptualized across disciplines, often leading to confusion about its meaning (Barki and Pinsonneault, 2005). While all these terms relate to working together, understanding the nuanced differences between them is essential.

The definitions of these terms vary depending on the discipline and industry. This thesis focuses on literature related to organisational behaviour to explore these concepts.

#### *Cooperation*

In cooperation, each department remains completely separate, retaining their autonomy and resources (Keast et al., 2007). They perform their tasks individually, taking into account and accommodating each other's goals. Cooperation mainly involves information sharing where alignment is needed. It refers only to the implementation of a goal rather than its determination (Castañer and Oliviera, 2020)

#### *Coordination*

As departments within an organization increase, the need for coordination between different organizational units becomes crucial. Organizations appoint someone to ensure proper coordination between these units (Alblas and Wijsman, 2019). Coordination has an instrumental function, with units remaining separate but working together towards a common goal. It involves joint information sharing, planning, and possibly joint funding (Keast et al., 2007), focusing on established goals.

#### *Collaboration*

This term describes a complex form of working together, requiring strong linkages among members. Even though members are independent, they view themselves as interdependent while collaborating to achieve a common goal (Keast et al., 2007).

Collaboration extends beyond sharing resources and aligning activities to work towards systemic change. It is particularly effective in complex situations where cooperation and coordination are insufficient (Keast et al., 2007).

#### *Integration*

Integration encompasses a broader concept than the previous ones. Its definition varies

depending on the context, such as management strategy, operations, information systems (Barki and Pinsonneault, 2005). A common theme is the formation of a single entity. Haig et al. (2009) defines it as involving common governance, organisation, and structure, representing a fully connected system even at the structural level, going beyond collaboration.

Cooperation is the most simple way of working together, engaging in minimal interaction. Moving beyond cooperation, coordination requires team members to organize their efforts, ensuring activities are aligned and synchronized as task complexity increases. In collaboration, there's a substantial increase in interaction as team members work together, leveraging their combined resources to accomplish complex tasks that would be unattainable through coordination of activities. Integration goes beyond merely working together as it requires a structural change to form a single (integrated) unit.

Exploring these concepts separately is simpler than combining them to pinpoint differences. However, using traffic situations as an analogy helps clarify how these forms of working together differ.

#### *Consider this analogy*

In an imaginary small village with around 30 inhabitants, a few own cars. With such a small number of drivers, there's no need for a coordinated traffic system. Instead, drivers naturally cooperate, giving the road to each other.

Years pass, and the village grows, now with 150 inhabitants and an increased number of drivers. With the rise in traffic and complexity, car incidents become more frequent, highlighting the need for traffic coordination as cooperation is not enough anymore. The village responds by installing traffic lights to coordinate traffic.

As time goes on, the village grows and begins to resemble a city, attracting more residents. However, this growth brings traffic congestion problems. The existing traffic lights, while helpful, are insufficient for the increasing city's needs. A team of different areas is assembled to solve a problem, leading to the implementation of a city-center bicycle system - a new solution. This initiative represents collaboration, solving complex issues through unified efforts (when coordination is not sufficient).

The city continues to thrive and expand, attracting companies and new residents, increasing the demand for a comprehensive transportation strategy. It becomes apparent that a broader, systemic change is necessary to accommodate bicycles, buses, trains, and ensure road safety while managing the city's capacity. This means building new roads, connecting with other cities, and making delivery services faster to keep up with city life. This situation calls for an integrated approach as collaboration alone can not tackle the city's complex, evolving transportation needs as it requires a *structural* change.

All of these are ways of working together, and none is right or wrong; rather, they serve different purposes. Moreover, all of them are necessary. It is about mixing and matching different ways of working together with tasks.

**Closing question:**

When does your commercial strategy team need to cooperate, coordinate, collaborate?

### **2.2.2 Conflict drives collaboration**

*Opening question: Why do we collaborate?*

All of the above-mentioned terms refer to types of linkages among people, departments, and organizations. However, the one that has been discussed the most recently is collaboration, which refers to more complex linkages (Jassawalla and Sashittal, 1999). The term itself originates in conflict management literature, where it is a method to reach win-win outcomes despite competing interests.

The word 'collaboration' has a Latin root, *collaborare*, which means working together (Maccoby, 2006). It has been extensively used by practitioners to describe a way of working together. However, even though it is widely used in everyday language, there is a lack of clear understanding of what collaboration is, and even more, how to improve it (Patel et al., 2012). One of the reasons is that definitions of collaboration in the literature are often adapted to the context.

Bedwell et al. (2012) identified that the majority of the literature refers to collaboration as a process rather than a prescribed state of organization. They suggest that people work together to achieve a desired outcome; however, the outcome itself is not collaboration. As Lewis (2006) said, "we do not have a collaboration, nor are we a collaboration; we engage in collaboration" (cited in Bedwell et al., 2012, p 130). Collaboration is characterized by interdependence that brings members of a team together around issues that concern everyone (Keast et al., 2014). Bedwell et al. (2012) does not exclude that members might have simultaneously conflicting goals; however, they must have at least one common goal. In fact, that's the reason why they need to collaborate. If they have only conflicting goals, then it reflects more negotiation rather than collaboration (Bedwell et al., 2012). Having no conflicting goals at all does not require collaboration. In fact, it can be argued that the best incentive for collaboration is conflict, as competing members are drawn together for the simple reason to advance their individual interests (Kramer, 1990). According to Gray (cited in Kramer, 1990, p. 545), "opportunities for collaborating are arising in countless arenas in



which business, government, labor, and communities are finding their actions interconnected." Collaboration is needed to work through conflicts to achieve their common goals.

Collaboration is not limited to teams; it can be among individuals, departments, companies, and even societies. However, this thesis focuses only on collaboration in teams. Bruns (2013) suggests that collaboration requires individuals from different expertise to work together to achieve what one of them could not have done individually.

The following definition will be used in the context of this thesis: Collaboration is a process where two or more interdependent members of a team from different expertise work together to accomplish at least one common (complex) task.

**Closing question:**

Does your commercial strategy team have a common goal to collaborate?

**2.2.3 Lemons in, Lemonade out**

*Opening question: Why does collaboration not always improve team performance?*

Collaboration within groups can be tricky and often runs into problems (Alblas and Wijsman, 2019). Team's overall performance often does not equate to the sum of what each member could achieve independently, raising the critical question of why collaboration does not always enhance team performance.

McGrath (1964) conceptualized team effectiveness based on the input-process-output framework, which has shaped theory and research on team effectiveness for decades (Ilgen & Kozlowski, 2006). In this framework, 'inputs' refer to individual, team, and organizational characteristics; 'processes' to the activities that team members engage in to accomplish a task; and 'outputs' to the performance outcomes. Essentially, processes translate inputs into outputs.

Later, Hackman and Morris (1975) suggested that the key to understanding group effectiveness lies in the process, or in other words, in the interaction between team members while they are working on a task (see Figure 1). They reported substantial agreement in the academic literature that something happens during this process that affects the output. They suggested that a single theory cannot explain all factors affecting team effectiveness due to its complexity. Their framework builds on the input-process-output model, focusing on how different variables (including context and team tasks) impact

the outcome.

