

Guidelines

1. Gather a group of 4-6 colleagues and give each one a print out of this document.
2. Pick one person to act as the facilitator/time keeper. This person will keep track of time spent on each page, as indicated in the upper right corner and ensure that the instructions are followed.
3. Have one person read the first page aloud. Make sure all participants understand the content before continuing. Most pages will require everyone to participate in reflections and discussions.
4. When the page time is up, go to the next page. Select a new person to read the page aloud and then follow what it says to have a discussion.
5. Keep repeating until all the pages are done... this should take about 45 minutes.
6. "Happy Exploring!"

Silos and Slabs in Organizations



Henry Mintzberg, Cleghorn Professor of Management Studies at McGill University in Canada, is an internationally renowned speaker and author on organization and management. He has been described by Tom Peters as "perhaps the world's premier management thinker". Henry has published 170 articles and seventeen books, including *Managers Not MBAs*, from which CoachingOurselves has sprung. See www.mintzberg.org.

Management Happenings

a) **Each person share and reflect on a story about something that happened to you or around you as a manager during the last couple of weeks.**

- Maybe there was a situation that occurred with an employee/ customer/ partner/ colleague, and you felt you resolved it in a way that the rest of the group would find interesting. Or perhaps it didn't get resolved, and the group could help you.
- If others in this group were involved in the same situation, this is a great time to share your thoughts on how and why things happened the way they did. Are your perspectives very different?

or

b) **Follow up on any items from your last session.**



"Most people go through life undergoing a series of happenings, which pass through their systems undigested. Happenings become experiences when they are digested, when they are reflected upon."

Saul Alinsky (Rules for Radicals)

Topic Agenda

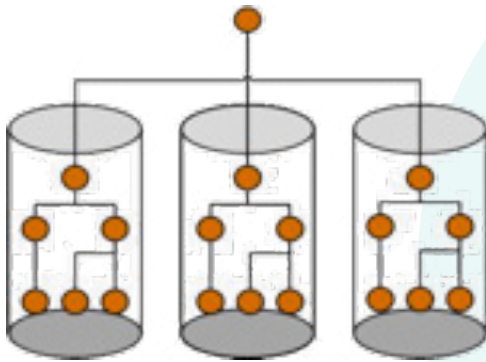
This is the agenda for the session. For this demo, skip this page.

2	Management Happenings	10 min
4	Topic Overview	1 min
5-9	Silos	32 min
10-13	Slabs	30 min
14	Following Through	10 min
15	Wrap Up	5 min
16	Readings and References	
17	Facilitator Notes	
18	Blank Page for Follow-Up Notes	

TOTAL APPROXIMATE TIME OF TOPIC IS
85 Minutes

Topic Overview

Many of today's organizations are highly-structured and complex, which can make communicating and getting the job done difficult. We look at two characteristics of their formal structures—silos and slabs—and the challenges they present to managing, and then investigate ways to manage across and beyond them.

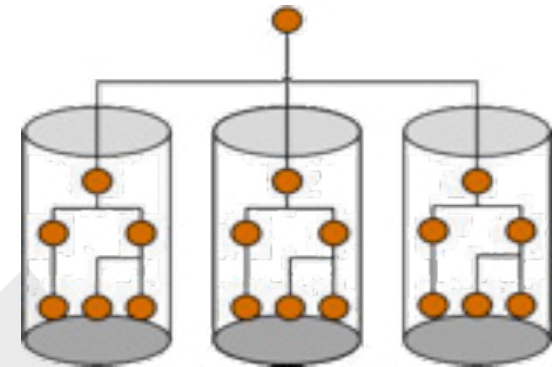


Today's session will provide you with an opportunity to:

- Understand the effects of silos and slabs within organizations.
- Understand how these structures can act as barriers to getting things done.
- Challenge yourselves to manage together beyond formal structure.

