



## Taking the world on a mission

Edyta Sikorska

Germany

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We communicate constantly. Anytime, anywhere. We talk, we discuss, we tackle tasks and solve problems. We put our forces together to achieve the best possible outcome. For this, we cooperate and collaborate – but opposed to the common misconception, these actions are not the same. Rochelle and Teasley (1995) have differentiated those forms and defined cooperation as a “division of labour among participants”, whereas collaboration is a more elaborated form of “mutual engagement of participants in a coordinated effort to solve the problem together” [1] and thus creates an additional value. In organizational psychology, the concept of synergy postulates that a cohesive group is more than the sum of its parts, i.e. synergy is the ability of a group to outperform even its best individual member [2]. This concept has successfully been applied in a multitude of contexts such as computing, biology, economy and society – and it will stick around in the future.

### The Age of Collaboration:

Communication has led to an Age of Information, but current developments bring us to the next step – the Age of Collaboration. By all means, collaboration is a driver for successful development. To join all of our forces, we as the world need a mission. One that makes us all strive towards one goal, focusing on the same “why?”, before we start thinking about the “how?” and “what?”, because why we do something is more important than what we do. In order to exploit our full potential, we need a common vision, so even if the circumstances change and the execution of a project must be altered along the way, the eyes are still set on the bigger goal. A vision is a representation of something greater – a belief, it gives us a purpose and a cause. It is the underlying explanation to the main question that drives our actions:

### Why?

The best inventions – whether intended or not – happened because somebody dared to ask why. Why is the world like this? Why do we do it this way and not another? Why has nobody tried another approach before? The great minds of our times repeatedly look for answers to this question, and reach to the very core: Why do we actually do something? Why do we, the citizens of the world, take action and collaborate?

To solve the problems of the world.

To achieve global goals.

To make the world a better place.

To make life beautiful for every human being.



We do all this because we believe – we believe that each and every one of us deserves it, and not just because it human dignity the basis of Human Rights Law. Our belief is the reason we care, the reason we get out of bed in the morning. To break it down to a simpler level, we reach the next question:

## How?

From good leadership comes inspiration to achieve those goals - but how can we manage this? Aiming for a greater good leads to intrinsic motivation, the most powerful of all motivation types as it comes from within – i.e. “I’m doing this because I want to; I’m doing this for myself” –, rather than from outside – “I’m doing this for the money or fame”. Intrinsic motivation also leads to a higher level of engagement.

How else do we solve problems? The best way to start doing so is to follow the rule of glocalization – think globally, act locally. Such a decentralized approach removes the weigh of a big system and brings back simplicity and flexibility and allow actions on the spot. Innovation grows fastest in small, yet diverse teams, where a multitude of thoughts and opinions evolve. However, a multicultural and international setting are not the only indicators for diversity. For years, engineers have been solving technical problems, doctors have been curing diseases and sociologists have been developing better social models. But in the Age of Collaboration, disciplines mix to an extent that they all ask the same question and work on the same goal in synergy. This interdisciplinary approach is highly appreciated and applied by cutting-edge, leading organizations like the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The “MIT Collaborative Initiatives” promotes a “systems-based approach to solving deep-rooted societal issues”, and they do so by engaging experts “from a broad range of disciplines both within and outside the scope of a problem” [3]. These constant processes can be exhausting, but they maintain momentum. With a focus on specific areas of interest, this instigates challenging discussions, as well as bridges the gap between the way we think and what the world actually needs.

In contrast to engaging experts, more and more issues are being solved by swarm intelligence, which should never be underestimated with the earth being a home to almost 7,2 billion people. The user base of Duolingo, a simple language learning platform (with a very innovative twist), could translate Wikipedia from English to Spanish in only 80 hours [4].

The collective behavior of decentralized, self-organized systems is, once again, a perfect example for synergy – and the basis for development of artificial intelligence.

Applying this to entrepreneurship, from a wide pool of startups and innovators arise new market players, who are now able to disrupt whole industries. A short time ago, this would have been unthinkable. Breaking the process of collaboration down into ever smaller pieces, this leads us to the final question:



## What?

And “what?” does not even matter much. What we do is just the result of this systematic development, and we happen to be solving some of the world’s most basic, yet most critical problems, like the United Nations Millenium Goals set in 2000 [5]. This includes eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, achieving universal primary education, promoting gender equality, and combating HIV/AIDS, just to name a few – and in the end, this is the small pieces that we collaborate on. The evolution of the Internet has made all the “what’s” easy to manage, and nowadays it is even easier than ever before to start actually doing something instead of overthinking. From E-Government through E-Health to E-Education, “E-” is the new buzzword among prefixes, enabling us to participate over the Internet in whatever we want, whenever we want. Mass collaboration has even lead to smart energy grids, where the differentiation between suppliers and consumers is vanishing, as well as a new kind of economy based on networks.

There is no coming back from global to local, from the “we” to an “I”. The Age of Collaboration has begun, and its values have been incorporated by us, the Millennials, the Generation Y – the Generation “why?”. We are now entering the workforce and changing the way organizations, corporations and politics work across the globe. It takes innovators (who make up only 2.5 per cent of the population) to set the rules of the game. It takes great leaders to inspire action and shape the future, so the world can collaboratively focus on the “why” and make the world a better place, before we focus on the “how” and “what” and break our goals down into tiny little tasks. We have all it takes for synergy, and the Age of Collaboration has come. It is time to set the world on a mission.



Note: Based on the concept of “The Golden Circle” by Simon Sinek [6].

[1] Roschelle, J., & Teasley, S. D. (1995, January). The construction of shared knowledge in collaborative problem solving. In *Computer supported collaborative learning* (pp. 69-97). Springer Berlin Heidelberg.

[2] Hall, D. J., & Saias, M. A. (1980). Strategy follows structure!. *Strategic Management Journal*, 1(2), 149-163.

[3] MIT Collaborative Initiatives. (2010). Retrieved April 26, 2014, from: <http://collaborativeinitiatives.org/>

[4] Ariel Schwartz. (December 13, 2011). Retrieved April 26, 2014, from: <http://www.fastcoexist.com/1678985/how-the-creator-of-captcha-will-translate-the-entire-internet>

[5] United Nations. (2014). United Nations Development Goals. Retrieved April 26, 2014, from: <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>

[6] Sinek, S. (2009). *Start with why: How great leaders inspire everyone to take action*. Penguin.