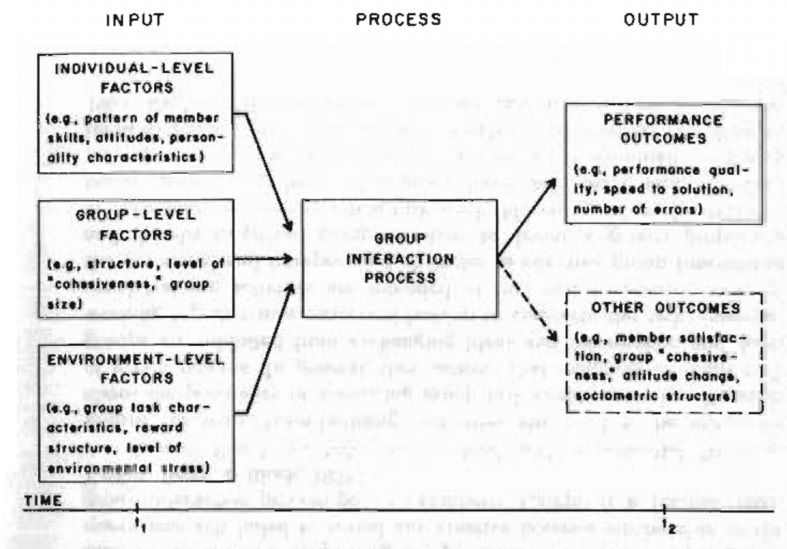


Figure 1: A traditional paradigm for analysis of group interaction as a mediator of performance outcomes. (Adapted from McGrath, 1964, as cited in Hackman and Morris, 1975, p. 6)

Subsequently, Ilgen et al. (2005) suggested incorporating the concept that team dynamics are cyclical—meaning a team's outputs can become inputs for subsequent tasks (see Figure 2). This model also considers teams from individual, team, and organizational perspectives. Inputs encompass various resources, such as team composition, organizational structure, rewards, among others. Processes include team processes and emergent states, leading to outcomes typically associated with team effectiveness.

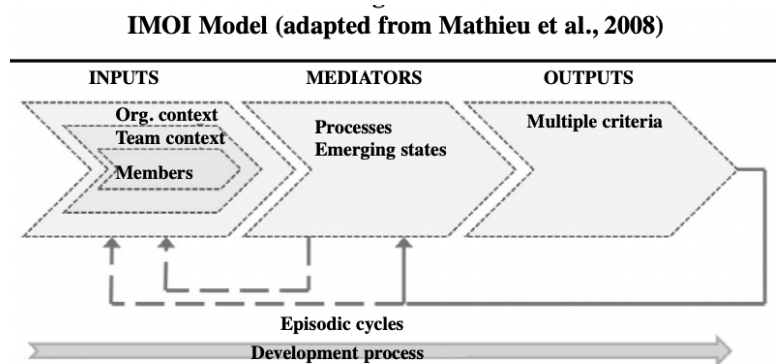


Figure 2: IMO Model (adapted from Mathieu et al., 2008, as cited in Rico, de la Hera, and Tabernero, 2011, p. 59)."

These frameworks serve as a foundation for frameworks related to collaboration. Bedwell et al. (2012) emphasized the lack of clarity regarding what constitutes collaboration both conceptually and practically. This concept has been explored across diverse disciplines, including organizational behavior, management, environmental science, communication,

education, sociology, anthropology, history, and medicine, each offering its unique perspective on collaboration. Bedwell et al. (2012) developed an overarching theoretical framework for collaboration that is broad enough to be applicable across various contexts and practical enough to inform Human Resource Management practices. This framework is based on the Input-Mediator-Output-Input (IMOI) model suggested by Ilgen et al. (2005). The IMOI model differs from Input-Process-Output (IPO) model mainly in its cyclical structure and broader focus. The IPO model follows a linear sequence from inputs through processes to outputs, the IMOI model includes an additional stage where outputs feed back as inputs, emphasizing continuous cycle. Additionally, the IMOI model replaces 'Processes' with 'Mediators' to account for a wider range of variables including affective, behavioral, and cognitive factors, highlighting the dynamic and evolving nature of team interactions.

In Bedwell et al.'s collaborative framework (2012), entity characteristics and individual characteristics serve as inputs; emergent states and collaboration behaviour act as mediators; and distal collaboration outcomes are considered outcomes (see Figure 3). The process of collaboration bridges inputs and outputs, encompassing emergent states and collaborative behaviours.

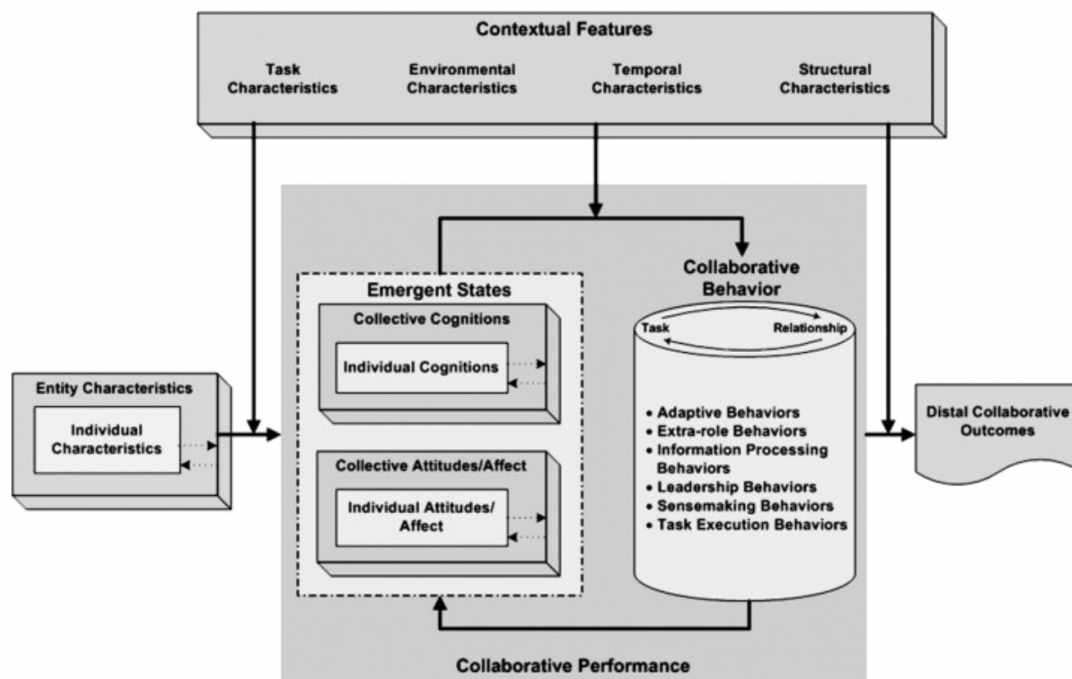


Figure 3: Collaborative performance framework (Bedwell et al., 2012, p. 137).

Collaboration may vary with context; however, this IMOI framework aids in identifying factors that hinder or promote effective collaboration in a given context (Bedwell et al., 2012). The nature of teams is dynamic, evolving, and interconnected. Collaboration, as with team effectiveness, is a highly complex concept, with many variables impacting the output,

some within and some outside the team's control.

This thesis aims to improve collaboration by focusing solely on the mediators of the IMOI model (team processes and emergent states), as they are controllable by a team. Altering inputs, such as the rewards system or organisational structure, is beyond the scope of this thesis and, thus, not further explored.

Consider a simple analogy: A chef seeks to improve the performance of the kitchen team (the outcome) with the given staff, tools, training, ingredients, and compensation (the inputs). Given that these inputs may not be (immediately) controllable by either the team or the chef, the chef can nevertheless improve team performance. This could be achieved, for instance, by improving communication (a team process) or team spirit (an emergent state).

Similarly, this thesis does not propose changing the composition of a commercial strategy team or the acquisition of new technology. Instead, it aims to explore mediators to improve how members of the commercial strategy team collaborate to complete tasks, in other words, this thesis will look into what happens in the kitchen.

**Closing question:**

When your commercial strategy team thinks of collaboration, do you only consider team composition, technology (other inputs), or do you also 'look into the kitchen'?

*We have explored what collaboration is and how it works through the team effectiveness model. In the next chapter, we will focus on a key part of the model known as "Mediators." These are often seen as the hidden elements of collaboration. Specifically, we'll look into process losses, which are often the reasons why teams fail.*

## 2.3 Chapter III: Mediators

### **2.3. Black box of collaboration**

*Opening question: What happens inside the black box of collaboration?*

According to Alblas and Wijsman (2019), the primary reason why teams are not always effective is often attributed to 'process losses.' Process losses in teams refer to the phenomenon where the collective performance of a group is lower than the sum of its individual members' potential performances. This typically occurs because something is lost in the process of people working together. Steiner termed this "process losses," which are "any losses due to faulty processes of teams" (Franz, 2012). Lampridis (2000) examined these process losses across various tasks and proposed a simple formula: Actual productivity = Potential productivity - Process loss. This formula can be adapted to our context as follows: Actual outcome of collaboration = Potential outcome of collaboration - Process loss.

