

Apple Adjustable Keyboard

Stephen Peart, Vent Design

Process and Design Collaboration

Collaboration is typically defined as working jointly with others. Although artistic productions or expressions are often attributed to a single individual, design is just one of many disciplines that greatly benefits from interfacing with others. The practice of collaboration can yield very powerful solutions.

Is there a difference between collaboration and communication? Does collaboration mean just communicating well? Collaboration hints at the existence of a team at the inception of a program, with a wish to combine several disciplines. A true team exists from the beginning; it is not a team that shops and drops skills at various stages of a project. In product development, for example, a core team should consist of the necessary creative and technical players that incept and complete the project.

To be effective, teams do not have to be large in numbers. Small groups, including designers, engineers, and managers, unhindered by large committee influence, are very potent producers—generating and responding in very short periods of time.

This practice requires large amounts of commitment and selflessness. For the product process mutual understanding of acute disciplinary skills is vital in order to assist the communication of new ideas. In other words, collaboration needs to go further than just working jointly with others. It also involves respect and patience for all skill-bases involved in any given project. In reality this tends to be easier in theory than in practice, since different companies hold certain activities more precious than others. Designers and “design-thinking” can be a useful balance to avoid over-focusing on certain disciplines.

Is this why some products are more outstanding than others? Companies with successful products contain engineers, marketers, and leaders who have open minds toward design and technology; they enjoy the experience that true collaboration can bring to a program. Unfortunately, those companies that do not seem to be quite numerous.

When a balanced approach is embraced, one can materialize a product of remarkable nature. This aspect is passed on to the maker and end user as a product vitality that can be enjoyed by all.



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of good design (as if these were a quantifiable entity) so that they can bypass a rigorous design process and achieve a quick fix.

— Peter Spreenberg

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Cross-disciplinary skills are time-consuming to teach.

But, to appreciate their necessity one needs only to experience the results of a development effort when they are absent.

— Stephen Peart

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Design and problem solving are synonymous.

— William Chapin