Silos

There is a lot of talk about silos in organizations —those “vertical ghettos”, shown in the figure— that separate their different components. Most often these silos are different functions: purchasing, production, engineering, selling, etc., or different geographical regions. But they can be just about any form of specialization: for example, Product Line A and Product Line B, or surgery and cardiology in a hospital.



They are called silos because they do not exist at just one level in the hierarchy, but all the way up, for example, from marketing analysts through marketing directors to the marketing vice-president.

This is called “structure” because these silos have been formally designed in the organization, even if no organization designer ever meant them to be so disconnected from one another. So the first thing to consider is...

Managing Beyond Silos

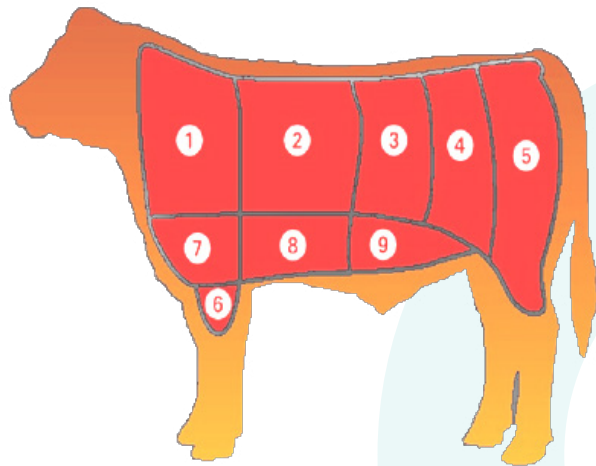
How do you manage past these silos?

In other words, how do you, individually and together, get past the silos to coordinate your efforts across these “divisions of labor” to make the necessary things happen?

- 1. Write down what each of you individually finds to be your biggest problem in managing beyond the silos.***
- 2. Read what each of you have written down, noting especially any of the problems that involve two or more of you in the group. Do not get into a discussion about this yet.***
- 3. Now, write down one or two examples each of you know personally of yourself or someone else successfully managing beyond these or other silos. Again, do not share these yet but go to the next page when the group is ready.***

Working Like a Cow

This is not a cow.



(Adapted from Anderson & Lembke NY advertisement for SAP Canada, used with permission.)

This is a chart that shows the different parts of a cow. In a real cow the parts are not aware that they are parts. They do not have trouble sharing information. They smoothly and naturally work together, as one unit: as a cow.

You have only one question to answer. **Do you want your organization to work like a chart or a cow?**

So the question on the previous page becomes: **How do you get your organization to work like a cow?**

Read the list on the following page for some suggestions.

Some Ways Out of Silos



- Creating cross-silo teams, projects, and task forces, as well as holding regular meetings across the silos and using a matrix structure that reports two ways.
- Developing incentive systems that reward cross-silo cooperation.
- Assigning people from one silo to another (e.g., a purchasing agent assigned to manufacturing), whether temporarily or permanently.
- Doing managerial exchanges, where people spend time shadowing each other for a few days at their workplace in order to experience a bit of their working lives.
- Locating people's offices not by silos, but across them, in other words, all mixed, for easy communication.
- Holding lots of events where all sorts of people socialize informally.
- Just plain taking a walk or having lunch with people you rarely see, but should.
- And, of course, creating CoachingOurselves groups across the silos!



Spend some time together discussing which of these may be relevant or feasible in regards to getting your organization to "work like a cow".

A Word on Seamlessness

It is common today to talk about seamlessness in organizations. It means getting so far past the silos that they don't even exist. But is this really what your organization needs? After all, the silos exist for a reason: to get specialized, focused work done.

So perhaps we need to change the metaphor. Somebody once talked about his father who was a tailor, and loved a good seam! Does anybody really want to wear seamless clothing? So maybe what your organization needs is not seamlessness, but some really nice seams that elegantly connect together its parts.



Slabs

If silos are vertical separations between different

THE DEMO VERSION OF THIS MODULE ENDS HERE.