The existence of process losses challenges the intuitive assumption that groups naturally outperform individuals due to pooled resources and collective effort. Steiner suggested that there are two main sources of process loss in simple tasks: "coordination losses, which occur when group members fail to combine their efforts optimally, and motivation losses, which occur when group members fail to achieve an optimal level of motivation" (Lampridis, 2000). It is suggested that understanding the team task is crucial to predicting team performance, as it allows the identification of what activities a team will engage in to complete a task, and hence, potential process losses.

Before looking into process losses, it is important to zoom into mediators of the IMOI model: team processes and emergent states. Understanding those helps to see process losses that might occur, and hence, minimize those.

Team processes are defined as "the activities that team members collectively engage in, utilizing their resources to meet task demands; thus, processes transform inputs into outcomes" (Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006, p. 79). Wang (2018) suggests that the efficacy of these team processes directly influences team performance. The nature of these processes varies depending on the task, essentially combining and coordinating individual and collective abilities to address the task. Importantly, these processes are controllable by team members, as they pertain to collaborative work efforts. These activities aim to organize the work required to complete a task as a team, with the goal of achieving collaborative

outcomes. Collaboration is regarded as a process rather than an outcome, with the outcome varying based on the team task.

Marks et al. (2001) provided a similar definition of team processes as "members' interdependent acts that convert inputs to outcomes through cognitive, verbal, and behavioral activities directed toward organizing taskwork to achieve collective goals." He sought to develop a taxonomy of processes broad enough to apply to different types of teams and specific enough for research and application. Three categories were identified: transition phase, action phase, and interpersonal process. He argued that some processes are likely to occur at different stages, with interpersonal processes occurring throughout the whole process. Transition phase processes are periods when teams focus on evaluation and planning of their activities, for example, strategy formulation. Action phase processes are periods when teams actually execute those activities, for example, strategy implementation. Interpersonal processes occur during both phases and describe the processes that teams use to manage interpersonal relationships, for example, conflict management during disagreement on strategy. Their study does not propose an exhaustive list of processes as it varies across contexts. They acknowledge that some processes might not be applicable to certain types of teams and some processes might not be included in their taxonomy. Examples of their processes are coordination, affect management, systems monitoring, goal specification.

Kozlowski and Ilgen (2006) classified team processes into cognitive, affective/motivational, and behavioral, which aligns with the classification proposed by Marks et al. (2001). Essentially, this categorization divides processes into thinking (cognitive), doing (behavioral), and feeling (affective/motivational). Similarly, their study does not suggest an exhaustive coverage of every possible process.

As there is no exhaustive list of team processes, the following examples aim to give a general idea of what team processes during collaboration entail in different contexts.

Patel et al. (2012) developed a framework for collaborative working within multidisciplinary teams in the engineering and construction sectors. They categorized the main factors into several groups: context, support, tasks, interaction processes, teams, individuals, and overarching factors. Interaction processes include learning (task and personal), coordination (goal setting, planning, scheduling, monitoring, etc.), communication (understanding each other, sharing knowledge, etc.), and decision-making.

Warner et al. (2005) suggest that when military teams collaborate to solve a problem, they go through four stages: knowledge construction (building individual and team task knowledge); collaborative team problem-solving (communicating to develop options for the

problem); team consensus (negotiating solution options and reaching a final agreement); and outcome evaluation and revision (evaluating the selected solution option against the goal and revising if needed).

Kee et al. (2023) examined the behavioural processes underlying effective collaboration in integrated care within the healthcare sector. They developed a conceptual framework showing how, when, and why team members of integrated care collaborate, which, in this case, is a joint decision-making process. They outlined three behavioural processes: sharing one's own interests, values, and perspectives; listening to the information shared by other actors; and thoroughly processing the information shared by other factors.

Sicotte et al. (2002) examined collaboration in interdisciplinary primary healthcare teams. They suggested six dimensions as intragroup process variables: the belief in the benefits of interdisciplinary collaboration; group cohesiveness or social integration within the team; conflict (relationship- and task-related) resulting from the collaboration; attitudes describing traditional professional logic; attitudes associated with interdisciplinary logic; and workgroup design characteristics.

Mulvale et al. (2016) suggested a gear model for collaboration in interprofessional primary care teams. They divided processes into two groups: social (levels of conflict, open communication, supportive colleagues) and formal (team vision/goals, quality audit/process, recognition, group problem-solving, team meetings, decision-making).

While team processes are commonly categorized into cognitive, behavioral, and affective/motivational, it is important to recognize that they are context-specific. As shown by the examples above, team processes vary significantly depending on the context in which they operate. This underscores the importance of contextual understanding in identifying team processes.

The same as team processes, emergent states vary depending on the context. Marks et al. (2001) suggested that emergent states are products of team experiences. In other words, they emerge from team processes, and they do not describe the nature of member interactions but rather its attitudes, values, cognitions, and motivations. Emergent states are "constructs that characterize properties of the team that are typically dynamic in nature and vary as a function of team context, inputs, processes, and outcomes" (Marks et al., 2001, p. 357). As emergent states arise from team processes, emergent states were categorized into cognitive, behavioural, and affective/motivational as well. They can be seen as the echoes of repeated team processes (Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006). Rapp et al. (2021) aimed to develop a taxonomy of team emergent states, which is in line with the one proposed by Marks et al. (2001). However, they added that some of the states fit into two categories. Two more categories were added: cognitive-affective and cognitive-motivational. The same as with team processes, there is no exhaustive list of emergent states. The following list

shows the most researched team emergent states: cohesion, psychological safety, trust, climate, confidence, and cognition (Rapp et al., 2021).

Essentially, team processes entail what is happening, and emergent states result from these processes (attitudes, values, cognitions, and motivations). Team processes and emergent states are mediators in the IMOI model of team effectiveness. Team processes are activities that teams engage in to complete tasks (e.g. decision-making, information-sharing etc.). Emergent states are the products of team processes (e.g. trust, respect etc.). Process loss occurs when 'something goes wrong' in these processes. For example, conflict (a process loss) during decision-making (a team process) might arise due to a negative team climate (an emergent state), preventing the team from achieving its potential outcome. Process losses can result from poor team processes (e.g., poor communication) and negative emergent states (e.g., low morale).

Working in teams holds great promise, but the reality often falls short of expectations. Often, process losses interfere, creating a gap between the team's potential and the actual outcomes. Team processes and emergent states act as mediators that translate inputs into outputs. However, those mediators, along with the inputs and outputs, vary depending on the context.

*Consider this analogy:*

A teacher asks five students to move a bucket filled with 20 litres of water from one place to another. Each student can only carry 4 litres at a time. They manage to move the bucket, but when they arrive, they find only 18 litres left. Along the way, 2 litres were lost. This loss happened because they did not coordinate well on how to carry it carefully (team process), leading to conflicts (emergent state). These 2 lost litres are the result of "process losses." It means something went wrong during the process of carrying the bucket, resulting in less water than expected. The potential outcome was 20 litres, as each student could carry 4 litres individually, but the actual outcome was 18 litres due to process losses.

Actual outcome (18 litres) = Potential outcome (20 litres) - Process losses (2 litres)

**Closing question:**

Does your commercial strategy team always bring 20 litres?



### **3. METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Research objectives**

Main research question:

*How to improve the collaboration process in a commercial strategy team in the hotel industry?*

To address the main research question the following objectives were formulated:

1. To understand how a commercial strategy team in the hotel industry looks like.
2. To identify foundational elements of the collaboration process in a commercial strategy team in the hotel industry.
3. To understand the collaboration process in a commercial strategy team in the hotel industry.
4. To identify potential process losses during the collaboration process in a commercial strategy team in the hotel industry.

#### **3.2 Limitations**

Several limitations were identified in this study that could influence the applicability of the findings. Firstly, the absence of academic literature specifically addressing commercial strategy teams in the hotel industry meant reliance on industry articles and primary data from interviews, which may not provide a comprehensive overview. The research also depended heavily on the personal experiences and recollections of the interviewees, which can introduce a subjective bias, (potentially) limiting the scope of the responses.

Additionally, the initial plan for a single round of interviews had to be adjusted to include a second round to go more in-depth regarding collaboration. This decision left limited time for additional research and preparation, which may have affected the quality of the second round of interviews. Furthermore, the diverse backgrounds of the companies involved resulted in varied responses that may not be applicable across the whole hotel industry.

#### **3.4 Research Approach**

The study utilized a qualitative research approach to gain an in-depth understanding of collaboration as a process within commercial strategy teams in the hotel industry. This approach allowed for exploring such a complex phenomenon as collaboration, which involves understanding interpersonal interactions that might not be captured via a quantitative approach. Additionally, the qualitative approach helped to account for contextual factors that might have impacted responses. The study combined inductive and abductive reasoning.

The research process consisted of two distinct phases. First, general interviews were conducted to address Objective 1 (to understand what a commercial strategy team in the hotel industry looks like) and Objective 2 (to identify foundational elements of the collaboration process in a commercial strategy team in the hotel industry). This phase aimed at reaching thematic saturation with general questions about what a commercial strategy team is and how collaboration occurs in the given context.

As I moved through the different interviews, it became evident that collaboration is a much more complex topic, and exploring it in its entirety was too broad. During this phase, I returned to the literature to look into different aspects of collaboration and decided to focus on the aspect of process losses. This part, therefore, has been added at a later stage in the literature. This then also required a revision of my research questions and objectives to make them more specific.

Consequently, I conducted seven additional interviews focusing on collaboration processes and process losses. This phase of data collection was guided by both the emerging data from the initial interviews and the theoretical insights gained from academic literature. Subsequently, a second round of interviews was conducted aiming to achieve two additional objectives: Objective 3 (to understand the collaboration process in a commercial strategy team in the hotel industry) and Objective 4 (to identify potential process losses during the collaboration process in a commercial strategy team in the hotel industry).

In general, this inductive and abductive approach was used to develop a comprehensive understanding of the collaboration process and to produce more specific outcomes of the research, addressing a gap in academic research on commercial strategy teams in the hotel industry. This exploratory approach was justified by the lack of structured knowledge regarding collaboration in commercial strategy teams in the hotel industry.

### **3.5 Sampling, Recruitment, Interview Procedure**

Data was gathered through semi-structured interviews to explore collaboration processes within commercial strategy teams in the hotel industry. This interview format allowed for in-depth discussions while adapting to the flow of conversation. Two rounds of interviews were conducted following the same approach (only questions were different). The first round had eight interviewees, and the second round had seven.

The study used a non-probability sampling strategy, specifically using purposive and convenience sampling methods. This approach was justified by the need to gather detailed, experience-based insights from professionals with extensive and recent experience in the hotel industry in one or a few of the commercial departments such as sales, revenue, marketing, branding, e-commerce, distribution, and related. Some interviewees were not working in the hotel industry at the moment of the interview but had extensive and recent

experience in the hotel industry, ensuring they could provide valuable insights. Recent experience was an important criterion as the topic of the commercial strategy team is a recent one.

Interviewees were chosen from various companies that differed in structure in order to get a broad understanding of the hotel industry as a whole. All interviewees operated at the corporate level. The criteria for selecting interviewees remained the same both rounds of interviews as there was no need to change the criteria.

Initially, interviewees were selected through convenience sampling, using personal industry connections. Later snowball sampling was employed, where current interviewees recommended other potential interviewees. This diversity of interviewees in terms of countries, companies, types of companies, functional background, gender helped with contextual understanding of the study.

Recruitment for this study was conducted the same way for both rounds of interviews. All potential interviewees were approached via email, which included the purpose of the research and an invitation for an online interview. Given the international composition of interviewees, online interviews were the only feasible option. The invitation email provided a link where interviewees could select a one-hour time slot that best fit their schedule, allowing for immediate scheduling of the interview. In total, 17 interviews were conducted over two weeks, with no drop-outs.

All interviews were conducted online using Google Meets, except for one conducted on Microsoft Teams as requested by an interviewee. Only the researcher and the interviewee were present at interviews. Prior to the interviews, all interviewees signed a consent form offering three options of confidentiality (see appendix 3).

The majority of interviewees opted for full disclosure. At the start of each interview, a brief introduction was given to explain the focus of the research and the procedure, including the use of audio recording. Interviewees were informed about the research focus but were not provided with questions in advance.

All interviews were conducted in English as it was the only language that both the researcher and interviewees spoke (most of them were native English speakers). Interviews varied in duration from 40 to 60 minutes, depending on how much time interviewees needed to think before answering, how many examples they gave, and in general the way of answering questions.

The interview questions were predominantly open-ended, with some close-ended questions used for clarification. Following the interviews, the sessions were transcribed verbatim, excluding initial introductions and casual conversation at the start of the recordings. Repetitions and minor verbal fillers, as well as any disruptions due to connection issues, were removed from the transcripts to enhance clarity.

Based on the first interview from round one and the round two, minor adjustments were made to the questions. For example, the question, "What is the difference in the given examples of effective and ineffective collaboration?" was removed due to confusion and overlapping answers with previous questions. In the second round, certain questions such as, "Out of all these collaboration stages, which one tends to be the most frustrating, overlooked, and easy?" were removed due to confusion and overlapping answers with previous questions.

The interview guide for both rounds can be found in the appendix 1 and 2.

### **3.6 Data Analysis**

Thematic saturation was considered achieved after the initial eight interviews, as no new themes emerged that could further contribute to the understanding of the general topics of commercial strategy teams and collaboration. Therefore, a second round of seven interviews was conducted to go more in-depth about collaboration processes. After these additional interviews, it was again believed that thematic saturation had been reached. While further interviews might have provided additional (new) responses, the researcher believes that these would not likely introduce new themes to impact the overall research outcomes.

The coding of interview transcripts was done by the researcher only. The process involved open coding, where data were broken down into first-order codes, then grouped into more second-order codes, and then overarching themes were developed. These themes were not predefined but emerged from the data. Here is an example from the first phase: Ego as a source of conflict (first-order code) -> Conflict on personal level (second-order code) -> Emotionally safe environment (theme). Process of the thematic analysis for the second phase was a bit different. During the second phase the researcher was specifically looking for stages of collaboration and process losses, however, not predetermining what those might be.

All interview transcripts were stored in a Word document. The coding process was organized using an Excel spreadsheet. This setup enabled efficient sorting and filtering of codes, aiding in the identification and comparison of themes across different transcripts. Thematic analysis was used to identify, analyze, and report results for both rounds of interviews.

### **3.7 Ethical Considerations**

All interviewees were informed about the study's purpose, their involvement, and their rights in the consent form and introduction email. Interviewee data was handled according to their specified preferences from three available options: complete anonymity, partial anonymity, or full disclosure. They were informed that participation was entirely voluntary, with the right to withdraw at any time without any consequences.



## **4. RESULTS**

### **4.1. Round 1**

The first round of 8 interviews focused the following objectives:

1. To understand how a commercial strategy team in the hotel industry looks like.
2. To identify foundational elements of the collaboration process in a commercial strategy team in the hotel industry.

Table 1 shows interviewee profile in the round 1. Some interviewees at the moment of interview worked at a tech company providing services in the hotel industry. However, due to their extensive experience in the industry before joining tech companies they were still selected to participate in the research.

#	Gender	Based in	Background
1	Female	USA	Sales, Revenue, Marketing
2	Female	USA	Sales
3	Male	USA	Revenue, Distribution, Commercial
4	Male	USA	Revenue, Sales, Marketing
5	Male	Germany	Revenue
6	Female	Netherlands	Revenue
7	Male	USA	Commercial, Revenue
8	Female	USA	Revenue, Commercial

*Table 1: Overview of interviewees in the round 1*

#### **4.1.1 Commercial Strategy Team**

Results from eight interviews showed that the description of a commercial strategy team in the hotel industry varies greatly depending on the company.