To view the full module or to set up a CoachingOurselves program, contact us at: info@coachingourselves.com.

A CoachingOurselves program is launched in two steps:

Step 1: We (or our partners) train managers-facilitators

Step 2: The manager-facilitators “train” the managers using our library of over 80 modules

Managers learn from and coach other managers, resulting in the self-developing organization. This process is now used by over 15,000 managers in organizations around the world.

For more info, visit www.coachingourselves.com.

Examples of Slabs

- We know a company in central Europe where all the senior management was installed on the top floor. Everyone else talked about that mysterious "seventh floor"—quite literally a slab!—where "mysterious" things happened which seemed inaccessible to everyone else.

- Sometimes regional management is a slab, quite independent of, on one hand, the local management below

These pages are included on the full version of this 90-minute discussion module.

In some organizations, by the way, the slabs may represent status, not hierarchy. In hospitals, for example, there can be the senior physicians who do the fancy research work on one slab, separated from the regular physicians who do the more of the common operating work, who are in turn separated from the residents, who are separated from the interns.

Does any of this apply to your organization?

Managing Through the Slabs

Organizations whose people cannot get through the slabs are no better off than ones whose people cannot get out of the silos. After all, the head of a cow has to function with the body.

So let's ask the question again, more generally:

How do you manage beyond structure?

**These pages are included on the
full version of this 90-minute
discussion module.**

Some Ways Through the Slabs



- Culture and a clear sense of mission is one way to penetrate the slabs, by having everyone share a sense of being in it together.

- Senior managers can spend more time out of their offices than in, making themselves seen and known all over the organization.

The reverse: senior management can be opened up to others. For example, Kao, a cosmetic company in Japan, became famous for holding its meetings

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In many cases, the open flat area for ease of communication.

Again architectural-reform. United States, moved out of the famous Sears Tower in Chicago years ago, it's CEO explaining that "we had become a vertical culture." Flat works better—especially for the slabs!

Note that sometimes middle managers, or sets of them, can play a key role by being able to connect both ways. They maintain an intimate understanding of the operations, where things get done, yet also have the ear of senior management.

Spend some time together discussing what might be feasible for you within your organization.



Following Through

These pages are included on the full version of this 90-minute discussion module.

Wrap Up

1. Step back for a moment and discuss the group process you just went through together. e.g.

What were the group dynamics over the course of the topic? Were the discussions smooth or challenging? What went well? What could you do differently next time?

These pages are included on the full version of this 90-minute discussion module.

Reading and References

If you would like to learn more about this topic, we suggest:

Galbraith, Jay R. (2002). *Designing Organizations: An Executive Guide to Strategy, Structure, and Process*. Revised. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Mintzberg, Henry. (1992). *Structure in Fives: Designing Effective Organizations*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ, US: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

**These pages are included on the
full version of this 90-minute
discussion module.**

If you wish to further explore such managerial topics, contact CoachingOurselves. Topics include: *Some Surprising Things about Collaboration*, *Time to Dialogue*, and *Chains, Hubs, Webs, and Sets*.

Facilitator Notes

Silos and Slabs in Organizations is an excellent first topic for groups and is a suitable for all levels of teams.

It is intended for use in situations where companies desire better collaboration or acknowledge they have a problem with silos and slabs. The content can provide participants with a new common language to deal with such issues in a constructive way.

As facilitator, you may need to help people focus on what they are personally going to do. If you want to ensure that participants take what positive measures they can take within their scope of impact.

Suggest Page 4, Topic Overview and formal structure.

As facilitator, you will need to focus on the goal of this topic.

These pages are included on the full version of this 90-minute discussion module.

For Follow-Up

Use this page to write down any items that you want to follow-up on, personally and as a group. You may wish to remove this page from the topic and put it into a binder,

collecting these items for future reference.

**These pages are included on the
full version of this 90-minute
discussion module.**