##### **Core disciplines**

The results showed that all participants reported the inclusion of revenue management and sales as core disciplines in the commercial strategy team. However, the presence of other disciplines in the team varied significantly, and was often reflected by differences in

organizational size and scope of the company. For instance, interviewee 1 noted, "If we're talking about a brand with all of those representatives, there'd be a Head of Brand, a Head of Loyalty, a Head of Revenue, Distribution, Head of Sales and Digital Marketing." However, Interview 1 elaborates, "if you're in a management company or a smaller group, you have sales, marketing, revenue management, and distribution."

Interviewee 8's description of her team's structure further underscores this variability: "Structurally, I have three people [two area revenue directors and one sales director] reporting to me, but my impact and who I engage with really goes beyond who directly supports me," indicating a broader interaction across the commercial function, but sales & revenue keeping at the core.

### **Other disciplines**

All responses indicated an integration of marketing within commercial strategy teams, however, in different ways. For example, Interviewee 1's said: "We do not have nearly as many people in marketing as we do in sales and revenue. And so they can not be on an equal level from a communication standpoint, because they are spread much thinner than our sales and revenue teams." This suggests that marketing often operates with a lower profile compared to its revenue-generating counterparts.

In contrast, Interviewee 6 highlighted a more balanced approach, "There is a head of marketing...And then you have the commercial director. The commercial director looks after groups, sales, and demand [revenue] and distribution. The commercial director and then the head of marketing are at the same level. And then they report to the CCO [Chief Commercial Officer]" Here, marketing and commercial roles are equally positioned, both reporting to a Chief Commercial Officer.

A different division was shared by interviewee 4: "Not with my current organization. So marketing for us is split into two senior directors. So I oversee ecommerce and media spend. I have a counterpart who also reports to the Chief Commercial Officer. She's also a Senior Director of Digital but she does creative".

The involvement of other departments in commercial strategy teams varied based on specific operational needs. For example, Interviewee 6 said: "You will have revenue, group, sales from the commercial side of things, marketing will not participate here. And then you will have hotel managers for each hotel... and finance are just listening for the information." Interviewee 7 adds another layer to this discussion by introducing public relations into the commercial strategy team, "Another part that also gets included, which sometimes does not, is PR - public relations, which is another aspect of commercial strategy at the corporate level."

## **Leadership and Structure**

During the interviews it was emphasized that the leadership structure within the commercial strategy teams varied as well. Most interviewees reported the presence of a Chief Commercial Officer (CCO) on the highest level of the company. Interviewee 4 described a hierarchical yet specialized system: "There's a Chief Commercial Officer who oversees everything... and then there's my boss, the Senior Vice President of revenue, and then there's me." However, it is not common, yet present, to have commercial directors on other levels.

Interviewee 1's company is an example of a commercial strategy team without a CCO: "It is a combination of the sales and revenue leader, although, for the most part, sales textbook takes the driver's seat, but not always. It is an organic conversation amongst the sales and revenue leaders."

## **Core Task of the Commercial Strategy Team**

In exploring the specific role and responsibilities of commercial strategy teams, the interviews revealed consistency around two elements: strategy and revenue.

Interviewee 1 described it the following way: "Determining the marketing budget, determining the marketing plan, determining the key strategies for every hotel, so determining what those key strategies are and then once the strategies are determined, and the responsibilities are assigned." Interviewee 7 also mentioned the strategic element "So, a lot of it has to do with strategy, right? We have what we call a strategic business plan that outlines what we want to do for that hotel. Here are all the action items that we have."

Interviewee 3, as most other interviewees, talk about driving revenue as a team task: "A commercial strategy team would be responsible for all the revenues of a hotel right so or any entity but sales, marketing, revenue management, distribution, and some of the support functions too."

Another key task that came up most of the time included problem solving and identifying opportunities as Interviewee 2 said "...identifying the different places where initiatives will overlap and impact each other, identifying where potentially strategies or actions could hinder others...". However, interviewee 5 reported merely exchange of information "You know there were budget meetings, forecast meetings you call them or regular catch up. So there is some kind of exchange but from my personal experience, it is not developed well enough." Interviewees reported regular meetings and some more on the project basis, as interviewee 6 mentioned "Exactly. And like problem solving, development, stuff like that is done through circles [projects]. It naturally happens. Like certain things can come from people's ideas, but often they come from problems right." (Interviewee 4).



### **4.1.2 Foundational elements of the collaboration process**

In order to identify foundational elements of the collaboration process in a commercial strategy team in the hotel industry, questions about effective collaboration, ineffective collaboration and process of collaboration were asked. Four elements emerged that were put into four categories such as technology, alignment, education and emotionally safe environment.

#### **Technology**

Most participants mentioned that for them technology is one of the main factors that impact collaboration in the commercial strategy team. Technology refers to the various tools, software, and systems that commercial strategy team members use individually and collectively on a daily basis. Currently, however, most disciplines have siloed technology instead of one that has integration across all disciplines. Interviewee 1 said "There has been somebody's been successful in revenue that's created a great tool for revenue management. And sales has created a great tool for sales. But now that we're building commercial leaders over the last six, seven years, hopefully there's a commercial leader that's creating technology and tools that will support it from the total commercial approach and not a disciplined approach".

#### **Emotionally safe environment**

Emotionally safe environment, characterised by trust, respect, and openness, was identified as essential for mitigating fear, blame, and ego that could otherwise hinder collaboration. Interviewee 1 pointed out, "there has to be a trust aspect, that each person is going to do their job so you do not have to look at doing it yourself." Similarly, respect for diverse roles and expertise underpins effective teamwork. Interviewee 3 stated, "You've got to have a team that is willing to work together... They do not have to love one another. But they've got to have mutual respect."

Openness was universally recognized as vital for overcoming discipline silos. Interviewee 8 gave an example of a close-minded colleague, "I am a director of sales. I know the best business to book for this hotel. Do not question me; I know what I'm doing because I am the subject matter expert."

Interviewee 4 gave an example of how ego could hinder collaboration due to lack of respect for each other's opinion: "The source of most conflict in professional meetings tends to be ego... conflict itself usually occurs when somebody is diminishing another person's opinion or their role."

## **Education**

Education is another pivotal element for effective collaboration, primarily involving an understanding of each other's discipline within the team and a collective understanding of 'commercial'.

Interviewees emphasised the importance of understanding the impact of disciplines on one another. Interviewee 3 remarked, "If I do this, it impacts them here and you might do this over and distribution and impact sales here. You get a better understanding and I think a better leadership team out of it and you also prepare them to become the conductor for commercial management, when you have those conversations and people know more than just their own world in a silo."

The necessity for ongoing dialogue was stressed, with a focus on the exchange of knowledge and experiences. "Because the only person that really knows exactly what you're doing day in and day out is yourself and what you're constantly doing when you're sharing what is happening is you're educating those around you", said interviewee 4

## **Alignment**

Alignment of vision, objectives, goals and incentives is crucial for the effectiveness of a commercial strategy team. Misalignment often leads to miscommunication, conflict, and poor coordination, as consistently highlighted by interviewees.

Interviewee 1 explained, "If the team is aligned towards a common goal, then everybody's focused on the same outcome." This sentiment was echoed by others, noting the detrimental effects of conflicting goals. For instance, Interviewee 6 shared, "Initially, I focused on OTA production while the marketing team prioritized direct business, leading to conflicts. This year, we aligned everyone around three shared goals to mitigate these issues."

Moreover, clarity in roles and responsibilities often lacked due to misalignment. Interviewee 3 observed, "It wasn't always clear how everything fits together, which complicated collaboration."

## **4.2 Round 2**

The second round of 7 interviews focused on the following objectives:

1. To understand the collaboration process in a commercial strategy team in the hotel industry.
2. To identify potential process losses during the collaboration process in a commercial strategy team in the hotel industry.

Table 2 shows interviewee profile in the round 2. . Some respondents were working at a technology company that provides services to the hotel industry at the time of the

interview. However, due to their extensive experience in the industry before joining tech companies they were still selected to participate in the research.

#	Gender	Based in	Background
9	Female	USA	Revenue
10	Female	USA	Revenue, Distribution, Commercial (tech)
11	Female	UK	Sales
12	Male	USA	Revenue
13	Female	USA	Sales
14	Male	USA	Sales, Revenue, Marketing, Commercial
15	Female	UK	Sales

Table 2: Overview of interviewees in the round 2

#### 4.2.1 Stages of collaboration

All interviewees gave an example of problem solving or opportunity identification as a case for collaboration, and the following stages were identified: information sharing, brainstorming, decision-making, coordination, and evaluation.

For instance, Interviewee 10 gave an example of opportunity identification: "So I'm thinking specifically of inauguration because it is something that happens every four years...And that is a time when you have to really collaborate and think about how you're going to sell your hotel." Conversely, Interviewee 13 gave an example of problem solving : "Yeah, so for example, we have one hotel that just lost a million dollar piece of business. So now, of course, it is all hands on deck, right? What are we going to do to replace a million dollars this year?"

The process of collaboration was universally described through five stages:

1. Information Sharing: coming together, bringing relevant data and insights from their respective areas.
2. Brainstorming: generating diverse ideas on how to tackle the situation
3. Decision-Making: selecting the best idea to pursue
4. Coordination: dividing tasks, setting timelines, making an action plan

## 5. Evaluation: assessing the outcomes of the implemented actions

While all interviewees mentioned these five stages, they also noted variations depending on the specific scenario. For example, Interviewee 9 added one more stage 'opinion of impact' as not all problems or opportunities need to be addressed as they might not have an impact on a company: "For this specific crisis: so information sharing, opinion of impact... And then it branches." In another example, Interviewee 16 noted the inclusion of a higher-level approval in certain decisions depending on the complexity of the situation.

It is important to recognize that the collaboration process can differ based on the specific challenges or opportunities being addressed. Some situations may require more in-depth analysis and back and forth, while others might have a more linear process.

### **4.2.2 Process Losses**

After identifying the stages of collaboration, interviewees were asked about potential process losses related to how team members worked together during each stage. Participants reflected on their experiences, limiting their answers to those experiences. For instance, if an interviewee had no personal conflicts with team members, then process losses related to differing personalities were not mentioned. It is important to note that answers varied depending on variables such as conflicting goals, interpersonal relationships, and the duration of working together.

#### **Information Sharing**

During the information sharing stage, interviewees mentioned a lack of preparedness as a process loss, which included no preparation in advance (searching for documents and data during the meeting) and missing information. Since members of the commercial strategy team come from different professional backgrounds, they might misinterpret the information shared or not understand what is being said (due to the different 'languages' used). For instance, Interviewee 16 stated, "We've got a glossary of acronyms. We've got names that we use within sales, which are different from what they use in revenue. But it is also about, I guess, understanding the information shared itself... It is making sure that when you're sharing that information, they understand and you go into a bit more depth about what you're referring to." Some interviewees mentioned information overload because a lot of data is being shared from different disciplines. It is important to ask the right questions to help each other understand what is actually happening; however, this might be challenging. Apart from different professional backgrounds, team members have different personalities. Some might perceive 'asking questions' as a lack of knowledge or as

questioning one's expertise, which could result in defensive behavior when the respondent is trying to 'defend' their expertise, turning this stage into an emotional conversation.

### **Brainstorming**

Fear was a consistent theme during the brainstorming phase. Most interviewees reported a fear of sharing, rejection, and feeling judged. Interviewee 10 observed, "And then there are probably teams on the other end of the spectrum who do not trust each other a lot, and they do not feel safe. And so they are not sharing big ideas." Another interviewee stated that it needs to be an emotionally safe environment; otherwise, people do not trust each other enough to share their ideas. Even if everyone feels safe to share their ideas, process losses such as sticking to the first idea and cutting off the brainstorming process too early might occur. It is easy and quick to go with the first idea without exploring alternatives to move faster. However, the first idea is not always the best and might exclude other ideas. Teams might also cut off the brainstorming session too early due to time pressure.

### **Decision-Making**

Most interviewees cited difficulty in agreeing on the best route due to different professional backgrounds, personalities, visions, and conflicting personal goals. However, the root cause seems to be a lack of a clear goal. Interviewee 14 explained, "So it is really about making sure that the team is aligned and deciding if that aligns with the ultimate goal of the business." Conflict does not seem to be a problem, but a lack of common understanding of the 'commercial approach' and where the team is heading, and why is what caused frustration and disagreement during decision-making. When there was a clear goal set, interviewees reported that it was much easier to make decisions as it was no longer about personalities and preferences, but about data, goals, and what is best for the organization. Emotions were put aside.

### **Coordination**

Lack of buy-in, lack of clarity about responsibilities, and work style are process losses identified during the coordination stage. Some team members might not be motivated to carry out the action plan as it is additional work that has been added to their regular responsibilities, and they may not see the value in collaborating. Interviewee 11 said, "We tend to do what we like doing. So if you're given a project and you do not actually like or find the work interesting or do not see the value in it, it is not going to be the first thing that you're going to do in your day." A lack of clarity creates unnecessary problems that can be easily solved with communication. Members have different priorities, work styles, communication channels, and personalities. When these differences are not discussed and agreed upon, they lead to process losses. Interviewee 14 gave a simple example of these differences: "Or maybe, you know, one team has used Teams all the time to communicate,

and they have a great system for that. Another team just uses email, and they are like, 'I do not know why I need to use Teams.'"

### **Evaluation**

The evaluation stage appears to be the least problematic. A few interviewees noted that some team members might feel deflated if the team does not pursue their ideas, while others might blame their colleagues (not always explicitly). Not everyone might feel comfortable sharing what went wrong, and team members might become defensive: "This wasn't really my problem, so I do not even know. It is more of an 'I gotcha' versus 'Here's my part.'" (Interviewee 14).

## **5. DISCUSSIONS**

This chapter synthesizes the findings of the thesis on collaboration within commercial strategy teams in the hotel industry, integrating insights from both literature reviews and interviews. It addresses the four key objectives that collectively respond to the central research question, which will be explored further in the recommendations section: How can collaboration be improved in commercial strategy teams within the hotel industry? This discussion sets the stage for practical recommendations aimed at improving collaboration.

### **5.1 Commercial strategy team in the hotel industry**

Since there is no academic literature specifically about commercial strategy teams, this part draws primarily on empirical findings and industry articles reviewed earlier. It is important to note that this thesis does not aim to define what a commercial strategy team is, but rather set the scope and explain what is meant by a commercial strategy team in this thesis, focused on the hotel industry.

The description of this team varied depending on the company from which the interviewee was coming, more specifically the size, the organizational structure and the type of company. Additionally, as the commercial strategy team is relatively new in the industry, one more factor 'commercial mindset' impacting the description of the commercial strategy team was added. 'Commercial mindset' here refers to the progress of companies towards becoming more commercially oriented (bringing three disciplines together). Companies that have embraced a holistic commercial approach influences how the commercial strategy team is defined and functions.

The objective was to gain a general understanding of what commercial strategy team is due to the limited information available online.

It should not be seen as an ultimate, but rather a general description of a commercial strategy team in the hotel industry.

At the beginning of the thesis, the commercial strategy team was defined as a team of executives in sales, revenue, and marketing at a company's corresponding level. The results from interviews align with this definition, however, they require a closer examination.

#### **A team of...**

According to the definition adopted from West (2012, p. 28), "a team is a relatively small group of people working on a clearly defined, challenging task that is most efficiently completed by a group working together rather than individuals working alone or in parallel; who have clear, shared, challenging, team-level objectives derived directly from the task;

who need to work together to achieve these objectives; whose members occupy distinct roles within the team; and who possess the necessary authority, autonomy, and resources to meet the team's objectives". A commercial strategy team *can* be a team as its team task does require a team (which is the very reason why teams exist). However, it is not clear that all commercial strategy teams are actually teams rather than groups. Even though the team task requires a team, if the task is not clearly defined, shared and challenging to all team members (and on team-level), then they might not know they even have a team task.

#### **...executives in...**

The interviews and literature review were consistent regarding the team's task, which includes both strategy and revenue. McGuire and Guglielmetti (2023) emphasized strategizing and long-term planning. Interviewees further mentioned problem-solving and opportunity identification, all aimed at strategy and revenue.

The word 'executive' has been used intentionally accounting for differences across companies and aligning with the team task. Executive refers to a person who is responsible for decision-making, strategy and overseeing operations in a respective discipline (at a company's corresponding level).

#### **...sales, revenue and marketing...**

Industry articles like those by Estis Green (2023), Hesel (2020), and Walters (2023) include sales, revenue, and marketing in their definitions of the commercial strategy team, with minor variations: some include operations and distribution. The interview results confirm that sales and revenue are part of the commercial strategy team. Marketing is involved as well, although its involvement varies based on the company's size, organisational structure and type. Other departments were occasionally mentioned by interviewees but were not as integral to the team as sales, revenue, and marketing.

In order to make a general description of the commercial strategy team those three disciplines (sales, revenue and marketing) are included as the core disciplines identified in industry articles and interviews. Other disciplines are not included as they vary depending on the company. Including only those three disciplines makes the applicability of the findings broader without excluding some companies in the hotel industry. Additionally, it is believed that minor differences in team composition have no significant impact on the applicability of the findings.

#### **...at a company's corresponding level.**

It is not clear from industry articles where the commercial strategy team is positioned within a company, as most articles discuss disciplines involved rather than organisational structure. However, the Chief Commercial Officer (CCO), who frequently leads the commercial strategy team, is described as being at the company's highest level. It seems that industry



articles refer to the commercial strategy team as the one that generally operates at the highest level within the commercial function.

However, varying responses from interviewees show that it is challenging to generalize the exact positioning of a commercial strategy team due to differences in company size, organizational structure, and type. The definition used in this thesis (“a team of executives in sales, revenue, and marketing at a company’s corresponding level”) is broad enough to apply across different companies in the hotel industry without limiting itself to the highest level within the commercial function. Inconsistent results might have occurred due to different profiles of interviewees who had a relation to the commercial strategy or worked with colleagues from other disciplines, however, it was only for a certain region or service / brand line. Therefore, the phrase ‘a company’s corresponding level’ has been intentionally used here to highlight that this thesis is about a commercial strategy team at a company’s corresponding level (not in a company as whole). It makes the applicability of the findings broader without excluding some companies in the hotel industry that might not have a commercial strategy team at the highest level, but for a certain region, or level.

## **5.2 Break it down: collaboration as a process**

Collaboration is a **process** where two or more **interdependent** members of a team from **different** expertise work together to accomplish at least one **common (complex)** task. Before proceeding to the next section it is important to understand every element of this definition.

### **Process**

As Lewis (2006) said, “we do not have a collaboration, nor are we a collaboration; we engage in collaboration” (cited in Bedwell et al., 2012, p 130). It is mistakenly believed that collaboration is the outcome. It is a process. It can be compared to decision-making which is a process, and decision is the output; brainstorming is a process, and idea is the output; collaboration is a process, and collaborative outcome (depending on the task) is the output.

### **Interdependent**

Commercial strategy teams engage in collaboration when there is a problem to be solved and an opportunity to be identified that concerns all disciplines involved. If there was no interdependence, in other words if one discipline’s success did not depend on another one, then there would be no need to work together in general. Members of commercial strategy teams collaborate because they need each other.

### **Different**

Collaboration is needed when there is a complex task which cannot be solved within one discipline, in other words, with resources one discipline has. If one discipline can accomplish a task on their own (without resources from other disciplines), then there is no need to work others.

### **Common**

Collaboration originates in conflict management literature, where it is a method to reach win-win outcomes despite competing interests. People collaborate because they want to advance their own interests (Kramer, 1990). Members of the commercial strategy team collaborate with each other because they know that at the end they will achieve more than what they could have done on their own (to accomplish a complex task).

Conflict is not a problem, the absence of a common goal is. If a commercial strategy team sees only competing interests and conflicting goals, they do not have a reason WHY they should collaborate.

### **Complex**

Collaboration refers to more complex linkages than cooperation and coordination. It is important to note that for some tasks just cooperation or coordination is sufficient. Those different ways of working together are not right or wrong, they serve different purposes. It is about mixing and matching means with the purpose. Commercial strategy teams refer to collaboration when there is a problem to be solved and an opportunity to be identified that concerns all disciplines involved.

## **5.3 Understand to navigate: collaboration as a concept**

Collaboration is a complex concept, and one of the ways to conceptualize it is to look at the Input-Process-Output model of team effectiveness developed by McGrath in 1964. It marked the beginning of all later models aimed at explaining team performance. The model has three parts: input, process, and output. Input has three levels: individual, team, and organizational, and refers to characteristics (e.g., individual belief systems, team composition, reward systems). The process refers to activities that team members engage in to accomplish a task (in our case, collaboration). The output is what comes out of that process with the given input (e.g., team member satisfaction). This initial model served as a foundation for later models. Ilgen et al. (2005) advanced the model, proposing an Input-Mediators (team processes & emergent states)-Output-Input (IMOI) model to highlight the continuous cycle where outputs feed back as inputs. In other words, collaboration in a commercial strategy team might not be the same every time as outputs feed back as inputs, altering the input. For example, the team had a problem that had to be addressed, and during the decision-making, team members had opposing views that led to conflict. The

next time the team needs to collaborate, the team dynamics might have been impacted by the conflict from the previous time, and it will serve as an input (e.g., as a lack of trust on the team level).

Bedwell (2012) developed an overarching conceptual framework broad enough to be applicable to different contexts. It shows how many variables might impact the potential outcome of collaboration. There is no one answer as to why team members often fail to collaborate. However, why teams are not always effective is often attributed to 'process losses' (Alblas and Wijsman, 2019). Process loss refers to something that is lost during the process of working together. There are two elements in the mediators box of the IMOI model: team processes and emergent states. While team processes are activities team members engage in, emergent states are the results of those.

Before going into process losses, it is necessary to break down the process of collaboration into team processes that the commercial strategy team undergoes during collaboration. Here, they are referred to as stages to avoid confusion with the collaboration process and team processes. Another reason for calling them stages of collaboration is that it helps to organize the processes of collaboration.

The process of collaboration in commercial strategy team was described the following way:

- Information Sharing: coming together, bringing relevant data and insights from their respective areas.
- Brainstorming: generating diverse ideas on how to tackle the situation.
- Decision-Making: selecting the best idea to pursue.
- Coordination: dividing tasks, setting timelines, making an action plan.
- Evaluation: assessing the outcomes of the implemented actions.

These stages should not be seen as sequential but rather as a non-linear process with the possibility to go back when needed. It is important to note that these stages are for collaboration, in other words, when there is a complex problem to be solved or an opportunity to be identified. It is not about cooperation, coordination, or integration. Additionally, it is specific to the commercial strategy team as described in this thesis. The characteristics of the team are important to take into account. For example, if your commercial strategy team does not have the authority to make decisions, then the decision-making stage might not be needed.

These stages are general, and they do not delve into details. For instance, information sharing is not broken down into cognitive, behavioral, affective/motivational processes (as it is explained in the literature review) because it would overcomplicate the conceptual

framework and is believed to be unnecessary in this thesis. The current stages are sufficient to organize the process of collaboration to proceed to the next step of identifying potential process losses during the collaboration process.

#### 5.4 Minimize to maximize: process losses

As the collaboration process is broken down into stages, it is possible to identify potential process losses that might occur during each stage of collaboration. It is important to emphasize the terms "potential" and "might." The table below provides a list that is by no means exhaustive; some of these process losses might not be applicable to your commercial strategy team. As discussed earlier, numerous variables could impact the outcome, some within and some beyond the team's control. The focus of this thesis on process losses, rather than on elements like team size, stems from the fact that process losses are within the direct control of the team. Teams can minimize process losses to maximize the potential outcome of collaboration.

<u>Information sharing</u>	<u>Brainstorming</u>	<u>Decision-making</u>	<u>Coordination</u>	<u>Evaluation</u>
Lack of preparedness	Fear of sharing, rejection and feeling judged	Lack of a clear goal	Lack of buy-in	Blame
Defensive behaviour	Sticking to the first idea	Lack of common understanding of 'commercial'	Lack of clarity about responsibilities	Defensive behaviour
Fear of asking questions	Cutting off too early		Lack of clarity about work styles	Feeling deflated
Misinterpretation of information shared				

Some process losses might occur at several stages; the table indicates where they are most likely to occur. Moreover, these losses are interconnected. For example, a lack of buy-in might cause team members to feel unmotivated to prepare all necessary information. A lack of a clear goal might emerge as a process loss at the evaluation stage when it is unclear against what the outcome is measured, turning discussions towards personality rather than

objectives. It is important to be aware of these potential process losses as they undermine the collaboration process and, consequently, the outcome.

## **5.5 Foundational elements**

Since commercial strategy teams have not been researched before, the interviews aimed to get a general understanding of what is of utmost importance for commercial strategy teams in the hotel industry when asked about collaboration. Interviews revealed four main factors: technology, alignment, education, and an emotionally safe environment.

Technology is one of the main hindrances in the industry as there is no system that can integrate all discipline-specific ones. Currently, technology is siloed, and so is data, which makes it more difficult to work together and make decisions collectively. Alignment refers to vision, goals, objectives, and incentives. It can go further and say alignment is about strong and visionary leadership and team members' buy-in. The word 'alignment' is used to show that it is necessary, especially in this case where there are conflicting goals, objectives, and incentives. Education refers to team members' understanding of each other's discipline, impact on one another, and the collective understanding of 'commercial'. Interviewees emphasized the difficulty of collaborating if members do not buy into this approach. Last but not least, an emotionally safe environment encompasses trust, respect, and openness. These four factors are interconnected as everything else is in the team effectiveness model. They can be seen as a foundation for collaboration in commercial strategy teams in the hotel industry, where one is the prerequisite to another.

An emotionally safe environment is where the team can trust each other's motives, trust that everyone makes decisions that benefit the team and not (only) their personal interests and trust the information shared. It is where the team respects all disciplines involved, respects different ways of working in different departments, respects different points of view during discussions, and respects different personalities. It is where the team is open to asking questions, is open to answering questions, is open to learning, is open to growing, and where every discussion is an opportunity to learn.

Education is not possible without an emotionally safe environment. If team members do not trust each other, they will not ask questions (as they might be perceived not knowledgeable). If team members do not respect each other, they will not build relationships. If team members are not open to each other, every discussion will be an opportunity to defend one's 'territory' and attack another's. It is important to highlight the ongoing process of constantly educating each other about what is happening in every discipline.



## **6. RECOMMENDATIONS**

### ***How to improve the collaboration process in a commercial strategy team in the hotel industry?***

This recommendation section takes a zoomed-out yet actionable approach to how to improve collaboration in commercial strategy teams in the hotel industry. It does not focus on specific issues or propose direct solutions; instead, it encourages teams to clarify the basics before delving deeper into collaboration. It has been written in a way that can be initiated by any member of the team, regardless of the position.

Recommendation section is presented as a step-by-step guide for commercial strategy teams with implications for Human Resources at each step:

1. Clarify team task
2. Assess the need for collaboration
3. Identify process losses

### **6.1 Step 1: Clarify team task**

The first step is to clearly the team task because it will show whether the task outlined so far requires a team; and whether there is a common understanding of WHY the commercial strategy team exists.

To do:

1. Ask all members of the commercial strategy team to write down the team task in one sentence (individually)
2. Share with each other what everyone has written
3. Discuss and agree on the team task
4. Complete the sentence: The team task of our commercial strategy team is \_\_\_\_\_.

**Important:** TEAM task is the one that is best completed by a TEAM. If a task can be accomplished by one or a few members of the commercial strategy team, it should be assigned accordingly. The commercial strategy TEAM should be focused on tasks that requires a TEAM.

To determine if it is a team task, answer the following question: If one of your team members left the team, would it still be possible to accomplish the task? If yes, then it is not a team task.

**Remember:** Team members need to work closely and interdependently, as the success of the team depends on it.

### **General Implications for HR: Team Skill training**

Companies often provide leadership training to those promoted, but training in teamwork skills is frequently overlooked. However, the same as leadership, teamwork skills need to be developed. This is critical because, especially at higher levels, leaders learned to navigate traditional vertical hierarchies rather than working with colleagues who have different agendas, motivations, and priorities. The skillset required for leadership and teamwork is different. Leaders may excel at leading their own teams but often struggle to work within teams. Therefore, HR should consider providing training that develops teamwork skills, not just leadership skills.

## **6.2 Step 2: Assess the need for collaboration**

The second step is to determine in which cases collaboration is needed because it will help to identify process losses in the next step. If your team task requires a team, there are different ways how the task can be accomplished. Not every task needs collaboration; sometimes, cooperation or coordination are enough.

To do:

1. Ask all members of the commercial strategy team to write down cases when the team needs to collaborate
2. Share with each other what everyone has written
3. Discuss and agree
4. Complete the sentence: Our commercial strategy team needs to collaborate when\_\_\_\_\_ [provide specific examples]

To assess the need for collaboration, use the following checklist:

- Interdependency: the success of the task depends on each other
- Different expertise: all disciplines must be involved to accomplish the task
- Common: there is a reason WHY every member needs to collaborate (i.e it concerns everyone)
- Complex: cannot be done through coordination or cooperation
- Objective: the task is about a problem or an opportunity

### **General implications for HR: Collaboration as a competitive advantage**

Collaboration should be seen as a Strategic Human Resource Management practice, not as a modern workplace expectation. It is a way to gain competitive advantage, therefore, it



needs to be taken seriously. HR should consider all the factors (including contextual) that might impact collaboration. Effective collaboration requires strategic planning to allocate resources to train knowledge, skills, attitudes required for effective collaboration.

### **6.3 Step 3: Identify process losses**

The third step is to identify process losses during each stage of the collaboration process because it will help to pinpoint what goes wrong, where it goes wrong, and why, which in turn helps improve the collaboration process.

To do:

1. Ask all members of commercial strategy team to answer the following question:  
What might go wrong at each stage\* of collaboration? (it is better to do it in a few rounds to avoid limiting to the initial thoughts)
2. Share with each other what everyone has written
3. Discuss to ensure everyone understands the concerns raised
4. Create a table outlining process losses at the each stage of collaboration

\*collaboration stages identified in the thesis are information-sharing, brainstorming, decision-making, coordination and evaluation (review those stages if needed to reflect your collaboration process)

#### **General implications for HR: Regular reflection moments**

It should be a regular practice to evaluate how the team is performing. Often, teams overlook its importance or fail to allocate time for it due to daily work pressures. There should be time designated specifically for that with the guidance on how to conduct those reflection moments. As discussed in previous chapters, collaboration is not the same every time as outputs feed back as inputs. Reflection moments are not a waste of time; rather they are strategic investments that pay off later.

### **6.4 Next steps: Build the foundation**

The previous chapter identified foundational elements for collaboration in commercial strategy teams in the hotel industry: emotionally safe environment, education and alignment. It is important to note that starting with these elements without first following the steps outlined above might not be effective. Building a strong foundation for collaboration is unnecessary if there is not a clear need for collaboration.

This section does not provide a complete answer but establishes essential preliminary steps that should not be overlooked for building the foundation. Process losses identified in Step

3 highlight specific areas that require attention. Those losses can often be minimized and even prevented by addressing the three foundational elements.

Further research is necessary to explore how to build a strong foundation, focusing on an emotionally safe environment, education, and alignment, to improve collaboration within commercial strategy teams in the hotel industry.

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